JOURNAL OF POLITICS

Editor

Dibyajyoti Dutta

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FORMATION, GROWTH AND BREAKDOWN OF IMMIGRANT VOTE BANKS OF CONGRESS IN ASSAM

Monoj Kumar Nath

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand how immigrant vote banks were formed in Assam, a state from India's northeast, after independence, and eventually how these vote banks disappeared, in a region which has remained peculiar from other states of the country because of its complex immigration problem.Becoming the sole ruling political party after independence, Congress owned these vote banks which started to disintegrate after Assam witnesses an anti-immigration agitation between 1979 and 1985 and by the 2016 Assam assembly elections, the party had lost its entire immigrant vote banks. This paper argues that growing communalism in the politics of Assam is the dominant cause of the breakdown of the immigrant vote banks. It mainly analyses the political developments in Assam surrounding the immigrant vote banks based on official election data.

Keywords: *AIUDF, Assam Accord, BJP, Congress, Jamiat, vote bank.*

Introduction

Assam witnessed huge immigration during British rule, mainly under the patronage of the government, for fulfilling the need of colonial economy and administration. The independence even could not stop the immigration to Assam, now from neighbouring countries. Because of this, the central government has been giving special treatmentto the stateconcerning illegal immigration. In 1950, just after three years of independence, Indian parliament enactedthe Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act. In 1962, the central government adopted the scheme of Prevention of Infiltration into India of Pakistani Nationals (PIP) which covered Kamrup, Nagaon, Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam. Again, in 1964, it formed the foreigners' tribunals in Assam for fair identification and deportation of illegal foreigners. In 1983, the IM(DT) Act was imposed on Assam which remained operational in the state till 2005. During 1983–2005 while the rest of the country followed the Foreigners Act, 1946,Assam followed the IM(DT) Act. Finally, the central government fixed a separate cut-off date for Assam to identify and deport illegal foreigners from the state. Under the provisions of the Assam Accord (1985), the cut-off date for the identification and deportation of illegal foreigners in Assam is fixed as 25 March 1971 whereas the cut-off date for the rest of the country is 26 January 1951. It should be noted that the Assam Accord made all the people who illegally entered Assam from neighbouring countries until 24 March 1971 legal citizens of India. All these explain the peculiarity of the illegal immigration problem in Assam from the other states of India. These also signal that the state has a significant population who are recently immigrated.

Assam is the most populous state of northeast India, comprising 31.2 million inhabitants (2011 Census). During almost seven decades since independence till the 2016 Assam assembly elections, the Indian National Congress (hereafter Congress) ruled the state for most of the time, barring 12 years (1978–1980, 1985–1990 and 1996–2001). It is believed that this has become possible for the party because of its vote banks among three recently immigrated communities of the

state – the Muslims, the Hindu Bengalis and the tea community. Even some prominent Congress leaders openly identify these communities as vote banks of the party. Dev Kanta Barooah, the Congress stalwart from Assam who became the national president of the party (1975–1977), used to say publicly that so long as *Alis* (Muslim immigrants), *coolies* (tea labourers) and Bengalis (Hindu refugees) were with the Congress party, it did not care for anybody (Gokhale and Kashyap, 2004: 32).

For different reasons, Congress formed strong political alliances with the Muslims, tea community and the Hindu Bengalis (hereafter Bengalis) after independence. As a result, these communities became a support base of the party. When Assam witnessed a six years long anti-immigration agitation (known as the Assam Movement) during 1979–1985, these communities, stood behind Congress which opposed the agitation and behaved as a vote bank of the party. However, after the movement had ended, these vote blocsstarted to desert the party one by one. By the 2016 Assam assembly election, Congress had lost all its traditional immigrant vote banks in Assam.

By the time of the 1972 assembly elections, Assam did not have any formidable political party to challenge Congress and most of the communities supported the party in elections. It faced strong opposition from the Janata Party alliance, for the first time in Assam, only in the 1978 assembly election. Therefore, the Assam assembly elections held since 1978 are mainly analysed here to understand the vote bank behaviour of the communities under discussion. Avote bankis a loyal bloc ofvotersfrom a single community, who consistently back a certain candidate orpoliticalformation in democraticelections. However, when we discuss vote banks, it should be noted, a community's support for a candidate or a political party can never be absolute in a democratic electoral politics. Considering this, here, continuous electoral support of the majority section of a community is identified as the criteria for the existence of a community vote bank. This vote bank behaviour of a community, in this paper, is examined from the outcome of

the Assam assembly elections from the constituencies dominated and determined by the community.

Immigrant Communities

The Muslims, Bengalis and the tea garden workers are three large communities in Assam. According to the 2011 census, Muslims constitute 34.2 per cent of the total population of the state. However, there is no authentic figure of the exact population strength of Bengalis and according to some unconfirmed estimates, they consist of almost 14.19 per cent of the population[1] of the state. On the other hand, the tea community account for around 15 per cent of the total population of Assam (cited in Ahmed, 2018: 15).

These communities are recent immigrants in Assam. The Muslims started to immigrate into the state since the beginning of the thirteen century. Till Assam was taken over by the British in 1826, they immigrated mainly as artisans and religious preachers. A section of Muslim war prisoners who were left behind here as a result of the defeat of the Muslim invaders from East Bengal and north India who repeatedly attacked the Ahom[2] kingdom also settled here. Large-scale Muslim immigration happened to the state after British colonial administration wished to grow jute in Assam as a cash crop. It imported Muslim cultivators from East Bengal, settled them and allotted them land for growing jute. This started huge waves of immigration of poor and landless Muslims from East Bengal since the late nineteenth century. The immigration got a new boost when Assam was ruled by Muslim League consecutively from 1937 to 1946, as the party attempted to make Assam a part of proposed Pakistan by increasing the Muslim population of the state.

In present Assam, the Barak valley is considered as the home of Bengalis, although the community has a strong presence in Brahmaputra valley and hills also. The Barak valley is the undivided Cachar district of Assam after independence. The 'Cachar' is the region once ruled by the Kacharis, an aboriginal tribe of Assam.

Since the beginning of the seventeen century, the Kacharis extended its rule into the plains of Cachar. However, in the present Barak valley, the Kacharis are almost non-existent and the valley has been taken over by the Bengalis and the Muslims. The immigration of Bengalis to the Brahmaputra valley started with the beginning of the British rule in Assam. By then, the British started to employ a section of Bengalis from West Bengal whowas educated in the English language to run their administration. The colonial administration imported many such Bengalis to be engaged in administrative works in Assam. After this, Bengalis immigrated to the Brahmaputra valley from West Bengal in droves to grab the employment opportunities created by the British administration in the state. Meanwhile, under colonial rule, immigration of Bengalis from former East Bengal to the Barak valley became an internal affair. During 1905–1912, Assam was even made a part of East Bengal with Bengali dominated Dhaka as its capital. Eventually, lakhs of Bengali families took refuge in Assam and were settled in different parts of the state, particularly in the Barak valley, after the Partition at independence. In a letter to Union Home Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel on 22 June 1950, Assam Premier Gopinath Bardoloi disclosed that his government had already shouldered the responsibility of rehabilitating one lakh new refugees in addition to 1.25 lakh who came one and a half years ago and some ten thousands of the earlier batch was already allotted land (Pisharoty, 2019: 259).

The tea labourers had been imported to work at the tea gardens as labour by the British tea planters since the beginning of the 60s of the nineteenth century. They were recruited mainly from Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Chottanagpur, Central Province (now Madhya Pradesh), Madras (now Tamil Nadu), Bombay (now Maharashtra) and United Province (now Uttar Pradesh), where, at that time, the population was denser, less secure and more accustomed to working for wages (Hazarika, 2006: 32). The import of these labourers continued until the end of the 30s of the twentieth century.

The immigration of the tea community to Assam stopped before independence. But the immigration of Muslims and Bengalis from East Pakistan

continued even after independence. Because of this unabated immigration, the Assam Accord fixed 25 March 1971 as the cut-off date for the identification and deportation of illegal foreign nationals from the state, a provision made only for Assam among the states and union territories of India. Based onthe time of immigration into the state, the Muslims are categorised into indigenous and immigrant in the broader contexts of society and politics of Assam. The Muslims immigrated to the state before it was taken over by British in 1826 are known as indigenous while those immigrated during British colonialism and until 1971 are known as immigrant Muslims. The immigrant Muslims are also known as East Bengal-origin Muslims, as they immigrated from East Bengal. Among the Bengalis, there is no such categorisation. On the other hand, the tea community is an umbrella term of different groups who were imported to Assam by British tea planters from different places of British India to work as labourers in tea gardens in Assam.

In this paper, while 'Muslim' indicates only the immigrant Muslims living in the state, the 'Bengali' covers the Hindu Bengali community living in the Barak valley (Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj districts). The 'tea community', here, includes all tea labourer groups residing in upper Assam of the Brahmaputra valley (Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Sonitpur, Lakhimpur and Dhemaji districts). While the tea community lives mainly in upper Assam, they live in some pockets of the Barak valley also. Besides lower Assam of the Brahmaputra valley (Dhubri, Goalpara, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Kamrup, Nagaon, Morigaon, Sonitpur, Mangaidoi districts), the immigrant Muslims lives in the Barak valley. On the other hand, Bengalis live in entire Assam. To specifically address the topic of the present study, we will consider the regions where these communities are electorally dominant: Muslims in lower Assam, Bengalis in the Barak valley and tea community in upper Assam. An overwhelming majority of the Muslims, Bengalis and tea community live in these regions. It should be noted that Assam at present has five administrative division – North, Lower, Central, Upper and the Barak valley. Here, we have not followed this administrative division; rather considering the traditional regional divisions of the state: Upper and Lower Assam of the Brahmaputra valley,

the Barak valley and the hills. Moreover, in the present paper, the electoral behaviour of only the immigrant Muslim community is studied. It is because the indigenous Muslims immigrated before Assam was colonised. It should also be noted that the immigrant Muslims are an overwhelming majority over their indigenous counterpart, and they dominate the Muslim electoral equations of the state[3]. The indigenous Muslims, living mainly in upper Assam districts of the Brahmaputra valley, cannot determine the electoral equations of even a single Assembly constituency in Assam,as they do not live in contiguous areas like their immigrant counterparts. Moreover, Congress has been benefitting mainly from the support among the immigrant Muslims. Finally, the present discussion on vote bank is based only on the assembly elections held in Assam. The parliamentary elections have different electoral geography and demography than assembly elections, and they are contested mainly on national issues.

Congress and Electoral Alliances

The immigrant communities, in any society, can easily be politically manipulated if they are socio-economically vulnerable. The formation of immigrant vote banks is possible in such situations. The Congress, in early years after independence, tried to create political alliances with the Muslims, the Bengalis and the tea community in Assam, as they becamecrucial for the party to maintain its political dominance in the state. Present Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were parts of Assam at the time of independence. But the central government faceda revolt by the Nagas for a sovereign state just after independence. The Indian government had to deal the Nagas with force until Nagaland was made a separate state in 1962. Amid these developments, the Congress leadership in Assam was not sure of the electoral support of the entire tribal population which constituted a large chunk of the population of the state at that time. So, the Assam Congress leadership tried to create political alliances with some communities of the state which could significantly help the party's prospects in electoral battles in both the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, even if the tribal population did not rally behind the party.

Congress identified the immigrant Muslims, Hindu Bengalis and tea labourers as the communities with whom such alliances could be long-lasting. These communities were recently immigrated, large in number, socio-economically backwards and were in need of the support of the government in new situations created by independence and the partition.

Congress – Muslim Alliance

After independence, the most vulnerable community in Assam was the Muslims. In the last decade of the freedom struggle for India's independence, Assam emerged as a playground because of the communal politics of the Muslim League. An overwhelming number of Muslims rallied behind the party in support of its demand for the inclusion of Assam into Pakistan. In the 1946 provincial assembly election, the Muslim League bagged 31 seats out of the 34 seats reserved for Muslims. However, the partition of India shattered the dream of the Assam Muslims. The Assam Provincial Muslim League was dissolved in June 1948 and several prominent League leaders, including Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, the most prominent leader from the immigrant Muslim community, left the country for East Pakistan, which created a leadership vacuum for the Assam Muslims, creating a feeling of being vulnerable. Against this backdrop, they did not have any other option but to join the Congress. Before the first general election of 1952, there were hectic activities of Muslim leaders from both Congress and former Muslim League to ally with Congress and the Muslim of Assam. As a result, a Congress-Muslim electoral alliance was formed just before the 1952 election. In this regard, Congress even took the help of Jamiat-ul-ulema-e-Hind (Jamiat) to influence the entire Muslim community of Assam to lend their support for Congress. The party imported Muslim religious leaders of Jamiat from Cachar and Uttar Pradesh to help build its support base among the Muslims of the Brahmaputra valley (Hoque, 2007: 310). During the freedom movement, Jamiat stood for undivided India against the demand of the Muslim League for the division of the country in communal line. There is no denying the fact that the League had more influence over the Muslims of Assam

compared to Jamiat. After independence, while the League ceased to exist, Jamiat became non-political. Then,the Congress used the Jamiat to gather Muslim votes for the party who were supporters of the League till independence. This had provided Jamiat a new lease of life in the politics of Assam after independence, as they had virtually no influence over the Muslims in Assam before independence.

Another factor that contributed significantly to create a Congress-Muslim partnership in Assam after independence was the communal clash of March 1950 in the lower Assam of the Brahmaputra valley, when nearly a lakh Muslim immigrant had to fleeriot-affected areas of lower Assam for East Pakistan in search of security (cited in Guha,2006: 271). Most of these displaced immigrant Muslims returned to Assam after the Nehru-Liaquat Pact was signed in April 1950. However, this communal clash made the entire Muslims community in Assam to realise that security was their main concern, and they tried to minimise their security concerns by aligning with the Congress which became the sole political party in India after independence.

Congress-Bengali Alliance

In initial years after independence, the Bengalis of Assam, particularly from the Barak valley, were not satisfied with the Assam Congress led by Assamese leaders from the Brahmaputra valley. They strongly believed that the Sylhet Referendum, as a result which Sylhet was transferred to Pakistan at partition, only happened because of the Assamese Congress leadership. They believed that Gopinath Bardoloi and other Assamese Congress leaders agreed to the referendum because they wanted the transfer of Sylhet to Pakistan to bring an end of the Muslim domination in the state. But the truth was that thereferendum was agreed to by the Congress Working Committee and even Hindu Bengali Congress leader from Sylhet like Basanta Kumar Das did not oppose it (Pisharoty, 2019: 254).

Although the Bengalis were not satisfied with Congress leaders of Assam, they aligned with the party after independence because of the proactive role of its

central leadership in settling the Hindu refugees in Assam after the partition. There was a huge influx of Hindu Bengalis from East Pakistan to Assam during and after the partition. The state shouldered the burden of lakhs of Bengali families immigrated from East Pakistan as refugees. The then Assam Premier Bardoloicommunicated to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that the independence of the country had made little difference to the influx problem of Assam. He argued that not much land was available in the state to settle the Hindu and Muslim refugees coming in droves from East Pakistan. Nehru reacted angrily and wrote to Bardoloithat Assam was 'getting a bad name for its narrow-minded policy' and 'if land is not available in Assam for the refugees, the rest of India had still less land'. Nehru also threatened in the letter that 'if Assam adopts an attitude of incapacity to help solve the refugee problem, then the claims of Assam for financial help will obviously suffer' (cited in Deka, 2015: 37-39). Because of the strong stand of Nehru, the Assam government had to settle all the Hindu refugee families immigrated to the state. However, Bardoloi continued his demand for the expulsion of illegal immigrants living in Assam. Against this backdrop, the parliament enacted the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950. But this act was to expel only 'certain immigrants' from Assam. The clever wording in the act was designed toput an end to the identification of a Hindu Bengali as an illegal immigrant in Assam[4]. All these convinced the Hindu Bengalis of Assam that the central leadership of Congress was really concerned about their interests. This realisation made them rally behind the party although they were apprehensive about the Assamese Congress leadership of the state.

Congress-Tea Community Alliance

The entire tea community, till independence, was a disintegrated, underdeveloped and depressed class under the British tea planters.In the early years after independence, the community did not have a middle-class to join the mainstream social and political lives beyond the boundaries of the tea gardens. They have remained vulnerable for political manipulation in a democratic polity where number

counts. They rallied behind Congress in elections after independence as the party emerged as the ruler after the British left. Then, Congress, in an attempt to make aware the community about the labour rights under a sovereign country, tried to form a trade union for the community. If this could be done, the party realised, the fragmented community could also be united behind the party. As a result, the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (Assam Tea Labour Organisation; ACMS) was formed in 1958 as a subsidiary of the Indian National Trade Union Congress. During its initial stage, the ACMS was led by non-tea community Congress leaders because of lack of leaders from the community. Gradually, an educated class, though very small in number, started to emerge from the community and the organisation was taken over by them. By now, it is a large trade union with an organisational presence in more than 800 tea estates in Assam and has approximately 3,50,000 active members (ACMS website). Since its formation, the ACMS has remained the strongest trade union in Assam till date. Because of the absence of any strong rival trade unions among the tea labour community, it has started to determine the voting behaviour of a large section of tea community in entire Assam. It has worked as an agent of Congress, like the Jamiat in the case of Muslims, during elections to gather vote for the party.

Making of Vote Bank

Nagaland in 1962 and Meghalaya and Mizoram in 1972 were carved out of Assam and made separate states, and with that, the hill tribe politics came to an end in the state. After 1972, whatever hill region remained with Assam became insignificant in the number game of electoral politics[5]. The present assembly constituencies of the state were fixed just before the 1978 election, which was the first election after the three states were separated. Congress lost power in the state in this election for the first time after independence. Against this backdrop, the existence of immigrant vote bank of Congress in Assam in this election becomes interesting.

Assam Assembly Election 1978

After the Indira Gandhi-led central government imposed internal emergency (1975–1977), Congress was widely hated in most parts of the country. But the story was

different in Assam. The party fared poorly in most of the other states in the parliamentary elections held in 1977, but it won 10 of the total 14 constituencies in Assam, which shows thatthe internal emergency hardly impacted the party in Assam. Therefore, the defeat of the Congress in the 1978 assembly elections just one year after a strong performance the parliamentary election was as a surprise.

The defeat was mainly due to party's division nationally into the Indian National Congress (INC) and INC (Indira) [INC(I)] just before the election. The parallel division of the party and defection of a few prominent Congress leaders to newly formed Janata Party in Assam just before the election made defeat inevitable for the party in the 1978 elections. How the division contributed to the defeat of the Congress becomes clear from the election outcome. The percentage of votes polled in the elections by both the fractions of Congress [INC – 23.62, INC(I) – 8.78] was higher than the winning alliance [Janata Party – 27.55, Plains Tribals Council of Assam (PTCA) – 2.60]. Total 26 candidates won on INC tickets,and the tally of INC(I) was only eight. In total, 21 constituencies, where Congress was defeated, the combined vote of both the fractions of the party was more than the winning candidate.

However, the defeat of the Congress in this election did not signal the breakdown of its traditional vote banks. Of the total 26 constituencies won by INC, while one was Bengali dominated, seven were Muslim dominated, and nine were tea community dominated[6]. On the other hand, three of the eight winning INC (I) candidates were Muslims, two Bengalisandthree tea labourers[7]. This reflection of *Ali*, *Coolie* and *Bengali* vote bank in favour of Mrs Gandhi's party [INC(I)] in this election even prompted her to strongly oppose the Assam Movement in the succeeding years, as she looked to consolidate her party's vote banks. In the next assembly election held in 1983 amidst the Assam Movement, the *Ali*, *Coolie* and *Bengali*steadfastly stood behind Congress. This election emerged as a clear reflection of immigrant vote banks of Congress in Assam.

Assam Assembly Election 1983

The Assam Movement was against the continuous illegal immigration to the state, and it demanded the identification and deportation of illegal immigrants. It

demanded that all the people immigrated to the state from the neighbouring countries after the publication of the 1951 National Register of Citizens be identified and deported from Assam. The demands of the movement directly targeted the recently immigrated sections of both Muslim and Bengali communities.

This election was held forcefully by the central government as the leaders of the Assam Movement had opposed and boycotted it. While the central government under Mrs Gandhi was adamant on holding the election, the movement leaders and supporters were committed to failingany such attempt. While Janata Party, BJP and Lok Dal decided not to contest the election, the Congress, Indian Congress (Socialist), PTCA and the left parties decided to participate. Meanwhile, after coming back to power at the centre in 1980, the Mrs Gandhi-led INC (I) started to represent Congress in Assam also, as the other fraction (of the Congress) started to decline mainly because of the defection of its leaders to Mrs Gandhi-led Congress.

Violence marred this election and thousands had to sacrifice their lives in election-related clashes. The election could not be held in 17 constituencies because of the absence of candidates and a large section of ethnic Assamese communities who supported the movement boycotted the elections even where it was held. In several ethnic Assamese dominated constituencies where the election was held, the voting percentage was very low (even below one per cent in two constituencies). From the total of 105 constituencies where the election was held, Congress (I) won from 91.

While the indigenous Assamese communities steered clear of the election, the immigrant vote banks of Congress, particularly the Muslims and the Bengalis, participated in huge number and supported Congress overwhelmingly. Bengali dominated Barak valley voted normally in this election, and barring Dholai, where polling percentage was 46, in all other constituencies the percentage was above

50,with the Sonai constituency recording the highest 75.6 per cent of polling. The Congress won 12 of total 15 constituencies from the Barak valley. It should be noted that the Assam Movement was concentrated mainly in plains districts of the Brahmaputra valley and Barak valley did not have much influence of the boycott call by its leaders. The immigrant Muslims of the Brahmaputra valley, too, where ethnic Assamese communities largely boycotted the election, participated in the elections in droves and supported the Congress. The polling percentage in some of the Muslim dominated constituencies from the lower Assam of the Brahmaputra valley were: Salmara South – 73.49, Baghbor – 70.97, Dhubri – 64.60, Dhing – 54.45 and Rupahihat – 52.15.

Compared to the high participation of Muslims and the Bengalis in this election, the participation of the tea labourers was low. The polling percentage in some important tea labourers influenced constituencies were: Sonari – 11.22, Doom Dooma – 20.41 and Tinsukia – 24.8. This shows that unlike the Muslims and Bengalis, a section the tea community voters from the Brahmaputra valley boycotted the election in response to the Assam Movement leaders. This support of the community for the movement was interesting as it was also an immigrant community. It was because the community was not directly targeted by the movement. As has already been highlighted, while a portion of both Muslims and Bengalis living in Assam had recently immigrated (from neighbouring countries) after independence, the tea community was imported to the state before independence. Besides, the tea labourers live in upper Assam among the indigenous Assamese communities which also might have influenced them not to come to direct conflict with these communities by participating in this election. It can be said that the community, despite its low participation in this election, never deserted Congress entirely in the post-Assam Movement period until the 2016 assembly election. Even in the 1983 election, Congress won from all tea community influenced constituencies where the election was held.

The 1983 election was largely boycotted by the indigenous Assamese communities in support of the Assam Movement. But the Muslims, Bengalis and tea community hugely participated in this election and overwhelming

supportedCongress which opposed the movement. This clearly reflected the immigrant vote banks of Congress in Assam.

The Breakdown

The Assam Accord, signed between the Congress-led central government and the movement leaders on 15 August 1985, which ended the movement, fixed 25 March 1971 as the cut-off date for the identification and deportation of illegal foreigners from Assam. This cut-off datewas repeatedly proposed by the Congress party and its consecutive central governments since the beginning of the movement. It should be noted that while the Assam Movement demanded 1951 as the cut-off year for the identification and deportation of illegal foreigners from Assam, the Muslim and Bengali organisations opposing the movement argued 1971 as cut-off year[8]. Although that demand was fulfilled in the Assam Accord, they were dissatisfied with Congress for two reasons. First, these communities made a lot of sacrifices and faced risks to their lives and future to support the Congress in the 1983 election, which was largely boycotted by the ethnic Assamese community. A total of 3,026 persons (both supporters and opponents of the election) lost their lives only in election-related violence from 1 January to 30 April 30 of 1983(Nathh, 2015: 135). They felt betrayed by the Congress despite putting everything on the line for the party when just after two years following the election, the central government led by the party signed the Assam Accord. Second, the feeling of betrayal was aggravated by the Clause 6 of the Assam Accord, which provides for constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to the Assamese people for protecting their cultural, social and linguistic identity and heritage. Both these communities started to consider this clause as an attempt to make them subordinate to the indigenous Assamese.

In this perspective, the Assam Accord becamea turning point from where the breakdown of immigrant vote banks of Congress started. The feeling of being betrayal among the Muslims and the Bengalis was so strong that Congress was routed in the 1985 Assam assembly election, held just after the Accord was signed.

It wasthe beginning of the breakdown of the Muslim vote bank. The Bengali vote bank of Congress started to crumble in the next Assam assembly election held in 1991.

Muslim Vote Bank

After the Assam Accord was signed, the leaders of the Assam Movement formed a regional political party – AGP. Organisations led by immigrant Muslims and Hindu Bengalis, who opposed themovement, lost faith in Congress because of the signing of the accord. Against this backdrop, representatives of organisations like Citizens' Right Preservation Committee (CRPC), All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU), Assam unit of Jamiat etc. formed the United Minority Front (UMF), a regional political party, as an answer to AGP, and to protect the minorities of Assam from the anticipated perils of the Assam Accord. The CRPC, led by Hindu Bengalis, was the main force behind the new party. The UMF was an alliance between the Hindu Bengalis and immigrant Muslims and was led by leaders from the Barak valley. While a Hindu Bengali leader, Kalipad Sen, became the President of the party, A.M.F. Golam Osmani, an immigrant Muslim, became the General Secretary. Both were from the Barak valley.

The immigrant Muslims living in the Brahmaputra valley, for the first time, deserted Congress in the 1985 Assam assembly election and rallied behind the newly formed UMF. Congress candidate could win from the Muslim dominated constituencies from the valley except for Dhubri constituency. A total of 17 UMF candidates won from the valley of which 15 won from Muslim dominated constituencies. However, the Muslims in the Barak valley did not align with UMF in this election. Not a single UMF candidate won from atotal of 15 constituencies of the Barak valley. Congress performed well in the Barak valley and won 10 seats, unlike its poor show in the other valley. Even the Muslim dominated constituencies like Karimganj South, Hailakandi, Sonai and Katigora voted for Congress. It was interesting that while, in this election, immigrant Muslims from the Brahmaputra valley punished Congress for signing the Assam Accord, the

Muslim from the Barak valley aligned with the party and did not support UMF. It happened for two reasons; first, the Barak valley was not much influenced by the Assam Movement, and second, the UMF was formed and led mainly by Hindu Bengali leaders from the valley which was not accepted by a large section of the Muslims in the valley.

The success of UMF in the Brahmaputra valley in 1985 exhibited the strength of Muslim votes in Assam. Realising this, the Jamiat wished to play a bigger role in the future politics of Assam by determining the electoral behaviour of immigrant Muslims from both the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. After independence, Jamiat was made relevant in politics of Assam by the Congress party. Until the Assam Movement, it worked as an agent of Congress to whip up Muslim votes for the party. This significantly helped to continue the Congress - Muslim alliance that was formed after independence until the 1983 Assam assembly elections. The Assam Movement provided Jamiat with the opportunity to play a more activist role in the politics of Assam. Hindutva organisations tried to take the opportunity of the mass mobilisation of the movement. National leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, L.K. Advani and Jaswant Singh of the newly formed BJP supported the movement and actively campaigned for it. Against this, Jamiat came forward to oppose the movement on the premise that it was influenced and controlled by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). It strongly expressed the concerns of Muslims vis-à-vis the movement and actively opposed it. This helped the Jamiat to make itself more relevant among the immigrant Muslims in Assam who hadbecome the main target of the movement.

With renewed relevance among the Muslims, since the 1991 assembly elections, Jamiat started to lend its heft publicly to different political parties in elections held in Assam. In the 1991 assembly election, it lent support to Congress. In 1996 and 2001 elections, it supported AGP-led coalition and Congress, respectively (Omar, 2005: 12). In 1991, 1996 and 2001 Assam assembly elections, the party or formation that won the election and came to power in the state was

supported by Jamiat. This made the Jamiat 'kingmaker' in the politics of Assam. However, it was interesting that it did not show much interest in UMF after 1985 Assam assembly elections. It might be because CRPC, a Hindu Bengali organisation, led the process of the formation of UMF. On the other hand, the first-ever Bengali Hindu and immigrant Muslim political alliance through UMF proved a failure in the 1985 Assam assembly election itself as not a single candidate from the party could win from the Hindu Bengali dominated Barak valley.

Assembly elections held in 1991, 1996 and 2001 created the impression among the Assam Jamiat leaders that they determine the politics of Assam. They became confident that they could even form a government in Assam if the Muslim community, accounting for one-third of the total population of the state, could be united under a political party. The repeal of the Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal) Act, 1983 [IM(DT)][9] gave Jamiat leadership the opportunity to become the 'king' from 'kingmaker' in the politics of Assam. The Assam Jamiat then formed the AUDF in 2005 under the pretext of the alleged betrayal by the Congress in repealing the IM(DT) Act and in an objective to safeguard the interests of the minorities in post IM(DT) situation. The party showed significant success in the 2006 Assam assembly elections which inspired its leadership to extend its activities to other parts of the country, and the party was relaunched as All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) in 2009.

Since the formation of AUDF, the Assam unit of Jamiat has solidly stood behind it. In the 2006, 2011 and 2016 Assam assembly elections, the AIUDF gained 9.03, 12.57 and 13.05 per cent of the total votes polled. It bagged 10, 18 and 13 seats respectively in these elections. Because of the existence and success of AUIDF in these consecutive elections, the Muslim vote in Assam remained divided between the Congress and AIUDF. In the 2016 Assam assembly election, Congress could not win three constituencies from the Barak valley (Patharkandi, Sonai and Katigora) and eight constituencies from the Brahmaputra valley (Golakganj, Bilasipara East, Barpeta, Mangaldoi, Raha, Batadroba, Nowgong and Lumding) because of the presence of AIUDF.

Bengali Vote Bank

In the 1985 Assam assembly election, the Barak valley Bengalis largely supported the Congress. They did not rally behind the UMF even though the party was formed and led mainly by the Hindu Bengalis from the valley. The Assam Movement might not have influenced the Barak valley much, but the Bengalis from here were opposed to it. They were aware of the clauses (including Clause 6) of the Assam Accord after it was signed. They were not at all happy with Congress because of its role in signing the accord. Despite all these, the Bengalis from the Barak largely voted for Congress in this election. It was because, although CRPC leaders took the lead of the formation of UMF, the main constituents of the party were Muslim organisations like the Jamiat. This discouraged the Bengalis ofthe valley from supporting UMF in the 1985 election. They, without an alternative, supported Congress despite strong dissatisfaction towards it. This dissatisfaction reflected in the valley in the next Assam assembly election held in 1991. It has already been mentioned that UMF was not supported by Muslims from the Barak valley in the 1985 election because of the leading role of CRPC in setting upthe party. Against this, the Hindu Bengalis did not support it as Muslim religious organisation Jamiat, and few Muslim student organisations were constituents of it.

The BJP started to gain grounds nationally with the *Rath Yatra* of its national President L.K.Advani in support of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in late 1990. In the Assam assembly elections held in 1991, the Barak valley Bengalis overwhelmingly supported the BJP. In this election, BJP won 10 seats in Assam and nine of them were from Barak. This was the first election when BJP won a seat in Assam elections. It can be said that it started the electoral journey in Assam from the Barak valley in 1991. After the party was formed, it did not participate in the 1983 Assam assembly elections in support of the boycott call of the Assam Movement leaders. Although it participated in the 1985 Assam election, it failed to show any success.

The Bengali vote bank of Congress in Assam disintegrated in the 1991 assembly election. However, this cannot be subscribed only as a fall out of the growing popularity of BJP as a result of *Rath Yatra.* It was also a fall out of the

Assam Accord. In this election, the Bengalis from the valley sided with BJP to punish Congress for the accord and to compete with the Jamiat's increasing influence among the Muslims in Assam. As has been mentioned, in the 1991 Assam assembly election, Assam Jamiat openly lent its electoral support to Congress after it dissociated itself from UMF just after the 1985 assembly election.

Congress recovered to some extent and blunted the influence of BJP among the Bengalis from the Barak valley in the next (1996) Assam assembly election, and since then the Bengalis from the valley remained divided between Congress and BJP in subsequent 2001 and 2006 assembly elections. In the 2011 Assam assembly election, however, Barak valley Bengalis supported Congress overwhelmingly. In this election, Congress won 13 seats from the valley and BJP, which won at least four seats from the valley in subsequent Assembly elections since 1991, drew a blank. This wholehearted support of Bengalis to Congress in the 2011 assembly election again was a reaction to Muslim politics. The Congress Chief Minister of Assam, Tarun Gogoi, during the period after the AUDF was formed, successfully emerged as the warrior against the Muslim communalism of AIUDF with his public criticisms and rhetoric against AIUDF President Badruddin Ajmal. To contain the growth of Muslim communalism under AIUDF, Congress was widely supported by non-Muslims from both the valleys of Assam in this election (Nath, 2019: 39). As a result, it won 78 seats in this election in entire Assam, against 53 in the previous election, and formed the third consecutive government under Tarun Gogoi. To help Congress to contain AIUDF, in this election, the Barak valley Hindus did not rally behind BJP which did not have much influence in the other valley.

After this election, the AIUDF emerged as the main opposition party in the Assam Legislative Assembly, winning 18 seats. This frightened both the indigenous Assamese communities from the Brahmaputra valley and the Hindu Bengalis from the Barak valley of being politically subordinated by immigrant Muslims. This should be noted that AIUDF is led and supported mainly by the

immigrant Muslims of the state. Against this backdrop, BJP started to gain ground fast in the entire state after it formed government at the centre under Narendra Modi in 2014. The consequence was that the 2016 assembly election was communally polarised between AIUDF and BJP. In this election, while BJP won eight constituencies in the Barak, AIUDF showed its best-ever performance there, by winning four seats. Congress won only three seats from the valley, the worst ever since independence.

Tea Community Vote Bank

The tea community in Assam did not take a clear stand vis-a-vis the Assam Movement which was reflected from their very low to average participation in different constituencies in the 1983 assembly elections. They, again, remain divided between Congress and the newly formed AGP in the 1985 election. In this election, although constituencies like Rangapara, Behali and Dhekiajuli from the north bank of river Brahmaputra stood behind Congress, AGP candidates won from constituencies like Sarupathar, Khumtai, Mariani, Sonari, Moran, Lahowal etc. from the south bank of Brahmaputra. All these constituencies have a high concentration of the tea community. In the 1991 assembly election, the community again rallied behind Congress in large numbers. And till 2011 assembly elections, they remained a consistent support base of the Congress. The influence of AGP over the community, during this period, remained confined to few constituencies like Dhekiajuli, Sarupathar, Naharkotia and Khumtai. The tea community deserted Congress completely only in the 2016 Assam assembly election. The party did not wina single constituency influenced by them from the north bank of Brahmaputra. Again, only four constituencies witha heavy concentration of the community from the south bank of Brahmaputra—Sarupathar, Nazira, Doom Dooma and Mariani— were won by the party. In this election, the tea community of entire Assam solidly rallied behind BJP and deserted the Congress. With the breakdown of tea community vote bank, Congress lost its last immigrant vote bank in Assam.

BJP started to gain ground among the tea community since the beginning of the present century. It started to influence the electoral politics of the Brahmaputra

valley significantly since the 2001 assembly elections. In this election, it won from total four constituencies from the Brahmaputra valley of which two were dominated by tea labours: Behali from the north bank and Duliajan from the south bank of the Brahmaputra. The other two constituencies it won from the valley (Golakganj and Lumding) were with a high concentration of Bengali population. In this situation, it can be said that in the Brahmaputra valley, BJP started to influence the tea labourers before the indigenous communities. Interestingly, with the rise of BJP over the tea community, the influence of ACMS over it started to decline. The structure and membership of ACMS haveremained intact, but its influence over the community in elections began to wane. From the origin, it always followed a policy of not to hamper the interests of the planters as it was a trade union under Congress which ruled Assam most of the time after independence. In this situation, the rising aspirations of the community as a result of the spread of education among a significant section of them has emerged as a challenge before the organisation. Pawan Singh Ghatowar, a five-time Congress Member of Parliament from Dibrugarh who also became a central minister, emerged as the tallest leader of ACMS during the 1980s and 1990s. Even he faced a defeat from Dibrugarh parliamentary constituency in 2004 election which he had retained since the 1991 parliamentary election.

Assam has a large Muslim population. The BJP realised the electoral importance of the tea community in its mission to spread organisation in the state. To contain the influence of the Congress-backed ACMS over the tea community, the Bharatiya Chah Mazdoor Sangha was formed in the late 1970s under the patronage of then Jana Sangh. However, it could not sustain for long. After BJP formed government at the centre in the late 1990s, different organisations of RSS started to work among the community. However, the BJP broke the Congress vote bankthrough a calculated electoral strategy in the 2014 parliamentary election. One important point to be noted here is that the Assam Tea Garden Tribes Students Organisation (ATGTSO), formed in 1970, became Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTSA) in 1984 and became very active regarding the interests of

the tea community in the post-Assam Movement period. While most of the leaders from ATGTSO and then ATTSA migrated to Congress after leaving the student organisation, few leaders from AATSA joined BJP after it formed government at the centre in the late 1990s. Two young prominent ex-ATTSA leaders who joined BJP at this juncture were Rameswar Teli and Kamakhya Prasad Tasa. BJP won over the entire tea community through these two leaders in a well-formulated strategy in the 2014 parliamentary election.

Assam also witnessed a strong electoral wave in favour of BJP in the 2014 parliamentary election after Narendra Modi was designated as the prime ministerial candidate from the party. In this election, BJP strategically fielded tea community candidates from Dibrugarh and Jorhat constituencies. While Rameswar Teli was fielded from Dibrugarh, Kamakhya PrasadTasa was made the candidate from Jorhat. These two constituencies from upper Assam of Brahmaputra valley fall under the region where the tea community is mainly concentrated. While Dibrugarh is absolutely determined by the community, Jorhat is strongly influenced by it. The Jorhat is mainly determined by the Ahoms. The Congress strategy for these two constituencies remained like earlier – Dibrugarh for tea community candidate and Jorhat for Ahom candidate. But BJP took a risk by fielding tea community candidates from both the constituencies in an attempt to steal the tea community vote bank from Congress. Under Narendra Modi wave, both Teli and Tasa won and this worked as the winning strategy to break down the Congress dominance over the community in the next Assam assembly election. The victory of the Teli and Tasa created new opportunities for the BJP to penetrate the community. After this, the migration of leaders from ATTSA and entire tea community to Congress completely stopped, and BJP emerged as the new platform of these leaders. In the 2014 parliamentary election, BJP promised to give the Schedule Tribes status to the Adivasis, a major section from tea community. The scheduling of the Adivasis as a tribe hadrepeatedly been promised by Congress in previous elections, but the party never been fulfilled it. Meanwhile, since the 2014 parliamentary election, Narendra Modi started to earn popularity among the tea community also like other

ethnic communities of the state. All these contributed to the shifting of the tea community votes to BJP and the breakdown of the Congress vote bank among them in the 2016 assembly election for the first time in post-independence history.

Conclusion

The immigrant Muslims, Hindu Bengalis and the tea community are three large communities living in Assam which started to migrate to the state after it was taken over by the British. Congress formed electoral alliances with these recently immigrated communities after independence which helped it significantly to rule Assam for most of the time since independence. However, the Assam Accord changed the situation and the post-Assam Movement period has shown a gradual decline of immigrant vote banks of Congress in the state. In the last Assam assembly election held in 2016, Congress contested, for the first time in the post-independencehistory, without an immigrant vote bank. The Muslims were the first todesert the party just after the Assam Movement. In the post-Assam Movement period, the community's electoral behaviour was significantly determined by Jamiat. However, it can also not be said that the community has become a communal bloc under Jamiat. It is because the AIUDF, patronised by Jamiat, could not get more than 13 per cent votes in the last three assembly elections although Muslims are more than one-third of the total population of Assam. The Bengalis were the next to desert Congress as a vote bank. It can be said that leaving of Congress by the Hindu Bengalis is the consequence of increasing communal politics among the Muslims in the state. Besides, the decline of the ACMS and smart ethnic politics of BJP have broken down the tea community vote bank of Congress in 2016 Assam election.

Notes

1. In census enumeration, there is no provision of recording the Hindu Bengali population separately. Their population strength cannot be ascertained even from language data as a large section of Muslims living in Barak valley and lower Assam of Brahmaputra valley identify Bengali as mother tongue. The present figure is from www.wikipedia.org (accessed on 5 June 2020).

2. Ahoms are an ethnic community living mainly in upper Assam districts. They, a Tai clan originally from Southeast Asia, immigrated to the Brahmaputra valley and ruled Assam during 1228–1826.

3. In the Brahmaputra valley, the immigrant Muslims are concentrated mainly in the lower Assam districts. This region consists of more than 78 per cent of the total Muslim population of the state and almost 94 per cent of total Muslims living in the Brahmaputra valley as per the 2011 census. It should be noted, however, that all Muslims in lower Assam are not immigrants; they are an overwhelming majority over the indigenous Muslims.

4. It was clear from the discussions on the bill in the parliament that the provisions of the bill would be applicable to only those immigrants staying in Assam whose staying is detrimental to the interests of India. The bill would not be applicable to those whose staying is not detrimental to the interests of India, or who have migrated to Assam because of instability in Pakistan or other nations (Parliamentary Debate, Vol. I, Part III). The central government, through this act, wanted to expel only the Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan.

5. Since the 1978 assembly election, the hill region has only five of total 126 assembly constituencies in Assam.

6. Among the constituencies won by INC, Katlichera was Bengali dominated; Karimganj South, Katigora, Dhubri, Baghbor, Chenga, Lahorighat and Rupahihat were Muslim dominated; and, Dhekiajuli, Rangapara, Behali, Bokakhat, Sarupathar, Mariani, Nazira, Lahowal and Doom Dooma were tea community influential.

7. Of total eight elected MLAs from INC(I), Muslim: Abdus Sobhan (Jania), A.N.Akram Hussain (Chaygaon), Syeda Anwara Taimur (Dalgaon); Bengali: Nepal Chandra Das (Algapur), Sisir Ranjan Das (Dholai); and, tea community: Satya Tanti (Sonari), Joy Chandra Nagbangshi (Moran), Rameswar Dhanowar (Digboi).

8. AAMSU, formed as a student organisation of both religious and linguistic minorities of Assam in 1980 to counter the Assam Movement; CRPC, a Hindu Bengali organisation; and Jamiat, a religious organisation of Muslims, were the main opposing forces of Assam Movement. All these organisations argued that1971 be made the cut-off year.

9. The Act was legislated by the Indian parliament and imposed on Assam in 1983. After 22 years of existence in the state, the Supreme Court of India declared it as illegal in its judgment on the Writ Petition (Civil) 131 of 2000 (*Sarbananda Sonowal vs. Union of India & Anr*), on 12 July 2005, and the Act was repealed.

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FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL : POPULAR PROTESTS IN LATIN AMERICA DURING 2011-2015

Binay Prasad

Abstract

Pink tide were implicitly seen or projected as an opposition to neo-liberal policies, however, what emerges during 2011-2015 suggests that the reason are linked to the local concerns. One can examine these either in reference to the regions or the nature of demands and the outcomes. Further, the protests emanate from the sectors for which these countries have been well known the world over, for being the best. Chile and Colombia, both under the right-wing governments (2014), the students were calling for more state intervention in education. In fact, Chile resembled the best in education. Similarly, in Colombia coffee growers protested against free trade agreements. Bolivia and Ecuador, both under the new- left (2014) was backed by indigenous masses; the very sections that protested against them. Street protests in Brazil (2014) were for the reasons beyond a mere transport fare hike, but encompass governance issues too. Indeed, Brazil was seen as a perfect case of governance and poverty alleviation. Surprisingly, the sectors which have remained a government priority for decades are not an exception to the ever rising discontent. This may give an indication; discontent in other sectors might be even deeper and wider.

Keywords: Latin America, protests, street protests, neo-liberal agenda

Introduction

Public protests in Latin America are neither new nor surprising. Leave troubled times, Countries in the region have witnessed protests even during some of the most brutal regimes in history (Carey, 2006, p. 3). In fact, Latin America has witnessed protests in various phases of its transition ranging from socio-economic to political transitions. In reference to the contemporary time, Latin America is in a stage of strengthening democracy and consolidating its institutions, and the present time is no exception to it (protests!). Those on the left have successively replaced right wing governments one after another, all across the Latin America. This was universally accepted as in response to the deep resentment among Latin Americans with the previous so-called pro market 'right-wing and neo-liberal' regimes.

Whatever may be the type of new regimes, they are undoubtedly more socially inclined than their predecessors were[1]. New social and economic programmes like *Bolsa Familia* in Brazil and *Oportunidades* in Mexico were introduced despite the disagreements with the pro-market lobby in the respective countries. The impact of such programmes has been widely acknowledged and replicated worldwide. Hence, this might have reduced a probability of nationwide resistance from the general public, but the same does not stand true. This is so as the protests with local or global agenda seems to have taken Latin America aboard. The protests during the period 2011-2015 are, however, a surprising thing as for over a decade, Latin America has been experiencing changes in governments and governance pattern and an environment of wide optimism had prevailed.

Why Protest?

Be it the Deep South Andean region of Chile, or top north Mexico, people were on the streets everywhere. In South America, be it Brazil, Ecuador, Bolivia or Venezuela, people were out on the streets with one demand or the other. It is, however, confusing that the said protests were often clubbed with the past phenomenon usually associated with the victory of Hugo Chavez (1999) and the successive victory of similar regimes all over South America. To be simple, as the rise of leftist leaders was projected to be a Latin American way of protesting

against the policies of United States, so were the protests during the period in consideration[2].

It is in fact an irrefutable point that Latin America drawing its subjugation from the dependency thesis which existed both in theory as well as in reality, did on a massive scale protest against the free market policies and neo-liberal elements (Frederick Solt, 2014), however such agendas cannot and should not be associated with each and every protest that took place in the recent times, more specifically in the last one decade, as the sole reason. It must be agreed that the very nature of neo-liberal policies does feature as an element, but it cannot form the sole basis of all the popular protests. However, analysis of the latter is yet to find a place in the academic discourse. It is surprising that articles on anti-government protests of recent times have largely appeared in the Latin American, American and western presses and for that very reason it was being seen as a conspiracy against the populist leaders in LAC.[3]

In fact, the rise of 'left-of-the-centre' leaders starting from Chavez (1999) and Lula (2002), also coincided with the Latin American boom, which has eventually ended. Undoubtedly, the charm of populist leaders whose rise after a long period of political control under the so- called 'right' over the state, was on the downfall. With the conditions deteriorating on the economic front, protests against Rafael Correa over the rise in oil prices acts as the perfect example to it. Added to it, the anti-mining protest against Evo Morales' government in Arequipa in Peru also shows that resentment exists with the way the government is acting, that too in the sections that form the support base. Added to it, corruption, which more or less a norm in Latin America has become intolerant, so as to invite massive and disruptive protests, like the protests in May 2015 in Guatemala City.

Local versus Global

As discussed earlier, the paper intends to distinguish between local and global agendas embedded with the protests. Coming down to the street protests (2011-2015), neither miners in Ecuador or Bolivia can be said to be protesting against the neo-liberal policies alone, nor are the Brazilians on the streets for the opposition

of neo-liberal policies 'propagated by United States', World Bank or IMF. Similarly, teachers in Mexico are against the education policies implemented by the Mexican government and not by anyone else beyond its frontiers. It is to say that despite the broad feature of all the protests in the Latin American region to be transnational, it is the local agenda that matter as that is what that concerns the people on day to day basis.

It implies that even on the academic framework a different approach, i.e. moving away from the lenses of neo-liberalism could throw fresh insights into the issue. It is one way to analyse on the continental level the Latin American protest against neo-liberalism. It is another way to look if there are some local issues involved in such protests that are more significant. Added to it, one must look at the composition of masses at protests orthe sectors that are protesting and whether these sectors represent the popular sectors of the country. In case, they represent the popular sector, why is it the case that sectors, which were considered to be the best and well off as It implies that even on the academic framework a different approach, i.e. moving away from the lenses of neo-liberalism could throw fresh insights into the issue. It is one way to analyse on the continental level the Latin American protest against neo-liberalism. It is another way to look if there are some local issues involved in such protests that are more significant. Added to it, one must look at the composition of masses at protests orthe sectors that are protesting and whether these sectors represent the popular sectors of the country. In case, they represent the popular sector, why is it the case that sectors, which were considered to be the best and well off as well as remained a government priority at least for the current regimes, are protesting?[4] The analysis of the class to which protesters resemble ranges from general public to police officials, from students to teachers and from indigenous communities to coffee plant growers and other agricultural workers. The issues that sparked such protests are common issues of corruption, incompetence of governments, discriminatory economic and social welfare policies (Jose Enrique Arrioja, 2015). It is high time to recognise the point that, the set of protests mark a significant turn in emphasising that the issues have become more localised (Reiter, 2010). In a span of over sixteen years (from 1998 i.e. victory of Chavez), people have become more concerned with the local

policies that deprive them, than a long span of dependency and under-development that was determined by external factors.

In this context, the resistance by people is to reclaim their rights (Fabian Machado, 2009, p. 8) than mere resistance to the implications of neo-liberal policies. Just as a matter of fact, would protest by miners in Bolivia and Ecuador be directly related to neo-liberal policies? Alternatively, neo-liberal policies do not have any linkage with the protest of indigenous communities in Bolivia or anti-government protests in Venezuela. Nor does discontent owing to neo-liberal policies can in anyway explain the reason for the protests by teachers in Mexico or protest by police officials in Bolivia. In part, it is true as in reference to the students' protests in Chile and Colombia or protests by coffee plant growers and farmers in Colombia, but states' own failure cannot and should not be undermined. Why Chile, a politically strong, for over a decade seen and presented as a perfect case of globalisation witnessed and still is witnessing a nationwide student' protests? Adding to the point, Chile by several standards fares better in education in Latin America to most others and if students are protesting then something must be wrong with the Chile's education policy rather than the neo-liberal policies of the United States or the World Bank. It is argued; weak states often witness more protests than the strong ones (Arce, 2010). It is to be ascertained that strong and weak states alike are witnessing protest from their citizens; hence the reasons for the same seem to be more related with the local problems than a global one.

As an area of research, public protests have more come to the focus, when such protests took place in 'non-democratic regimes' like China or repressive regimes like the one of Pinochet's Chile[5]. It is however equally important to study when such methods of dissent expression are adopted by the people in democratic regimes. The question has come a long way, why do people protest but not its answer. It has always been an area of study by scholars, why some regions protest more than the other do and why people in some countries protest the way they do (Arce, 2010). A consensus on the same is that protest sometimes remains the sole way of showing disagreement with the governments' policies or expressing their discontent over the prevailing circumstances. The positive thing about the protest

is that a healthy democracy witnesses protests more often; as it shows peoples' trust on the method deployed to bring about a change in the governance pattern and their grievances be addressed (Quantana, 2013). To say the other way round, people would not protest, if they think it is useless and the government remains rigid enough to listen to their demands. The scale and the size of protest are also dependent on various factors irrespective of either the country's size or its population. Drawing lessons from the protests by labour unions during the period of the 50s and 60s be it Latin America or the world-over shows that the more organised group a protest group represents, the more massive a movement can be and hence better in position to receive concessions from the government (Tenorio, 2014). In context of the political system, the permeability of the system determines the scale of resistance it would experience i.e. the state having more decentralised structure would have more massive protest as people feel they can penetrate into the system from more openings and attack it from all sides to get their voices heard (Quantana, 2013). Hence, people in the centralised states protest less as it is harder to penetrate the system than otherwise. In conceptual terms, it is also a significant point that, people who are near to the system protest more often than those who are far. In the context of Latin America, it is important to emphasise here that, in the fast changing Americas, the sections that are protesting the most are likely the ones, which are or are becoming electorally important.

The first decade of the 21st century saw propping up of leftist governments in Latin America one after another so called as the 'new left'. Be it Chile or Bolivia, Brazil or Ecuador all are or have been in the said times, under a 'some' kind of new left. This is also surprising from the fact; over two-third of governments during the period 2014-15 in Latin America are under Pink tide a term coined by Larry Rohter[6] for this phenomenon. Several groups, which were not electorally important, become a significant determinant of electoral victory due to the emergence of such regimes. Communities like indigenous groups and women have come to the fore and their issues are being taken seriously in the changed environment. It is important to see that the sectors that actually voted the leaders to powers are the ones who are protesting not very far from the seat of powers of the executive.

Indigenismo

An important change that has been witnessed with the rise of new left is the corresponding empowerment of indigenous politics in Latin America (Puig, 2010). An ideal example would be of Bolivia that constitute over 60 percent share of the indigenous population. The indigenous people played a strong determinant in voting Evo Morales to power in 2006, who himself belongs to an indigenous group. Morales, an indigenous with *Aymara* descent became the first indigenous president of Bolivia. He belongs to a family of coca plant growers; had championed the cause for the uplift of the marginalised sections of Bolivian society. The *Moviemento al socialismo* (MAS) initiated by him, brought various indigenous groups in mainstream politics under his leadership. During more than two decades of his activism, he protested against the anti-narcotics policy of the United States, a policy that targeted destruction of all coca plants, as they are used for making drugs and are subsequently smuggled along US-Mexico border to the United States. The anti-narcotics policy of United States became a serious issue due to the reason that, the livelihood of wide sections of marginalised groups in Bolivia were dependent on the revenue earned out of coca plants. This traces the origin of anti-US sentiments in Bolivia, which was capitalised by Morales, also to legitimise the centuries of oppression that Bolivia suffered owing to foreign powers. This is how Morales often accused foreign powers of disturbing political stability in Bolivia like in the case of the alleged coup in 2010. This was also done during the expulsion of American diplomats and expulsion of anti-narcotics agency set-up by US which was working in Bolivia and several other Latin American countries, on the charge that it was interfering in the domestic politics of Bolivia (Kraul, 2009). However, the trend of accusing an external hand in domestic politics of Bolivia was reversed when indigenous groups from Isiboro Secure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS) region started a 500 km march to La Paz, the capital city of Bolivia. Though, as usual Morales accused exiled opposition leaders and the United States for the same, but it suffered a backlash when ministers in Morales' cabinet started resigning over the accusation of indiscriminate use of force by the police on protesters (Bolivia minister resigns over Amazon road protest, 2011). It is important

to stress that Bolivia, with its rewritten constitution, provides the citizens 'right to protest' as well as special provisions for safeguards of the rights of indigenous groups, solidifying its commitment towards the indigenous communities living in Bolivia. However, the protest by indigenous groups and the way police dealt with the protesters seem to question their long-held commitment. The continuous protests by the indigenous population that lasted for more than 11 days suggest that the grievances are deep. The protest by the indigenous group of people was over the construction of highways passing over the region where indigenous communities lived. Eventually, Morales announced the suspension of the highway project being built by a Brazilian company, which was supposed to integrate many parts to the country with each other as well as help it link with coastal seas and other bordering nations (Bolivia's Evo Morales suspends Amazon road project, 2011). Additionally, Evo Morales announced holding a referendum before proceeding ahead with this (ambitious as well as controversial) project and also to open dialogue between two provinces namely Cochabamba and Beni, which are involved in the dispute (Bolivia's Evo Morales suspends Amazon road project, 2011). While the decision to have a referendum is welcoming, it is important to point out here that a government, which draws its powers from the support offered by indigenous communities, decided to hold a referendum after the upheaval and not before. This exposes the fault on the government's part. Additionally, it is important to stress that indigenous communities chose to come all the way from TIPNIS to La Paz, to express their dissent, highlighting the flaws of avenues for people to express their disagreements at the local level. Now the most important question is how a 'marginalised' section was capable of holding a protest at all. The reason is, as discussed earlier in the paper; their rise and with increasing electoral importance they hold with Morales' rise to power, they have come forward expecting a viable solution to their problems. It is again interesting to note that, in June 2012, the same police sector that was used to suppress the protesters (indigenous groups), themselves protested against the low wages being paid by the government. This was possible because having shown their faithfulness and integrity, they felt their protest would also bring a change in their lives. Rafael Correa in Ecuador too belongs to the club of 'new left' who rose to power with a commitment to nationalise

natural resources in the country for the welfare of the Ecuadorian and not multi-national companies. By mid of 2013, the indigenous communities in Ecuador protested against the proposed 'copper mining plans' in Yasuni national park, denting his image as the saviour of the said community.

Students' Protests

Next case would be Chile and Colombia, both witnessing protests from the university students so to increase more state intervention in the education sector. In South America, both Chile and Colombia, have retained a strong democratic structure, in the post-dictatorship era. The rankings by Freedom House year after year classified both the countries as politically free . It is commendable that with time, political decentralisation in Chile and Colombia alike have reached an acceptable level and clear division of powers between different organs of the government exists, so as to maintain checks and balances between them (Fabian Machado, 2009, p. 6). It is in this context that scale of protest and popular participation by students must be seen. As discussed earlier, states having a well-developed decentralised structure are more permeable and offer more openings for people to express their disagreements. Contrary to the protests by indigenous groups in Bolivia, which was mainly concentrated towards the La Paz, the university students' protest is more decentralised and distributed over several parts of the country. It is the decentralised character of Chile that determines the national character of the students' protest. Had Chile been a centralised state, it would not have been easy for the university students beyond the capital city of Santiago to attack governments' seat of power in the same way as those in Santiago could do. Coming to the popular sectors in protest, it is to be reminded that education sector in Chile, and to a lesser extent in reference to Colombia, are considered one of the best in Latin America. Even by ranking, Chile was ranked better off than many other Latin American countries (PISA 2012 Results, 2013). Now as referred earlier, Chile is and has been said to be the best in the education sector, but nationwide protests by university students suggest not everything may be right in Chile. In reality, Chile's private educational sector is performing well but the same may not stand true with the government owned and run universities and schools (Long,

2011). Chile ranks lower on social segregation; some call it a 'social apartheid' or 'educational apartheid' being practised by Chilean government . The demand by students both in Chile and Colombia have been in respect to more and more state intervention in the education sector as opposed to private investment that basically limits education on to the elite ones. Despite, a year-long protest, the government does not seem convinced enough to again monopolise the education sector (Long, 2011). The discontent is rising not only due to hike in fees but the public-private divide is equally fuelling the protests. In Colombia, students in fact with a slogan expressed their disagreement over Colombia becoming more and more like Chile (Devia, 2011). By coincidence, both Chile and Colombia have right wing government in power. Even in this case, the protest cannot be called; solely a protest against neo-liberal policies, rather state's failure is more evident. To add further to this case; Mexico witnessed huge protests by the teachers, despite right-wing government in power external factors cannot be blamed, as the reasons are more local than a global one. With the coming of Enrique Peña Nieto (2012) in power, many educational reforms and the evaluation system that have been introduced are alleged to target teachers. As per the allegations made, it is said the new evaluation system makes it easy to fire teachers (Agren, 2013). As the statement by Porfirio Diaz goes 'Poor Mexico, so far from God and so close to the US'; Mexico having a border with the United States always had problems where the US had a stake. Be it the issue of trade or drug trafficking or illegal immigration, Mexicans have spent much of their time pointing fingers towards the US as well having accused by the US for many other similar problems. However, the protests by teachers are a result of governments' own policy rather than of United States. The drug war that is continuing in Mexico is also being protested by Mexicans, in demand for legalisation of drugs in the country. As obvious, it is to be seen how does the US views this specific demands of Mexicans

Colombia not being an exception like most Latin American countries experienced several cycles of boom and bust. With coffee exports rising, money earned from it has been a source of foreign exchange for Colombia. It has remained a priority sector in Colombia. Coffee institutes and agricultural institutes not only

promoted advanced research but also advised the government on the economic policies to be followed. Farmers have also been benefitted by the increasing food prices in the world market. While, that case with agricultural workers has been well off, the protest by agricultural sectors is directed against the some clauses of economic policies of the government that may put Colombian farmers on the losing end while in free trade with external partners.

Brazil's case

A country as giant as Brazil, if revolts it is certain to get international attention. Brazil, which hosted 2014 World Cup and is set to host 2016 Olympics suddenly saw spiralling of protests all over the country from June 2013. The protest started during confederations cup training almost a year before the scheduled world cup (June 2014) in Sao Paulo. Surprisingly, the scale of protest were huge spreading to more than 80 cities in Brazil, similar to the national- level students' protests in Chile. Though a seven percent hike in transport fares might have triggered the protest, it is not mere the hike in transport fares but encompasses wide range socio-economic dimensions to it like corruption, huge spending on building sports infrastructure while letting public utilities at a bad end (Saad-Filho, 2013). The protest in Brazil resembled a new generation of protests; without any ideological leanings and with a wide usage of social networking sites to retain the speedy interaction as well as connecting people in various countries at the same time, making them aware of the police atrocities at the same time (Saad-Filho, 2013, p. 659). A nameless protest, comprising Black blocs was given an ideological bent, as in various other countries such groups have been associated with anti-globalisation protests. It is, however, to be stressed that, people expressed their grievances to Mayor of Rio and the Brazilian President. It was purely a protest against the corrupt politicians as well as the law of 'secret ballot' in Brazilian Senate that seems to protect the corrupt leaders against the law that may go against their interests. The surprising part is that Brazil, which lifted millions out of poverty with the help of several welfare programmes like *Bolsa Familia* and *Fome Zero*, has such a large discontented population. Post-election of Luiz Inacio Lula da' Silva, policies under his leadership have had added millions of people to the middle class and the same

middle class is out on streets against his successors. Hence, it is important to know that despite improvements in governance patterns, the economic situation has deteriorated and the growth rate remained between less than one per cent to two per cent in the last few years. The social divide between haves' and have not's has worsened over the years. Given the participation of middle class in huge numbers, it is important to note that Brazil constitute the largest middle-class in the Latin American region, and middle classes have remained an utmost priority of the government since Lula came to power (Saad-Filho, 2013, p. 661). Contrary to the expectations, the loopholes existing between government and public in reference to the transfer of benefits managed to retain the discontent of the class. It is important to mention here that, students, youths, teachers and labour union leaders also flared up their demands for an increase in wages and extension of good education and other public benefits (Saad-Filho 658).

Against the populists!

The news that retained a special concern in American media is that of anti-government protests in Venezuela against the president Nicolas Maduro. This is obviously due to animosity between Venezuela and United States. It is important to note here that Hugo Chavez's victory apart, roaring voice and televised speeches by him were seen as Venezuela's and Venezuelans' protest, to the economic policies that the United States resembled. However, it is surprising that dissent of 'pueblo' i.e. people for which Venezuela's populism stood is not being tolerated by the government. It is worth mentioning here that Maduro's victory was by a mere one percent margin and even post his victory, he has not been able to retain the popular charm that was instigated by his predecessor Chavez, not to say about discontent among 'people', a section that constitutes the core of Venezuela's current participatory democracy. The inflation remains currently above 50 percent even by the official figure, worse to say about the availability of consumer goods in the market. Despite repeated accusation by Maduro; protesters of being fascists and protégé of United States, it is not worth convincing given the current economic situation in Venezuela. Though the protest might have ended, it is visible from the use of excess force that, be it Venezuela or Bolivia or Brazil, the new liberal regimes

have not been able to exhibit their tolerance towards the dissenting parties, despite their commitment of being tolerant (Carey 2006).

Expectations and accomplishments

It is without a doubt that the very rise of 'political outsiders' in the form of leaders of the new left exhibit peoples' expectation with those candidates who did not have previous experiences in politics, and who won on their personalist charm. The rise of 'political outsiders' also reflect that people have lost faiths in the conventional albeit a rather organised political system (Carreras, 2012). The academic and scholarly debate currently is led by the point, whether the new regimes too have fallen short of the expectations that people in the region had with those 'pro-people' governments. Citing the Brazilian case, for over a decade since Lula took over as Brazilian president, people have been said of Brazil's success on the economic front and on Brazil's growth as a vibrant economy. The resentment, however, is with the fact that if Brazil has witnessed remarkable economic growth, why the benefits have not trickled down. The point mentioned here is substantive from the fact that Brazil's income levels continue to remain stagnant, poverty levels continue to rise and unemployment rates continue to retain an increasing trend. The Brazilian case more or less reflects the state in other Latin American nations.

Serious resentment and dissatisfaction have also resulted from the attempts towards 'radicalisation' and 'recentralisation' of political system fuelling more protests than ever in the past (Eaton, 2014). This has often been at the cost of undermining the uniform political processes that existed before (Ellner, 2013). However, such initiatives have not been successful everywhere, and resulted in varying outcomes depending on the prevalent conditions. In the period 2014-15 alone, Guatemala, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, Chile, Brazil, Mexico have witnessed violent protests in response to the innumerable corruption cases and anti-people policies. Some experts also point to the fact if good days of Latin America's new left might have ended (Watts, Scandal, protests, weak growth: is Latin America's left in retreat?, 2015). To add further, fall of 'Peronist' regime in October 2015 election in Argentina has perhaps already given a hint (Watts, Peronist setback in Argentina may mark breaking of Latin America's 'pink wave', 2015). The volatile

period that encompassed the phase of military rule has ended in Latin America, and hence with strengthened democratic set-up and giant middle class, the new generation expects more from the governments, than bashing up at external forces for all the wrongs.

Conclusion

Ideological leanings in protests in Latin America have moderated having brought local issues which are a reason for discontent among people in the continent. This is a shift altogether from the trend of voting to power left-leaning leaders one after another, as a vote against the model of Washington Consensus. The failure of the capitalist model in Latin America may partly be the reason for voting in power the candidates, who seemed better to provide psychological and material support to already discontented public. However, it would be a mistake to classify the voting trends with the 2011-2015 protests, as the intended goal of the protests were quite clear and vocally expressed by the people themselves than the leaders of the ruling elite. The sectors and sections, which remained an identification mark or Unique Selling Proposition (USP) of the respective country are themselves on the street to revolt against the executive. This is to be mentioned here that, Brazil's middle class, Bolivia's indigenous community, Ecuador's mining sector and Chile's students are not the only sector that are depressed, in fact, it is only a tip of the iceberg. Given the challenges that contemporary Latin America faces, it is rather a challenging task for not only the governments to focus on accomplishments, but also for the scholars to localise their analysis in reference to popular protests. Events of the past might have induced transnational elements in popular protests in Latin America, but now local issues are a priority to Latin Americans than a global agenda. Future research works can focus on bringing out the local issues in the popular protests across Latin America.

Endnotes

i.   The argument is put forward, as their policies are directed towards bringing social and economic equity, as opposed to the model of Washington Consensus which was directed towards growth, but not much focused on bridging the divide between haves' and have not's.

ii. This might not be exactly true, as irrespective of how the leftist leaders capitalised their popularity on the phenomenon of a pink tide, the new left can also be viewed simply as a movement for electing more responsible and accountable leaders (not much to do with the United States).

iii. The author draws the argument from general newspaper reports. The author based on his knowledge ascertains that, well established journals in the field of Latin American Studies still correlate the protest in Latin American region at conceptual level to be in response to neo-liberal policies. The news articles however paint a different picture, and focus the protests to be largely on local agendas.

iv. The reason to raise this question here is that, the group of people or sections or sectors that have come to protest are not the neglected ones, but, in fact, remained under priority of current regimes in power if not their predecessors.

v.   This based on the general perception developed by the researcher, as ascertained from the research articles appearing in the reputed journals.

vi. Larry Rohter is a journalist associated with New York Times newspaper. The reason for using the word 'pink' in place of red is their reformed and moderate nature.

vii. Freedom House is an international organisation that ranks the country in three categories namely 1 for Politically Free, 2 for Partially Free and 3 for Not Free.

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COLONIAL INDIRECT RULE AND THE MAOIST INSURGENCY IN POST-COLONIAL INDIA

Chandan Kumar Sarma

Abstract

In "Colonial Institutions and Civil War: Indirect Rule and Maoist Insurgency in India" (2021) Shivaji Mukherjee, puts into historical perspective the Maoist insurgency in post-colonial India. While poverty, caste oppression and other kinds of marginalization are common across India, Maoist problems persist only in certain districts and states of the country. Mukherji asserts that the areas in India where the Maoist insurgency problem persists are those where colonial indirect rule was imposed. In British India where there was direct colonial rule, the state apparatus was strong but in areas where princely states were operating, the state apparatus was relatively weaker. Moreover, Shivaji also expands the idea of colonial indirect rule and incorporates the permanently settled areas in this administrative category. In such areas the zamindari class was powerful which provided foundational fodder for a class based struggle such as Maoism to emerge.

Keywords: land, revenue, colonial state, insurgencies, state formation

Introduction

Recent literature has sought to unearth the link between the colonial state formation process and its administrative structure with the recurrent post colonial disturbances and insurgencies of India. Conflict in the post colonial period in terms of demands of autonomy leading to insurgency is endemic in certain parts of India such as Kashmir, North East and for some years in Punjab. Another recurring problem for the Indian state for the last several decades is the Maoist upsurge in certain areas of eastern, central India and in parts of Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. One pertinent question which is important to understand the manifestations of these unrests in different parts of India is the role of political and administrative institutions which evolved in the colonial period. In a recent book, "Colonial Institutions and Civil War: Indirect Rule and Maoist Insurgency in India" (2021) by Shivaji Mukherjee has tried to explain the impact of colonial governance in the emergence of proximate causes of insurgency in certain regions of India. He asked a very important question- are there deeper process of colonial state formation, so far ignored by scholars of civil war, that have created structural and ethnic fault line within states that have erupted into ethnic conflict and rebellion in the post colonial period years. Mukerjee (2016) also reconceptualizes colonial indirect rule and provides new data on 'rebel control and precolonial rebellions.'

Historical Roots of Maoist Insurgency

Mukherjee (2021) explains that ethnic movements in North east states of India such as Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Manipur can be explained and traced back in the context of the discontentment and identity formation emerging from polices of indirect rule and chieftaincy system set up by the British. He also suggests that the long terms effects of such colonial indirect rule should be investigated properly. According to him the effects of past institutions influence many of the insurgent movements but these are yet to be adequately explored as a result of the long term legacies of the historical institutions shaped during the colonial rule.

The writer explores the historical roots of maoists insurgency in India by focusing on the colonial origin of the problem. In this thesis the writer explores the historical connection in terms of colonial indirect rule and how the administrative structure created at the time of colonial indirect rule had strong political ramification even in the post colonial period. According to him the ethnic secessionist insurgencies which emerged in North East, Kashmir and Punjab can also be analysed in the prevalent British indirect rule in this states.

Understanding Maoist Insurgency of Today

To prove his thesis of the origin of maoist insurgency in the colonial indirect rule the writer collects data from 2005 to 2012 from the different provinces and districts that witnessed Maoists insurgency. As maoists insurgency is spread in different parts of India the sub national variation helped the writer to understand the maoist insurgency in a comparative context. Moreover maoist insurgency also had greater policy related implications as it was termed as the greatest threat to Indian democracy by former Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2005.

The maoist insurgency in the early 21st century has to be understood in the context of the unification of Maoist Communist Centre in Bihar, the People's War Group in Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh and the People's Unity operating in Jharkhand and Bihar. These factions came together to form the Communist Party of India (Maoist) and very soon their struggle of guerrilla warfare expanded its geographical zone of influence and could touch more than 150 districts of India. This new wave of insurgency was perceived to be the greatest challenge to Indian democracy by successive governments.

According to the author, "The long term effects of colonial indirect rule are very visible in the Maoist insurgency case, since the descendents of the zamindars from colonial times in Bihar and Chhattisgarh started various vigilante groups like the Ranvir Sena, Salwa Judum which led to the human rights violation against under privileged ethnic groups like dalits and adivasis. The land inequality created

through Deshmukhs who collected land revenue under the Nizam of Hyderabad was difficult for the post colonial Indian Government to reverse through land reforms and created ideal structural conditions for the maoists rebels. The direct policy significance of the colonial indirect rule for the current Indian state is clear both for counter insurgency and land reforms." He basically asked one important question why insurgency emerged and consolidates along certain territories along central eastern part of India and not in other parts. He asked again is it because the tribes and the lower castes faced their horizontal inequalities in these regions due to the colonial administrative structure created by indirect rule? But the same inequality and the similar terrain are there in many parts of India which has witnessed no similar left wing extremism and insurgency.

Implications of Colonial Indirect Rule

The crucial omitted variable in the study of maoist insurgency in India, in the analysis of the author is colonial indirect rule which was not adequately explored in most of the analysis. According to him different forms of colonial indirect rule – whether informal indirect rule through landlord based zamindari land revenue system or more formal indirect rule through certain type of native princely states created long term persistent effects conducive to leftist ideological insurgency in India. The North epicentre of this insurgency is situated near the conjunction of the Bihar, Bengal and Jharkhand and here the informal indirect rule was through the permanent settlement which created the zamindari settlement. "In these areas, the zamindari land revenue system based on local political aid like landlords (zamindars) required less expansion of the colonial bureaucracy than the ryotwary land revenue system in Bombay and Madras presidencies in which the colonial state directly collected tax and revenue from the villagers or riots"(p. 10).This system of permanent settlement helped in the creation and promotion of local intermediaries who were entrusted with the duty to collect the revenue from the common people but this also created the weakness of the state mechanism which continued even in the post colonial period. The local intermediaries dominated the

ruling dispensation in the post colonial period as well hindering effective land reform regulations to empower the weaker section of the society. The southern epicentre of maoist insurgency is situated in the borders of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Southern Orissa. The author emphasises that, "In this area the formal type of indirect rule was established through princess/native rulers in the form of the large princely state of Hyderabad and the smaller feudatory states of Chhattisgarh and Orissa and Eastern State Agencies"(p. 10). Intermediaries in terms of revenue collection were part of the structural indirect rule in these areas which faced left wing insurgency in the post independent period. In the areas of erstwhile smaller feudatory states of Chhattisgarh, Orissa and Eastern State Agencies inhabited mostly by the tribal people there was exploitation of the natural resources which happened mostly through colonial forest policies. The same structure of development policies mostly continued in the post colonial period in these areas of central India where the local indigenous people were not accommodated within the development paradigm. In the princely state of Hyderabad, the Nizam appointed Deshmukhs for collection of land revenue and these revenue collectors can be compared with the zamindars of Bihar and Bengal. This process of indirect rule created land and caste inequalities and also promoted horizontal inter growth of inequalities. According to the author the maoists guerrillas later used this land/ethnic inequalities and ethnicgrievances.

The author compares the situation with southern and western states of India where the British established direct rule. Moreover the British also established ryotwary agrarian revenue system and collected the land revenue through the revenue officials appointed directly by the colonial state in western and southern India. According to the author, "These areas were both de-facto and de-jure direct rule and had higher levels of development and lower levels of land inequality and no maoists insurgency"(p. 7). These states also had large forest terrains and presence of adivasis and dalits. But as these areas were not indirectly ruled, historically these areas didnot have "high levels of land inequality and no maoist insurgency and state weakness." Through comparative framework of the maoist insurgency

having sub regional variation, the author arrives at the conclusion that, "almost all areas that experienced maoist insurgency had been previously exposed to some form of indirect rule which make it a necessary condition for maoist insurgency" (p. 11).

In the recent years some scholars had explored these relationships but arrived at a different conclusion that the princely states had better development outcomes. Even Verghese stated that though Bastar was a princely state, it faced maoist conflict as it was more directly ruled by the British with frequent internal interventions. But Shivaji shows that Verghese had empirical and conceptual flaws as they fail to explain why Maharastra and Tamil Nadu did not witness maoist insurgency though these were directly ruled by the British.

Earlier which dealt with insurgency focussed on either ethnic grievances or rebel opportunities whereas the question of ethnic exclusion of certain communities or groups from the power arrangement was not properly contextualised (Narayan 2014, Mukherji 2012). Recent studies have started to emphasise on this aspect of ethnic exclusion which are historically constituted leading to grievances and insurgency. Mukherjee, in his explanation of maoist insurgency in India the author explains that in the context of this left wing insurgency both rebel opportunity and ethnicgrievances are "possibly endogenous to the long term process of state formation triggered by colonial choices and institutions"(p.12). The existing literature on causes and spread of insurgency mostly overlooked the colonial historical intuitions which had strong functional presence even in the post colonial framework (Verghese 2016, Singh 2016, Roy 2016). Emphasising the importance of such colonial institutions, the author through his comparative framework, states that the character of the post colonial state and its capacity to deal with issues of structural inequality were determined by the colonial residues and also by the structural continuity which shaped the post colonial period. This overlooked or omitted variable, according to the author is important to understand why certain parts of India witnessed Maoist insurgency whereas the other parts with similar

rebel opportunities and grievances did not witness similar insurgency. According to the author, "By including such omitted variables that are causally prior to the more proximate processes of weak state capacity, or exploitation of natural resources, or creation of ethnic grievances into explanations of civil war, it may be possible to reduce some of the endogeneity issues and have a more holistic explanation for conflict"(Mukherjee 2021 pp. 13-14).

Conclusion

Though some scholars have explained the impact and long terms dynamics of this problem of colonial indirect rule to explain the issues of development, nationalism and the power of the state but the historical linkage of colonial indirect rule with insurgency in the post colonial period was not properly addressed. In the recent years some scholars had explored these relationships but arrived at a different conclusion that the princely states had better development outcomes. Verghese (2016) stated that though Bastar was a princely state, it faced maoist conflict as it was more directly ruled by the British with frequent internal interventions. But Shivaji shows that Verghese had empirical and conceptual flaws as they fail to explain why Maharastra and Tamil Nadu did not witness maoist insurgency though these were directly ruled by the British.Shivaji states that though the earlier authors who also used the direct rule and indirect rule paradigm could not explain why the Southern epicentre of this problem was situated around Bastar and Telengana areas which were indirectly ruled by the British. Moreover he also shows that earlier authors did not properly conceptualise the zamindari system of Bengal and Bihar as these were explained as directly ruled areas. According to the present author, the zamindari areas were characterised as "a different shade of indirect rule in which rulers depend on intermediaries to collect land revenue" though these areas were under the British administered areas. In his approach the question of direct rule and indirect rule in India cannot simply be perceived as binary concept as the same had more regional variations within these categories themselves. In this new analysis the author extends the category of indirect rule – "the more formal type of

indirect rule through princely or native states and also the informal type of indirect rule through zamindars in Bengal and Bihar provinces in the east." Moreover the present author also shows that the princely state of Baster and Orissa had rulers from outside these areas and this "resulted in despotic extraction and maoist insurgency while warrior/conquests princely states in Travancore and Mysore that challenged the British had lower levels of land exploitation and more state capacity and less successful maoist insurgency" (Mukherjee, p.19).

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REINTERPRETING BODO LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM IN ASSAM

Phulmoni Das

Abstract

Language in contemporary time has been a contested notion in a multilingual and multiethnic nation like India. Language has been playing as an instrumental role in mobilizing and formulation of an identity of a community, similarly language is also a cause of factor for the ethnic assertion of different smaller communities against the dominance and hegemony of the dominant nationality. Assam is a land of diverse culture, ethnicity and multiple languages. But later on because of the adoption of hegemonic policies by the dominant nationality in Assam have not only generated tension in different times but also created resentments among the ethnic groups which further led to the ethnic conflicts and identity politics among the different ethnic groups. In this paper, however, an Endeavour will be made to examine the role of language in terms of building nationalism in Assam and in this process how this politics of language has also been a source of resentment among the different ethnic groups especially among the Bodo tribes of Assam will be highlighted.

***Key Words :** Assam, Bodo, Nationalism, Ethnicity, Identity, Politics, Language,*

Introduction

Nationalist project all over the world, particularly in multi ethnic, multi cultural societies have come to a rough weather. Nationalist projects are by nature homogenizing exercise as the nation building task insists on creation of a single and common homogeneous culture and identity[1]. In multi ethnic, multi cultural societies such nation building exercise therefore, encounter serious resistance from the different ethnic groups of those societies. This is particularly so when culture and identity of a particular group is sought to be imposed on other communities under such nation building exercise. Different ethnic groups consider such project as threat to their distinct identity and culture and oppose such move to protect and preserve them. Sometimes, such protest against nation building project has led to the ethnic assertions and mobilizations for protection of their different cultural, political and economic interests. Nationalist project of post colonial Assam has invited sharp reactions from the different ethnic groups of Assam. The response of the different ethnic groups towards this nationalist project has been mixed one. Sometimes, they have approved this nationalist project and even enthusiastically participated in it and at other instances have expressed strong reservation against it. Moreover there are differences between these ethnic groups in terms of their attitude towards the nation building process in Assam and even the same ethnic group has shown different attitude to this at different points of time.

This ambivalent attitude of the ethnic groups of Assam towards the nationalist project of Assam can be explained to some extent by the fact that they are torn between two different identities-one is the greater Assamese identity and the other one is their respective ethnic identities. Reflecting on this one scholar has argued that "dualism of identity among the indigenous communities of Assam is between their local beings as distinct community and as a member of greater Assamese community or nationality. While requirement of asserting as Assamese was based on broader political eventuality, assertion as a distinct community was more against their identity as Assamese".[2] It should be noted that though some time Assamese culture is identified with the caste Hindus Assamese, tribal of Assam have equally contributed towards its development. Many of them even underwent

a process of de-tribalization through initiation into Hinduism and more importantly, through renunciation of their mother tongue in favour of the Assamese language. In fact, the Assamese culture is the result of a continuous process of sociocultural formation among diverse linguistic and ethnic traits for centuries.[3]

The establishment of British rule in Assam brought further political unification of Assam. However, this administrative unity did not result in further integration of Assamese society. In fact, it hindered the ongoing process of integration by introducing separate administrative arrangement for some of the tribal groups of Assam and thus contributed in keeping the caste Hindus and the Mongolian tribes alienated and separated.

Growth of Ethnic Demands in Colonial Assam

The growth of ethnic consciousness and formulation of demands by different ethnic groups of Assam could be observed in the colonial period itself. Such ethnic sentiments and mobilization in an articulate and organized way first took place among the hill tribes and subsequently similar sentiments were expressed by the tribes of Plains also. In fact, history of growth of ethnic aspirations among the tribes of Assam can be traced back to the days of Simon Commission. At the time of the Simon Commission's visit to Shillong on January 4, 1929, altogether 27 memorandums were submitted by different groups and organizations of the province. Out of these four were submitted by organizations belonging to Bodo, Kachari, Naga and Khasi community. The fact that when the rest of India including mainstream Assam were busy in protesting against the Simon Commission, these communities belonging to periphery of Assam both in geographical and cultural terms, considered it necessary to submit their demands at the hands of the Commission clearly indicate the rise of ethnic sentiments among these communities.[4]

In the plains also similar sentiments were exhibited by different ethnic communities and raised several demands to protect their particular interests in the colonial period itself. For instance, All Assam Ahom Association (later renamed as Ahom Sabha) was established in 1893 to preserve their distinct ethnic identity

and with this first ethnic organization of plains of Assam came in to being. This was followed by the establishment of different ethnic organizations such as Koch Rajbangshi Khetriya Sanmilan(1912), Bodo-Kachari Mahasanmilan (1923), Assam Chutiya Sanmilan (1925), Assam Miri Sanmilan, Assam Bodo Sanmilan, Assam 182 Kachari Sanmilan, Xadou Deori Sanmilan, Xadou Lalung Sanmilan, Xadou Asom Matak Sanmilan etc. to protect the interest of their respective communities.[5] By this time, some sort of ethnic consciousness began to dawn among the leaders of these different plains tribes as they came to believe that they were different from Assamese caste-Hindus in terms of their custom, tradition and culture and they have their own distinct identity and culture. Their economic, educational and political backwardness further contributed towards the growth of such feelings.

Rise of Bodo Nationalism

As mentioned earlier that although rise of ethnic consciousness emerged in the 1930s itself, it was only after 1960 that this political consciousness took the form of separate ethnic demands. From this period onwards, different tribes of Assam started raising demands to protect their distinct ethnic interests. Notwithstanding some variations in terms of level of aspirations and degree of mobilisation, the process of ethnic assertions of different tribal groups has followed a similar pattern. While in the case of the hills tribe, from the very beginning the nature of ethnic demands had been political, the plains tribes of Assam began their journey with some non-political issues. Most of these tribes of Assam plains initially stressed on non-political issues such as safeguarding cultural identity, preservation of language, choice of a script, instruction through mother tongue, continuation of English as medium of instruction in higher education etc. And it was only after certain period these cultural demands of each of these ethnic groups graduated to the next phase to include other socio-economic demands and ultimately culminated in political demand for a separate political identity.[6] However, different ethnic groups have moved from cultural demands to political demands at different pace and are at different stages of this process. Apurba Kumar Baruah has tried to explain this variation in terms of Paul Brass formulation of stages of nationality formation.[7]According to Paul Brass, the process of nationality formation involves

passing through three stages. The first stage is of ethnicity, implying an existence of cultural markers recognised easily but their political significance unnoticed. The second is of community awareness implying evolution of political consciousness of cultural identity and the urge to employ it for furthering community interest. And the third is of nationality formation involving right to selfdetermination.[8]Besides the strength of the ethnic groups in terms of number, resources, organisational ability, leadership quality have also influenced the ability of ethnic groups to move from one stage to another. However, all the tribes of present Assam, who are subject of the present study, have already gone through these different stages and now at the last stage of nationality formation. Though all of them by now have developed political demands, there are some variations among them with regard to the nature of their political demands. Their political demands usually range from equal partnership in federal structure and autonomous status to separate, independent political existence. With regard to the most of these ethnic groups, middle class and youth organisations have been at the forefront of raising and articulating ethnic demands. These middle class, however, have been successful in mobilizing the people of their respective communities around these demands and as a result what began as a demand of the middle class gradually turned into demands of entire people of these ethnic groups.

Their urge to maintain and develop their own culture has found its most articulate expression in the form of demand for recognition of their language. All the tribes are now insisting that their language should be introduced as medium of instruction in the primary and secondary level. It was initially the Bodos who demanded that Bodo language should be introduced as the medium of instruction at the primary and secondary level of education. After the Bodos, the other tribes of Assam such as Mishing, Karbis, Tiwa, Deori, Rabhas etc also have raised similar demands.[9] It is argued that under Article 350(A) of the Constitution of India, it has to be endeavour of every state and every local authority within the state to provide adequate facilities for instruction in mother tongue at the primary stage of education to children belonging to linguistic minority groups.[10] It was this desire to protect and promote their language that led them to oppose the successive language policies

of Assam government. In 1960, the government of Assam, under the pressure of Assamese people passed the Assam Official Language Act which made Assamese language the sole official language of entire Assam. In 1972 again at the insistence of All Assam Student Union (AASU) and Asom Sahitya Sabha, the academic council of Gauhati and Dibrugarh University passed a resolution in 1972 to the effect that after ten years, i.e. 1982 only Assamese language would be the sole medium of instruction in the university level throughout the state of Assam. Further in 1986, under the AGP government, Secondary Education Board of Assam (SEBA) issued a circular making Assamese as the compulsory third language in all the non-Assamese medium schools of Assam. These initiatives on the part of Assam Government have evoked sharp reactions from all the tribes of Assam and opposition to such policies had been a recurring demand/theme in number of successive memorandum submitted by these tribes.[11]

 They saw such move as conspiracy on the part of Assamese junta to 'Assamise' them by forcing Assamese language and culture upon them and wiping out their own language and culture which they too cherish to develop. The Bodo Sahitya Sabha, in a resolution adopted on the issue of Assam's State Language Bill, argued that the biggest linguistic group in the state is that of Assamese which can claim only 54 percent. However, according to the State Reorganisation Committee a language should be spoken by seventy percent or more to be recognised as an official language of a state. Looking from this point of view, the declaration of Assamese as an official language of Assam would mean imposition of Assamese language on the people of other linguistic groups.[12]Therefore, they demanded that either English or Hindi should be the official language of Assam and English should be retained as the medium of instruction in the colleges of Gauhati and Dibrugarh University.[13]Some of them have moved further ahead with their linguistic demands. In fact, for tribes like Bodo what initially began as demand for protection of their language has ultimately turned into a movement for securing equal status for their language along with Assamese. This becomes obvious from various demands raised by Bodos such as incorporation of Bodo language in the Eight Schedule of Indian Constitution, introduction of Bodo as associate official language in areas where they enjoy numerical predominance, introduction of Bodo as Modern Indian

Language (MIL) subject in M.A. course in 189 Universities, appointment of lecturers for Bodo as M.I.L. subject in degree level, introduction of Bodo language as optional subject in Assam Public Service Commission and Union Public Service Commission examinations, setting of High School Leaving Certificate examination question papers in Bodo, financial assistance for writing and publishing a book on history of Bodos etc.[14]The urge to preserve distinct identity and culture of the tribes has also found expression in number of different cultural demands such as-establishment of a Central Museum at Kokrajhar, Doordarshan Kendras at Udalguri and Kokrajhar, transmission of Bodo programmes and Bodo news from Gauhati Doordarshan Kendra, broadcasting of Bodo programmes from All India Radio, protection of monuments and temples of different tribes, establishment of research centers for all tribal groups etc. The most important phenomenon in case of bodo nationalism is the non addressal of their script issue. As bodo does not have their own script therefore their issue was to have their own script. Bodo Sahitya Sabha the most prominent literary organisation formed in 1952 was trying to introduce Roman script for bodo language. When Bodo primer Bhithorai (Balab-se) in Roman script was introduced in Bodo medium schools in 1974, the Assam government stopped financial grants for Bodo primary schools in an attempt to force them back to the Assamese script. This led them to massive protests in bodo areas against this decision which has led to the boycott and gherao of educational institutions. When bodo leaders approached union government, Prime Minister advised them to adopt Devnagiri script. Two members of BSS Thaneswar Boro and Ramdas Basumatary submitted proposal to Union government and agreed to Devenagri script.This has divided the bodo community along an increasingly religious divide and threatened their cohesionas a nationality. Christian bodos, the church and most of the students as well as NDFB supported Roman script and ABSU and Bodo Proples Action Committee stridently oppose the Roman script. The Script movement of Bodos have not gained much success because of their internal difference among the bodos over roman script and strong opposition raised by a section of Assamese intellectuals instead they favoured retaining of Assamese script again the centre trying to champion national integrity by introducing Devanagiri script. Imposition of Language Bill 1960 in Assam not only attracted opposition

from the ethnic communities but also from Bengali dominated areas of Silchar. 11 people were died on that incident of defending Bengali language. Now the political parties and social groups in Barak valley are demanding that the railway station of Silchar, the biggest town in the valley , should be named as ' Bhasa Shahid' station in memory of the martyrs.

Reaction to Nation Building Process in Assam

There has been a strong tendency to view the ethnic assertions of different communities as a reaction to the nation building process of Assam. This nation building process has continued in the post-independence period also and assumed different dimensions. It has been argued that this nation building process in Assam is structured around the exclusive definition of Assamese nation based on Assamese language and culture. The leaders of Assamese society, who are engaged in the task of building an Assamese nation, have defined it primarily in terms of Assamese language and culture. The language and cultures of different ethnic groups are not accommodated in the definition of Assamese language and culture and as a result these groups have remained outside the purview of Assamese nation. As a result, nation building project of Assam in effect has turned into an attempt to protect and promote the interest of Assamese people without taking into account the interest of different ethnic groups of Assam. The nation building process of Assam has aimed at making Assam for Assamese, but the very meaning of 'Assamese' (or notion of 'Assamese') is defined in such a way as to exclude the different ethnic groups. The project of making Assam for Assamese thus has meant politically capturing political power and administration, economically establishing monopoly over the government jobs, services and other economic opportunities and culturally promotion of Assamese language and culture.

The nation building process with such objective in post-colonial Assam quite often has gone against the interests of different ethnic groups. For instance, the Assam Movement which was launched ostensibly to oust the outsiders/foreigners from Assam, at times was also directed against the different ethnic groups of Assam. During the agitation in places like Gohpur people belonging to Bodo community were targeted, attacked and even killed.[15] The Assam Agitation came to an end in

1983 with the signing of the Assam Accord between the Central Government and the leaders of the AASU and Assam Gana Sangram Parishad representing the interests of Assamese speaking people. However, at the time of signing the Accord, different ethnic and minority groups were not taken into confidence. As a result, the Accord incorporated number of provisions that were highly resented by different ethnic groups as anti-tribal and anti-minority[16].The Accord in its number of clauses provided for protection of political, economic and cultural interests of 'Assamese' people. But in the absence of any explanation of the meaning of the term 'Assamese', the AGP government interpreted it narrowly to mean only the Assamese speaking people and indulged in various activities that adversely affected the interests of ethnic groups of Assam.80The desire to make Assam for Assamese in the name of nation building process has also made the Assamese people reluctant to share political power with the members of ethnic groups of Assam. It is alleged that the Assam Movement was launched mainly to ensure the monopoly of Assamese speaking people over the political power and prevent others from getting share of it[17].

The sectional design of nation building process in Assam is most obvious in its cultural manifestation. In conformity with general trend (or like elsewhere) the nation building processes in Assam has sought to forge a common Assamese identity out of the diverse cultural tradition of Assam. The idea is to form a homogeneous Assamese community on the basis of common language and culture. As a part of this homogenizing drive, the Assamese speaking people have imposed Assamese language and culture on the different tribes of Assam. The Assamese speaking people through their numerous acts of commission and omission on the one hand have attempted to impose Assamese language on the tribal people of Assam and on the other hand thwarted the development of their own language and culture. At the same time the Assamese speaking people have shown utter neglect towards the development of language and culture of tribes of Assam and ignored some of the genuine linguistic and cultural demands of them such as introduction of their language as medium of instruction in primary and secondary level etc. The tribal people of Assam have reacted strongly to such policies of Assamese speaking people aimed at establishing cultural hegemony over them. Lot of people argues

that such cultural chauvinism of Assamese speaking people has created a permanent rift between the tribal groups and Assamese speaking people. For instance, the State Official Language Act of 1960 hurt the cultural sentiment of tribal people and eventually paved the way for disintegration of Assam and formation of hill states. The plains tribes have also resented against such expansionist design of Assamese speaking people. Various tribal organizations, in numerous memorandums, have categorically mentioned the hegemonic attitude of Assamese as one of the main reasons behind their demand for political autonomy.

The exclusive nature of nation building process in Assam has created sharp reaction among the tribal people of Assam and the ethnic assertion of tribal people of Assam is interpreted as reaction to such nation building process in Assam. It is interesting to note that tribal people of Assam while expressing their reaction to the nationalist project of Assamese people have emulated the sub-nationalist movement of Assamese people. Particularly from the late 80s, different organisations representing the tribal people of Assam have modelled their agitation on the line of Assam Agitation in terms of goals, strategies and techniques to secure their various cultural, economic and political demands.

Conclusion

The socio-cultural negligence of tribal people is most glaring in case of their language. It is to be noted that most of the tribal groups of Assam have their own language and aspire to develop their respective language. But successive language policy of Assam government is to deny the linguistic aspirations of the tribal people. On the other hand, Assamese people have strongly resisted the claim of tribal people for recognition of their language as medium of instruction at the primary and secondary level of education. Though Bodo and Mising people have succeeded after a prolong movement in forcing the government to recognize their language at primary and secondary level, language of other tribal people is still deprived of such status.

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A BRIEF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE IDEA OF INDIGENEITY

Rimon Bhuyan Gogoi

Abstract

Indigeneity is a complex concept to explain. This paper tries to move through some trajectories involved in the discourses surrounding the category. In a world hegemonised by capitalist institutions and western perspective, indigeneity has for long been understood in terms of alterity or the 'other'. In the last couple of decades, however, newer discourses have begun to emerge exploring the meaning of the category. It is being broadly understood as (though not limited to) original inhabitants of a place or people inhabiting a place prior to colonisation. The agency of the indigenous people themselves have been now identified as primary in any acceptable discourse. The role of international agencies like the UN is important here. Understanding these complex categories requires going beyond capitaocentrism and accepting the essential diversities and multiplicities of the people's identities.

***KeyWotds :** Indigeneity Colonisation, United Nations, Capitalist Institution, Indigenous People*

Introduction

Indigeneity essentially is a function of cultural membership and relation to land. Both of these markers of identity have come into crisis with expanding capitalist forces. Indigenous peoples all over the world have faced the onslaught of imperialist expansion and capitalist assimilation at different stages of history. With colonial expansion, Europe began controlling distant lands thus leading to centuries of exploitation of resources and peoples of these lands. Colonialism was fought against from time to time and receded, only to emerge in newer forms.

Colonisation involved economic, political and cultural subjugation of whole communities. It not only took away resources but also the power of people to understand themselves and comprehend the world. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) writes about the deep rooted alienation that colonialism brought to the colonised when they were robbed of their own perspectives, knowledge systems, and universe of meanings and symbols. "It appalls us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own cultures and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century and centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems of living within our environment" (Smith 1999: 1).

We can identify two phases of evolution of the nation-state system under capitalist expansion. The colonial nation-state was very much an ally of the capitalist forces. In the post colonial era, this system changes. The post colonial nation-state in many cases, acquired relative autonomy vis a vis global capital in the first few decades of independence. India was one such instance. However, under the neoliberal regimes of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, the status of the nation-state remains ambiguous. On the one hand, it has retreated from welfare functions, and on the other hand, has become more interventionist in favour of global capital.

In this phase, it retains much of its power and authority vis a vis the indigenous peoples and in fact, expands upon it.

But the old indigenous world dies hard; it still keeps struggling against the incursions of the modern state that cannot thrive without dismantling the traditional social and human relations rooted in the old and natural pattern of life and economy. Looking beyond the restrictive lenses of class struggle and capitalist production, and liberal rights and individuality, helps us look into these collectivities in new light and understand social relations and deprivation in a new conceptual framework. This paper is divided into two sections. The first engages with the major indigeneity debates that have emerged theoretically. The second is a brief description of these debates as they have emerged in the international forums especially the United Nations (UN).

Exploring the Category of Indigenous People

Indigeneity is a complex phenomenon or category. It has been described, defined and explained in many ways, underscoring the diversity, contestability and non-fixity of the term indigenous. The UN has become the central stage for the debates regarding indigeneity, especially since the closing decades of the twentieth century. In a general sense, indigeneity is associated with the idea of belongingness or situatedness in a certain place implying original (or prior) inhabitance, and connotes subsequent displacement, dispossession and marginalisation. "It (indigeneity) connotes belonging and originariness and deeply felt processes of attachment and identification, and thus it distinguishes "natives" from others. Indigeneity as it has expanded in its meaning to define an international category is taken to refer to peoples who have great moral claims on nation-states and on international society, often because of inhumane, unequal, and exclusionary treatment" (Merlan 2009: 304). Merlin identifies two dominant discourses that have emerged in defining the concept of indigeneity: criterial and relational. Criterial definitions describe indigeneity on the basis of a group's own characteristic experiences and identities. Though it may have relational aspects like being prior to etc, its main thrust lies upon a peoples' internal attributes. The definitions adopted by the United Nations

(UN), best reflected in Martinez Cobo's reports, and those emphasised by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), fall into this category (UN conventions and developments will be dealt with in more detail in the following section). The relational aspect of indigeneity, on the other hand, highlights indigeneity as a form of identity that gets formulated and shaped as a result of a group's associations and engagements with others. Merlin (2009) writes that this can be found to be exemplified by David Maybury-Lewis's (1997) statement that "indigenous peoples are defined as much by their relations with the state as by any intrinsic characteristics that they may possess" (Merlan 2009: 305). Dyck (1985), De la cadenza and Starn (2007) argue in the same vein.

Karlsson and Subba (2006) argue that indigeneity can be understood on three primary grounds. The first is in the sense of being 'original inhabitants'. European colonialism as well as waves of migration have tended to pose serious threat, on certain occasions, to the people who have been natives to a particular place. Here again, it must be stated that, given the experiences of colonial domination of the larger part of the world's population and in the wake of the evolving scholarship and the formative discourses at the UN, the idea of being 'original inhabitants' has also come to be understood as 'prior inhabitants', meaning, prior to any colonial occupation. Stavenhagen and Gray are leading proponents of this perspective. A second understanding of indigeneity is based on structural aspects. Largely inspired by the discussions at the ILO and the UN and the studies and reports compiled by Cobo, it stresses on the 'non-dominant' nature of the indigenous communities. "Indigenous people are non-dominant people with a culture different from that of the majority" (Karlsson and Subba 2006: 6). Apart from these two perspectives, a third one looks at indigeneity from the angle of self-identification. Burger (1990) stresses that, as very strongly put forward by indigenous peoples themselves, it is the indigenous communities who should have the right and authority to define indigeneity and to decide who should be considered indigenous. To take away the agency of the indigenous peoples to define, organise and voice their concerns is to rob them off of those very rights and dignity for which the indigeneity movement had originated. "To say, as some critics do, that the indigenous issue has grown merely out of patronage and promotion by the

international agencies like the International Labour Organisation, world Bank, and the United Nations is to ignore the history of the indigenous peoples' struggle all over the world" (Karlsson and Subba 2006: 7). Indigeneity is a contentious issue. Given the wide variations in the histories, experiences, nature and associations of indigenous communities, it is only understandable, to some extent healthy, for such an idea to be treated as open-ended and conceptually constitutive.

Indigeneity has been approached differently by different states. Whereas some states have openly welcomed the indigeneity category, others like India have questioned the applicability of the concept in its context. Scholars like B. K. Roy Burman, Sumit Guha, Andre Bateille have been sceptical about the applicability and adaptability of the concept in India. Karlsson (2006) writes that their whole dismissal of the term rests on the idea that the discourses on the indigenous peoples have been imposed on India by the West. Others like Virginius Xaxa, Damodaran, Subba, Karlsson have been more positive in tis regard. One of the central loci in the indigeneity debate in India has been associated with the concept of self-determination. The fragile political condition in which India gained its independence, and the massive ethnic, lingual, religious, cultural diversities that have been weighing heavily on its 'nation-building' agenda ever since, have made the debates of self-determination uncomfortable and unsolicited. That indigeneity is closely associated with self-determination has made it even more unappealing and ill-favoured.

Beteille (2006) states that the generally used term or category in India for the indigenous peoples is 'tribe'. Whereas the latter underscores the distinctiveness, isolatedness or backwardness of a community, the former focuses on 'rights and empowerment'. He argues that India makes a complicated case for indigeneity and requires detailed social and historical study. The differences among different indigenous groups across the world are too large to forego serious historical details. But the traditional association of these communities, he writes, with land and forests, and their gradual alienation, however, mark their striking commonality.

"The idea of indigenous people is tied inextricably to ideas relating to land, soil and territory. The force of those ideas cannot be appreciated

without taking into account of conquest, spoliation and usurpation. The claims of the weak have been violated repeatedly by the strong, dramatically in some cases and insidiously in others. But a distinctions to be made the claims of land of an individual or a family and the claims to soil and territory of a whole community or an aggregate of communities" (Beteille 2006: 29).

Karlsson (2006), on the other hand, carries a more favourable outlook towards the whole indigeneity debate. The rapidly growing activism of the indigenous peoples and their efforts to come together in order to address the historical injustices, if nothing else, points towards the relevance and undeniable resonance of the indigeneity concept.

The increasing representation of the indigenous peoples from India in the Working Group for Indigenous Peoples (WGIP) at Geneva, Karlsson further argues, reflects the anxiety and fears on the one hand and the urge to voice their own opinion on the other. In his study of the the statements and interventions of the participants at the WGIP, he notes remarkable activism of the representatives of the indigenous communities from the India's north-east. In general, these exchanges and meetings denote a commonly held understanding that indigeneity can mean different things (and hence definitions are mostly open-ended), and a will to connect through their common experiences and injustices 'translated into a new language that emphasise a common indigenous predicament' (Karlsson 2006: 54). Equating indigenous identity and movement with self-determination (for independent statehood) is politically as well as conceptually incorrect, and by doing so, the Martinez Report of 1999, that is being discussed below, 'misrepresents the aspirations of most indigenous peoples' and their struggle to 'make states more inclusive and democratic' (ibid: 64). He instantiates the indigenous struggles of the North-East where 'extensive ethnic complexities' characterise its society and politics. To understand what these communities drive for (barring few exceptions like the Nagas), we must go 'beyond the imaginary of the territorial nation' (ibid: 68). One Tripuri representative explained the threats that the indigenous peoples in Tripura have been facing, in the 2002 session: "The Tripura kingdom's merger

with India in 1949 opened the area for large-scale immigration from neighbouring East Pakistan (later Bangladesh), and the indigenous Borok people as a result have become 'refugees in their own country' (ibid: 59). These threats, for the indigenous peoples, are real. But they do not automatically translate into a demand for separate statehood. Doing so, and through that not engaging with their claims of indigeneity, only causes further alienation and exclusion of these communities. This also robs them of their own agency in a representative democratic platform and reduces them to, as Amita Baviskar puts it, notions of 'adivasi-as-victim' or 'adivasi-as-exotic other' (Baviskar 2006: 41). The importance of reinstating the agency of the indigenous peoples in reclaiming their own history and in constructing their own discourses must be taken up with utmost urgency, and this, what Dipesh Chakravarty argues. will 'bring aboriginals into the mainstream narratives of the nation by portraying them as active agents of history' (Chakravarty 2006: 242).

The discourse of indigeneity acquires even more gravity in the context of the modern political-economic system. Nathan and Xaxa (2006) argue that in India, aboriginal or tribal people and their 'deprivations' have been generally explained in terms of their exclusion or distance from the 'modern' economy. This would mean that their 'inclusion or incorporation in to the market-based or capitalist economy and society' would make things 'fine' (Nathan and Xaxa 2012: 3). In India, they argue, two different discourses on aboriginal people have developed. One discourse, best represented in G. S. Ghurye (1963), explains the 'comparative backwardness of the tribes' in terms of 'their comparative distance and isolation from the larger Hindu society' (Xaxa 2012: 23). Such an understanding not only confirms and legitimises the hierarchies as well as dominance of the Hindu society, but mitigates the essential diversity, indigeneity and autonomy of the tribes of India. The second discourse, as Varrier Elwin (1944) would argue, explains that 'the backwardness and deplorability of the tribal society was owed to their contact with the outside world, which had led them to become increasingly indebted and to lose control over their land and forests' (ibid). Since, after independence, the emerging national leadership explicitly was convinced of the first discourse and attributed the economic deprivations of the indigenous communities to their

isolation, Xaxa argues that the entire stimuli of the tribal policies after independence were put forward to bringing an end to such isolation and integrating them with the larger Indian (Hindu) society. The use of this very nomenclature of 'tribe' instead of indigenous people, he further argues, represents this line of thought. It tends to accrue the economic poverty and related aspects like poor health and education to the tribal communities themselves and their internal social structures. The category of 'indigenous peoples', on the other hand, 'focuses the overall discourse not on the large issue of colonisation and expropriation of tribal lands, forests and other resources' (ibid: 29). Explaining the indigenous communities' status in the modern post-colonial state in terms of their isolation and autonomy shall only create a self-other dichotomy in place of a more heterogenous multi-cultural understanding of society. This shall delegitimise the claims of these communities over their lands and resources, and weaken their struggles for autonomous existence even within the overarching state and its constitutional safeguards. Selma Sonntag (2006) asserts the primacy of the Constituent Assembly debates in the social-structuring of post-colonial India. The Fifth and the Sixth Schedules together define the tribal (indigenous) communities' status and rights within the Constitution. However, she argues that "it was the Sixth Schedule, in opposition to the Fifth Schedule, the reified the exotic as authentic — providing a cultural justification for self-government. The two constitutional schedules imparted an implicit gradation of indigenous peoples along a continuum of authenticity" (Sonntag 2006: 191). Such a reading of the constitutional provisions ensuring the rights of the indigenous communities undermines the (essential) intrinsic differences and of the social structures of these communities and their active will to maintain and sustain these practices. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, that grants autonomous districts to two communities of Assam, Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao (now three with BTAD), is meant to preserve the essential uniqueness, indigeneity, and traditional nature of the socio-economic practices of these communities as well as their rights over their lands and resources. Reading this as gradation of the 'exotic' will only further the discourse that attributes the deprivations of the indigenous to their isolation from the 'Indian society'. This further reaffirms the 'self' (the Hindu Indian society) and the 'other' (the exotic/victim indigenous communities)

dichotomies. The Sixth Schedule shall be taken up in more detail in a later chapter. But to quickly just assert here, it must not be read as a medium or a measure of 'authenticity', but must be considered as an attempt to preserve the primary attributes of a community that describes itself as different from the rest of the society (and therefore fear marginalisation) and securing their basic rights as a group over their land and resources owing to their indigeneity which are just demands in a democratic polity. Having had a general discussion on the category pf indigenous peoples, we also must juxtapose it against the larger dominant socio-economic forces of capitalist production, global market, and development discourse.

Indigeneity Debates at the United Nations

A major part of the debates on indigeneity has taken place in various forums of the United Nations (UN). The first international involvement regarding the engagement of the indigenous issues was attempted at a time when the League of Nations was still in a functional state. When the League was formed, the issues of indigeneity hardly featured anywhere near the prominent agenda. It was however approached in 1923, by Deskaheh, a Haundenosaunee chief, to speak and 'defend the right of his people to live under their own laws, on their own land and under their own faith' (as mentioned in the UN website for indigenous people). Though he did not get a chance to speak there, his efforts marked one of the foremost attempts to take indigenous issues to an international forum. Almost at the same time, a Maori religious leader named T. W. Ratana, in his protest against breaking of the Treaty of Waitangi between the Maoris of New Zealand and the British, travelled first to London and then Geneva (the League headquarters) to speak against the injustices done to the indigenous people. He was denied any opportunity to speak. These attempts, however, brought the indigenous issue to international platform.

When the UN was established in 1945, the initial years saw its exclusive and undivided attention channeled towards international security and peace-keeping. Gradually the scope of its activities got broadened. The agenda of indigenous peoples, however, remained outside its debates for a long time, primarily because of the ambiguities related to the concept of indigeneity. It was the Martínez Cobo

Study of 1981 that made one of the first comprehensive attempts to put together a nuanced and exhaustive conceptualisation of the category of indigeneity.

The Martínez Cobo Study states in detail the actions and initiatives taken towards protection of indigenous peoples' interests at various forums within as well as outside of the UN. The most notable of them can be found at different conventions of ILO at different points in time. ILO had carried out studies on indigenous workers early as 1921. In May 1926, a Committee of Experts on Native Labour was set up by the ILO Governing Body which led to, among others, adoption of a number of recommendations towards aboriginal people. The study notes that, "the International Labour Conference, in article 2(b) of the Recruiting of Indigenous Workers Convention 1936 (No.50), defined "indigenous workers" as "workers belonging to or assimilated to the indigenous populations of the dependent territories of Members of the Organisation and workers belonging to or assimilated to the dependent indigenous populations of the home territories of the Members of the Organisation" (Cobo 1981: 10). Subsequent conventions tried to incorporate more and more such communities within its forms. Since the Philadelphia Conference of 1944, the ILO has been working in various ways to fight the 'social problems of the indigenous populations of the world'. A Committee of Experts on Indigenous Labour was formed which first met in Bolivia in January 1951 and came up with a series of recommendations, one of which was working in closer association with the UN. The Panel of Consultants on Indigenous and Tribal Populations and a Technical Meeting on Problems of Nomadism and Sedentarisation were also organised by the ILO between 1962 and 1967. The conventions led to some important deliberations on the indigenous peoples' situations. Parts from the ILO, other UN agencies like Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), World Health Organisation (WHO), Andean Indian Programme (AIP), and Organisation of American States (OAS) also have made attempts at deliberations in the interests of the indigenous communities all across the world.

The Chapter 5 of the Cobo Study deals in detail with the definitional aspects of the term indigenous. It mentions at the very beginning about the difficulties

associated with defining such a complex term with varied notions. It, nonetheless, is very essential to state outrightly that, as Cobo explains, the agency of the indigenous peoples themselves must be given supreme consideration in developing any idea surrounding the category. The World Council of Indigenous Peoples had developed the following as a working definition of indigeneity: "The World Council of Indigenous Peoples declares that indigenous peoples are such population groups as we are, who from old-age time have inhabited the lands where we live, who are aware of having a character of our own, with social traditions and means of expression that are linked to the country inherited from our ancestors, with a language of our own, and having certain essential and unique characteristics which confer upon us the strong conviction of belonging to a people, who have an identity in ourselves and should be thus regarded by others" (Cobo 1982: 5). Cobo then identifies certain aspects that are widely regarded across the world, albeit with variations, in defining indigeneity: Ancestry, culture, language, group consciousness, multiplicity of defining criterions, acceptance by indigenous community, residence in certain parts of the country, and legal definitions.

The ancestry factor is known to have commonly existed among all indigenous peoples, though its relative importance vary from one case to another. Ancestry is invoked here to denote a common descent rather than any 'racial' identity. Amongst the Maoris of new Zealand, for instance, common ancestry for Maori identity relies more on how people see/identify themselves as, rather than their actual Maori blood/kinship relations or descent from the ancestors. "In practice, then, the criterion established by the Maori Housing Act 1935, which included 'any person descended from a Maori' is applied for the purposes of definition of who is a Maori. The present trend is stressing self-identification as a Maori and moving away from a specific degree of Maori blood" (Cobo 1982: 13). Amongst the Métis and Inuits of Canada, Lapps of Norway, the indigenous ethnic communities of Bolivia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, French Guyana, Philippines etc, too, ancestry is an important denomination of indigeneity.

Culture has been enumerated by Cobo as the second important factor in determining indigeneity. The report states that "any group in which the so-called

'autochthonous' elements predominate to a considerable degree would be classified as 'indigenous' group (ibid: 16). The consideration of culture must include "both material and technical elements as well as those relating to behaviour and ideology" (ibid). One of the other elements in understanding culture is religion, which might be both implicitly and explicitly stated in various cultures. A second element of culture, as noted here, is the practice of a tribal system. Reference has been made of India where the term "Scheduled Tribe" is used to designate communities as indigenous. "The specification that a person must be a 'member of a tribe, a tribal community, or a part of a tribe or of a tribal community or of a group within a tribe or within a tribal community' in order to be considered 'tribal' seems to give this criterion overriding importance or determining whether a person is or is not indigenous" (ibid: 22). In Canada, indigeneity is intrinsically attached to the association of a group with its land, its land rights and a general practice of common ownership. The Canadian government in its Indian land statute 1874 mentions that "the status of Indians are members of Bands who hold in common certain reserve lands generally by virtue of written treaties, though treaties were not signed in all cases. Some of these Band members have taken up residence off reserves" (ibid: 24). However, Cobo underscores the importance of the agency of the indigenous communities themselves in defining themselves and urges not to superficially read them into a western-styled membership of community. The 1968 US Congress imposed upon the tribes, through a statute, a legal system similar to the Bill of Rights. Though might seem 'emancipatory' and progressive, it diminishes the tribes' internal juridic-political authority and includes them within the voting membership practices (and regulations), thereby leading to 'the imposition upon already-threatened tribal societies of the standards of urban America'.

Thirdly, in the contexts like Philippines, Guyana, Peru, Bangladesh etc, simply living as a member of an indigenous community can lead to be regarded as indigenous. In many of these cases, specific dress codes and attires are also considered as symbols of indigeneity. "Dress is generally considered as an aspect of group consciousness, or of self-identification of the person, group or community with the indigenous population, or of the option or choice of that person, group or

community. It is stated by their continuing decision they reflect both the indigenous culture and their attachment to it" (ibid: 29). Moreover, culture also connotes how a person or a community earns livelihood. Certain occupations have been identified in taxonomic references as indigenous, like reindeer breeding or herding in Norway and Sweden or living semi-nomadic lives in Bangladesh. In Indonesia, Paraguay, Ecuador and so on, indigeneity is understood as 'pre-modern' or backward which is contestable. Use of vernacular languages also has been commonly regarded as a cultural indicator of indigeneity. Finally, self-consciousness of a group pr an individual is paramount in defining indigeneity. This idea of group consciousness denotes that "the individual or group considers himself or itself as 'indigenous', or that the community in which the individual or group lives considers him (sic) or it 'indigenous', or alternatively that there is a combination of personal and communal considerations which make him or it 'indigenous' person or group" (ibid: 37). Having discussed on the definitions of the category of the indigenous as put forward by Martínez Cobo, below is a brief discussion on the United nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP).

The WGIP was formed in 1982 under the Economic and Social Council (Resolution 1982/34) as subsidiary to the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. It meets annually in Geneva. Consisting of independent experts as well as Sub-Commission members, the Working Group is one of the largest forums at the UN. It has initiated several dialogues for the promotion of interests of indigenous peoples and has provided a platform for various indigenous representatives to meet and exchange ideas. It has been home to, therefore, some of the most formative debates on the issue of indigeneity.

Subsequently in 1989, the ILO organised the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. The UN General Assembly, through its Resolution A/RES/47/75 declared in 1993 the International Year of the World's Indigenous People. This was followed by the launch of the International Decade of the Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004). In July 2000, UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was established. It is an advisory body to the ECOSOC. It is a 16 member committee that has a mandate to deliberate upon indigenous issues. In 2005, the second

International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005-15) by the General Assembly. Five objectives were enlisted, namely, non-discrimination and inclusion, full and effective participation, redefining development policies, adopting targeted policies and programmes, and ensuring accountability. The year 2007 saw two important developments. The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (EMRIP), a subsidiary organ to the UN Human Rights Council was established. The same year, UNGA adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People on September 13th. Along with their right to equality and freedom, the Declaration also states clearly the indigenous peoples' right to self-determination and autonomy. It also states their rights against any discrimination and forced assimilation. Highlighting their relationship with their lands, Article 10 of the Declaration states that: "Indigenous peoples shall not be forcibly removed from their lands or territories. No relocation shall take place without free, prior and informed consent of the indigenous peoples concerned and after agreement on just and fair compensation and, where possible, with the option of return". Articles 26 and 27 underline the indigenous peoples' rights to their lands, resources and territories that have been theirs traditionally, and that the states must give legal recognition to such customs, traditions and land tenure systems.

In 2010, the General Assembly decided on conducting a 'high level plenary meeting' for the interests of the indigenous peoples. It was called the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. The first conference was held in September (22nd and 23rd) 2014. The objective was to bring together different perspectives on indigenous peoples and discussing on the best ways to achieve their rights in view of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The UN still continues to hold active platform for debates as well as actions regarding the protection of the indigenous peoples all over the world. However, to reiterate what has been said here before, the developments at the UN in this regard must be understood merely as facilitation or initiation of world-wide discussions that will lead to an inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the indigenous issues and as extension of the struggles and strifes of the indigenous peoples everywhere. Below is a brief engagement with the overall research design of this study.

Conclusion

Indigeneity is not an easy concept to be defined. It has been understood and interpreted by different scholars at different places, differently. On a very basic and rudimentary understanding, indigeneity can be regarded as belonging to or situated at a certain place in terms of being the original inhabitants of the place. However, in a context of growing challenges in terms of increasing loss of the traditional dominance of the indigenous communities over their land and resources, the exclusiveness of such an understanding has come to be questioned. Indigeneity has now, therefore, come to denote communities with distinct customary cultural and socio-economic practices who had been inhabitants of a particular place prior to any colonial occupation. The major thrust of defining the category has started to be put on the indigenous peoples themselves. Increasing activism of these communities in the international agencies and also within their own contexts, has now made their agency in developing any discourse surrounding the category undeniable and unsurpassable.

The primary argument must be reiterated here. Understanding indigeneity in terms of alterity or 'otherness' in a capitalocentric world will forever keep the mainland societies dominant. It is only by accepting the essential diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity of the socio-economic world would we be able to begin to understand categories like indigeneity in their right.

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THE PLEASURES OF BEING A 'KANIYA': THE POLITICS OF 'LAZINESS' IN COLONIAL ASSAM (C. 1854-1930)

Bipul Chaudhury

Abstract

The term laziness plays an important part in the history and culture of Assam. From being constructed as a lazy people by the colonial states constructions to its native understanding makes it an interesting point of interrogation, as it still remains an important marker of Assamese identity.

Keyword: *Laziness, Colonialism, Revenue, Nationalism, Immigration, Entrepreneurship*

Introduction

Laziness in an integral part of human character or habit from the very onset of civilization. From the times immemorial, several categories of the population are termed as lazy in different times and contexts. In majority of the cases it was the nobility and the intellectuals and the artists or the creative people who fell into the category. But, at the same time a large section of the common people were also included in the category that did not openly oblige to the norms of the society. The growth of the nation state in Europe gave a new identity to its citizens as active and passive. Every citizen was required to actively participate in the activities of the nation state, particularly in serving the army. The Industrial Revolution further confined the definition in favour of the bourgeoisie classes where citizens were

expected to be disciplined and obedient to the new class. It was the new class who due to their accumulation of wealth and knowledge to enjoy luxury and comfort as well as lazy. Karl Marx had repeatedly emphasised the sufferings of the commoners who had to struggle under the dominance of the capitalist classes and expected the sufferings of the masses be redressed.

The triumph of capitalism in Europe is also linked with colonialism. By the 19th century majority of the European powers controlled the destinies of a large section of the people through their colonies. Through the colonial rule the dominance of the capitalist classes were provided with a new platform to accelerate their interests. The colonial state never established any industries in the country nor was they interested in imparting technical knowledge to the native to maintain their dominance. The colonial state's policy was clear cut, to promote the interests of the British private interests and investments. In pursuing these agendas the colonial state tried to peruse several steps which were against the interests of the natives. The best example, in this regard in context of colonial Assam was the policy of opium.

The colonial state in order to justify its policies also tried to make categorization of the native as backwards, 'effeminate' and lazy who were destined to be poor. Interestingly, this categorization was also related to the revenue yielding capacity of the natives. In other words, the natives failed to pay their revenue as they were lazy. Since land revenue constituted the largest share of revenue for the state its regular collections in spite of the odds became the primary focus for it.

The introduction of the tea cultivation in the province created a new concept of laziness. As Jayeeta Sharma has pointed out the European planters when unable to procure natives for the tea gardens began to categorise the natives as lazy and unprogressive. (Sharma Jayeeta, 2009). But this attitude of the colonial state did not remain confined to the tea industry but to the land revenue as well as the general characteristic of the Assamese people. This colonial attitude was constantly challenged by the Assamese nationalists from the days of Anandaram Dhekial Phookan.

The present paper seeks to examine the colonial notion of laziness in the proper context. First, whether, laziness was the inherent character of the Assamese people? Second, how the colonial state official understood the concepts of laziness and pleasure apart from their own imperial interests? Thirdly, whether the colonial state itself was responsible in making the natives lazy through the introductions of opium, which was not popular among the natives prior to the advent of the colonial rule? Fourth, how the educated natives tried to respond to these issues? Fifth, how far the colonial state was successful in defending its policies against the India National Movement for Independence in which opium and other narcotics as well as drinking became a specific area of attack, particularly under M. K. Gandhi during the National Movement for Independence. Sixth, how these issues affected the various tribal communities of the province? Seventh, how far the climatic and geographical factors also played in the colonial construction of laziness?

The scope of the paper will be confined to the Brahmaputra valley as the question of the Assamese identity and nationalism are interlinked within the parameters of the area. The new immigrants remained as a kind of competition under the colonial regime who were benefitting more than the natives.

The politics of Power, Knowledge& Identity

In the growth the difference between the West and the East the concepts of Orientalism and Race played significant roles. As Edward Said argues, the concept of Orientalism or the view that the West is superior and different to the East had long traditions dating back to the Greeks.(Said Edward, Orientalism, 1978) It carried a power structure in which the Europeans tried to situate their views on the east as lazy, weak and indulged only in luxuries. One of the best examples of this view is the concept of the 'Oriental Despotism' who was cruel and treated their women harshly. This tone can clearly be seen in J.S. Mills and T. B. Macaulay. The various Christian missionary works further strengthened these claims. In fact, there were also the Indologist's and the Theosophists who held alternative views on it.

In advocating the dominance of the West the concept of race became a handy tool for the colonial powers. Aided by the strengths of the Industrial and the Scientific Revolutions the idea of difference between the East and the West became stronger when the question of domination emerged. The newly established branch of knowledge, Anthropology gave a 'scientific' basis for establishment of the difference. The colonial regime made several efforts to make the difference within the Indian society by conducting several anthropological surveys among the entire people which was published and the various Census Reports further differentiated the people. The colonial rulers fully utilised the concept of caste as existed in the country through the various anthropological reports and the Census Reports made the existing divide which was also racial clearer, through the legal recognition of the various Brahmanical texts like the Manu Samhita in the Personal Laws of the Hindus. The colonial state tried to link itself with the Aryan concept so that it could depict itself as not foreigners or the 'other' but sharing a link with the dominant natives in order to establish its legitimacy to rule the country. But, this identification created some problems for the colonial state as it left a large section of the people like the Dalit's and the Muslims outside the dominant structure of the society. The colonial state understood this after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. Although, it was harsh on the Indian Muslims for the events of 1857 after the Mutiny the colonial state soon understood the utilities of the separateness of the communal divide. Later this was extended to the Indian Dalit's or the Depressed Classes. These shifting positions did not help the colonial state in many cases as it had to counter the challenges of the Indian National Congress. This made the colonial state as the champion for the cause of the minorities. But, this position of the state alienated itself from the dominant view held by the Indian National Congress to be the sole representative of the Indian people.

The Colonial State and the Question of Laziness of the Natives

Prior to the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) the British were not directly interested into the province. The prospects of directly annexing the province was not easy on the part of the East India Company, as the province was undergoing several turmoil's due to the decline of the Ahom State and various rebellions like the Moamarias.

Moreover, the three Burmese Invasions along with the Barkandez (a class of marauders from Bengal) attacks, which created a confusing situation. Several people were killed by these events and the Burmese also took with them several people as captives. One of the characteristic of the pre-colonial Assam was low density of population. The Ahom state managed this issue through the introduction of the paik system (where a large majority of the citizens had to serve through their labour. As a result, monetised economy did not develop in the province.At the same time it must also be noticed that this system remained confined in the upper parts of the valley, in the Lower Assam the people were well accustomed to the monetized economy due to their interaction with the Bengali Paragana system. There were no paik's as they were not under the Ahom rule and they were familiar with the practice of paying revenues in cash.

As a result, the British had no clear cut agendas about Assam. Regarding Lower Assam they were confident in directly annexing it as its population had familiarities with Bengal as well as the number of population was also higher than the Upper parts. But, the colonial administrations understanding of Lower Assam soon proved to be a failure as there were several differences between Bengal and Assam regarding the land revenue settlements. As the province was a disturbed by the Burmese invasions as well as various internal disturbances like the Mayamora Rebellion it resulted in large scale depopulation, a large numbers of people particularly in Upper Assam were carried away by the Burmese it required a period of peace so that it could recover to normalcy. So, initially land revenues were not enhanced for several years. But, after the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857, the situation began to change. Several efforts were made to enhance the land revenues but with little success. Rather it led to a series of peasant uprisings in the different parts of the province.

One of the major obstacles for the province was its landlocked and isolated geographic situation. Although, it had several potentialities in terms of its untapped resources its geography or remoteness from the purview of the European capital posed a major challenge for its commercial utilization. Secondly, the economy of the province particularly in Upper Assam was not properly monetized. The Colonial

state wanted a monetised economy and this was not a comfortable situation for both the state as well as its citizens. The Assamese people failed to pay adequate revenues to the state. The state tried to cope up the situation by imposing several other forms of revenue apart from the land. After 1857 the situation became more acute for the colonial state as it had also to undertake some measures for the benefit of the newly conquered area. But how can this be done without a regular supply of revenue whereby the state machinery be maintained?The lack of sufficient population was another area of concern for the colonial state. This frustration was clearly expressed by Henry Hopkins, the Commissioner to the Agent of Bengal in 1861 in these words,

"*At present we take very little from the Assamese, and we do very little for him. We do not intercept the bounty of nature on one hand, on the other we do not lead him to look for more than nature provides, place him in communication with the outer world, and put him in the way of acquiring new material wants; the result is that he remains an indolent, sensual and non-progressive being.*"2

In order to attract European capitalist interests the colonial government from the days of Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Commissioner of Bengal tried to devise several plans. One of his primary agenda was to make the land attractive to the British capitalist by making special provisions. Later this system was known as the Waste Land Settlements. Through this the western capitalist class was given long leases of land at a very paltry amount. The natives were indirectly discouraged to involve in this enterprise. This is important to note that when the majority of the Assamese people were trying to come into terms to adjust to the newly introduced monetised economy the colonial state only confined itself with the outsiders. The colonial state tried to make several experiments in changing the boundaries for its own interests. Thus Sylhet was added to the province in 1867 in order to get more revenues, without considering the linguistic and cultural differences. Throughout the 19th century the colonial state was concerned to increase the land and other forms of revenue and had no easy answers.

The situation began to change to some extent with the discovery of tea and natural resources like coal and petroleum. Since the natives were unwilling to work

in the harsh conditions as they became free from the Paik system the colonial state encouraged large scale immigration from the other parts of the subcontinent.

The Paik System and Laziness

One of the characteristic features of the Ahom administration was the Paik System. Due to limited population the Ahom state resorted to a system in which in Upper Assam (in which it was mainly concentrated) introduced a system in which the majority of the citizens in lieu of paying revenue to the state had to provide physical labour. Apart from discouraging the growth of a monetised economy it became more repressive and unpopular among the paiks. It led to several uprisings like the Moamoriya and emerged as a major cause for the decline of the Ahom Kingdom.

These issues again came during the brief restoration of the Ahom monarchy in Upper Assam during 1834-38. The Ahom nobility wanted reintroduction of the system as they were not accustomed with the cash economy. The situation was not easy for Purandar Simha as he had also to look for avenues to pay his tribute to the colonial state. He had to bring some Bengali officials known as the Amlahs from Bengal to collect revenues in cash. This made the situation more difficult for the ruler as the majority of the natives were finding it difficult to see the growing importance as well the oppressions of the outsiders. Purandar was not a lazy person but he could not make any radical change in the limited space designed by the colonial state.

When the British finally annexed the Ahom kingdom in 1838 and later the adjoining areas there were no question of reintroduction of the system. The colonial administration wanted revenues in cash and the beneficiaries of the system had to accept it. The Paik system emerged as a major obstacle for the introduction of the monetised economy. Only by 1850, s a section of the nobility led by Maniram Dewan wanted the restoration of the system, but without any positive results. It resulted the Mutiny in 1857, which was quickly suppressed by the colonial state. The condition of the majority of the nobility deteriorated rapidly and they lost their earlier status.(Saikia, Rajen, 2001, p.16-45).Their dependence on the paik system made them lazier and economically impractical. The accounts of Harakanta

Sadar Amin clearly portray the situation very aptly. Although he was related with the old noble class he soon understood that unless his class understood the utility of adjusting with the new regime their future would be bleak. Sadr Amin Harkanta, Guwahati 1989).Interestingly, the Paiks were happy with the situation as they under the new regime were not forced to do the unpaid jobs. But, soon their euphoria subsided as the colonial state imposed new revenue system in which they had to pay their revenues in cash. The punishments of non payments were heavier. For example, the beggar system that prevailed in parts of the province, in which people was forced to work for construction of roads.

Slavery and Laziness

Like the other parts of the country slavery was also a dominant feature in the pre-colonial Assam. The Assamese nobility and a large section of the society were dependent on it. The colonial state knew about its existence but till 1860 made no specific rules to stop the practice. But soon the colonial state began to understand that if slavery existed in the province which also included the various temples it was not going to collect regular revenues from the people. In fact, a large amount of lands were put aside for the religious institutions like the temples and the satras by the colonial state till its existence to retain the support from the native beneficiaries. In this effort the Colonial State was successful to a certain extent as the majority of the beneficiaries remained loyal. But, this was not the case with the nobility who were the major beneficiaries of the system. Maniram clearly pointed it in his report to AJM Mills. (Dewan, Maniram, 1954:619) It must be added that in context of Assam the slaves in most cases were treated as part of the extended family, but not as captives or inferior objects. But, at the same time due to the existence of the system the native nobles became lazy and failed to take full opportunities of the colonial transition. Yet, apart from the economic grounds the existence of the slavery was to an extent in context of the temples to the devadasi system.

Opium and Laziness

One of the major problems which severely affected a large section of the population was the increasing consumption of opium. The use opium as narcotics was a recent

development in colonial Assam. The Assamese people were accustomed to the Bhang which also produced some pleasing affects to the addicts and it did not create any serious issue in the pre-colonial rulers who were not dependent on cash. A large section of the people consumed only during the Shivratri. In other words, Bhang had the Divine sanction for the majority. But, after the arrival of Captain Welsh in 1892, things began to change. Soon, it became quite widespread taking full advantage of the political instability of the province. Moreover, it can be easily cultivated in the province. The colonial administration took full advantage to the situation.   The Assamese elites became very concerned with this and urged the Government to do something to prevent it. Anandaram Dhekial Phookan, in his Report to A.J.M Mills in 1854 (who came to monitor the progress of the province from its annexation in 1826) argued in these words, "Moreover by the facilities afforded now-a-days, such low people as Doomnees, Meereoneos (wives of Dooms, Mohomedans and Meerees) have become inveterate opium- eaters, and by their allurements have spread the practice universally. Association of opium eaters is the cause of the increase of such characters.... If unable to procure opium, and good food, they are obliged to sell or give in servitude their wives and families. And when women becomes opium- eaters they will sell their domestic utensils without the knowledge of their husbands, and even barter their chastity or forsake the path of virtue to get the drug." He was disappointed with the situation and remarked that the Assamese had better qualities. They were unlike the present was "once a hardy, industrious and enterprising race" had converted into "an effeminate, weak, indolent and a degraded people...Women themselves are often not accepted, and in many parts of the country opium is freely administered to the infants and children." (Phookan, D. Anandiram, (Mills, ibid, p.110)

His contemporary, Maniram Dewan was also very concerned at this trend. In fact opium was one of the major problems in colonial Assam which affected the province till the 1930's. The case was different in the other parts of the country where its consumption was rapidly declining. This emerged as a major issue for the Assamese nationalists to involve directly with the Indian National Congress till 1920 as the later regarded it as a provincial matter. The Assamese nationalists were very critical about the impacts of opium on the Assamese people among the large

majority, irrespective of class and caste. Opium was one of important topic of debates among the Assamese nationalists and they creatively utilised it. The various public bodies like the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha and the Assam Association were also very active in this regard. These activities among others forced the Colonial State to appoint inquiry commissions on opium.

The present paper tries to raise the question, why opium became more popular in the 19th and the early 20th century when the people had the alternative options of pleasures like the Bhang and various local drinks? What was so special to opium in the context of colonial Assam?How far the British colonial state was responsible for the growing popularization of it in the province? Interestingly, Hemchandra Baruah, who wrote the first book on opium, 'KaniyarKirtan' (The Revels of an Opium Eater), 1861 was a regular drunkard. The role of the colonial state in this regard was very pathetic. It was primarily guided by the concerns of the economy rather than the well being of the natives. Interestingly, opium became a major problem in contemporary Britain and it emerged as the centre of the global anti -opium movement. But the colonial administration in Assam monopolised opium so that the deficits in the land revenues could be overcome. In other words, it did not regard opium as harmful to the people but tried to defend it. This becomes clear during the visits of the Royal Commission of Opium of 1884 into the province. A section of the representatives before the Commission, both natives and the Colonial officials, tried to argue that opium was not only a narcotic but a medicine for dysentery and other diseases which affected a large section of the people in colonial Assam. It clearly portrayed the failures of colonial state to introduce western medicines into the province and it tried to place the burden on laziness of the people. It did not have any visions for public health or public welfare and was confined to the English investments like in the tea industry but here also it practically did nothing but let the planters and the Christian Missionaries to take the responsibilities. Instead it allowed the promotion of opium particularly among the Assamese masses. The situation was no different in the tea plantations. So, the British colonial state in Assam was an active agent in the growth of the opium addiction among the masses. For the collection of revenue it could go to any extent.

The Growth of the Tea and Other Industries and Laziness

The growth of the tea and other industries like petroleum the colonial concept of laziness was different. Here, opium did not emerge as a major issue. In the tea gardens in particular, the colonial state promoted drinking, instead of opium and developed mechanisms for it. But why not opium, as it was done in the other areas? This was due primarily to the fact that if the tea garden workers knew about its cultivation the entire industry was to doom.

Immigration and Laziness

The rapid immigration into the province from the second half of the 19th century in to the province from different parts of the country gave a new momentum to the concept of laziness of the natives. The new immigrants were very hard working and soon they began to take control of the economy from labour to market. The natives began to lose their presence in the colonial economy and this was observed by a section of the Assamese elites. In order to evoke the spirits of the natives they tried to provide certain examples the natives to the commercialization of agriculture as well as enterprise. This can be clearly be seen from the days of the 'Jonaki' (1889) to the 'Banhi' and as we well as the later newsmagazines' like the 'Chetana' and the 'Awahan'. They tried to critically engage with the colonial understanding of the natives as lazy against the new immigrants.

The Assamese Middle Class and Laziness

The concept of laziness underwent several changes in the wake of the westernization or modernization as well as the growth of communication and the market economy. During the colonial period there were several contradictory pictures relating the issue. From the days of Bholanath Barooah and LakshminathBezbaruah as well as Malbhog Baruah (a pioneer in the tea industry) there were several men who instead of becoming colonial clerks tried to choose independentavenues for themselves. These men tried to change the stereotypes of the Assamese mindsets about the notion of entrepreneurship. In fact, from the days of the ''Jonaki'' various efforts were made to instil the spirits of entrepreneurship among the natives by showing the examples of the benefits of shifting to the new commercial crops like arrowroot.

Although, the respondents were fewer but a section of educated men became inspired in the 20thth century. One of the best examples is Purnakanta Burhagohain from Dibrugarh, who not only tried to cultivate turmeric but also to sell his products outside the province. For that he visited several parts of the South East Asia, particularly Burma. He was followed by some others as mentionedin the ''Chetana''.

Nationalism and Laziness

The question of laziness became an important issue in the growth of the Assamese identity. By the second half of the 19th century provincial national identities began to emerge which tried to provide new linguistic and cultural identities to the particular region. This became more problematic in colonial Assam where the Assamese identity had to face competitions from the Bengali identities as both relied on linguistic identities. The publication of the Census Reports made both the identities to become more alarmed at the numbers of the respective speakers. In Colonial Assam this was a contentious issue as the colonial government introduced Bengali as the official language from 1836 to 1873.

To the Assamese nationalists laziness became an important site of contestation. They were basically divided by two groups, one advocating the colonial understanding and the others by the limited provincial focus. The former entirely accepts laziness as the inherent quality of the natives and can only be reformed through the colonial enterprise. The other view belied that through inner -regeneration it can be done.

Conclusion

The issue of laziness in colonial Assam is important in the discourse of Assamese nationalism and identity particularly related with the men. From the days of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan the Assamese educated middle class continuously began to argue that it is due to laziness that the natives are not progressing. But at the same time they did not pay attention to the climatic conditions of the valley as well as the abundance of the natural resources that were also responsible for it. Regarding opium in the nationalist discourses the natives were mainly blamed for its addiction while the role of the colonial state was not questioned.

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OPEN VERSUS CLOSED BORDER :
INDIA-BANGLADESH BORDER
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Indrakshi Phukan

Abstract

Border generally represents the demarcating line between two nation-states. It is the symbol of state sovereignty. States often consider border from the perspective of national security and give importance to the securing of its international border for maintaining its sovereignty.However, understanding the concept of border is contested, as border can be understood with the purpose it serves. For example, it provides political identity, facilitates economic trade, cultural exchanges, operation of transnational human rights bodies etc. According to the Globalists, nation-state and its borders have lost its significance. Border is no longer remained as a barrier between nation-states as there has been tremendous flow of goods and services across the borders. The process of globalization had made borders interconnected. One little change in one parts of the world brings impact to the other side of the world. In the midst of these arguments and counter argumentsan attempt has been made in this paper to study India-Bangladesh border in 21st century from the perspective of open and closed border dichotomy.

Key words: border, nation state, national security, globalization, development

Introduction

For every nation-state border represents the symbol of state sovereignty. Border is the demarcating line between two neighboring states. Border, however, has its own characteristics. If some borders are open borders, some remain as closed border. Scholars of border studies have come with their own arguments in support and against of open and closed borders. In 21st century, on the one hand the unstoppable forces of globalization have made state borders more permeable by allowing free movement of goods and services across the borders and on the other hand, there are, of course issues which have made the whole world to rethink of the process of re-bordering of borders from national security perspective. In the South-Asian region, it has been found that the borders such as India-Bangladesh border are the sites of tremendous mobility of goods and people across the borders. Hence,India-Bangladesh border is considered as a porous border of the South-Asian region.

        In fact, whether a border is a closed border or open border it depends on the nature of border to a great extent. In caseof India-Bangladesh border it has been found that it is because of the porous nature of the border, India has gone for re-bordering process through the construction of border fencing to prevent illegal flows of people, goods and services from neighboring country, i.e., Bangladesh.It has been found that the illegal movement of people from Bangladesh to India is also associated with the origin of India-Bangladesh border which can be traced back to the partition of Indian sub-continent into two different dominions on religious ground with Hindu majority in Indian province and Muslim majority in Pakistan.No doubt, India has gone for the process of construction of border fencing keeping the national security into account, but in 21st century along with national security, there were some other issues which too made India to rethink of border fencing due to the people's demand to the same. The necessity of an open border and closed border in the context of India-Bangladesh border can be explained by looking at both the arguments and counter arguments against an open border and closed border. But before moving to those arguments/counter arguments, it is pertinent to understand the multiple connotations of the concept of border.

Understanding Border

The term borderhas been defined by different people different manner which has contributed towards the conceptual understanding of the concept. Initially,it was Friedrich Ratzel, a German Geographer and Ethnographer who first coined the term "Living Space" by the name "Lebensraum" and through his work he could make a foundation for German variant of Geo-Politics.Borders, according to him, are not fixed boundary line,[1] that is subjected to change.He substantiated his argument by saying that like human body, states are also organic, subjected to growth and development, and borders are the expression of the power of that organic state.[2]Following the organic state theory, later on it was Karl Haushofer,Frederick Jackson Turner,also made an attempt to conceptualize the term. Karl Haushofer stated that borders are delimiters of territorial control and ideology.[3] Again another geo-political theorist, Frederick Jackson Turner, an American geo-political theorist, provided an American variant of Geo-politics. He stated that frontier is the line of most rapid and effective Americanization. For him, frontier is the meeting point between savagery and civilization and it played a major role in shaping the unique national character of America.[4]Border,however, became an important matter of discussion especially for the geographers since the end of the 19th century. There were some important changes that took place in International Relations which contributed towards the growing importance of border and border studies among scholars/ academicians belonging to different disciplines. First, it was the end of cold war that drew an *ideological border* among the Europeans by dividing them into two power blocks- The Capitalist and the Socialist. Then the disintegration of Soviet Union into fifteenth separate Republics and then the formation and enlargement of European Union, the 9/11terrorist attack in the United States - all had raised the significance of borders and border became a matter of great concern for all including academicians, researcher, and state authority. The notable thing is that, the initial works on borders primarily discussed borders from the Geo-political point of view. Later on, people/scholars started viewing border from different perspective and in course of timeborder studies havegained an interdisciplinary character.[5] From that point of view it can be said

that the definitions of border vary from time to time for which the term does not have any specific definition which is unanimously accepted.Border is viewed from different perspectives, such as political, social, and economic and sometimes borders are also discussed from *psychological perspective* as they create cultural and mental differences between people living on either side of the border.[6] As mentioned above, there are, however, some remarkable definitions of border put forward by people working on borders. J. Agnew defined border as "a line on maps or barriers on the ground, whose existence are confirmed on many grounds: political, economic and social."[7]Gabriel Popescu defined border as the lines represented on the map which separates earth's surface. To him, borders carry with them a sense of division or separation in space and at the same time borders have the power to inculcate a sense of commonness among some people and also people's perception on neighbors.[8] For Malcolm Anderson, border is not just a line; these are processes as well as institutions. Wolfgang Zeller, in the book entitled, *What makes Border Real –In the Namibia-Zambia and Uganda –South Sudan Borderlands,* has expressed the view that a border is the limit of territorial sovereignty as well as a living space and membrane of everyday interaction between borderland inhabitants and frontline agents of state authority on both sides.[9] While discussing about borders the writer has held the view that it is the political, economic and cultural relations between the people of both sides that makes border real. Observing the mutual economic benefit brought by the settled boundary agreements between two states, Simmons has stated that borders are institutions that produce joint gains.[10] Tayyab Mahmud has stated that drawing of boundaries is the inaugural gesture of the law, whereby the lines of demarcation that separate legality from illegality often create zones where bodies and spaces are placed on the other side of universality, a moral and legal no man's land, where universality finds its spatial limit. Regarding border it has been found that border assumes the normative function of filtering the legal from illegal and often the illicit. This tension between legal, illegal and illicit makes the border an exceptional space within a nation-state. Sometimes border is understood as linear dividing line, fixed in a particular space, meant to mark the division between political space and or administrative units.[11]In contemporary period, however, the most widely accepted definition of border is the line that

divides two territorial entities.It needs to be mentioned that people belonging to different disciplines have made remarkable contributions towards the conceptual understanding of border and in this regard, David Newman, Brunet-Jailly, Malcolm Anderson, Donnan and Wilson, Michiel Baud and William Van Schendel etc., may be noted as the most celebrated authors of border studies who have made valuable contributions towards the conceptual understanding of the concept'Border'. It needs to be mentioned that North America and Europe played an important and dominating role in producing literature on border studies which has evolved into an interdisciplinary field of study from a disciplinary specific perspective.[12]

Closed Border and Open Border: An Understanding

Border, the demarcating line between two nation-states, can be an open border as well as a closed border and it depends on different factors. Most importantly the national security question/factor is closely associated with this. Most often it has been found that states go for a closed border paradigm keeping the national security issue into account. States have their own justification for a closed border.

However, there are scholars who have talked in favor of an open border. In this context, border scholar Joseph H. Carnes may be mentioned.Carnes, with the help of three contemporary approaches to political theory has tried to construct arguments for open borders. According to Carnes, the general perception people hold regarding border and border guards is keeping out the criminals, subversives and invaders. But, should a government treatthose innocent people who enter into a foreign land just by crossing the border for the sake of a good and decent life in the same way as with those criminals. For most of the people though the answer is yes but Carnes has strongly opposed/challengedthis by arguing that border should generally be open and that people should normally be free to leave their country of origin and settle in another.With the help of three contemporary approaches to political theory i.e.,*Rawlsian, the Nozickian and the Utilitarian principles*, Carnes has argued that there is little justification for restricting immigration. These three theories begin with some kind of assumption about the equal worth of individuals. As far as the Nozickian principle is concerned, following John Locke, Nozick

assumes that all the individuals in the state of nature had same natural rights and when people entered into the minimal state from the state of nature, the state has an important role to play. The state which was created with the sole aim of protecting people within a given territory is obliged to protect the rights of both citizens and non-citizens equally because the state enjoys a de-facto monopoly over the enforcement of rights within its territory. Individuals have the right to enter into voluntary exchanges with other individuals. They possess the right as individuals, not as citizens.The state may not interfere with such exchanges until they do not violate someoneelse's rights.[13]From the above discussion, it is clear that a Nozickian government has no grounds for preventing immigrants as Nozick states that the land of a nation is not the collective property of its citizens. The state can legitimately exercise over that land is limited to the enforcement of the rights of individual owners. Prohibiting people from entering a territory is not a part of any state's legitimate mandate. The state has no right to restrict immigration.

In the same way, following Rawls, Carnes has argued that John Rawls provides a justification for an activist state with positive responsibilities for social welfare. After discussing Rawls, Carnes has come to this point that even in an ideal world people might have powerful reasons to migrate from one state to another. One might fall in love with a citizen from another land, one might belong to a religion which has few followers in one's native land and many in another, moreover, one might seek cultural opportunities that are only available in another society. These are some of the reasons that make migration across state boundaries important.[14] Again, following utilitarian principle which seeks to maximize utility, Carnes has argued that any utilitarian approach would give more weight to some reasons for restricting immigration. For instance,if migration hurt citizens economically, then there should be restriction on it.It needs to be mentioned that it is not only economic factors, but if immigration would affect the existing culture of a given society that would count against open immigration. However, there are differences among utilitarian scholars regarding the quality of all pleasures and following that not only Carnes, there are some other scholars who have also argued in favor of an open border.

According to Teresa Hayter, people have migrated throughout their history.In every stage of human history, it has been found that the ruler tried to exclude others from their territories in different ways. In the article titled, "Open Border: The Case against Immigration Controls,"Teresa Hayter has mentioned that, comprehensive controls to stop immigration are a recent phenomenon. Governments adopt different measures to stop the process of migration or to exclude the people they do not wish to receive in their territories. Those people are treated in such a way which undermines the different norms of liberal democracy including the rule of law and human rights.[15]It needs to be mentioned that though the right of free movement across frontiers is not a right enshrined in any declaration on human rights, still its denial can beworst and most vicious abuses of human rights.[16]

Open border or no border in fact,permitsthe unconstrained migration of people. Harald Bauder regarding human mobility stated thatit is not only just crossing the physical border line, it also addresses other aspects of the border such as the unconstrained mobility of people within a territory after crossing its border and the ability to engage in society and the labor market as equal members.[17] When open border is talked of, according to the imagination of Bauder, it implies the territorial nature of political organization and the existence of territorial borders. According to Bauder, in the contemporary geopolitical situation, open borders and no border perspectives are a critique of existing border regulations and bordering practices. Border and migration controls are a means to selectively permit some people to enter a national territory as immigrants, future citizens, visitors and temporary residents while putting restriction in mobility to others. Border serve as a tool to manage national labor markets, foreign affairs agendas and security concerns, they create identities of belonging and non-belonging. From a liberal political theory perspective, migration controlsviolate the overarching liberal principles such as human equality.Again, from a liberal utilitarian position, it is difficult to justify migration controls. In the words of Carnes, open borders would be of greater collective utility than borders that restrict mobility. In the same way, the Marxian perspective too criticizes border for creating and reinforcing social injustices. According to the Marxists, migration restrictions enforce the

segmentation of labor between therich and poor countries and they argue for the abolition of border restriction.[18]

In the same way, the feminists as well as the scholars of anti-colonial struggles all oppose borders because of the role they play in the formation of oppressive subject identities.[19]In support of their argument, they have stated that in contemporary periodnational borders are instrument of implementing these practices of oppression, subordination and political exclusion. As expressed by Anderson and other border scholars the national borders have created different subject identities like citizen, non-citizen, migrant, immigrants etc.at the borders.[20] It needs to be mentioned that though the above-mentioned perspectives are different from each other in their emphasis on different philosophical ideas, but regarding border control and restriction, they have arrived at this common conclusion that border needs to be open. Border controls andmigrationrestriction, in fact, enables the unequal treatment of human beings who are otherwise equal. It also facilitates exploitation and different forms of oppression in a different manner.

From the above discussion it has been very clear that the arguments for open borders are made in terms of free movement. Generally, individuals exercise their right to freedom of movement for various reasons such as desire to relocate for improved employment opportunities, to be closer to their loved one, to travel, to join a community of like -minded people and so on.[21] It has been stated that open borders are the only ways through which people's freedom of movement as a fundamental right can be protected. [22]

However, there are some other scholars, who have provided their arguments in support of closed border keeping the national security issues into account. Those who talked against of open border, including the Communitarianhave provided various grounds and on the basis of that argued in favor of a closed border. Culture is one such issue/ground and the communitarians have talked in support of closed border keeping the issue of culture into mind. According to them, cultural has a moral status. The critiques of open border hold the view that the movement of outsiders/people across border may threaten the moral status of culture of a nation-state. The argument that states or nation states have the right to control their borders

is based on the political philosophy of Michal Walzer who stated that state should do so to protect one's own culture. Michael Walzer believes that the presence of temporary workerscan and does have a profound impact on the culture of the host country;hence the members of a nation states have a strong interest in protecting the public culture they share. The shared life of a community is in same sense embodied in the shared territory and therefore, its members have a right to control entry into the territory.

In 21st century, every nation-state is concerned about its border and national security, European nations as well as United States of America,India are too concerned about their borders and about their national security. States like USA do spend more on border security, they have focused too much on building fences, hiring more border patrol agentsand also on sophisticated electronic surveillance system at the border,[23] and thereby has made an attempt to createa peaceful situation by maintaining a healthy relationship with its neighbors. It has been found that there is always a possibility to transform that peace into both higher levels of economic integration and also broader and deeper security against transnational threats from illicit actors.

Following the above discussion, it can be said that India-Bangladesh border can neither be completely said as open border nor a closed border. No doubt, a large portion of the India-Bangladesh border has been fenced. The movement of people, goods etc. is strictly prohibited. But there are some border regions where free movement of people and goods are a common view of daily life.

India-Bangladesh Border:

India-Bangladesh border is a densely populated border and it goes through farmlands, rivers and hills. Itis partly fenced, mostly porous, cuts through rivers, seasonal chars, and hilly terrain. It crosses backyards, pastures and ponds. For some, simply moving from one part of home to another means crossing international border. Regarding India-Bangladesh border it has been found that smugglers, drug carriers, human traffickers and cattle rustlers from both countries continue to cross the border to ply their trades, often with the support of Indian and Bangladeshi border guards."[24]

India-Bangladesh border has been a contested colonial inheritance. Cyril Radcliffe, the man who was asked to draw the boundary between India and Pakistan did not have a detailed map of the region. All he had to work with were revenue maps prepared by the colonial administration to collect taxes from various landlords, tax documents and the 1941 census. It has been stated that the border between India and Pakistan was drawn by Sir Cyril Radcliff on the basis of the two-nation theory.In the book Vijayan has mentioned that the India-Bangladesh border is a hurriedly drawn border that cuts through villages, markets, rivers farms and even houses. The border turned neighbors into citizens of different countries –India and Pakistan in 1947, after the liberation war of 1971, East Pakistan became Bangladesh, and these rules were confirmed again in the 1974 Land Boundary agreement between India and Bangladesh.

India and Bangladesh which share almost 4,096 kilometers of land border is considered as porous border and there are different reasons behind this.The demarcation of the border was done in such way that it carries so many problems with it.Scholars have argued that problems lie behind with the drawing of the India-Bangladesh Border which later created tension between the two. The most notable problems which have been considered as irritant causing trouble to both countries is the problem of infiltration/migration, illegal flow of goods and services across borders, human trafficking, massive human right violation at the borders etc.The government of India has viewed all these as a threat to their national security and thought of border fencing as a means to deal with the problems emerged out of the border. Following that it can be said that India gave importance to a closed border with its neighbor, Bangladesh. India's attempt to close border with fencinglater on contributed towards the emergence ofirritants in the relation between both the neighbors. One such notable outcome/result of closed border is the problem of 'identity crisis.' Generally, the people living along the border line share lots of similarities with the other side of the border in terms of culture and these are found in the form of border –lingua franca, cultural affinities with the people living in the other side of the borderetc. Because of the close proximity, the people residing along the borderline face the problem of identity crisis.It has been found that Indian

state views them through the eyes of suspicion, consider them as a threat to the national security of the state. As a result of that the people in the borderlands alwayslive in a dilemmatic situation of citizen and non-citizen and remained isolated from the mainstream people. It needs to be mentioned that those people also lack the basic facilities like   education, adequate health care, housing, drinking water facility, adequate transportation system and many more.All these make their lives vulnerable and prone to illegal activities taken place at the border sites.

An attempt has been made in this paper to provide the ground realities found in the borderland while doing research on border communities residing along India-Bangladesh border in Dhubri district of Assam.The name of the visited village is Phulkakata village. Duringthe visit to Phulkakata Village, a char Chapori Area, under Birsing Jurua Development Block of Dhubri district by an Engine boat, lots of things have been revealed.In a sunny morning the journey was started to the aforesaid village. The only possible means to reach the destination was boat. Hence, an engine boat was booked for the purpose with the help of an official working in the Birshing Jurua Development Block. It was a journey from Dhubri New Ghat to Phulkakata village, across Brahmaputra. The journey was of about one and a half hour towards North. In the whole journey eyes were in search of so many things.After going for hours, when reached Phulkakata, it was already 12.30 pm. The boat reached its destination. Some people were coming towards us, later it was known from the boatman that they were school teachers working in the schools located there in the larger Phulkakata areas. They were returning to their home, they leave schools much early because they have to cross the Brahmaputra and in return journey time takes longer.The boatman said, it takes almost two hours and they need to reach Dhubri town before sun sets as it is very difficult to sail the boat in night hours. Then the boatman was interviewed and from him several issues have come to the light. The boatman who originally from Mutakhuwa Gaon, a bordering village under Birsing Jurua Development Block of Dhubri district expressed his views in this way:

…No doubt people are getting education…but these are of no importance, teachers come and go…no options also… They come from far Dhubri town to this place by

boat and how they will engage in classes for too long…. they have to go back.see… now it is going to be 1pm….and they are going back ….He became silent and then again stated ………..most of the inhabitants of my village,Mutakhuwa, a bordering village are engaged with cultivation. We have lots of problems in the char areas….In terms of education these areas are totally backward…. Again the communication and transport system. ….What will be found in the char areas…. There is no facility of drinking water, health care facility. How will a patient go to hospital in Dhubri town… he/she has to be carried by boat. That is two hours long distance….. One day we four people carried a patient in our shoulder……no option…. This is true that some people are getting some governmental facilities such as PMAY house, sanitary latrine, but some are notgetting yet. He again stated….

Our Mutakhuwa area was so big once upon a time…… but now it has become very small due to soil erosion. Hence most of them have left the village and gone to the Dhubri town…. What they will do…. after going to the town they are running small business like ration shop etc. Some are even engaged in activities like driving cars…no use/ of staying in the villages. But this area, Phulkakatavillag, is comparatively good….small amount of soil erosion…..hence people have been able to do cultivation and women can engage themselves in poultry……but, yes there is the problem of flood that remains for almost two months every year.

Anotherinterviewee from the same village stated:

For us, the transportation and communication remain the major problems………there are instances of drowning of boats in Brahmaputra for blowing of heavy wind and death of large number of people several times…Moreover…here we have no doctor…If someone becomes ill, need to go to doctor, they need to book a boat personally to reachDhubri town.

Another inhabitant of the village stated:

We are facing lots of problems due to the presence of Border Security Forces at the Border.When some illegal activities are taken place at the borders, they suspect anyone who are not engaged in any way with that illegal activity… I work in

Aadhar Centre and My home is in Phulkakata Part I village but even if I want to come back home after work but I don't come....because I have that fear for the BSFand it is the problem of education.....they do not understand our language....they speak Hindi and our people cannot make them understand about the truth....so misunderstanding arises. In our border areas we have problems and problems... But what the best thing here is that the co-operation and friendliness among the villagers... people can even tell you who has married to whom and even the name of their parents. Apart from this, wherever you go you will get problem... the problem of transportation, health, education,electricity, poor roads and many more.[25]

The above interaction clearly indicates a gloomy picture of the border areas. The people, in fact, live with the concept of "problems." Their problems and many other factors together make them isolated from the mainstream people. No doubt, some of the inhabitants of those border areas have been benefited by the facilities provided by the government. But the ground reality speaks that those have not been equally distributed among the people residing along border line. It also shows the apathy of government towards those people. Again, the presence of Border Security Forces at the border is though justified from the national security purposes but sometime it also brings lots of problems to the people.

India-Bangladesh Border through Open Border Paradigm

If India–Bangladesh border is viewed from the "Open Border" paradigm then one will find both advantages and disadvantages associated with it. Though illegal trade across border is considered as a threat to the national security,it is also an opportunity or a means of livelihood for the people living along the border side of India-Bangladesh border. Scholars working on India-Bangladesh border have come out with their own interpretations.In relation to the above discussion, the views put forward by different border scholars can be noted. Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder and Barun Kumar Sarkaron the basis of their work on India-Bangladesh border have brought the possibilities of informal trade at the borders to the light. Intheir article, "Livelihoods and informal trade at the Bangladesh Border,"[26] both have tried to express the fact that the people of international border areas believe cross

border informal trade as a process to maintain a sustainable livelihood. In that article the writers have made an attempt to analyze the nature and impact of informal trade between India and Bangladesh. According to the writers, cross border informal trade proves to be economically beneficial for most people involved in it, however, sometimes it is alsoconsidered as risky due to the possibility of being caught by police or the border security forces of either side of the borders. However,formal cross–border trade bears significance. Pushpita Das in her article, "Status of India's Border Trade: Strategic and economic significance,"[27] has made an attempt to highlight the significance of border trade in general or India in particular, which lies at various levels. According to the writer, at the international level border trade is a way of projecting countries like India and its neighbors as mature political entities committed to regional peace.Secondly, border trade has significance at the bilateral level as a major confidence building measure between countries like India and China by reducing frictions and encouraging constructive engagements.Thirdly, border trade has significance at the local level as well. Opening of trade along border brings economic prosperity to the border residents. In this article the writer has also mentioned the usefulness of border trade. According to her, border trade forms a part of Border Area Development plan by providing an alternate means of livelihood to the border residents. Moreover, successful conduct of border trade helps in tackling different problems like smuggling of goods by providing legitimacy to the exchange of commodities. It is clear from the above discussion that border trade works as a means of facilitating economic prosperity of the people residing along the India-Bangladesh border. In other words, it can be said that land Border trades have been proved to be as very important from the view point of facilitating economic activities which can also enhance the local economy. It has been highlighted by some people that movement of goods and people along the land border have profound impact on the livelihood of the people residing along the border sides. Borders, moreover, are viewed as gate ways to access market of the neighboring countries and border trade is considered as an important vehicle for the Socio-economic development of the bordering territories. It is one of the reasons that Indian state also stressed on trade relation with its neighboring country Bangladesh and once it led to the signing of "A Treaty of Peace and Friendship"

on 19th March, 1972 which later on led the foundation of Indo-Bangladesh relation. In that treaty, provision was also made for both trade and investment between these two countries. It needs a special mention that after few days of signing this treaty, the first Indo-Bangladesh trade agreement was made between these two countries where provisions were also made for both formal trade and border trade. Article V of the Agreement provides both the countries to make mutually beneficial arrangements for the use of their different mode of transportation such as water ways, railways, and roadways for trade and commerce. Regarding Border trade, there was provision for border trade for the people living within the 1 Kilometer belt of border between West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Lots of things get exchanged between these two countries. Bangladesh occupies a prominent place as one of India's trade partners. Lots of things flow across the land borders between the India and Bangladesh as a part of bilateral trade.It has been highlighted by many research works done on Indo-Bangladesh that the border between India and Bangladesh serves as a site for formal and informal structures of interactions and exchange and this has become possible as both the national governments want to encourage cross-border trade and promote economic corridors. In a research conducted at the Border sides of Meghalaya and Tripura sharing border with Bangladesh, it has been found that the two distinct groups of people,i.e, the khasi High Landers and the Bengali farmers do exchange different goods in a common market, in Meghalaya -Bangladesh Border.[28] But the research has also revealed the fact that the Khasi Hills Markets are unofficial as their existence are officially unknown in Delhi but these markets are still working under the watchful eye of the state's agents in these sensitive spaces.[29]

India-Bangladesh border through the paradigm of closed border

It needs to be mentioned that some of the border regions of Indo-Bangladesh border has been accused of being a center of insecurity. Paula Banerjee has also come out with the same realization. In her paper titled, "The Case of Indo-Bangladesh Border," she called the border regions as the "epicenter of insecurity." Lots of illegal activities take place at some of the border regions of Indo-Bangladesh border. Before going to discuss all those illegal activities taken place at the border, the circumstances or

the factors that have contributed to this need a special mention. This allegation has been made that it is the lack of political vision and will of governments in both countries to take necessary steps to secure the future stability of the region.[30]It has also been stated that in South-Asia, governments are more concerned with national security and give less importance /shows little desire to cope up with the serious sources of insecurities.[31] It is lack of proper strategies on the part of governments which has led to increasing insecurities in the region. As regard to the problem of illegal migration in the region, this view has also been found that it is the inability of Bangladesh to provide adequate opportunities to the people for livelihood that make them bound to cross the border for a better livelihood.[32] Moreover, it has also been stated that unlike Indo-Pakistan border, India-Bangladesh border does not get much importance by their respective governments. Anotherresearch work onIndo-Bangladesh border organized by Calcutta Research Group in collaboration with the International Committee of the Red-Cross brought it to the light that Indo-Bangladesh border remainsneglected in terms of attention. This report has highlighted the fact that states most often forget that the borders are not merely lines but these are areas where people lead civilian lives, an area where people pursue economic activities.[33] The cross border-issuessuch as the illegal migration, illegal trade, smuggling of commodities, drug, human trafficking etc. have not been addressed by both the governments. It has been found that it is the lack of infrastructure, proper security and management policy for the borders which has been contributing to the increased insecurities at the borderlands. Regarding illegal migration, it can be said that illegal migration from across India's border especially from Bangladesh since independence of India is posing a serious threat to India's national security as well as its integrity. Regarding migration it can be said that hat there are some pull and push factors which have contributed towards the large-scale influx from Bangladesh to India. There has been lots of push and pull factors which has led to migration. The push factors include political upheavals, religious persecution, demographic pressures, environmental crisis etc: and the pull factors are the availability of land, employment opportunity, education etc: which contribute towards large scale of migration to India.Though border denotes a territorial limit between two countries, still borders are not homogenous in nature. Some portions

of borderlands are used as modes of economic and cultural exchange, while some parts of the border represent high areas of tension and illegal activities. Keeping that into view, therefore, it has been said that to tackle such problems it is necessary for the states to deal with concept like 'Smart Border.'No doubt,Indian government has taken different initiatives for proper border management, though border management with lots of different implications on the diverse people of both the countries appears to be a difficult task. Keeping the national security into account, the Indian government also talked of Border fence to tackle the illegal activities, to prevent the infiltration of migrants into Indian land as well as to check the flow of insurgents and illegal trade. But such move of government of India is not out of criticism. India's attempt to construct fences at the borders has been considered by the media in Bangladesh as a hostile move from the part of Indian state. Moreover, there were instances of shooting at infiltrates from Bangladeshwho were trying to cross border illegally by Indian Border Security Forces. Such incidents have contributed towards creating anti-Indian sentiments inside Bangladesh.[34] Moreover, the fence represents as a step in attempting a permanent closure of the border against the potential porosity and fluidity of border lives. There is no doubt that most part of the India-Bangladesh border has been fenced with the sole purpose of maintaining national security. But this fenced border has created lots of problems to the large group of people, specially residing along the border line. Fenced border has curtailed their right to free movement across borders. They have come under the 'territorial trap' of nation state. As a result of that, one hand their right to free movement across border has been curtailed and on the other hand, some of them have lost their livelihood, cross-border family relationships and many more leading to an identity crisis. Moreover, due to theclose proximity and affinities with the people of other side of the border, the Indian citizens residing along the border line suffer from identity crisis or face trauma for being considered with suspicious eyes by the mainstream people. Here the story of people of Jhaskal, a bordering village of Indo- Bangladesh border can be noted. After interacting with some of the inhabitants of the village it was known that they suffer from "Identity Crisis" because of their facial and linguistic similarities with the people of other side of the border. Hence, inhabitants of the village stated that people of Sadiya, Jorhat

and even Guwahati consider them as illegal migrants.[35] According to him, they do not feel good for being suspected as illegal migrant. The irony is that even if they are the son of the soil but in their own land, they are made foreigners. Another inhabitant of another bordering village named 'Ramraikuthi' also expressed the similar expression that they are being suspected as foreigners. The old man continued…….. *"I refuse to talk to you… because, before also some people came. During that time there was no fencing. Some people were cultivating. Suddenly we were asked to stand up and then they clicked our photos. Then they declared that people from Bangladesh are cultivating in the lands of India. It is our land… but we were made foreigners,… hence I have that fear and I refuse to talk to you. Though we are living in our own land, still we are not considered as the citizen of India and as a result, we are denied of not only the basic necessities but also some other facilities which are being enjoyed by the mainstream people.[36]*

This is true that the issue of illegal migration seriously has been working as an irritant in the relation between both the countries and has been the reason behind the occurrence of different violent conflicts between the natives and the Bengali Muslims. The violent conflicts between the two ethnic groups of Assam,i.e., theBodos and the Bengali Muslim that took place in July 2012 is the best example of it.[37] There are reports of illegal immigrants from Bangladesh having entered the country without valid travel documents. Though it is not possible to figure out the accurate data of such illegal entrants living in different parts of the country, still then Union Minister of State for home Kiren Rijiju in a written reply to a question posed by Rajya Sabha MP Jharna Das Baidya statedthat as per available input, there were around20million illegal migrants from Bangladesh staying in India.[38] However, the government of Bangladesh refused such claims.

As far as India-Bangladesh border fence is concerned, it needs to be mentioned that India began the construction of border fence, 150 yards from the zero point. The notable thing is that the border fence was constructed in such a way that it left substantial areas of Indian farmland, villages, and families living close to the border outside of the border fence. It has been found that from its construction the fenced border has been disrupting the lives of citizens residing

near the border. Here the views put forward by Anoop Prakash and Shailaja Menon regarding the Indo –Bangladesh border fence may be noted. According to them, the mainstream discourse of security has excluded these people residing along the border and these people are bearing the costs of fencing[39] and the reason pointed out by these writers is the unnatural division of people. It needs to be mentioned that there is absence of understanding relating to the ground level conditions of the residents along the border line. Following that it can be said that there are huge numbers of problems associated with closed fenced border though constructed keeping the national security into account.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is very clear that in 21st century India-Bangladesh border bears a special significance. Neither India-Bangladesh border can be claimed as an open border nor Closed border in totality. With regard to India-Bangladesh border, a middle way can be suggested.Because border has itsown significance at the local level. Opening of trade along border brings economic prosperity to the border residents as land border trades have been proved to be as very important for economic development. However, it can be said that both the states can think of other modes of transportation for trade and commerce.When India-Bangladesh is talked of, the issue of illegal migration occupies the minds of people as it is closely associated with the occurrence of Assam Movement which later on led to the signing of Assam Accord etc. In 21st century, there is the need for every country in the world to work cooperatively with each-other in different matters. Following that it can be said that there is a need for both India and Bangladesh to work cooperatively in different matters keeping the larger interest of the South Asian region into account. The both states should work on peaceful co-relation. Both states can think of the system of work permit. Then the question of 'illegality' will be reduced to a great extent. The ground reality speaks that people living along the Indian side of Indo-Bangladesh border do face problems even if they have identity card, in terms of entering into the land situated outside of border fencing. What needs to be done is some amount of flexibility in those systems. However, recent progress between the states in terms of trade and in other matters is a good sign

and it clearly indicates that both the states have come forward to work together on different matters. No doubt for Indian state the border works as a symbol of state sovereignty but at the same time it is felt that the rigidity that is placed with the border has become lessened. As both the states have expressed their desire to encourage cross-border trade and promote economic corridors. The international trade centre situated at Sonahat, Lakhimari Village under Golakganj development block of Dhubri district is contributing towards this goal. This trade centre is one of the best examples that contribute towards local economic prosperity. Again the illegal crossing of people has to be equally given importance and for that both the states ought to work on proper border management.

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NORTH EAST REGION IN INDIA'S ACT EAST POLICY: ISSUES AND CONCERNS OF CONNECTIVITY AND REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS

Debashis Nath

Abstract

With the rise of new government at the centre in India, the age old Look East Policy (LEP) has got elevated to Act East Policy (AEP) and NER has come closer to the epicenter of this new foreign policy shift. So far it was believed that improved connectivity would enable NER to play a key role in AEP and transform its economy drastically also putting an end to age old insurgent violence. However, if NER did not develop a competitive capacity and persisted with a protectionist approach to political-economic changes, it would be difficult for both the Government of India (GOI) and NER to gain any rich dividend from the ambitious AEP. Present study was therefore, an attempt to find out the ramification of such contradiction using the Primary and secondary data available online. It was found that other than 'Connectivity' NER has a lot more other areas to work on in order to make a case or itself so far as AEP is concerned.

Keywords: *North East Region, Look East Policy, Act East Policy, Connectivity, Development*

Introduction

The North East Region (NER) has not been inside the cartography of India's development discourse for long. In fact, it was viewed as a peripheral border land, thanks to a governance model which Partha Chatterjee described as a 'colonial governmentality' on the part of the centre. The traditional Indian notion about its NER was actually shaped by British legacy of demarcation of people and territory. "People were (therefore) classi?ed as belonging either to the hills or to the plains" (Baruah, 2008) and territories were branded as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded'. In order to comprehend the exclusion the Inner line Permit (ILP) system was introduced. Though it was done in the name of protection of indigenous population of some parts of NER, it permanently separated them not only from the people outside but also from the other tribes in plains. It allowed the colonial British to administer an ethnically divided NER without interruption. The sense of separate identity was strengthened with the time and by the time India got independence after a traumatic partition on communal lines, identity crisis among the northeasters manifested in the form of demands for independence in some parts and Autonomy in some other. The Indian state response to such demands was intimidating as parts of the NER were declared 'Disturbed Area' by the Union Parliament and the draconian Armed Force Special Power Act (AFSPA) was imposed areas of Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram and some parts of Assam. "India, in its post- colonial epoch has been witnessing a number of ethno-identity based mobilization and violent conflicts" (Chhetry 2018, 34). Atrocities of security forces were reciprocated by identical hostility in the form of numerous seditionist and insurgent violence. One of India's most diverse and strategically momentous land got reduced to a 'Zone of Conflict' and the contestation continued even after seventy years of years of India's independence. Perennial conflict and political unrest coupled with policy paralysis concerning NER on the part of the central government have led to situation of what disorder and underdevelopment. NER lagged behind on most of the growth parameter and the natural corollary of which has been failure of its integration with rest of India. NER remained a puzzle box for Indian government and a mystery

unsolved and could feature only in the security discourse under the ambit of India's foreign policy. Things have started to change in the last two decades as Indian government could rediscover the importance of NER and its geo-strategic location in the context of its Look East policy (LEP). With the initiation of LEP and consequent rise in relevance of NER as it could provide land access to the South East Asia (SEA), led Indian state to revisit its Northeast Policy by late 1990s resulting in the formation of first independent Ministry for development of North East Region (DoNER) and efforts to transform the region was resumed. This paper is supposed to focus on the study of gray areas of India's AEP so far as 'Act East through North East' is concerned. It is focused on inquisition of ground realities of NER which creates obstacles in the way of materializing AEP even if Connectivity roads and Highways are constructed.

Inception and analysis of India's Look East Policy (LEP) - the limited outreach

Much of the changes in foreign policy discourse came in the wake of India's Economic Reforms in 1991 and simultaneous to its economic reforms India adopted the LEP, which was seen as a measure of India's outreach programme to its South East Asian neighbors'. "P. V. Narsimha Rao was the first prime minister to truly enact the 'Look East Policy'. With the fall of the Soviet Union, India strengthened the ASEAN and started reaching out to Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and others" (Abhijit Majumdar, 2020). "Looking East" was a less contentious way of embracing market forces and cooperating with U.S. allies and partners, it paradoxically also became a way for India to "Look West" (Jaishankar, 2019). Building on the contemporary imperatives and logic of development, ASEAN-India entered into sectoral dialogue partnership in 1992 and full dialogue partnership in December 1996 and it further advanced to Summit level partnership in 2002 (ASEAN 2021). Another significant breakthrough came in to the mutual relations between India and ASEAN as they initiated Free Trade Agreement (FTA), on 8th October, 2003 in Bali and was finalized on 13th August, 2009 and came into effect on 1st January2010. (National Apex Chamber, 2019).

Such Engaging policies with ASEAN under the banner of LEP had its impact on the overall relationship of India and the South East Asian countries which can be reflected in the statistics of ASEAN -India Trade and also the in trade volumes of individual member countries of ASEAN with India. Since its coming into effect, India-ASEAN trade has grown from US$2.9 billion in 1993 to US$81.33 billion in 2018 (Baruah, 2009). In spite of the growth in India-ASEAN trade, LEP has been mocked as 'Looking East' only owing to some lasting limitations. Connectivity still remained a very big concern; China appears to be better engaged economy with the ASEAN in most parameters. In spite of being aggressive on South China Sea, China shares a more balanced regional trade with the member Countries of ASEAN. The magnitude of Chinese investment in Laos and Cambodia is 117 percent and 40 percent of the total GDP of these two countries. According to world the World Integrated Trade Solution (WITS) data China is the largest exporter to all the member countries of ASEAN. WITS data reveal that China's export share with Indonesia stands at 26.23%, Malaysia 20.68 %, Thailand 21.12%, Vietnam 29.82%, Philippines 22.82%, Singapore 13.66%, Myanmar 34.64, Brunei 13.07% and with Laos and Cambodia it stands at woofing 37.41% (WITS,2020). All these China has achieved when "China considered ASEAN as an instrument designed to 'encircle China' and therefore kept a safe distance from the regional body" (Chatterji, 2021). India, on the other hand, shared deep historical and cultural bonding with the ASEAN member countries. Therefore, understandably, India's LEP has fallen short of what it was likely to achieve in first two decades of its inception.

Act East -as a proactive shift from the LEP

"Act East' and its early avatar, 'Look East' are not different; rather, they are two sides of the same coin, representing two different, but continuing phases in the evolution of India's policy towards the Asia-Pacific region" (Kasavan, 2020). The Act East probably started with PM Modi's formal invitation to the ASEAN head of the states to attend the 69th Republic day celebration of India, which was

positively accepted by the ASEAN leaders. It marked a symbolic move towards Act East. As pointed out by the Prime Minister of India, "India's Act East Policy is an important part of our Indo-Pacific vision. ASEAN is and always will be the heart of our Act East Policy" (Speech of Prime Minister of India, 2014). In the 17th virtual ASEAN Summit 2020, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pointed out that the ASEAN group is the nodal center of India's AEP since the very beginning. India is now an "active member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the East Asian Summit (EAS) and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus. Today there are 30 sectoral dialogue mechanisms and seven Ministerial-level interactions in addition to annual summit-level meetings" (Kesavan, 2020).

Act East and the NER of India: an overview

"Through the framework of AEP, India seeks to achieve deeper political and economic development goals for the region (NER) by creating sophisticated markets and connectivity links between the region and Southeast Asia" (Dewan, 2021). "It is aimed at ensuring the overall development of north eastern states in terms of people to people contact, border trade through border haats, cultural ties, infrastructure projects…etc." (Sengar, 2018). There has been a lot of enthusiasm at institutional levels regarding the 'Act East' Policy. Assam for instance in May, 2017 introduced "Act East Policy Affairs Department" to formulate, implement and monitor the state policies concerning the neighboring and other foreign countries so as to reap the benefits of implementation of Act East Policy by the Government of India (Notification Govt of Assam, 2017). Assam also initiated 'Advantage Assam- the Global Investors Summit' in February 2018 to attract the global investors to Assam and managed to attract investment worth Rs. 8,020.21 crore and A total of 207 Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) have been signed during the Advantage Assam summit (Singh, 2018). Manipur has been equally enthusiastic about AEP as it has created 'Act East Policy Committee'. It has also constructed trade and Expo centre in Imphal and proposed 69 bridges to facilitate border trade (The Hindu, 2020). Integrated Check Post at Moreh was also inaugurated by PM

Modi on January 4, 2019. Nine Border haats were also supposed to be opened to facilitate locally produced commodities. Intra-regional connectivity, both rail and road has improved in NER.

According to the Reports of North Eastern Council (NEC) total length of different types of road is 3,76,819 km. out of which the length of National Highway around 13,500 km (as per the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways data published in August 2012) and the average road density per 100 Sq Km of area is 143.72Km against the national average of 115.30 Km (NEC, 2021). Since India has been working towards increasing its engagements with SEA under its `Act East Policy' the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway is one of the biggest infrastructure projects in the region (Siddiqui, 2020). This was followed by the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project. National Highway 39 that passes through the state capital Imphal up to Moreh on the Indo-Myanmar border is being developed as Asian Highway 1.

However, the question still remains relevant, 'whether NER is prepared for LEP/AEP and the open competition it's likely to bring with it? and if connectivity is the only solution to all problems? Quest to find answer to these questions might lead to some ultimate conclusion.

Though, LEP had a commitment to making India's NER a trading and commercial hub (Deka, 2015). However, it took India nearly a decade's time to form an independent Ministry for development of Northeast, i.e.. The Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) and till 2014, the Ministry could complete only 368 Connectivity Projects out of the 675 projects it sanctioned (DoNER,2021). LEP as such never get going the way it was supposed to. The following data will provide a better impression of the realities of LEP in NER.

Table-1: Data showing the current status of NER on various development parameters

States	People below Poverty Line (BPL) (in Percentage)		Ease of Doing Business (By FICCI)	Implementation of business Reforms (2016) As per NER Vision 2030 data	Hydro Power (MW) (IBEF data)		Infrastructure (Surfaced road 1997)	GDP Contribution (In %)
	2001 Census	RBI Publication (Sep,2020)			Potential	Actual		
Arunachal Pradesh	33.5	31.40	31	31	50328	281	28.32	0.13
Assam	36.01	34.40	24	24	674	250	16.94	1.67
Manipur	28.05	37.90	28	28	1784	105	32.88	0.15
Meghalaya	33.09	16.10	34	34	2394	185	46.26	0.18
Mizoram	19.05	15.40	29	29	2196	0	41.10	0.12
Nagaland	32.08	08.80	27	27	1574	91	28.55	0.14
Sikkim	36.04	30.90	30	30	21	15	NA	0.15
Tripura	34.05	40.00	22	22	4286	84	31.10	0.26
NER	31.42	25.86	--------	----------	---------	--------	----------	2.8

(Source: 1. Census Data 2001, 2. RBI (https://m.rbi.org.in/scripts/Publications View.aspx?id=19887).   3. FICCI, 4. IBEF data, 4.Ministry of Road Transport (GOI). 5. NER Vision 2020, 6. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (Available at: https://statisticstimes.com/economy/india/indian-states-gdp.php)

Contrary to scholarly rhetoric, NER presents a very dismal image of itself on numerous growth parameters. A significant portion of NER's population persistently stays inside below poverty line. Its GDP contribution is among the lowest when compared to the rest of Indian States. Together the NER contributes only 2.8 percent of India's total GDP and without Assam this percentage contribution of GDP of the rest of the seven states drops down to only 1.13 percent.. The NER still remains lagging behind on multiple heads. Keep aside the capacity to sustain the global competition, the region is hardly in a position to keep pace with the domestic market challenges it's likely to face once the connectivity projects are completed.

NER and the Factors of regional disadvantage

The irony of reality still persists. Trade surely opens growth opportunities. It is considered a prime vehicle to attract investment. However, there are many examples to prove that trade and connectivity are no panacea… The ability to extract gain from geographical proximity depends on readiness of the economy'' (Bose,2019). Trade needs reciprocation, which in turn depends upon 'Absolute and Comparative Advantage' (Dominick Salvatore 2014:32-34). In fact, India's trade with the SAARC countries suffered a lot due to lack of reciprocation. Under the prevailing circumstances what NER can reciprocate for international trade is highly debatable. And if NER is unable to reciprocate than it stands every chance of becoming a dumping yard for outside products. The ASEAN –India trade which stands at above USD 80 billion, but land route through NER is hardly used for such trade. In fact the trade routes are yet to be developed and are tottering at preparatory stages and Indian Ocean Region is used for boosting trade in AEP (Datta, 2017).

NER and issues of Connectivity

NER has much to do before it can compete with the outside challenges. Intra-regional connectivity is still very poor. State capitals in NER is not yet inter connected by Railway network. The national highways are also vulnerable to natural and anthropogenic disturbances. The overall infrastructure remains alarming in spite of making constant progress. This can be reflected with the help of the following table.

Table-2: Road, Rail & Air infrastructure of NER and their Ranking

Name of the states	Road Length Per 100 sq. Km (in Km)	Ranking in terms of Road Infrastructure	Rail Network Length Per 100 sq. Km (in Km)	Ranking in terms of Rail Infrastructure	Ranking in terms of Air Connectivity
Arunachal Pradesh	36.7	29	0.03	28	29
Assam	420.4	04	4.47	11	12
Manipur	111.0	17	0.08	26	23
Meghalaya	96.9	21	0.06	27	27
Mizoram	38.5	28	0.03	29	25
Nagaland	217.8	08	0.13	15	26
Sikkim	116.2	15	0.00	30	28
Tripura	375.4	05	2.60	19	22

(Source: 2019 INDIA STATE RANKING SURVEY. URL: https://www.hospitalitynet.org/file/152008769.pdf)

Other than road infra structure, both rail and air connectivity of NER is consistently poor. Except Assam, most of the states of NER are ranked among the lowest in terms of Road, Rail and Air connectivity, compared to rest of the Indian states. States like Sikkim has not even witnessed the rail link as of now and its air connectivity is also only in the name sake. The state is connected to India through the Siliguri Corridor trough an approximately 120 km long national highway no. 10 which is at the same time is highly vulnerable to natural calamities like landslides and heavy rainfall.

As per a field survey conducted in 2014 in the Imphal- Moreh border road connecting Tamu in Myanmar through the More-Tamu Land Custom station (LCS), it was found that the 110 km long Imphal- Moreh national highway which was

supposed to link India to the ASEAN countries, through Myanmar, was highly vulnerable to insurgency related problems… Besides, the Moreh Market area is also a highly contested zone and suffered a serious scarcity of essential infrastructure for trade. The Moreh market didn't have a good quality hotel, there was problems of pure drinking water, electricity supply remained highly obstructed and security has always been an issue (Nath:2014, 74-97).

Loose regional cohesion

North East India as a region is not a cohesive unit, rather 'Balkanized'. Most of the states in NER have border disputes. In a recent incident border disputes led to violent clash between the security forces of Assam and Mizoram resulting in massive casualties. "The two sides fired at each other, leaving seven dead and 60 people injured. Six of those killed were policemen from Assam" (BBC, 2021).) The incident was a corollary of unresolved border dispute originated as a colonial legacy. "The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) of 1873, which defined the Inner Line Regulations, better known as the Inner-Line Permit (ILP) system…Based on the 1873-regulation, Mizoram claims a 509-square-mile or about 1,318 sq km area of the inner-line reserve forest notified 148 years ago" (Dutta, 2021). Again "In 1933, the British demarcated the northeastern region into separate districts based on cultural, linguistic and tribal lines. This led to a new boundary separating Lushai Hills (Mizoram), Cachar (Assam) and present Manipur" (Baruah, 2021). Assam backs the carving of districts in north-eastern states as per the 1933 demarcation (Parashar, 2021). However, escalation has never been of the recent magnitude where both the states resort to filing criminal cases against the top most leaders of the other states, including the case filed against Assam Chief Minister, Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma and Member of Parliament (MP) from Mizoram, Mr.K Vanlalvena.

According to Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sharma, Assam has 12 areas of differences with Meghalaya but the dispute with Arunachal is at 1200 places (The Hindu, 2021). In order to reap leverage out of AEP, it is essential that such disputes are resolved and cohesive and integrated NER borderland is restored. According to Prof Sanjay Hazarika "the public image of the Northeast

was shaped by conflict and confrontation, bandhs and violence" and such perceptions needs to altered. Hazarika Further elaborates that, "The visionary Act East Policy and its predecessor Look East Policy rest on the pillars of peace and trust, not just better roads and physical infrastructure. They depend on good relationships between neighbours which enable economic cooperation, transport and trade" (Hazarika, 2021).

Contradiction of Orientation

Yet another significant aspect of NER and AEP is that both have contradiction in orientation. The economic orientation of AEP a liberal one and it breeds out of the economic reforms which India introduced in 1991. As such, AEP talks in favor of free market and open trade. NER on the other hand is 'Protectionist' in character. It enjoys constitutional protection under 'Sixth Schedule' and some parts of it enjoy the support of 'Inner Line Permit system'. So, how a region with utmost protectionist orientation will contribute to 'free market model' is a debatable subject. The Sixth Schedule of India is based on the recommendation of the North East Frontiers (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-committee popularly known as Bordoloi Sub-Committee under the Chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Chief minister of Assam. According article 244 The Sixth Schedule consists of provisions for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. "The idea behind the Sixth Schedule was to provide the tribal people with administration of their own, so that they could safeguard their own customs, traditions and culture, and to provide them maximum autonomy in the management of their own affairs" (Datta, 2020). Other then this NER also holds provision for 'Inner Line Permit (ILP)'. ILP puts restriction on movement of people from outside in the protected areas. "This is an offshoot of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations, 1873, which protected Crown's interest in the tea, oil and elephant trade by prohibiting "British subjects" from entering into these "Protected Areas" (to prevent them from establishing any commercial venture that could rival the Crown's agents)" (District East Siang, 2021). Though it must be admitted that rights of the indigenous people needs to be protected, yet there is no denying that such provisions necessarily restricts free movement of goods, services and people.

Though they protect the tribal rights but at the same time they persistently separate the tribal population from the rest of the world. Such, political discourse of NER is antagonistic to the free trade regime that AEP propagates.

Political Culture of agitation and protest

NER has a very unique political culture ridden with Movements, agitation and protests. It has a long history of armed violence (insurgency) owing to a feeling of identity crisis and apprehensions concerning the so called outsiders. Keep aside the context of Assam Movements or armed insurgencies in various states of NER, comparatively smaller issues have led to serious violence and mass protests. Proposal to grant Permanent Resident Certificate (PRC) to six non-Arunachal Scheduled Tribes (APSTs) communities led to widespread violence in Arunachal Pradesh in February 2019. "Protesters also set ablaze the house of Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein and vandalized government offices, including the Deputy Commissioner's office and Itanagar Police Station." (Zahan, 2019). Police firing in response to vandalism led to the killing of at least four protesters, imposition of curfew in the capital city and the Para military forces had to take control of the situation as large scale vandalism of markets, shopping complex and other business establishments were carried out. According to reports the six tribes who were proposed to be granted PRC included Deoris, Sonowal Kacharis, Moran, Adivasis and Mishing and all of them enjoy schedule Tribe (ST) status in neighboring state of Assam. There are consistent *anthropogenic hurdles* that NER has to face. During the Anti-CAA movement in Assam from 8 to 28 December 2019, the road transportation between Tinsukia and Dibrugarh was (also) blocked at several places along National Highway 37, leaving travelers stranded for days, before they could reach their destination (Kalantri, 2019). "a total of 244 cases were registered and 393 people were arrested by the police" (Nath, 2019). In November 2016, indefinite economic blockade swept through Manipur. "United Naga Council Called for an indefinite economic blockade, cutting off normal movement of trucks on National Highway 2and 37…or long the 100km Imphal- Moreh Roadon the Trans Asian Highway No.1" (The Hindu, 2017). The blockade lasted for 139days. In fact,

Manipur has a disturbing record of blockades', "2004-2005 - 92 days; 2005-2006 - 121 days; 2006-2007 - 83 days; 2007-2008 - 103 days; 2008-2009 - 60 days; 2009-2010 - 154 days; 2011-2012 - 292 days" (Bhowmick, 2014:15). Recent deadly clash between Assam and Mizoram police which led to the unfortunate demise of six Assam Police personnel ultimately resulted in an unofficial economic blockade of Mizoram. "Hundreds of trucks carrying essential items to Mizoram, stranded in Assam for over 10 days following a deadly clash over a border dispute" (Purkayastha, 2021). Movement through NH-306 was brought to a standstill by the blockade.

Such situation is common to most of the northeastern states and has contributed to NER's dismal positioning in 'ease of doing business index'. As shown in 'table no1' none of the states of NER is among the first 20 business friendly states in India.

NER – a dependent economy

NE as a 'Region' comprises 7.9 percent of India's total geographical area (NE vision 2020) and a population of 45 Million, i.e. 3.78 percent of India's total population (Census 2011). Basically an agrarian economy NER "contributes only 1.5 per cent of country's food grain production, thereby depending on supplies from the rest of the country" (Bose, 2019). According to the data available in the NSSO, yield per hectare is lowest in the NER and it hardly produces the goods it consumes the most. Most of the NER consumes rice as staple food, however other than Assam none of the NER states feature in the top ten producers. In fact, with 4.73 million tones produce (Maps of India, 2021). Assam is in ninth place. As such NER has to depend upon other states to sustain its consumption requirements. The NSSO data further reveals that, some NER depends heavily on other states for Pulses, Oil seeds, Cereals, Fiber, meat and fish, egg, milk products and so on. Of these essential products only in fish production Assam is in the top five producing states. However, fish production in Assam has dropped down to 4.4 percent in 2017-18 from 5.5 percent in 2011-12. Most of the fish supplies NER receives are from Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Meat is heavily consumed in all of the NER states and pork is the most popular kind of meat, as in 2010 of the total

meat NER consumed 68.75 percent was pork (NSSO). In 2019, Assam, at over two million, had the highest population of Pigs in India (Statista, 2021). But, ironically enough, in spite of having domestic production, NER's one of the largest consumer of pork meat and imports pork from Uttar Pradesh to sustain its growing consumption need.

Tourism, silk and bamboo industry are presented as some of the potential profitable industries. However, in tourism sector the ground reality is entirely gloomy, thanks to the frequent agitations and lack of coordinated efforts of the parts the governments in the region. The following data of Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India gives a depressing impression of NER Tourism Industry. NER is the lowest receiver of tourists among all the states in India.

Table-3: List of NE states and their ranking in as recipients of domestic and Foreign Tourists

Name of the state	Domestic Tourists Visits (DTV)	Foreign Tourists Visits (FTV)
Arunachal Pradesh	30	30
Assam	22	26
Manipur	33	31
Meghalaya	27	27
Mizoram	35	36
Nagaland	34	33
Sikkim	26	24
Tripura	32	22

(Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India (GoI), URL: https://tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/2020-04/India%20Tourism%20Statistics%202019.pdf.)

According to Forest Survey of India (2017), the total bamboo bearing area of the country is estimated at 15.70 million hectares and more than 50% (90 out of 136) of the bamboo species in India are found in NER of India. Total 32.68 percent of forest area in NER covers Bamboo plants (Forest Survey of India-2017). But, in spite of such natural advantage, according to the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), the country imported bamboo sticks worth Rs. 370 crores, mostly from China and Vietnam, for meeting the requirements of raw incense stick manufacturing units (The Sentinel, 2020). Another big problem which NER industrial sector faces is problem of unskilled labour. The Ministry of Skill development apprised the parliamentary Standing Committee on Labour in March (2021) that of the Rs 320 crores unspent in 2019-20, Rs 160 crore was on account of low capacity utilization of fund intended for North Eastern Region" (The Sentinel 2020). Low skill level of NER can be perceived through the issue of Mudra loan and Micro Finance scenario in Assam. According to reports of the The Sentinal, "launched in 2015, as many as 60,44,434 accounts have been opened till July2019" (The Sentinel, 2019). But, a significant portion of loans issued under the scheme became Non Performing Assets (NPA) and 'micro finance loan exemption' became an electoral promise of the ruling Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in the state Legislative Assembly pools 2021.

Organic farming is encouraged in NER for quite sometimes now and positively enough Sikkim became India's first fully organic state in the year 2015 (as declared by the state Govt. it self). However, contrary to claims, Sikkim relies heavily on West Bengal, particularly, Siliguri (market) in North Bengal for its vegetable and fruit requirements. NER organic farming like the rest of India, suffers from numerous problems. Some of these problems are, Lack of Awareness, Output Marketing Problems, Inadequate Supporting Infrastructure, High Input Costs, Marketing Problems of Organic Inputs, Absence of an Appropriate Agriculture Policy, Lack of Financial Support, Lack of Quality Standards for Bio-manures, and so on (Babu, et. al. 2017). Thus, NER has its own issues to deal with before it can present if self as an epicenter of India's AEP. The problems of infrastructure and connectivity, culture of political agitation, economic and cultural protectionism, lack of entrepreneurship, lack of competitive skill are some of the areas where

there is genuine needs to work on. "North East is suffering from is flow of easy money, which must be resolved in a time-bound manner, if the state and central governments want market forces at play here, so as to harness the local growth potential" (Bose,2019).

Conclusion

For all these ages LEP could not be implemented through NER as the land transport of goods has never been profitable compared to trade through the sea route and connectivity has always remained a major problem coupled with the unfriendly environment for trade that the NER offers. People of the region has been largely apprehensive regarding a grand top down policiy like LEP and these apprehensions are detrimental to the genesis and nurturing of an environment of trade and investment. Though there has been a shift in the approach of GOI towards its NER in recent years and connectivity issues are being addressed at a rapid rate. daily construction of highways in NER has increased from 0.6 Km during UPA to 1.5 Km under the present NDA Government (The Print, 2019). With the completion of projects like Dhola-Sadia bridge over Lohit River (a major tributary of river Bramhaputra) connecting Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and Bogibeel (Rail cum Road Bridge) over Bramhaputra, the connectivity landscape of the region has transformed significantly. So, issues of connectivity are now being addressed but, the region has more serious issues to deal with.

It has to promote regional solidarity, culture of political agitation needs to be replaced by positive work culture, economic dependence needs to altered by economic self reliance and enhanced productivity. To do all these it is essential that, the region opens up to the outside world keeping aside its protectionist approach to development. NER needs to develop its own capacity structure and participate to the ongoing market competition if it wants to extract benefits from the AEP. Both Health sector and Tea industry has developed by entering into the competition that the market has offered. But the tourism sector has failed to generate the same kind of success owing the political turmoil and lack of coordinated effort and publicity which are essential in a competitive market system. It is essential that governments in region take special care of skill development initiatives, so that,

economic dependence can be replaced by regional entrepreneurship. Concrete efforts are to be made on the ground to reduce the gap between rhetoric and reality so far as border trade is concerned. Though most of the present studies focus on the potential of NER in border trade under the ambit of AEP, it is equally important to find out the inner contradiction that the NER has deeply internalized over decades and find solution to them. A hostile and balkanized NER is unlikely to provide opportunity structure required to boost trade and commerce. So, efforts to transform the region into a cohesive unit are utmost essential. Political agitations need to be channeled to the right direction so that frequent issues of law and order do not arise. Issues of intra-regional conflicts need to be addressed peacefully thorugh discussion. In order to be an engine of development under AEP, NER needs to ensure free flow of goods and services and therefore, it has to work on to identify the factors which hinders this free movement and find ways to protect regional solidarity and cohesion.

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GLOBALIZATION, TEA INDUSTRY AND TRADE UNIONISM: AN OVERVIEW WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO ASSAM CHAH KARMACHARI SANGHA (ACKS)

Satyadeep Lahkar
Borun Dey

Abstract

It would not be an exaggeration in saying that the notion as well as practice of globalization is influencing each and every aspect of human life and society. Be it social, political or cultural arenas of present world, the deep imprint of globalization is so vivid that none of them can claim themselves being free from the impacts of globalization. In this context, it has been widely seen that globalization has also impacted the social movements going worldwide. Given the scenario, the spirit of trade unionism or more specifically trade union movements, major segments of social movement have also been seen receiving impacts of globalization to a great extent. In this connection, it may be highlighted that the tea industry of Assam and the trade union movement pertaining to the same has received tremendous changes owing to globalization. Hence, the present paper aims at throwing some critical lights on the dynamics of globalization, tea industry and trade unionism paying special attention to Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha. The paper is qualitative in nature and historic-analytical methods are used. Further, it is based on primary sources i.e., field investigation and interviews made and taken by interview along with consulting relevant secondary literature.

Key Words: *Trade Unionism, Globalization, Tea Industry, ACKS, Development*

Introduction

Assam came under British rule later in comparison to other pockets of the country. The colonial ruler initiated the process of industrialization in this region too like the other parts of the country. However, the Britishers faced some problems in this regard and among them a major problem was the lack of adequate manual labourers. Assam traditionally has been a self-supporting village economy based on agriculture and therefore most of the indigenous local population of Assam was reluctant to work as manual labour under the Britishers. The Britishers under the banner of East India Company occupied the administration of Assam in 1836 and it established a Company namely 'Assam Tea Company' in February, 1839 in order to spread tea plantation in Assam and to have profit. From then onwards till date the tea industry has been serving a dominant role in the industrial map of the state as well as of the country.

Globalization, Tea Industry and Trade Unionism: an Overview

Modern industrial set ups and the notion of trade unionism are considered as both sides of the same coin as emergence and continuation of modern industries often develop the spirit of trade unionism. Here, the tea industry of Assam is also not exceptional from this very fact as various trade union entities have emerging and operating its functions in the tea plantations of Assam. However, *Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha* (ACMS) and *Assam ChahKarmachari Sangha* (ACKS) have been two formidable trade unions of Brahmaputra valley representing the labourers and the employees recruited in the tea plantations of the valley. Emerged on 9th February 1947, ACKS has been articulating as well as aggregating various interests of the greater community of tea plantation employees of Assam.

The notion of globalization receivedits heightin India in the last decades of the previous century specially after the initiation of liberalization, privatization and globalization (LPG) by the state apparatus. Such move impacted the very socio-political structure of our country including trade union movement too. Emergence of innovative technologies has hampered the bargaining power of labour and in most cases labourers were bound to adopt the policy of VRS (Voluntary

Retirement Scheme) and with the arrival of new millennium the scenario became more vicious as the opportunity of employment getting complicated due to the initiation of recruitment of labourers and employees solely on contractual basis which ultimately hampers the strength of trade unions in terms of its numerical strength which are diminishing day by day.[1]

Globalization, Tea Industry and Trade Unionism: the case of *Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha (ACKS)*

As it has been mentioned above that the spirit as well as the practice of trade unionism is also not getting untouched from globalization. Hence, the present paper aims to examine the magnitude of such impact on ACKS and its respective trade union movement in Assam. In this context, the researcher hasinterviewed the senior office bearers of *Assam ChahKarmachari Sangha* who has vehemently opined on the condition of anonymity that the existing scenario itself is a big challenge in general to trade union movement of India and in particular to that of *Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha.* The office bearers further have gone on to say that with the arrival of multinational companies with fascinating market created by the same severely affected the numerical strength of ACKS. They further opinedwith great resentment that now the new generation is no longer interested to be a '*babu'*[2]. Similarly, while the interaction with the researcher a retired employee of Ethelbari Tea Estate of Tinsukia District, Assam and an active member of Panitola branch of ACKS recalled the parted days when the service of a *babu* in tea estates occupied special honor and respect in the society and it was one of the desirable jobs for educated youths up to the closing decade of the last century. In this context, the ex-*chah karmachari* expressed the view that now even the most of offspring of *chah-karmacharies* are not interested to be recruited in tea estates and this creates a great challenge in front of the ACKS and the seven-decade long trade union movement operated by them.Moreover, the leader expressing his view in this regard opined that introduction of computers in the official works of tea estates is also a key factor for the reduction of employees in the tea estates and though there have been *computer Kereni*[3]. But there was not satisfactory agreement on the pay structure of such employees. Now one may raise queries regarding the position of ACKS in

such a situation to continue its role as a trade union of representing the greater community of Tea Plantation Employees of Brahmaputra valley of Assam.Here, the researcher has made query in this regardto an incumbent central office bearer of ACKS and in response to the researcher the leader opined that ACKS being a trade union always trying to tackle such problems created by globalization and he pointed out the agreement of ACKS with C.C.P.A signed on 25th March, 2016 which has fixed a grade of *Computer Kereni*recruited in the tea estates of the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. Further, the leader has gone on to say that now ACKS has been adding voice to a new demand for respective authority to appoint the educated off-spring of *chah-karmacharies*in the tea estates. Although no agreement with C.C.P.A has been made in this regard and the leader expressed his pessimistic view that very soon ACKS would be able to sign such an agreement which would ensure the appointment of the off-spring of '*Chah-karmacharies'* and would also ensure the strength of members of ACKS, an entity that has been bearing the flag of trade union movement in Assam from last seven decades.

The discourse of globalization, tea industry and trade unionism would definitely be   incomplete without being dealing with the rumor of crisis in tea industry. Such rumour nurtured and spread over the period of time hasalso possessed a great threat towards both tea industry and the trade unionism of the same which can be treated as one of the major evil impacts of globalizationover ACKS and the tea industry of Assam in its glorious journey from planters' raj to '*swaraj*'. Although production of tea is subject to weather and the production of tea may reduce due to various natural factors but a rumour regarding crisis of tea industry of Assam triggered controversy in the first decade of the present century. From 2003 onwards it had been speared far and wide that the tea industry of Assam had been going through severe crisis even C.C.P.A, (Consultative Committee of Plantation Associations),a body representing the employers of tea industry of Assam expressed their inability to continue the monetary and non-monetary benefits given to the workers and employees of tea estates of Assam. Most importantly, mass media, civil-society institutions and even state apparatus also compelled to accept such rumour. Given the complex situation, leadership of ACKS came forward to assess

authenticity of this so-called crisis and came in to submission that such crisis is nothing but a pseudo one intending to preserve, protect and defend the vested interest of some of capitalist forces. Further, ACKS along with INTUC (Assam Branch) approached government of Assam to look into the entire matter and to take necessary action which led to the formation of a committee under renowned economist, Jayanta Madhab to investigate the entire issue on 1st October, 2003.[4] Most importantly, the leadership of ACKS provided necessary information and data to this committee. Accordingly, the committee submitted its report stating the futility of the so-called crisis which has proved the stand of ACKS on this so-called crisis and C.C.P.A again compelled to continue the above mentioned benefits to employees and workers of the tea industry of Assam.[5] Apart from this, leadership of ACKS specially the erstwhile General Secretary of the same raised this issue in national level too while participating in a meeting of tea stake holder's organized by Ministry of Trade and Commerce, Government of India held in 16-17 September, 2004 at New Delhi. In this high-level meeting, the General Secretary of ACKS strongly opined that the rumour on tea crisis is a pseudo one and the leader urged the union government to declare special financial package for the revival of sick tea plantations of Assam. Afterwards, the union government made a proposal of providing financial aid to sick tea plantations in the next general budget.[6]

Apart from this, another burning challenge posed by globalization before ACKS is the infusion of the norms of unorganized sector industry to the tea industry, a major industry of organized sector of the country. Tea industry is considered as a vast industry requiring a large amount of land, capital and labourers of both manual and mental category and thereby tea industry of Assam has been traditionally operated by big capitalist companies and the public sector corporation like Assam Tea Corporation. However, with the emergence of neo-liberal policy and globalization which encourages open and competitive market brings drastic change to this scenario. The policy of open-market economy encouraged the peasants and common people to establish small or tiny tea plantations popularly known as '*Xudra Chah Kheti'* in vernacular language and it led to mushrooming of small tea plantations across the Brahmaputra valley. Moreover, small factories known as

bought-leaf factories are being established across the Brahmaputra valley specially in the upper Assam region. According to an article published in *Amar Asom,* a popular daily in Assamese language on 1ˢᵗ May,2006 more than 38,776 small tea planters established small tea plantations using 2,90,606 *bigha* lands of the state.[7] Such small plantations and factories can be considered as a big challenge in front of ACKS. Though such plantations and factories recruit both manual and mental labourers but it isn't easier to cover up these labourers under the banner of trade unions due the 'domestic' nature of such small plantations and factories. Similarly, the management of some tea estates also encourages such tiny planters by purchasing green tea leaves from the small tea planters. The motive behind such encouragement on the part of the tea plantations is nothing but to ensure more profit without providing monetary and non-monetary benefits to the laboureres associated with such tiny plantations which they have to provide the employees and workers of the tea estates having permanent worker and employee with their respective trade union. It means that some of the capitalist entities owing tea estates in Assam prefer to patronage small tea plantations because it is easier to make more profit which they cannot make in tea estate as in the registered tea plantations the managements have to give wage/salary to the workers and employees, have to provide housing facilities, healthcare facility and other facilities to the workers and employees.[8]

While interviewing with the then General Secretary of ACKS from 2002-19 in this regard, the leader opined that though such small tea plantations have been infusing the norms of unorganized industry to the century long old tea industry of Assam which possess a great threat to trade unionism in tea industry of Assam in general and in particular to that of ACKS. The leader further opined that due to some lacuna in current labour legislation the flag of trade unionism is yet to be fluttered among the labourers and the workers associated with the small tea plantations and its auxiliary arrangements. Hence, bringing necessary reforms in the existing laws pertaining to tea plantations of Assam is quite essential in this regard and ACKS has been pressurizing the competent authorities in different platforms with different channels. In this regards it is worthwhile to mention that the then existing general secretary of ACKS attended a meeting called by

Government of India on 26–27 August, 2005 held at Sram Bhawan, New Delhi. In this meeting several proposals have been passed to make necessary reforms in plantation labour act, 1951.[9] Afterwards, 'The plantation Labour Act, 1951' has been amended by the parliament with 'The plantation Labour (Amendment) Act, 2010' which broadens the jurisdiction of the term employer under section 2 A (E) of the said act and by dint of such amendment now individuals also fall in the purview of employer. Moreover, the state government determined minimum wage for the workers of the bought-leaf factories by a notification bearing no.GLR.503/ 81/Pt/39 dated 3rd November, 2015.[10] But these workers and employees are yet to be cover up under the banner of trade union.

Hence, in a nutshell, it can be commented that the very forces of globalization impact the trade union movement in India in general and that of ACKS in particular to a great extent. Further, it has been widely seen that ACKS in this regard trying with its best to tackle such impacts by using various means.The leader has further argued that since globalization has been negatively impacting trade union movement in various means like decline in the members of trade union, infusion of the norms of unorganized sector to the organized industries like the tea industry of Assam but now most of the trade unions are coming together regardless of the ideology possessed by them in order to combat together the evil effects of existing neo-liberal eco-political structure of our country. Most importantly, leadership of ACKS in spite of a trade union representing not more than 20,000 employees recruited in the tea plantations of the Assam valley is able to represent itself in various international forums. Though prior to the emergence of neo-liberal order in our country, the leadership of ACKS has been participating in international forums but in present context, as opined by the leader, it is quite essential in the sense that sharing international platforms helps the leadership of ACKS to have in-depth idea about the worldwide scenario of the trade union movement and to replicate the tactics used by trade unions of other countries to curb the challenges possessed by worldwide flow of globalization. Importantly, the leader of ACKS, while talking about the impacts of globalization on trade union movement carried out by ACKS with the researcher, opined that sharing international platform by the

leadership of trade unions of the countries like them helps in tackling new challenges before trade union movement posed by globalization. Here, the leader who participated in the 27th conference of ISSA (International Social Security Association) representing India held in September, 2002 at Stockholm of Sweden pointed out how the spread of the globe across the world specially in the socio-political arena of developing societies impacts the entire citizenry of such society specially the working-class of the same. Moreover, the evil effect of globalization initiates new tactics like introduction of new technology reduces the new recruitment of workers and that is also on contract basis has affected the bargaining capacity of workers which finally hampers the right to social security of workers which has also been incorporated in the article 22 ofUDHR (Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Further, the leader has revealed that though the tenants of globalization effects the right to social security of the working-class section and now consciousness among the leadership of trade unions have been increasing day by day and it sensitizes the leadership of trade unions not to be busy with traditional issues like salary, bonus and such other issues. But, most importantly issues like social security of the labourers are getting upper hand in the arena of trade union movement including that of ACKS. Here, the leader opined that globalization in one hand has been affecting the issues of labourers and their respective trade union movement. But at the same time, it compels the trade unions to come together to tackle the burning challenges of trade union movement created by globalization regardless of their ideological orientationwhich can be termed as a major boon for the greater scenario of trade union movements of the societies like ours.

Conclusion

To sum up, it may be noted that globalization has some tremendous impact on trade unionism and the trade union movement of ACKS is also not exceptional from this fact. However, it has been seen that though the notion as well as the practice of globalization possesses certain challenges to ACKS but it also provides a platform to the trade unions including ACKS to raise their voice in more organized way and to develop the sense of solidarity among various trade union entities across the globe.

Notes :

[1] Interview of G Sanjeeva Reddy, President of INTUC publishedin *Nava Chetana* (2012. April 6).P.6.

[2] The traditional word prevailed in the tea estates of Assam to denote employees.

[3] These words are used in tea estates to imply the clerical employees who works with computer.

[4]*Nava-Chetna* (2004, Nov 14).p.12.

[5] Baruah, Juva Kumar.2012. AikobaddhaSramSangathan: Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha (United Trade Union : Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha) in Hemanta Kumar Baruah (eds.) *SeujiSeuji.* Assam ChahKarmachari Sangha, Tezpur, pp.97-8.

[6]Secretarial report of ACKS.2006.pp.51-2.

[7]Goswami, Ajit Kumar. "Bishyayan aru Asomor Chah Shilpa" (Globalization and Tea Industry of Assam)in Jayanta Madhab Dutta (eds.) *Seuj Silpar Sandhanat (Asomor Chah Udogar Oitohasik, Rajanaitik, Arthanaitik Aru Samajik Dishsamuh)*, Assam Chah Karmachari Sangha, Jorhat, p.118.

[8]Sarma, Devabrata. Golokikaran aru Sramikshreni totha Chah silpa (Globalization, Labour Class and Tea Industry) *'Nava-Chetna'*, June14,2006, p.6.

[9] Secretarial report of ACKS, 2008, pp.24-5.

[10] Retrieved from http://www.labourcommissioner.assam.gov.in>files on November,27,2017 at 3.55 PM (IST).

CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER AND CHINESE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE PERSPECTIVE : THE FUTURE OF MULTILATERALISM

Bhupendra Kumar

Abstract

Following the financial crisis of 2008, there has been a challenge to the liberal world order which emerged after the Second World War that got the victorious thump with the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Chinese view, commonly characterised as the 'Beijing Consensus', has often been challenged as the opposite of the liberal idea of global governance popularly called the Washington Consensus. Does the new emerging order promise to bring a better world view, or does it conflict with the liberal order? These fundamental questions evoke particular interests concerning future perspectives on global governance and multilateralism. The paper has examined various claims of the Beijing Model or China model. It analysed similarities and dissimilarities between the liberal model of development and the China development model. The research elucidates China's impact on global governance and multilateralism by examining China's strategies in the New Development Bank (NDB) led by BRICS, the Chinese-led initiative of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

Key Words: *Global Order, Washington Consensus, China, Beijing Model, Global Governance, Financial Crisis, Multilateralism*

Introduction

The history of liberal order dates back before 1945 when Britain led it, and then it was characterised mainly by mercantilism. In the 1940s, liberal internationalism was reframed with the emphasis on open multilateral trade, managed world economy based on permanent international institutions, and a particular emphasis on democracy. These views have been materialised in Bretton Woods's multilateral institutions comprising the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, previously called the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IB RD). These appeared as the principal pillars of financial architecture for global governance, primarily for development purposes and coordinating policies of governments worldwide. One of the significant characteristics of the post-war period has been the domination of the United States and the West European countries with having maximum voting power and shareholdings in key global financial institutions.

The end of the Cold War heralded a new era which immediately saw the Unipolar moment spearheaded by the United States, however in parallel also witnessed the sustained economic growth of developing countries such as China, India, Brazil, South Africa. Nevertheless, the representative characteristics of the financial governance did not change reflecting ongoing transformations taking place in the world economy. With other emerging nations, India and China have been persistent in demanding more voices and quota reforms in IMF and World Bank, though it has been met with resistance by the European countries and the United States.

The latest reforms in the IMF and World Bank in 2010 did try to rationalise and allocate rightful demands of the emerging economies. However, underlying problems in the global financial institutions remain as developed nations do not wish to shed their prominent position in the global financial institutions. Furthermore, global funding agencies appeared very reluctant about spending money on infrastructure development and long term investment in developing countries. The divide between the Global South and the Global North appears very visible in ongoing trade negotiations under the aegis of the World Trade Organisation. In

sum, the global rule-making of investment and trade reduces the overall productivity of global trade. It highlights serious inadequacies of the Global North in managing global governance and the global economy. The financial crisis in 2008 has exposed the vulnerability of the global capitalist order, from which the world economy is still to overcome.

In the backdrop of the above discussion, the most transformative aspect in the world politics has been the sustained rise of China. Following Deng Xiaoping's opening of the economy and its acceptance of international institutions such as the United Nations, WTO, the World Bank, IMF, China was viewed upon as integrating with the liberal world economy. However, with the arrival of Xi Jinping, China has been following aggressive policies to redefine global multilateral order. After the financial crisis 2008, China's model of development, which has been so-called characterised as 'Beijing Consensus' evoked particular attention. China sought its emphatic presence and challenged global economic governance and multilateral order through NDB, AIIB, RECEP, etc. This development has a particular impact on current thoughts on multilateralism, where China is seen as revisioning the global economic order by its own model so-called 'Beijing Consensus, which is often characterised as 'authoritarian capitalism. China's rise necessitates examining the current world order and changing face of multilateralism. The paper firstly explores the impact of the 2008 financial crisis, which indeed pushed the prevailing global politics into another trajectory. Then, it has examined the 'Beijing Consensus' and China's vision of global governance.

The Impact of Crisis on the Uni-polarity

During the Cold War, it was assumed that multi-polar structure would be more stable than bipolar structure.[1] However, as years passed, and the Cold War failed to turn hot, new accounts of bipolar stability has emerged.[2] After the cold war, the system entered into a new phase of, 'uni-polar stability'. This period has famously been characterised as the 'the End of the History' by Francis Fukuyama.[3]

This signifies the beginning of the victory of liberal values. At the political level, the United States dominated all over the world. As the economic well-being

of a country constitutes itself as one of the most essential elements of power capability of a state and the United States has been steering the world economy since 1945, the US has proved itself not only a military superpower but also an economic power which leads world economy through innovation and leadership.

After 1945, the US saw many fluctuations in managing its leadership of the world economy, such as the credit crunch and oil crisis in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the world economy remained firmly rooted in the leadership of the United States. Many observers viewed the 2008 global financial crisis as the beginning of America's relative decline. The crisis within the liberal order poses two momentous questions: (1) is US hegemony declining? And (2) how are rising powers – China and India most prominently- likely to behave in a post-American world?

In the wake of the economic collapse that began in 2008, the case for American decline seems to have gained added momentum. The US has dominated the world's political economy for more than sixty years. It has played a dual role in international economic relations. On the one hand, it has served consistently and self-consciously as a liberalising world economy leader. On the other hand, the US has taken advantage of its privileged position to serve its ends within that international order. The US has maintained the relative openness of its large domestic market to absorb the products of its export-dependent supporters. In exchange, they have absorbed and held the United States Dollar (USD), allowing US central decision-makers the luxury of maintaining their preferred mix of foreign and domestic policies without having to confront the standard and politically difficult trade-off involving guns, butter, and growth. It can be better understood by locating US policies in the Cold War era when the US dictated the terms of adjustment. It has derived the necessary leverage because it provided the security of its economic partners.[4]

Following the Cold War, the outcome of adjustment struggles has been less certain as the US has been no longer in a position to dictate the terms. When we talk about uni-polarity, it denotes the might of cumulative economic, military, and other capabilities by a single country and in the context of the post-Cold War era,

it primarily refers to the US-led 'New World Order. As mentioned before, it is important to note that most liberal international institutions conformed to US preferences, though now China seeks a more significant role in existing forums and has been coming up with its parallel institutions.[5] Comparing before the crisis period and the aftermath, it becomes apparent that the US has dominated the international political economy, whereas after the crisis marked the emergence of developing countries such as China, Brazil, South Africa and India. As China emerged as the second-largest economy, it has featured prominently in all emerging regional blocs such as the G20s, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation, and so on. The following section engages with the emergence of the new global order and the Chinese role therein.

Emerging Global Economic Order and Beijing Consensus

The current world order gives ample reasons to believe the relative change in World Order as said by the former US secretary Henry Kissinger, "The Global order established by and proclaimed by the West stands at a turning point."[6] This shift can be observed as the global economic output proportion of emerging economies has risen above 30 per cent, whereas the ratio of developed countries has registered a substantial decline.[7] After the financial crisis in 2008, the debate over global governance has intensified. In this sense, the alternative to the dominant liberal modes of development or governance, a 'Beijing Consensus' or 'China Model' has increasingly gained salience in the policy circle across the globe, further, there has also been discussion about the possible hijack of the progress that has been made on democracy and governance.[8] It is important to notice that state-led development has been undermined because of the Asian Crisis of 1997; however, China's case presents an alternative to understanding how the global order is construed or considered. The most critical questions about the emerging world would be incomplete unless it addresses the question of China. What exactly is China's model, and does it represent a sustainable global future order?

The emergence of the China model supposedly redefines the various position of the (neo) liberal order. Francis Fukuyama pointed out the possible threat of

(neo) liberal order by Chinese led illiberal state-led capitalism. Joshua Remo firstly termed 9 Beijing Consensus in the financial times in May 2004. Remo observed Beijing consensus as innovative, and it promises to overcome contradictions posed by liberal order.[10] Though Remo did not deny the possibility of difficulties within the Beijing consensus. Quian Gang discussed China Model in the context of the post-financial crisis scenarios.[11] China's resilience in the wake up of the financial crisis legitimised the state-led development discounted after the Asian crisis of 1997.

The so-called 'China model' much discussed by Daniel Bell to Martin Jacques, claimed that it worked better than the 'Western model' of laissez-faire economy, universal suffrage and the rule of law. Daniel Bell explained that "the China model combines economic freedom and political oppression". It is important to note that post-Tiananmen, the Chinese regime rests on two pillars, the first one includes economic growth and improvement of livelihood conditions of ordinary people, and secondly, it includes nationalism. Another important aspect of the China model includes the belief in neo-authoritarianism, which include authoritarian, top-down decision making for efficiency, such approach as discussed by the ousted general secretary Zhaou Ziyang: "in such a complex and divided country as China, a leader needs to have overriding powers to push through reforms"[12].

The above description necessitates examining whether the China model is compatible with universal values. Xi Jinping claimed that not any single set of values could be universalised. However, it is ironic that core socialist values proclaimed by the Communist Party of China contain many universal values such as prosperity, democracy, harmony, freedom, equality, honesty, trust, benevolence, and the rule of law. In China, few views talk about adopting democracy with a universalistic characteristic, and those who have talked were side-lined. For example, Yu Keping, a Peking University professor and one-time adviser to ex-president Hu Jintao, pitched for adopting a universal version of democracy rather than the Chinese one, but with the change in the guard, he kept his mouth shut and resigned from the government post in 2015.[13]

Another important aspect of Chinese growth and the China model necessitates examining what fuelled China's fantastic growth? It has not been property rights and free-market with western-style democracy, though it has immensely gotten advantaged by the World Bank and other Western Institutions, the most important role has been State own enterprises (SOEs), which still comprise 40 per cent of China's GDP.[14] It is crucial to notice that in order to attain global hegemony, Deng drew on the ancient Taoist principle of "Wu Wei" literally means "without doing" or "without effort".[15] Deng, being a pragmatist, brought China closer to Western economies and western international institutions, China joined the WTO in 2001 and agreed to accept WTO's provisions promising that members countries will not be directly or indirectly influence, the commercial decisions of their state-owned enterprises, however, all SOEs operate to serve state objective rather than responding to market forces, in a way, Justin Lin said that China's economic strategy derived from World Bank and ancient history of China "this point were confirmed by at least one other defector, who added more details about the role of the World Bank and how America's free-market advocates had paradoxically provided the lessons that China used to consolidate its mercantilists approach to the world" [16].

How do China's internal growth and its ideological beliefs shape the external outlook of China? How does China respond to China-bashing policies such as the One China policy, a currency manipulator and so on? Xi Jinping, projecting himself as a responsible leader, in a well-crafted speech in Davos World Economic Forum in January 2017, told that Communist China was assuming leadership in globalisation and open market while Capitalist America under Trump appeared protective and inward-looking.[17] It is Ironical that despite the closed nature of China's economy, Xi was pitching for an open market internationally. The anomalies in Chinese thoughts could be mapped in various leaders.

There has been a change in China's external policy outlook, especially under the Xi Jinping regime earlier Deng followed the policy of "hide one's capacities and bide one's time", Jiang Zemin's dictum- "to act in. accordance with the situation in order to maximise benefits", and before Xi, Hu Jintao followed the dictum of

"peaceful rise/peaceful development". Under the current leadership of Xi Jinping, China is prepared to sell the 'Chinese Dream' with its 'Chinese Value Outlook'[18].

What does constitute the Chinese Dream? It connotes the opposite of the "Washington Consensus". It advocates for the market economy controlled by an authoritarian government, including population and foreign currency manipulations and political control. Further, the China model prescribes that for the benefit of market forces, it must be harnessed under the watchful eyes of a benevolent state.[19] More specifically, the China model emphasises infrastructure building for economic development and authoritarian decision making to expedite development projects. It is important to be noted, as Simon Shen put it, describing important features of the China Model, "these features differ significantly from the strings-attached loan model of the World Bank and IMF, the more countries "referencing" the China model, the more bargaining power China could have compared with the US ".[20] China's flagship programs, such as the "One Belt One Road" initiative, AIIB, and its association with NDB, RECEP, prima facie are extensions of the "Chinese Dream" and making it into a reality.

The emergence of BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS New Development Bank (NDB), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Silk Road Fund, and RCEP appear to contest Bretton Wood financial institutions. One of the most critical characteristics of emerging institutions has been China's predominant position. It necessitates examining China's current position in the world economy briefly. China's economy is currently about 60 per cent of the United States' size, and under the present scenarios of China's growth which is around 5 per cent to 6 per cent, it would take China to be the largest economy by 2029, albeit it is per capita income would not be much higher.[21] This raises questions about China's role in the external world. Historically China was ambivalent regarding joining its hand with the forces of globalisation as it happened under Mao Zedong. However, Deng Xiaoping embraced its openness towards the free market economy, which evidently reaped China towards sustained economic growth for decades. With the vibrant presence of China in Asia, Africa, Latin America and other parts of the world, it has emerged as a key player; furthermore,

it has a profound presence in various emerging global groupings such as BRICS, SCO, RCEP and G20s. The paradigmatic shift in world economic order manifests itself in G20, where both developed and developing countries sit together and prepare the future roadmap for the world economy. It is remarkable as earlier it was only G-8 that predominantly managed the world economy.

China's prominence had begun to reflect by 2003 when it became a net international creditor, and its net foreign assets have increased dramatically over the $1 trillion by the end of 2007, currently, by the end of May 2018, it was reported it consisted more than 3 trillion dollars. Added to it, China has expanded its inter-governmental loans to other countries, which elevated China's potential to influence the international financial system.[22]The value of China's investment and construction overseas stands approximately around $1.9 trillion in 2018.[23]. Nevertheless, the figures presented above would be incomplete without discussing internal contradictions within China's growth. Despite having robust growth previously, recent observations reveal a slowing down of the Chinese economy as the manufacturing sector has started shedding jobs and a reduction in imports.[24] This occurred partly because of China's one-child policy, which started in 1979, which caused the shrinking of China's working-age population roughly around 2012[25]. Another issue relates to rising wages which makes China a less preferable destination for investment by foreign companies and also as a result of China's balanced account, which earlier relied on a trade surplus, pushed falling of investment as a share of GDP from 82 per cent in 2016 to 71 per cent in 2018.[26] However, Christopher Balding, commenting on China economy said,

"As long as Beijing keeps lending growing faster than nominal GDP, the economy will likely continue to expand".[27]

Added to the above description, it is essential to be noted about inequalities within China, as according to China Daily, the top one per cent of China's families control 41.4 per cent of the total wealth of China, furthermore, Xi's administration has been resitting to bring reforms to save only the vested interests of the red aristocracy.[28]Despite the fact that the contradictions within China presented above,

it necessitates closely to examine China's external economic outlook that emerged following the financial meltdown in 2007-08. China's robustness of its economy and also its contribution towards easing the financial crisis has undermined the hegemony of neoliberal order, and here the much-debated talk of so-called 'Beijing Consensus' has caught the attention of international relations scholars, nevertheless. However, Chinese officials and scholars have rejected this phrase, nevertheless, they did not hesitate to take pride in China's unconventional development experiences.[29]

Emboldened with its success, the Chinese government criticised the dollar-dominated monetary system and suggested creating a pool of reserved currencies to desist problems caused by a single currency. Nevertheless, China has not still abandoned its misgivings towards globalisation as it is still hesitant to adopt globalisation vigorously, as it has been pointed out by Deng, who once said, "When you open the window, some flies will come in", and it is not surprising that China has continued to maintain strict censorship on foreign media and a tight firewall on its cyberspace.[30]

Chinese Global Governance Perspective and World Order

Wang and Rosenau refer to global governance as the complex of institutions and processes that determine the relationship between nations. However, global governance is different from the global government, which is non-existent, as the former is less permanently established, more fluid, and evolving than the latter.[31] Global governance connotes three distinctive features. Firstly it highlights the most pressing issues such as economic interdependence, migration financial crisis, drug trafficking, environmental issues, and health-related problems such as pandemics, secondly, it highlights the importance of non-state entities in framing and directing in pursuing policies to assist governments; thirdly, global governance signifies the importance of several norms of 'good governance.'[32]

As mentioned earlier, the arrival of China as one the most integral and inescapable part of the world economy poses serious questions about its role and intention, which it would like to do with the international system. China's activism

in global governance followed a relatively straight trajectory. Initially, Beijing joined as observers but did not participate in various economic organisations in the 1980s. Following it, China joined more state and non-state based groups in successive groups and non-state based groups, and finally, in the summer of 2008, China appeared prominently in earlier rounds and in Doha's WTO talks, active involvement in G20, and climate change talks. However, while integrating with the world economy, China has always maintained its intentions not to contest the global economic order led by the United States, and it proclaimed to follow the dictum of 'peaceful rise. China has benefitted immensely from its association with the world economy.

Core issues in Chinese's perception of global governance include the recognition of environmental degradation, transnational crime and financial crises, and so on, which affects regardless of different socio-political systems, regions, and ideologies. Managing these problems, China recognises that the government could not only be carried forward by the government alone; it also has to include non-state actors such as NGOs, MNCs, interest groups and social movements.[33] Nevertheless, a part of the elitist perceptions of China raises the apprehension that the interests of great powers and the principle of power politics would continue to dominate the world politics, and neoliberalism promoted by the World Bank and other International institutions could not trade with the state sovereignty and argue, "the development of the South must come from within each developing country rather than intervention by outside forces."[34]

The above discussion entails Chinese apprehension that Western countries and MNCs could use the concept of global governance to interfere with the domestic politics of other countries. According to Michael Swaine, China's global governance ideology sustained the continuity between the pre and post-2008-9 periods. He viewed China as affirming its commitment to the liberal international order and its principles, and China aspired to restructure to reflect the growing power of developing states and extend the concept of sovereignty to the cyber realm.[35] However, Hongying Wang and James N. Rosenau examining China's role in global governance doubts about Chinese leadership at two levels. Firstly, it relates to

China's domestic model, which is hierarchical and may reflect Chinese behaviours towards other people states. Secondly, China may not have sufficient instruments to assume a more significant role in global governance for the time being to come as global governance relies upon the partnership between states and non-state actors.[36]

Following the financial crisis of 2008, China has not only endured the crisis but also has provided its assistance to recover from the crisis. Under the current leadership of Xi, China is supposedly committed to the rules-based international order strengthening and consolidating global norms of the market economy, regionalism, faith in the United Nations and Multilateralism. However, Xi's commitment to the rule-based international order appears contrary when one carefully examines China's actual behaviour. Firstly, in relation to the maritime domain, it has aggressively pushed its own unilateral agendas, side-lining the judgment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration. Secondly, China's record of the proliferation of nuclear and missile technologies to rogue countries such as North Korea and Pakistan poses a huge question to its commitment towards pressing international security. The present paper's scope has left these pertinent security concerns in detail as it mainly focuses upon the external economic dimension of China. How could we locate Chinese policies and actions of global governance and multilateralism? To answer and decipher the Chinese perspective on global governance and the world order, one has to briefly examine its evolving historical thought and experiences.

Sun Yat-Sen replaced China's imperial dynasty in 1912, and a strong government of Chiang Kai-shek appeared in 1929; under his government, China faced the humiliating defeat by Japan in 1931. After the end of the Second World War, it fell under the Communist Party of China (CPC) after a series of civil unrest. Mao's rule consolidated communists rule-following with a series of tumultuous experiments such as the Hundred Flower Movement, and Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. Mao's embrace with the outside world carried distinctively upon the unique nature of China. Deng Xiaoping arrival brought China closer to the United States. Overall, reflecting on China's world view, according to Henry

Kissinger, it represents a mixture of the Communists with the traditional view of the Imperial Court.[37]

China's unprecedented growth following Deng Xiaoping's opening of the economy and its acceptance of international institutions such as the United Nations, WTO, the World Bank, IMF, and the established rules of world order signified Beijing's willingness to join ever-increasing the process of the globalisation. Moreover, China enthusiastically embraced many of the prestige aspects of the nineteenth century and the twentieth-century Western orders such as hosting the Olympics, addresses by its presidents before the United Nations, reciprocal visits across the globe.[38]

Understanding the Chinese way of thinking is somewhat difficult. It could be deciphered through examining its traditional thinking and historical experiences. In its traditional concept, China considered itself the sole sovereign government of the world, in which the emperor posits himself as a cosmic figure lying between humans and the divine. Therefore all territories falling under his rule represents "All Under Heaven" of which China was considered central and civilised as "the Middle Kingdom."[39] Modern China's interaction with the outside world went through a very topsy-turvy curve. Though China could not become a colony like many other Asia counterparts, it could not escape the wrath of imperialist power of the days.

China's historical experiences and beliefs show Beijing's ambivalence towards the current world order. China is still very apprehensive of promoting human rights and democracy, which are the bedrock of the liberal order; in this regard, it gives more importance to national sovereignty. As discussed before, China's rejection of a permanent court of Arbitration judgement regarding the South China Sea issue raises serious questions about China's intention and its deliverance towards the established norms and the issue of sovereignty itself[40].

Aspiring China, keeping asides several hurdles appearing from the existing world order and the decline of the United States, it forwards its initiatives such as aligning with BRICS and the establishment of the New Development Bank and

Beijing's unilateral initiative of Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).[41]In another word, "China is working to recast the international order to serve its interests."[42]

It is essential to be noted that the liberal international order has been primarily based on open multilateral trade with having permanent international institutions to manage the world economy. The great recession has exposed the vulnerabilities of the current international multilateral order. It has primarily two ramifications; firstly, it marked the shift in power from the Euro-Atlantic world to Asia and the emergence of G-20 in managing the world economy. Secondly, the most critical change in international politics, as mentioned before has been the emergence of AIIB, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the BRICS.[43] To elucidate emerging China's multilateral perspective, the paper further explores the role of BRICS, and its New Development Bank and Chinese led initiative of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), BRI and RCEP are briefly below.

BRICS and the New Development Bank

The BRICS-led New Development Bank was formally taken in the 5[th]BRICS Summit in Durban in March 2013. The New Development Bank (NDB) proposal appeared as a result of what the BRICS and other developing countries perceived as problematic governance structures in the Bretton Woods institutions, especially the World Bank.[44] In 2011 and 2012, BRICS challenged the process of selecting leaders in IMF and the World Bank, but the concerted efforts of European (Christine Lagarde) and American (Jim Yong Kim) thwarted the attempt and continued to preside over the organisation.[45] Against this backdrop, the formation of NDB presents the continued importance of alternative global governance and also enhanced the importance of multilateralism in changing the international order. The core purpose of the NDB is to mobilise funds for investment and sustainable development in the BRICS countries. The NDB has started with the authorisation of USD 100 billion capital. Reflecting the governing structure, the voting rights and shareholding have been distributed equally among its members. Apart from founding members, other countries can also become its member; the only condition is that the capital share of BRICS should not fall below 55%.

NDB has envisioned complementing the efforts of existing regional and multilateral financial institutions to finance development projects. Among the long-term objectives of the Bank, one is to defend the five countries from volatility in the dollar exchange rate. It will also help the member countries weather any balance of payment crisis, thus trying to substitute the role of the IMF, whose SAP conditionality has been much criticised due to differential treatment between developed and developing countries and encroachment on sovereign decision making.

Therefore, NDB has been envisioned as a significant project of south-south cooperation in an attempt to complement the infrastructure financing. Through this Bank, the five emerging economies have directly challenged the financial architecture of global governance which Bretton Woods's institutions have dominated. The agendas of successive meetings of BRICS demonstrate that the Bank wishes to play actively in development finance in third world countries.[46] The BRICS represents an alternative view of the present global system with an emphasis on more state intervention; it is important especially in the context of the great recession of 2008, where the lax banking regulation brought financial mayhems. They also wish to reduce the dollar's dominant role as the anchor currency of the global economy. There is talk within the group to conduct trade between them in the local currency. This may help in averting the situation like the financial crisis of 2008. Among the member countries of BRICS, particularly Russia and China have been trying to expand their development assistance domain due to large forex reserves.

Examining NDB's approach towards environmental concerns presents an effective framework. According to Article 2 of the Articles of Agreement of NDB, it envisions to pursue infrastructure and sustainable development projects based on addressing environmental and social management issues. The objectives of NDB about the environment and social framework include, "manage operational and reputational risks of NDB and its stakeholder; mainstream environmental and social considerations into the decision-making process of all parties, and encourage the international good environmental and social practices in its operations....to

ensure environmental and social soundness and sustainability of projects."[47]

In BRICS, China appears as the most formidable constituent owing to its population and the size of economy, however, combining other countries in the group reflects more of BRICS than China alone, also, the cumulative effects of this group presents effective bargaining power from the Bretton Wood institutions which have been primarily dominated by the Global North.[48] Coming together of BRICS and following up the formation of the New Development Bank consolidates the position of Global South and in a way, it leads towards the democratisation of global governance and multilateral cooperation.

Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Apart from NDB, the emergence of Chinese led the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is the most important development in the world economy, it aims to finance infrastructure in Asia.[49] It also sought to challenge Bretton Woods financial institutions comprising IMF and the World Bank, and it projected frustrations with the slow reform of the existing multilateral institutions. In this backdrop, it is imperative to examine the underlying principles and objectives of AIIB and its impact on the future global governance.

The idea of AIIB is an important initiative of Xi Jinping's foreign economic policy- the Silk Road economic belt and twenty-first century the Maritime Silk Road. It was formally launched in January 2016 as a USD 100 billion MDB with 57 founding members, out of all these members, 20 are non-Asian members including five members are from G-8 and three members from the UNSC besides China. The United States did not join AIIB as it viewed the Bank did not aspire to follow global norms and standard particularly environmental concerns and lacks transparency.[50]Though Japan and the US did not participate, the inclusion of European powers in the AIIB indicates the shifting financial power eastward with China at the centre.

AIIB financed many projects such as Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Project in Azerbaijan, Duqm Port Commercial Terminal and Operational Zone Developmental Project in Oman, National Slum Upgrading Project in Indonesia,

National Motorway M-4 project in Pakistan, and so on. The most ambitious project of AIIB is 'One Belt, One Road initiative which is often portrayed as promoting Chinese economic interests in Asia and beyond. The Capital Base of AIIB is USD 100 billion, that makes AIIB a medium-sized multilateral bank.[51] Currently 84 countries have approved its membership with AIIB by the end of January 2108. According to China Centre for International Economic Exchange, Xi proposed the AIIB, and he viewed this initiative as not just about speeding the development of Asian countries, it's also about promoting the global economic recovery.[52]

It is interesting to notice that China's voting share in AIIB is larger than 15.02 per cent of the United States and Japan's 12.8 per cent voting share in the Asian Development Bank.[53] China's control of AIIB decision making projects to further China's domestic interests. Alice de Jonge argues that China's prominent position allows it to finance projects that complement AIIB-financed projects, for example, Paunglaung hydropower project financed by China's Exim Bank and Myingyan Gas Turbine Power Plant Project co-financed by the AIIB, Asian Development Bank (ADB) and International Finance Cooperation (IFC), this enables China to counter growing India's influence in Myanmar.[54] China's investment in Pakistan through the much-celebrated project China-Pakistan Economic Corridor(CPEC) connecting Xinjiang province with Gwadar further China's strategic interest to counter India. Interestingly, CPEC vision complements two AIIB projects, namely Tabela 5 Hydro Power Extension Project and Pakistan National Motorway-M4 Project.[55]Most of the AIIB inaugural ventures have been located peripheral to China, especially near Western China. It highlights China's intention to pursue its core own strategic interests channelised through the newly constructed multilateral institution AIIB.

Apart from strategic considerations, one of the significant criticisms is AIIB's commitment to environmental and other concerns. The United States and other countries doubt that if the new institution would be sensitive to environmental issues, labour and human rights standards in comparison of World Bank, IMF and ADB.[56] Primarily, criticisms appeared related to the involvement of Chinese firms to bolster their Solar and Wind manufacturers companies, which, in turn, deprive

capacity building in recipient countries. AIIB will be more likely to be influenced by the Chinese development model in their operations for example China Development Bank (CDB) which has successfully financed various infrastructure projects in China and abroad. It has been observed that these projects, though efficient and having good financial results, have often come at the expense of the environment and recipient society and countries. A report by the 'NGO Friends of the Earth' revealed that "CDB is also a major financier of projects with environmentally and socially harmful consequences, particularly in the extractive industries and large-scale infrastructure. Its safe-guards are insufficient to protect the environment and local communities. It also lacks transparent, sector-specific environmental and social policies and grievance mechanisms".[57]

RCEP

Apart from AIIB, NDB and others, Xi Jinping furthered China's proactive institutional framework building by the set-up of APEC-Free Trade Area (APEC-FTA) under the Chinese led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), it primarily meant to oppose the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which the Trump Administration eventually withdrew. RCEP, as mentioned before, is FTA currently under negotiations among the ASEAN+6 countries which include Myanmar, Cambodia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, and Vietnam (ASEAN) on the other hand, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and India (+6 countries). Initially, RCEP was visualised as an extension of ASEAN+6 framework which was based on the ideas of ASEAN+3 template promoted by the East Asian Countries Vision Group (EAVG) BETWEEN 2001 and 2004, however, with the emergence of Chinese led regional projects such as the BRI, and AIIB, RCEP has been evolved as part of a contest between Chinese led multilateral agreement rooted in the Chinese leadership and norms, and a Trans-Pacific promoted by the US.[58]

Though RCEP is still under the negotiation process among 16 countries, some concern appears to China's approach towards the proposed multilateral agreement. Chinese political authorities have envisioned RCEP as an instrument promoting China's norms and interests based on 'neo-Confucian' ideas. Though

the deal has not yet been finalised, RCEP, as discussed before, would deepen China's interests more profoundly in shaping future multilateral order.

Assessment of China's Divergent Role in NDB, AIIB and RCEP

A close examination of China's participation in challenging Western-dominated economic institutions involves two findings firstly, China joined its hands together with emerging economies such as BRICS, resulting in the creation of the New Development Bank and RCEP. Chinese enthusiastic participation in BRICS reveals its commitment towards open multilateralism, South-South cooperation, and further democratising the existing West dominated financial institution. However, China's participation in RCEP is viewed as furthering the Sino-centric global order rather than promoting a just global governance vision. China's association with BRICS signifies that it avoids confrontation with the US hegemony. Most importantly, because of the regional character of NDB, it does not enhance the broader geopolitical goal of a particular country; rather, in a genuine sense, it aims to address equity in current global multilateralism. However, China's participation in RCEP is viewed as furthering Sino-centric global order rather than promoting a just global governance vision.

Secondly, when it turns towards the Chinese-led AIIB and BRI initiative, it reflects the Chinese revisionist attitude towards the world order, where China assertively places its strategic goals into the forefront. Examining into the governance structure, similar to the other regional development banks, AIIB is established as a regionally dominated structure. In AIIB, regional members will always hold at least 75 per cent of the total capital stock.[59] Seeing upon voting share, it reflects that China shares the largest portion with a staggering 29.78 per cent, India is the second-largest shareholder with a share of 8.37 per cent.[60] Therefore, the governance structure of AIIB gave China more control in determining the President of the AIIB than the US in the World Bank and Japan in the ADB. It signifies AIIB as the Chinese dominated Bank.

To examine it more closely, one has to locate in the context of Chinese practices of development and investment practices abroad. China has primarily

relied on bilateral arrangements to deepen its economic ties; as mentioned before with its abundant forex reserves, it provides infrastructure investment in exchange for commodities, however, interestingly, these bilateral arrangements have been executed by state-owned corporations, which, often, do not follow international best practices.[61] AIIB furthers China's bilateralism at its core. Moreover, at the international level, China's assertive role in expanding its operations through AIIB raises serious questions, if it could assist in international development while addressing environmental problems and other best practices.

Following the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping has clearly reflected China's great power more explicitly; after the launch of AIIB, it launched Belt and Road Initiative and, now has proposed BRICS into a "BRICS Plus", where China presumably would be the head, though some BRICS members resisted it. It is important to notice that each of BRICS share equally and each contributed $10 billion to initial subscribed capital in their agreement in 2014, though China did not force this matter of 'equality', shortly, followed the formation of AIIB that exemplifies China, not BRICS.[62] Furthermore, RCEP as discussed before would deepen China's interests more profoundly contesting liberal international organisations in shaping future multilateral order.

Conclusion

In his seminal book "the rise and fall of the Great Power", Paul Kennedy noted the close connection in the long run between an individual great power economic rise and fall and its growth and decline as an important military power.[63] Though, Kennedy's assertion primarily relates to a country's economic rise with its hard power capability. The present study focuses on China's sustained economic rise and its effects on global governance and global multilateral order. The findings of the present study indicate that China's rise has a significant impact on global governance and multilateralism as it diverges from the Washington Consensus, which previously China did not seek to challenge. The reflection of these trends emerges from very Chinese actions such as unilateral initiatives like AIIB and BRI. Secondly, its association with emerging cooperative multilateral institutions such BRICS's NDB, and RCEP indicates overwhelming influence from Chinese

thoughts rooted in neo-Confucianism. Further, the paper finds divergent goals of China towards the multilateralism, as at one hand China attempts to challenge West dominated Liberal order by placing emphasis partnership among developing countries, on the other hand, its multilateral initiatives reflects that China is more interested in furthering its unilateral dominance in emerging multilateral forums. What would be future multilateral order in such a contesting global governance perspective would be decided by how existing liberal multilateral institutions respond to 'Chinese Consensus' rooted in Neo- Confucianism.

Notes

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POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN THROUGH SELF-HELP GROUP: A FRAMEWORK OF UNDERSTANDING

Janardan Borah

Abstract

The term women's empowerment has evolved throughout a long journey of women's movement which means 'the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance'. It can be achieved only by transforming the structures or institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discriminations and build the capacity of women gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives, controlling both resource and ideology that governs their lives. Thus, it can be defined as a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as information and resources. The development of a country highly depends on the development of women on economic, political and social front. Among this, economic development is more important for the development of the other sectors. Economic independence of women provides significant scope to overcome their feelings of powerlessness and helps them to occupy a prestigious status in the society. In the process of economic empowerment of women, today the SHGs have emerged as a popular and effective means. Within this context, this article tends to understand the operability of political and economic empowerment of women through SHGs.

Key Words: *Empowerment, Self Help Group, Patriarchy, Gender*

Introduction

The term women's empowerment has evolved throughout a long journey of women's movement which means 'the manifestation of redistribution of power that challenges patriarchal ideology and the male dominance'. It can be achieved only by transforming the structures or institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discriminations and build the capacity of women gain greater control over the circumstances of their lives, controlling both resource and ideology that governs their lives. Thus, it can be defined as a process that enables women to gain access to and control of material as well as information and resources. The development of a country highly depends on the development of women on economic, political and social front. Among this, economic development is more important for the development of the other sectors. Economic independence of women provides significant scope to overcome their feelings of powerlessness and helps them to occupy a prestigious status in the society. In the process of economic empowerment of women, today the SHGs have emerged as a popular and effective means. Within this context, this article tends to understand the operability of political and economic empowerment of women through SHGs.

The Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era [DAWN] in 1985 articulated the empowerment approach for the first time. Naila Kabeer defines empowerment as "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them." The definition indicates the expansion in the capability to people that enables them to take decisions or to make choices with far-reaching consequences which were earlier denied to them. Participatory development methods and a vibrant civil society are usually proposed as the mechanisms by which empowerment takes place. In the discussions on empowerment, it is apparent that there are three important interrelated components, viz. resources, agency and achievement. Kabeer identifies four elements of power which is required for achieving empowerment. They are, Power over i.e., control or influence over others which is an instrumentation or domination; Power to—generate or productive power which creates new possibilities and actions without domination; Power with—a sense of the whole being greater than the sum

of the individual, especially when a group tackles problems together and; Power from within—the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us makes us truly human. (1994, Kabeer Naila).

Empowerment creates an enabling environment of positive economic and social policies for women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and thus advances gender equality goals. The extent of empowerment of women in a nation is largely determined by three factors, viz. economic, social and political identity. Empowerment creates an enabling environment of positive economic and social policies for women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them and thus advances gender equality goals. Thus, the interventions from various institutions and structures of the State or society could improve the agency and enhance the opportunity which can increase people's capacity to make effective choices (2006, The World Bank Report). In this definition, agency i.e. capability to make choice and opportunity to apply their agency to make choice is intertwined. For the purpose, interaction between assets like psychological (Level of Consciousness), informational, organizational, material, social, financial, and human is required to measure and enhance empowerment opportunities. In case of women, their situations are often influenced by the cultural framework in which they perceive their disempowerment to be right and proper. For example, wife battering, marital rape in India is seen as husband's right over his wife.

In India, the process of empowering women has a long trajectory starting with the coming of the British and the introduction of western education. In the late nineteenth century, the construction of the 'new woman' became the central issue to nationalist discourse. Institutions of sati, polygamy, female infanticide, *purdah* and child-marriage came under criticism. Independence brought many promises and dreams for women in India- the dream of an egalitarian, just, democratic society and the constitution of India was designed with lot of specific provisions directed at ensuring equality and dignity for women. The Indian Constitution prohibited the State from discriminating on the basis of sex; explicitly provided that the State may make special provision for women without offending the equality guarantee. But in reality, there remains a huge gap between the formal

rights accorded to women by the Constitution and their current social and economic status. Despite constitutional recognition of non-discrimination, in areas of marriage, ownership, and control over property and inheritance Indian women are still facing gender-gaps. With less secure property rights, women do not have the same ability or incentive to accumulate and control assets and thus to access finance or to grow their businesses. The report of Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI), 1974, "Towards Equality", shows the unequal status of women in all spheres of her life with rural women suffering the most. Women economic, political and social participations were highly influenced by the traditional, religious and cultural beliefs and practices (Harmon Louise, Kaufman Eileen, 2004). Women's contribution to the economy has remained unaccounted for her unpaid invisible domestic works or her work in her husband's land. Male domination in all spheres became the hallmark of Indian tradition irrespective of regional and class differences. Though women disempowerment in India as per the report on Towards Equality, Gender-related Development Index, 2003, Gender Empowerment Measure, 2003, is seen, the magnitude of disempowerment varies from various intersections like rural/urban, caste, religion, regional basis etc. Rural women of India face multiple deprivation because of marginalisation of rural areas in policy and public investment, poor coverage of service and infrastructure, depletion of natural recourses etc. Rural women generally have more limited and less secure access to control over productive resources, and their disempowerment rises due to aggravating commodity prices, conversion of land use technologies etc.

Economic empowerment is undoubtedly the key and may lead to all other kinds of empowerment. This is true in case of women also. A major cause of women's subordination is said to be their economic dependence. International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) defines women's economic empowerment as when women have both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions.In order to succeed and advance economically women should possess the skill and resources to compete in the market and at the same time women should have the equal access to the economic institution of the said society. Further, to have the power and agency to act on

economic decisions, women should be able to control resources and profits at their disposal(Anne Marie Golla,etal. 2011)Economic empowerment precedes political empowerment. In the event of a social crisis, women are unable to express or decide for herself and her children. It is precisely because of this that many women development programmes either emphasize fully or have a component on the income generation activity, so that there is money available in women's hand and she moves towards economic and political independence and take the first-step towards empowerment. Economic empowerment enhances decision making ability of women in family related matters, matters related to expenses, children's education and savings related decisions etc.

Empowerment of women could be brought about by challenging the unequal distribution of power in society which necessitated political intervention and participation of women in Political institutions. It is through political participation and decision making that the inegalitarian pattern of gender relationships operating in the state, markets and civil society could be challenged. It is, therefore, imperative for women to be in the corridors of power and have the power to negotiate a better deal for themselves, if they are to influence policy decisions which have an impact upon them. Empowerment of women in all spheres, in particular the political sphere is critical for their advancement and the foundation of a gender-equal society. Women's political empowerment is premised on "three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: the equality between women and men; Women's right to the full development of their potentials; and women's right to self-representation and self-determination" (Fadia, 2014). Thus, political empowerment of women signifies women's access to and full participation in power structures and decision making" and to "increase women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership." Political domain has always been regarded as male domain. The political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by one in the sharing of political power. Culturally, women are not encouraged to join the political domain and as such women themselves internalizes their incapability to make decisions in both private and public arena. As a result, women universally are seen not well represented in the executive bodies

of political parties, trade unions and other bodies. Women's participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. The limited nature of female participation and representation in decision making institutions has important consequences for women and for the legitimacy of the institutions. Women's disproportionate absence from the political process would mean that the concerns of half of the population cannot be sufficiently attended to or acted upon as it denies their viewpoints to be integrated in the political system.

Issues of rural poverty and health have traditionally been the concern of governments. In the past and even today, most programs designed to benefit rural India are funded and managed exclusively by the government. Since independence, Government of India experimented on various programmes under different names for the development of the socio-economic and political condition of rural poor, including women. Keeping in view the importance of political and economic empowerment of women, India became the signatories of various international conventions and formulated the National policy for the empowerment of women, 2001. This policy is in accordance The Mexico Plan of Action (1975), the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (1985), the Beijing Declaration as well as the Platform for Action (1995) and Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). For enhancing economic empowerment of women in India, Poverty Eradication and Micro-Credit facilities are given more prominence. Keeping in view the extreme poverty level in rural areas, social discriminations prevalent in the country, macro-economic policies and poverty eradication programmes like, National Rural Livelihood Mission (NRLM), Pradhan Mantri Gramin Awas Yojana (PMAY) , National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), Accelerated Rural Water Supply programme (ARWSP) the (erstwhile) Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), the (erstwhile) Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) and the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana. Further, Microfinance is emerging as a powerful instrument for poverty alleviation in the new economy. Officially, the intervention of micro-finance has been made legitimized as a tool of poverty eradication and women's empowerment,

in the meeting like World Micro-credit summit, Campaign, Washington DC, 1997. In India, too the nationalization of bank during 1969 and 1980s aimed at improving the flow of institutional credit into rural household. Later on, initiatives were taken to develop supplementary credit delivery mechanisms by encouraging the NGOs as facilitators and intermediaries and by establishing SHGs which could meet the demands at grassroots (Deshmukh, 2005). The common feature of promoting SHGs in India is through social mobilization, composed of women which start with pooled savings for internal rotation and eventually receive and repay loans. The NGOs, Government agencies and banks are promoting the SHGs through their micro-credit facilities to mobilize people and sustain people's intervention in economic production which leads to women empowerment, poverty alleviation in rural areas. The NGOs and banks under the Micro-Credit schemes are combined as an umbrella organization to promote SHGs along with systematic training and capacity building of women to enhance decision making capacity of women (Rajivan, 2005).

In India, Microfinance scene is dominated by Self Help Group (SHGs)-Bank Linkage Programme as a cost-effective mechanism for providing financial services to the "Unreached Poor" which has been successful not only in meeting financial needs of the rural poor women but also strengthen collective self-help capacities of the poor,leading to their empowerment. Rapid progress in SHG formation has now turned into an empowerment movement among women across the country (Biswas, 2015). Likewise Micro Credit policies for women's access to credit for consumption and production, the establishment of new and strengthening of existing micro-credit mechanisms and micro-finance institution is given so that credit facilities could be enhanced to the outreached. In addition to that, Women's perspectives in economic policy formulations were given prominence. Women's contributions to the economy as producers and workers in both formal and informal sectors are recognized. Keeping in view women's association with agriculture from seeds to kitchen, the National Policy for Empowerment, gave efforts to ensure that benefits of training, extension and various programmes like, training women insoil conservation,social forestry, dairy development and other occupations allied to agriculture like horticulture, livestock including small animal husbandry, poultry, fisheries etc were given impetus.

Further, the73[rd] and 74th Amendments (1993) to the Indian Constitution have served as a breakthrough towards ensuring equal access and increased participation in political power structure for women (The National Policy for Empowerment of Women, 2001). The concern for enhancing the right to agency and opportunity of rural women has grabbed International and National Attention. Empowerment of rural women was given a special attention in the first World Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975, Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) through its Article 14 which calls on States parties to eliminate discrimination against rural women, The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 1995 highlighted the need for policies and strategies to improve the situation of women producers in rural areas, increase their incomes and provide household food security and in 2000, the UN General Assembly drew attention to the large number of rural women working in the informal economy with low levels of income, little job and social security, and few or none land or inheritance rights etc. These efforts emphasized the need for rural women's equal access to productive resources, such as land, capital, credit and technology, gainful employment, and decision-making, as well as access to education and health services. The Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), focused on accelerating progress in promoting gender equality and advancing the economic, legal, and political empowerment of women through a range of specific measures. They emphasized the promotion of the empowerment and participation of rural women as critical agents for enhancing agricultural and rural development and food security and pledged to ensure equal access for rural women to productive resources, land, financing, technologies, training and markets Rural women's needs and priorities have been addressed in various resolutions of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and its functional commissions (Report, 2011). The Government of India has initiated various schemes spread across a broader spectrum such as women's need for shelter, security, safety, legal aid, justice, information, maternal health, food, nutrition etc. as well as their need for economic sustenance through skill development, education, and access to credit and marketing. In order to address the phenomenon of domestic violence, Sexual Harassment at Workplace, which are widely prevalent, the Protection from Domestic

Violence Act, 2006 and Sexual Harassment at Workplace Bill, 1993 was enacted by the Parliament.

Women's Empowerment under the New Economic Policy

India's rural economic scenario has undergone a tremendous transition since India's independence. India has been predominantly dependent on the rural self-sufficient and self-contained econ-omy based on agriculture. As a result, since independence, rural reconstruction and development have been the major thrust of economic planning. But a different trend has been observed since 1991 with the exposure of Indian economy to economic liberalization and globalization in line with the structural adjustment and stabilization policies initiated by World Bank and IMF. The fiscal imbalances were sought to be controlled through economic liberalization emphasizing more on private sector and withdrawal of subsidies from the public sector enterprises. Further, in agricultural sectors, where women work more, liberalization of external trade by removing restrictions on exports particularly on agricultural goods like fertilizer, seeds, food products to bring domestic prices in line with international prices consequently impacted a lot on the gender relations to the agricultural and employment sectors. Women's work in rural areas is strenuous and time consuming. Besides farm activities, they are also responsible for household chores. Women farmers are responsible for more than 50 per cent of global food production. In developing countries, women produce between 60 and 80 per cent of the food. In Asia, between 50 and 90 per cent of the work in the rice fields are done by women. After the harvest, rural women in developing countries are almost entirely responsible for storage, handling, stocking, marketing and processing. After the liberalization of economy and in the new circumstances created by the Structural Adjustment Programme for globalization, the traditional role of women is being undermined whereas mechanization and automation is becoming prevalent in the market-based economy which has adversely affected the village based traditional economy. The opening of markets led to the commercialization of agriculture and new technologies penetrated into our agricultural lands. But in this context too regarding up gradation of agricultural development tools women were neglected. The transmission of knowledge about the new technologies like use of tractors,

high quality fertilizers, selection of high yield variety seeds, pesticides etc., became man-to-man affair. Men were increasingly drawn into the modernizing agriculture sectors while women stayed in subsistence agriculture with no access to credits, training and technologies. The agricultural development has normally and almost entirely been manned by men right from the decision making to implementation. Again, women have also been excluded from owning or controlling land, the most crucial productive resource in agricultural economies. Earlier women and men were equal partners in agriculture. Their knowledge and contribution and participation in decision making were more or less the same. But with the commercialization of agriculture, women's job is taken up by men and mechanization has displaced a large segment of agricultural workforce which performed the traditional agricultural work.

Within this context, it may be referred that women don't belong to a homogeneous category so the impact of new technology was different among different segments of women. The women of upper middle class agrarian family, tasks like preparation of food for farm labour, caring for livestock, post-harvest tasks and supervision of labour from within the household have increased significantly. This led to the extra-mural agricultural work participation of women which are more invisible works and are not accounted. Revolution of agriculture has also had its effect on the most marginalized segment of women who have lost a large number of their specialized tasks and uses from agricultural waste which provide them subsistence. Process of shaving off already beaten rice, to glean the grains etc. were the specialized tasks performed by these women were replaced by masculinisation of modern chemical intensive and mechanized capital-intensive agriculture and feminization of traditional subsistence food production which feeds the bulk of the rural poor.

Implications of the policy on rural women and their livelihood makes them vulnerable in terms of their access to food, clothing, shelter, common property resources, access to education, health, skill training, childcare and other social services plus added a drudgery of double burden and extreme poverty on them (Zubeeda 1999). These policies led to the withdrawal of subsidies given to industry,

trade and agriculture and has made a shift from state-oriented development strategy to market oriented development leading to commercialization of agriculture and its subsequent impact on rural economy and gender relations. As trade liberalization strategies are inclined towards increasing export production, technological agricultural change, women farmers in the subsistence sector are often neglected. The new technologies favoured the men for it opened their horizons and interactions into a wider world. It means a close interaction with the market in relation to the buying and selling of produce, the purchase of fertilizers, pesticides etc., interaction with government personnel for loans, hiring of tractors, threshers, combines, payment of electricity bills etc. - all making the entire process male-centered, thus leading to a certain extent to the withdrawal of women from agricultural process in general (Kumool, 2005). Men are the greatest owners of land in India and women often find themselves working for their husbands or the family in fields and in the home. Women's labor spent on family farms becomes invisible and is not reflected in national accounts. As a result, the gender lens while formulating agricultural policies are not reflected relegating women further from economic empowerment. As per the report of National Commission for Women (NCW), in overall farm production, women is average contribution is estimated at 55% to 66% of the total labour with percentages(NCW Report on Women in Agriculture, 2005).

The New Economic Policy (NEP) under the World Trade Organization (WTO) regime has far reaching implications to gender relations and agricultural sector. Women being more seen in agricultural activities definitely face the trauma of lowering domestic support to agriculture. The National Agriculture Policy (NAP), 2000, states that agriculture has become an unrewarding profession due to unfavorable price situation and low-value addition. Further, under the impact of globalization, agricultural commodities prices are collapsing. As food production failed to keep pace with the rising population, the NAP directed the farmers to diversify and produce crops that are suitable for export and the international market. Thus, staple food cultivation where women are associated is replaced with cash crops production by male. Large tracts of forest lands in which the rural poor women depended for livelihood and paddy fields are converted into tea, rubber,

coconut, durum wheat cultivation in place of rice and paddy required for domestic production. Thus, corporatization of agriculture under the NAP has led to contract farming patterns creating landless laborers. Further women who were the subsistence cultivators were displaced from land as land remains to be the property of the male. The new technology and skills required in accordance with the agricultural reforms favoured the men. It means a close interaction with the market in relation to the buying and selling of produce, the purchase of fertilizers, pesticides etc., interaction with government personnel for loans, hiring of tractors, threshers, combines, payment of electricity bills etc. - all making the entire process male-centered, thus leading to a certain extent to the withdrawal of women from agricultural process in general (Phukon, 2008).

As per the report of NCW rural women carry out the heavier work burden in food production and because of gender discrimination, they get lower returns for their work(NCW Report on Women in Agriculture, 2005). Under the WTO regime, rural women's status is further devalued and is displaced from productive roles causing displacement, devaluation and disempowerment of women which on the other hand are increasing the instances of violence against women like increasing incidences of rape, female feticides, feminization of poverty, trafficking etc. Women who played a dominating role in conservation of land, water, fauna and flora with eco-friendly agricultural tactics from seed gathering, preservation, sowing to harvesting are now devalued under the new agricultural policies. Further rural women are associated in livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operation, agro-social forestry and fisheries which have been ignored in the policy formulations. This can be sensed from lack of security for women in case of family break-up, divorce, inheritance laws, discriminate land reforms and settlement programs which are inclined towards man. At present it has been acknowledged that the prosperity of household in the rural areas depends on the prosperity of agriculture and its associated activities like dairy, sericulture, poultry, weaving etc in which women are largely associated. The multidimensional role of women in agriculture like sowing, transplanting, weeding, irrigation, fertilizer application, plant protection, harvesting, storing etc, domestic tasks like cooking, child-rearing,

fuel wood gathering, household maintenance etc, allied activities like cattle management, fodder collection, milking etc are widely acknowledged of late in the rural development policy formulations and schemes (ibid.)

Women Self-Help Group (WSHG), Empowerment of Women and Rural Development

The capacity of women to be independent producers which would make them empowered, depends on a number of factors, including access to productive resources (e.g., land), which is often mediated by their dependent position in the household,and to publicly provided inputs (e.g., credit facilities, technical-skills training, basicsocial infrastructures, etc. Women's limited access to resources and their insufficient purchasing power are products of a series of interrelated social, economic and cultural factors that force them into a subordinate role, to the detriment of their own development and that of society as a whole.Despite their role as the backbone of rural economy in developing countries, women remain limited in their access to critical resources and services. While in most developing countries, both men and women farmers do not have access to adequate resources, women's access is even more limited due to cultural, traditional and sociological factors. In order to address these issues, entrepreneurship among women is emerging as a recent phenomenon. The Government of India have identified the usefulness of Micro-Enterprises as a new source for benefiting India's rural economy and also its potential to facilitate women empowerment through micro-credit which on the other hand would enhance women's ability to contribute to family income.

To enhance economic empowerment of the rural poor, the government of India took initiatives to form voluntary organizations for self-help. These voluntary organisations, known as the mobilize savings and recycle the resources generated among the members for economic self –reliance among themselves. Significantly, credit is a major factor in boosting economic development and as a result the government took initiative to streamline credit operations and delivery system through Banks and SHGs inter-relations Micro-credit intervention programme has been well-recognized world over as an effective tool for poverty alleviation and improving socio-economic conditions of rural poor.

The origin of the SHG is the brainchild of *Gramin* Bank of Bangladesh, which was founded by the economist, Prof. Mohammed Yunus of Chittagong University. This bank is also known as the "***Bank of Poor***". The establishment of this bank is a modest step towards the economic development of poor. Now there are more than 6.1 million beneficiaries from this bank of which 97% are women. The bank gives priority on the economic development of women. Presently there are more than 2,226 branches of this bank covering more than 371 villages of Bangladesh. The *Gramin* Bank of Bangladesh raised the economic condition of the rural women. In India Self-Help Groups are operating on the pattern of *Gramin* Bank of Bangladesh. As mentioned earlier, India is a rural country and the basic problem of the country is poverty. Since independence, the national government introduced a number of anti-poverty programmes. But unfortunately, the programmes are not been successful. Therefore, a large majority of the people remain below poverty level. They have failed to develop their socio-economic and political condition due to lack of fund. Despite having a vast banking network in India, the poor weaker villagers have no access to formal banking system. They are always under domination of the non-banking intermediaries for credit such as money lenders, landlords etc. The money lenders and the landlords reap the full advantage of this opportunity and as a result of this the rural community suffered a lot.

Poverty alleviation vis-a vis women empowerment is the goal of rural development in India. As the sword of poverty and hunger slowed down the development efforts, it is in this context the self-employmentprogramme assumes significance for providing income to the rural poor specially the women section. The self-employmentprogrammes which were launched by govt. of India towards the close of 1970 and beginning of 1980's is an important step to bring people above poverty line. The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) was the first self-employment programme launched on the birth day of Mahatma Gandhi in 1978 and the target groups are small and marginal farmers, rural artisans etc. With IRDP, a number of allied programmes have been added over years such as Development of Women and Children in Rural Area (DWCRA), Training of Rural

Youth for Self-Employment(TRYSEM), SampoornaGramin Rozgar Yojana etc. with a view to generate additional gainful employment of men, women, Schedule caste and Schedule Tribes and other backward people. The multiplicity of programme, being viewed as separate programmes in them, resulted in a lack of social inter-mediation, absence of desired linkage, proper enforcement of rules etc. and the implementation being more concerned with achieving individual programme targets rather than focusing on the substantive issue of sustainable income generation. To rectify the situation, the govt. of India decided to restructure all the self- employment programmes under one umbrella scheme on the recommendation of Hashim Committee. Hence, as an alternative and viable economic strategy, a new programme known as Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana [SGSY] has been launched since April 1999.The scheme established a large number of micro-enterprises in rural areas based upon the potential and aptitudes of the poor. This is a holistic programme covering all aspects of self-employment such as organization of the poor in to Self Help Group, training, credit, technology, infrastructure and marketing. SHG have created a silent social and economic revolution for the rural poor, weaker sections and underprivileged. Implementation of community action programme by the SHGs has proved them to be an indispensable worthy and viable way of socio-economic change.

Role of SHGs in promoting economic and political empowerment of women

The empowerment of women deals with a commitment to women's rights and capacity to make their own decision about developmental policies and strategies. Thus, SHG model of empowerment provides women the opportunity to acquire the ability and entitlement to their own lives, set their own agenda, solve their own problems and develop self-reliance. A women member of SHGs as per the report of Planning Commission of India exhibits the following outputs resulting from their activities (Planning Commission of India Report on: Micro Finance and Empowerment of Scheduled Caste Women):

    (i)   Acquisition of literacy and numerically skills.

    (ii)   Awareness of basic legal rights.

    (iii)   Awareness of projects and state development activities.

    (iv)   Critical political consciousness; electoralprocess, societal analysis and gender issues.

    (v)   Enhanced socialstatus as perceived by self and others;

    (vi)   Freedom from exploitation,money lenders, landlords etc.

    (vii)   Active role in organization of groupand other political bodies, viz. Panchayats;

    (viii)   Ensuring literacy andeducation of girl child;

    (ix)   Health consciousness;

    (x)   Restructuring ofwomen's time utilization; and

    (xi)   Enhanced decision-making power within the household.

After joining Self-help Groups, through economic activities women have got the ability to make income independently, ability to spend and increase their saving habit, ability to invest in other income generating activities, transaction with formal economic institutions, participation in family expenditure etc. the number of SHGs, who have taken part in the implementation of various welfare and development programmes directed through SHGs and in addressing various social issues is nominal. Many old SHGs and the groups promoted by NGOs have in turn formed many new SHGs and rejuvenated defunct groups with their rich experience. Many SHGs have taken part in the awareness campaigns on various welfare & development programmes, social and community issues at village level. The relation and the mutual respect between SHGs and PRIs have grown. The dependency on money lenders has decreased. The interest rate of informal credit sources has gone down. The health and educational status of household members, savings at household level have increased. Access to formal financial institutions and pro-poor programmes has increased. The confidence levels of SHG women have gone up, when compared to that before joining the groups (Tripathy, 2013).

In terms of mobility, the dependency of women on family members and others has decreased. There is a high support to SHG members from the family to attend meetings and payment of savings and monthly loan installments, as the men realized the advantages of SHGs. The SHG women have equal access to family income and control on resources or assets. The role of women in taking household decisions has increased, when compared to that before joining groups. The SHG women's participation in political activities is low and mostly due to the interest of family rather than 'own will'. There is no discrimination of children by gender in sending children to schools, but it is found that there is a different etiquette for various social categories of members in some SHGs. A majority of the SHG women felt that the work burden on women has increased; on the other hand, sharing of household work by men has increased. There is not much change in women taking up non-traditional activities. On the whole, there is a significant upward change in women status and role, when compared to that before joining the SHGs (Kailash, Revathy, 2014).

In Assam, the SHG movement has started very lately. The formation of thrift and credit groups has accelerated its speed only during the last couple of years. Still, patriarchy continues the subjugation of women. Most of them do not dare or are hesitate to play leadership roles in society and hesitate to talk freely with people outside the family because of male domination. It is one of the causes of high gender inequality in Assam. National Human Development Report, 2002, showed higher gender inequality in the state as compared to all India situations. Assam got 29th rank among the 32 states and Union Territories in India. But, now-a-days, they are ready to come forward and want more economic independence, their own identity, achievements, equal status in the society and greater freedom. And Government of Assam has provided for Self Help Groups (SHGs) to them so that proper attention should be given to their economic independence through self-employment, entrepreneurial development and wellbeing that ultimately leads to its contribution. Under the SGSY programme, 40% of the allocated fund is reserved for women with the objectives that if women are benefited, then the whole family is benefited and as result the health, nutrition and education of rural children have better chances of improvement (APMAS, 2009).

Precisely, since the beginning of the present century, a sizeable number of SHG have started to crop up in every district of the state. The women SHG are getting more institutional attention, men SHGs and men-women SHGs are also coming up in large numbers. Of the total 1,59,460 women SHG in the state since 1999 to 2013, about 1,20,000 WSHG have assessed institutional credit till 2013. The Self-help Groups and individual Swarozgaries are trained through various stages of development and provided bank loan with government subsidy for their self-employment. After obtaining the bank loan with subsidy, the beneficiaries can increase their income to upliftment of life. In areas where the NGOs and Bank Network is weak, a scheme for associating Individual Rural Volunteers (IRVs) in promotion and linkage of Self-help Groups was introduced. The scheme is currently implemented through Assam Grameen Vikash Bank (AGVB) with grant assistance of Rs 108.00 lakh for promotion of 6000 Self-help Groups through 600 Individual Rural Volunteers (IRVs) in 22 districts of Assam (Economic Survey, 2012-13). NABARD has sanctioned grant assistance of Rs 85.00 lakh to NGOs for promotion and credit linkage of 850 women Self-help Groups in four backward districts—Dhemaji, Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong and Kokrajhar under women Self-help Group Development Fund (ibid) . In the year of 2011, the Assam government has implemented the scheme of Cluster Development for Economic Empowerment of Women. A sum of rupees one crores is allocated by Assam government under the Head of Economic Service for Cluster Development of Women(Das. S.K, 2011).

The confidence levels of SHG women have gone up with reference to learning to sign, to speak to visitors, to participate in Gram Sabha and to attend meetings, when compared to before joining the groups. In terms of mobility, the dependency of women on family members and others has decreased as reported by of women who can go alone to meetings outside their village. There is a strong support to SHG members from family to attend meetings and payment of savings & monthly loan installments, as the men realized the advantages of SHGs. Majority of the SHG women have equal access to family income, and control on family resources or assets. Strong and sustained capacity building and SHG bank linkages seem to be critical for significant increase in aspects related to women's

empowerment. In the northern states where the capacity building inputs for SHG members have been limited and the banks are still reluctant to open accounts and lend to SHGs, women's empowerment is not evident. For the SHGs and their federations to become transformational in terms of SHG women becoming a social and economic force at the local level requires a much greater focus on their institutional capacity building that will make them a strong demand system(Sultana, 2011).

So far as the political empowerment of women through SHG is concerned, they are confined within their group regarding selection their group leaders, representatives since inception. Changing of SHG leaders is high in Karnataka (86%) and low in Bihar (7%) compared to other states (Rajasthan-12%, Assam-40%, West Bengal-61%, Gujarat-59%, Maharashtra-27%, Andhra Pradesh-41%). It shows that the leadership rotation is low in the states having low women literacy rate. The incidence of change of leaders, representatives is high among the SHGs promoted by banks (51%) and NGOs (49%) compared to government (31%) and community (35%). Further, as the age of SHGs increases the percentage of SHGs changing leaders also increases. SHG members also contested for various positions in PRI. Of the members contested or selected or campaigned for a candidate or campaigned against injustice, the majority of the members have participated because of family' interest, followed by own will and other's pressure. Both personal factors such as education, experience on social issues, motivation to bring development to their community and others, prior performance in panchayats, political negotiation skills, as well as external factors including family support, good relations with other villagers, economic stability and family's political contacts, all played a supportive role in enabling women to access panchayat positions (Mahajaan, 2013). Given the low social, educational, economic and gender status of these women, however, they could be challenged and overpowered relatively easily by dominant forces.

Conclusion

Women's political empowerment helps them develop a sound knowledge on various aspects like Indian Polity, Indian Constitution, fundamental rights, Right to

Education Act, Act for women's protection etc. which, in turn, builds their confidence in decision making related to political issues and convince others to their points of views. The formation and management of the SHGs by the rural women has given them the opportunity to have access to different extension organizations and various political institutions (ibid.). Besides this, SHG approach had provided the rural women a common platform to gain and share their knowledge and experiences on issues related to several aspects including political one and in this way motivates the women members to raise their voice both within the group and outside the group. The attributes like education, family education status, extension contact, mass media exposure and reasons for joining group have influenced women's political empowerment in a positive direction whereas age of the SHGs has negative implication on political empowerment of the women SHG members. So, the SHG approach can be an effective instrument towards accomplishing women's political empowerment in rural areas of our country (Hemraj, 2011). Hence, any policy framework towards political empowerment of rural women through strengthening of self-help group approach should follow the ground reality of the existing SHGs and thereby take care of the needs, interests and priorities of the women SHG members.

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GENDER AND IDENTITY IN LITERATURE FROM INDIA'S NORTHEAST

Mridul Bordoloi

Abstract

The aim of this article is to focus on issues of gender as reflected in contemporary short stories from Northeast India. I have included stories of Temsula Ao, Uddipana Goswami, Aruni Kashyap, Sibananda Kakoti, and Janice Pariat to explore different dimensions of gender dynamic and problematic, emphasizing on intersections with militarisation, precarity, class, identity, sexuality, and so forth. It is hoped that stories from three states of Northeast India - Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya - will be able to uncover roiling gender issues confronting Northeast India in both general and specific senses.

Keywords: *gender, militarisation, precarity, identity, queer.*

Introduction

Gender Studies in the contemporary context is understood to be explorations of fields which includes women's studies, men's studies, as well as LGBTQ studies. Its foregrounding as a prominent discourse is attributed to post-structuralist theory with its philosophy of interrogating reductionist assumptions. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* considers "gender" to be a fluid category. According to her, the categorization into "masculinity" and "femininity" are basically social and cultural constructions. Here, there tends to be the constitution of binary between "inner"

and "outer", and the attendant claims of the inner being saddled with an "essence" that gets manifested in the outer through different "stylizations" in terms of gestures, postures, dressing, through what Judith Butler phrased as "so many styles of flesh" (Butler 1985, 11). Compulsory heterosexuality is assumed to be the norm, while homosexuality becomes a manifestation of deviant or aberrant sexual behaviour. The patriarchal society assigns certain rules as well asroles for designated gender identities, and it is expected that everyone would adhere to the norms stipulated by them, without taking into cognizance their will or desire. Therefore, in exploring the idea of Gender and Identity in the context of Literature from India's Northeast, one needs to be mindful of representing gender by problematizing it in whatever ways it presents with an opportunity. This paper would attempt to explore gender by contextualizing it in terms of certain dimensions, and reading literary texts (particularly, short stories) from India's Northeast from these dimensions.

Gender and Militarized Society

Preeti Gill, in her "Introduction" to *The Peripheral Centre: Voices from India's North East* (2010) stated,

> "To say that women have faced violence in situations of conflict is to state the obvious, but what it means in terms of the short-term and long-term impacts is something that is still being studied and analysed. While the most obvious impact is physical or sexual violence, the psychological scarring s a result of prolonged exposure to brutality and the restrictions placed for women in a patriarchal society have even greater consequences for their well-being. (Gill, Introduction, para 13)

Gill's above statement sums up clearly the impact on women's psyche in militarized societies where they become victims of both patriarchal restrictions and sexual violence.

Militarization has defined to a significant extent the cartographical imaginary of India's Northeast since the post-independence period. Easterine Kire, in the "Author's Introduction" to the novel *Bitter Wormwood* has clearly documented the Naga struggle for independence from the neo-imperial Indian state in this manner:

The stories of torture documented seem to surpass each other in the army's inhuman treatment of the Nagas: men were tied to poles and burned; they were buried alive; their genitals were given electric currents. Each instance of torture was more gruesome and horrible than the next. The report lists the tortures and repression of the Nagas by the Indian army as i. execution in public, ii. mass raping, iii. deforming sexual organs, iv. mutilating limbs and body, v. electric shocks, vi. puncturing eyes, vii. hanging people upside down, viii. putting people in smoke-filled rooms, ix. burning down of villages, x. concentration camps, xi. forced starvation and labour. One of the stories of rape had as its intention the desecration of the village church of Yankeli where four minor girls were raped. The church building was abandoned by the villagers after that incident. (Kire, "Author's Introduction", para 5)

Such an incident (desecration of the church) finds resonance in Temsula Ao's short story "The Last Song" from her short-story anthology *These Hills Called Home*. This story is about a girl named Apenyo, who the narrator says was born to sing. She would break into a song at the slightest opportunity – at home, at community singing events, and also on Sundays at church. She had probably inherited her love for singing from her father, who was presently deceased. One particular year, the villagers were in an especially expectant mood because there was a big event coming up in the village church in about six months' time. This would be the dedication of the new church building. The villagers began the preparations with immense enthusiasm.

However, these were troubled times for the Naga people. The independence movement against the Indian state was gaining momentum, and the villages contributed to this movement by paying "taxes" to the "underground government." This village was no an exception, as they genuinely sympathized with the sub-nationalist cause of the underground insurgents. But the government swung into action. The narrator notes:

> A recent raid of an underground hideout yielded records of all such collections of the area and the government forces were determined to "teach" all those villagers the consequences of supporting the rebels' cause by paying taxes. (Ao, "The Last Song", para 7)

Unknown to them, a sinister plan was being hatched by the forces to demonstrate to the entire Naga community what "happens" when they "betrayed" their own government. It was decided that the forces would go to this particular village on the very day that the village folks would dedicate the new church building and arrest all leaders for their support to the underground insurgent outfit.

On the day of dedication, Apenyo, lead singer, was waiting inside the church to begin her solo rendition after the group song. As the choir song began, there was the sound of gunfire. Very soon the approaching soldiers surrounded the crowd, and demanded the leaders of the community to come out. But before they could do anything, Apenyo burst into her solo number, thereby exposing herself to these marauding soldiers. The soldiers were incensed with her as they felt that it was an act of open defiance. The leader of the army contingent grabbed Apenyo by the hair and dragged her away. But, she continued with her song. After that, the situation got out of hand. Villagers who attempted to flee were shot at, kicked and clubbed by the soldiers. Libeni, the mother of Apenyo, tried to search for the daughter, and was horrified to find her being raped by the army officer. As the mother attempted to free her daughter from the soldier's grasp, she was herself knocked down cold and raped multiple times. Both Apenyo and her mother could not survive such brutal onslaughts on their bodies, and succumbed to their injuries. The soldiers, then, opened random fire upon the crowd, killed many, and then set fire to the church. When later, the villagers arrived at theburnt-out site of the old church building, they found the charred remains of both mother and daughter.

Ao's horrifying story, in a way, depicts the fate of women in militarized society. It depicts how insurgency has affected the lives of the people of India's Northeast, and especially how women's bodies become objects of occupation or invasion in such traumatizing terms that it leaves indelible scars upon their collective psyche. The tragic deaths of Apenyo, an innocent teen-aged girl, and the mother

who tried to protect her, amply testifies to the vulnerability of women's bodies in militarized societies.

In another story of Temsula Ao titled "Soaba" about a mentally-disabled boy, we find how psychological scarring of the Naga people in militarized zones, is exacerbated by seemingly-innocuous terms like "convoy," "grouping," "curfew," and "situation" (Ao, "Soaba", para 5) – which have extremely sinister implications. The narrator in the story notes that convoy implies massive deployment of security forces; grouping generated chilling images of people being herded together and dislodged from their ancestral home, which was the worst form of humiliation that could be inflicted upon a proud race; curfew (a word which did not exist in their lexicon) became a dreaded fact of everyday life of the people residing in urban spaces; and the word situation implied all-out conflict among antagonistic forces.

In the story "Soaba," the depiction of a mentally-challenged boy as protagonist, could be quite symbolic. In militarized society, it is most often the innocent, law-abiding, meek citizens that happen to be caught in the crossfire in a "situation" between the underground insurgent outfit and the security forces of the State. Like Apenyo, the innocent girl who becomes a victim of the state's repressive apparatus, Soaba - the village "idiot" - is killed in a fit of rage for no fault of his, by the commander of a dreaded Home Guard squad – another rogue (state-sponsored) militarized faction, which became the "disquieting elements in the power struggle between two warring groups" (Ao, "Soaba", para 6). Through both these stories, Ao perhaps attempted to highlight the horrifying consequences to lives of common people cutting across rigid gender lines amid insurgency. The killing of innocents (both Apenyo and Soaba) is a "normal" phenomenon in violence-torn militarised society, and writings from India's Northeast, provide ample illustration of this fact.

Assamese writer, Uddipana Goswami, in the afterword to her short story anthology *No Ghosts in the City* attempted to understand the psyche of the people inhabiting the Northeast plagued by "violence and protracted conflicts" (Goswami, "Aftweword", para 1). She feels that "there is a lot of darkness in people's souls" ("Afterword, para 1), but there is also light. She feels that what makes us ultimately

human is the capacity to dispel the darkness. In her short story "Colours," gender in militarized society is intersected with identity-politics. In a way, identity-politics figured also in Temsula Ao's stories. However, her stories were more concerned in foregrounding the repressive functionalities of the state.

In Uddipana Goswami's "Colours," identity-politics is underscored by situating her story in a mofussil town of lower Assam – Kalguri, Borbari – which happens to be a Bodo community stronghold. This town became a hotbed of insurrectionist activity due to inter-community clashes between three minority factions – the indigenous Bodo community, the tea garden tribes or adivasis, and the East Bengali Muslim immigrants. Due to such inter-community dynamics, Kalguri transforms into a militarized zone. This is exacerbated by the intervention of the government's security forces who too have their own covert strategies in place.

In this story, the star-crossed love affair between an Adivasi boy named Dambaru and a Bodo girl named Deepti (who happens to be the daughter of the village headmaster), becomes the flashpoint of inter-ethnic clashes resulting in the murder of Dambaru on one side, and the devastation of the Bodo village as collateral damage, on the other.

In the wake of this violent conflict, Deepti goes missing, and it is later learnt that she was forcibly carried away by Adivasi attackers and dumped in a mustard field after perhaps being raped, from where she was picked up by "another group," perhaps alluding to the government security forces, which again subjects her to multiple rape, and eventually dumps her outside the army camp. She survives somehow, and eventually enlists in an underground Bodo militant organisation, and get indoctrinated into the sub-nationalist militant Bodo ideology. She, by dint of her education, swiftly rises in rank in this organisation's hierarchy. However, she ends up surrendering and getting "co-opted" into the mainstream society, with the government promising all sorts of assistance to "rehabilitate" her into the mainstream society. The fact that her lover Dambaru was killed by the Bodo insurgent group did not now figure much in her scheme of things after she joined the underground militant outfit. The question of survival becomes paramount.

Thus, Goswami's story uncovers the plight of women caught in militarized society, where they require the intervention of powerful forces to remain alive. Assertion of identity could, in a way, ensure protection, entitlements, and patronage, thereby ensuring their survival in spaces where the language of the gun wields enormous clout. Therefore, identity politics and insurrectionist ideologies appear to be the only pragmatic solution in militarized societies.

In another story titled "This is How we Lived," Uddipana Goswami recounts the horrors of women being used as docile bodies in militarized zones. The narrator in the story reveals that the fear of attracting attention of soldiers "made every woman, every girl, for miles around … to underplay her femininity … There was no point in attracting undue attention "(Goswami, "This is How we Lived", para 31). However, they were not often lucky enough, and after being spotted, were summoned to the camp.

In one such incident, a woman named Bogi bai was once picked up from her house at night. The next morning, her mortal remains were found, dumped off in the fields. The reason could have been due to her putting up a stiff resistance against her molesters. Here, the narrator attempts to rationalise (perhaps, out of fear) the psychology of soldiers in committing such heinous crimes against women. Perhaps, it could be because they were dehumanized by the nature of their duty. The narrator states:

> These soldiers do not even have the illusion of fighting for a cause. They face death every day for a pittance, to send home a few thousand rupees every month. Out of that if they spend fifty rupees on buying the bodies of our women, it does not seem like a bad bargain to them. It is perhaps like a routine trade, an outlet for their frustrations. ("This is How we Lived", para 33)

However, such empathy does not seem to be genuine, but engendered by the fear of not getting killed. The reality is that women must endure pain, trauma, and stigma of becoming sexual playthings in conflict situation. In a way, they must bear the ignominy of their bodies being invaded despite their will or desire.

Submitting to mortification of the body, however involuntarily, is the only means of remaining alive. Therefore, these molested women utter nothing, just wash themselves "ten times, maybe a hundred, and try to forget it happened, till it happens a second time perhaps, and a third" (("This is How we Lived", para 34). Such submissions happen to be a way of life for women caught in militarised society, and it in a way, constitutes gross violation of their human rights.

As already indicated, it would be wrong to assume that only women become victims of patriarchy or "toxic masculinity" in militarised society. The situation of men, too, can be quite precarious. This becomes evident in Aruni Kashyap's short-story "Before the Bullet" from his anthology *His Father's Disease*, in which a US returned boy, Digonto, who stayed for six years and completed his Ph.D, is shot in the head by the army without the slightest provocation or motive. Digonto's only fault was that he did not disembark from his bicycle while crossing the army camp on the way to his house after eight long years. He did not get down from his bicycle because he was not aware of the existence of the army camp as it was established after he went abroad to pursue his doctoral dissertation.

However, his ignorance was interpreted by the paramilitary forces manning the camp as sheer arrogance and audacity. He was insolently demanded to show his passport and other documents, which he promptly obliged. They looked at his passport and went through its pages several times, perhaps intending to detect some discrepancy. When he asked them with a slight hint of irritation if they were done with the checking, the officer giving him a long, cold stare, gave him permission to leave.

But the interaction with the US returned boy made the officer experience resentment as well as trepidation. The thought of meeting a confident, strapping, English-speaking, US returned boy, possessing swagger and chutzpah, were unpalatable to the officer. This narrator notes that "[the] officers were used to submission, earned from the fear that they had spread in the last five years" (Kashyap, "Before the Bullet", para 33). Officers did not like the confidence of men who were educated in Delhi or London or the US. He was fearful lest the "story of a young local lad who did not dismount from is bicycle, who spoke in

English went around ... It would create confidence in the minds of the villagers" (Kashyap, "Before the Bullet", para 34). These were considered sufficient grounds to shoot Digonto in the head as he cycled away. This story illustrates how in militarized society, it is both women and men who are rendered vulnerable and precarious by power. The notion of precariousness, or precarity in intersection with gender will figure in the next section.

Gender and Precarity

The word "precarity" has two meanings. The first is general, and it implies an ontological condition of precariousness that is trans-historical, existential, and affective. The second meaning is related but is more specific. It implies human vulnerability and fragility in the face of powerful, instrumental forces, including market forces. So, precarity implies a condition for those who are elided from the neoliberal, capitalist state's schema. They could be gender identities who are disenfranchised, landless, and vulnerable to various modes of social, economic, and political exclusion. Therefore, the connotation of precarity is instrumental and determined by hegemonic power-relations. Gender figures prominently while dealing with what Judith Butler termed as "precarious life" in her book of the same title. In this discussion, Sibanandi Kakoti's two short stories "Amlabristi" (translated/transcreated as "Bitter Rain") and "Siddhi" (Attainment) will be explored.

Coming to the first story "Amlabristi," it is about the plight of a landless woman named Dalimi, who was the single parent to her adolescent daughter after her husband had forsaken her after a few months of their marriage, leaving her pregnant. The story is particularly relevant in the present context of Assam as the issues highlighted in it are so much a part of our present "developmentalist" narrative, engendered by neoliberal policies and measures. Many parts of Assam are witnessing arterial extensions and metal scaffoldings in the form of multi-laned highways and long bridges over interminable riverbanks.

The cathexis of growth is getting to be more of an obsessionin our everyday lives. This is bolstered by regimes of thought that are vehement in their push for

urbanisation, yet glossing over sustainable development, and disregarding the emotional attachments of people and community, and regarding monetary compensation as the only possible transaction between the state and the "subjected" subjects. Perhaps, the ideology of developmentalism is rooted to the principle of capitalist pragmatism in which "structures of feeling" need to be bracketed off by instrumentality, that is, the logic of market forces. It is this ontological condition of precariousness which is existential and transhistorical, and the specific sense of "precarity" (which is political economy) that Sibananda Kakoti attempts to portray in "Amlabristi."

An important question that the story attempts to raise is what happens to the precarious lives caught in the grip of the state's "growth" narrative, and deprived of their tangible possessions (even if not safeguarded by the legal machinery)? Are the lives of the landless and disenfranchised of any consequence to a regime that has rejected the social contract? What happens to precarious subjectivities enmeshed in the web of patriarchy and the state apparatus? The story attempts to address these problematic issues in a nuanced manner.

In the story, Dalimi's hardships – being a single parent to an adolescent girl, having no legal claims over an encroached government land, and one who is forsaken by her husband – are presented. Thus, she was consigned to living her life as a "widow" without being one, and without means or stable resources. The disadvantages of a subaltern woman – without any means of achieving upward mobility – is starkly indicated. Being a single parent of an adolescent girl made her situation even more precarious.

Gender theorists like Toril Moi for instance, consider the binary constitution of "masculinity" and "femininity" as social constructs. In this story, this notion of social construction of gender is given an interesting treatment. The "performative" aspect of gender identity is underscored through the transformation that Dalimi must undergo, to keep herself and her daughter safe. A single woman is often assumed to be available, desirable, a temptress, an object of scopophobia. Therefore, patriarchal codes stipulate maintenance of a comfortable distance from men lest she arouses their sexual appetites. Dalimi has to assume almost a butch identity

through "masculine" performativity. She acted belligerent, wrathful, bitter, hostile on the external front. She had to maintain such an obnoxious attitude so that it would keep proverbial wolves at bay.

The story highlights the difference between those possessing legal rights over immovable property over those having none. Unlike other villagers who had legal possessions over their lands due to which they received handsome compensations from the government, Dalimi's plot of land was under the provisions of *eksonia mati*, which implied that the government could stake claim to it and confiscate it anytime without granting any compensations to the encroachers/settlers. Thus, for precarious subjects like Dalimi, the state's developmentalist agenda turns out to be a bane. It leads to dispossession and eviction. Her macabre death by being run over by a gigantic bulldozer is symbolic of the might of a hegemonic ideology that has succeeded in pulverising the principles of welfare state economy. In such a reconfigured political, economic, and ideological space, the disenfranchisement of precarious subjectivities, who are also twice marginalised, placed at the "other" pole of the binary, becomes more starkly evident.

Another story of Kakoti titled "Siddhi" (Attainment) can also be read in this light. In this story, the hardships of a migrant worker named Kanak and his family, is depicted. Kanak will fall under the category of the "precariat," which has been defined by Brett Neilson and Ned Rossister in "Precariat as a Political Concept" (2008) as an emergent political subject whose social relationships to capital or the state were not determined by wage labour but by their exclusion from steady jobs and from the status of citizen worker.

Kanak, hailing from a remote district in Assam, comes to the city in search of work opportunities, and is lucky to find temporary shelter in a tract of land possessed by a rich Gwahati-based businessman, named Jadab Kalita.

Kanak earns his meagre livelihood by running a tea-stall in the office owned by his master and landlord. He barely earns enough to afford two square meals for his family of four. Since he does not possess a plot of land or have a regular job, he is often dogged by anxieties of being evicted from the land in case it was put up

for sale. The rising inflation made his situation even more precarious. He could not afford even staple food items like onions and potatoes, which his children craved.

In sharp contrast, rich people like Jadab Kalita lived lavishly. They went to huge shopping malls and splurged their money purchasing fancy items. What the precariat considered as unaffordable luxuries (like potato and onion) were claimed as free coupons by the rich. Thus, the sharp contrast between lives of the rich and the poor is tellingly indicated. It may be noted that inflationary trends do not affect the purchasing power of the rich. It only affects the like of poor, disenfranchised subjects. This is eventually shown at the end of the story, where Kanak and his family must suffer the pain and hazard of walking all the way back to the hill, after a sudden curfew is imposed in the city, as they tried to claim the coupons for potatoes and onions generously given to Kanak by his master, Jadab Kalita. After collecting the said coupon and exhausting his meagre savings, he and his family members are faced with the prospect of walking a long way from the city to their ramshackle hut in the foothills.

It is as if the poor must suffer hubris for even small aspirations like entering a mall. Thus, what stands out in this story is the documentation of the life of the "precariat," a class that needs to be researched more by gender theorists, since precarity is a condition that can affect people across gender identities.

Another precarious subjectivity that is forced to remain in the closet due to their sexual orientation is the LGBTQ community. Writings from Northeast India has not (till now) presented their identitarian problematics to the extent that it should have been done. Yet, there are stories where the third sex have found poignant, evocative expression. This dimension is taken up in the next section.

Gender and Queer Identity

Writer from Meghalaya, Janice Pariat's short story "Secret Corridors" from her anthology *Boats on Land* can be explored from the standpoint of what patriarchal society would term as "non-heteronormative" subjectivity. Pariat's story can be considered as a "coming-of-age" story and also a metaphorical "coming out" of

the closet. The story revolves around two introverted school girls – Natalie and Carmel. Natalie nurtures queer fantasies towards a classmate, a girl named Iba. She is besotted by Iba's body and used to fantasise about it in the classroom. The following lines from the story indicate this sensation of intimate longing towards a person of the same gender:

> It was a mouth that made Natalie think of forbidden things, like the forest behind her house, which she wasn't allowed to explore, or the pink roadside ice sticks sh'd been expressly instructed not to taste. That morning, the intricacies of chemistry didn't interest her as much as Iba's mouth, and the face to which it belonged, she thought, was just attractive. Boyish, some said, but not for Natalie. (Pariat, "Secret Corridors, para 1)

However, Natalie also knows that her desires are forbidden by the codified laws of patriarchy, which believes in (what Adrienne Rich terms) "compulsory heterosexuality" as the only legitimate expression of sexuality. Therefore, despite an over-arching desire to transgress socially-sanctioned norms, which are nothing more than social constructions of gender identities, she is not able to do so. Natalie is so distracted by Iba's presence that she often gets chided and penalised by teachers for not applying to her studies inside the classroom.

The other girl, Carmel, is reclusive, without friends, and an object of persistent bullying and gossiping by the other girls, especially on account of her striking beauty. They cast aspersions on her character, saying that she was promiscuous, and attributing the same to her mother's alleged scandalous past, in which the latter was supposed to have had "a string of affairs with some naval officers in Bombay" ("Secret Corridors, para 5), which in all likelihood, indicated the possibility of Carmel's siblings having different fathers. The girls at the school concocted rumours of "Carmel meeting boys after school … taking them home" (para 5) and indulging in forbidden pleasures. Natalie, who always wanted to be part of Iba's group would disparage Carmel, just to win Iba's approval. She would lie that Carmel smelled of "old socks and sour milk" (para 13) much to the amusement of all girls. So, in a way, most conversations of this group centred on Carmel as an object of "abjection" – particularly her imprudent promiscuity, and lack of hygiene culture.

Hence, as Natalie pretended to be heteronormative in the presence of the girls, and indicated the presence of a "secret passage" that led to the All-Boys's St. Edmund's school, only to impress Iba, she was apprehensive that if her confidential information turned out to be false, she might become an object of "scorn" for Iba. All the girls began to eagerly hunt for the secret passage. They reached the abandoned room where they were forbidden to enter by the school authorities. But they were not able to locate the secret passage. This was perhaps due to the fact that it was a mere fiction created by some overactive imagination with no corresponding reality, whatsoever. However, they were detected, and taken to task. Natalie, as expected, became an object of derision for Iba, and called an "idiot" by the latter. As everybody left the room, Natalie heard the sound of a low, muted sobbing. She was gripped by horror, and thought the eerie sound to be the work of spirits. As she made her way into another room, she discovered that it was Carmel who was in tears.

It is at this point that Natalie began to feel empathy towards Carmel. She learnt that this abandoned place used to be a military hospital during the Second World War. She knew because her grandmother was a nurse and had met her grandfather, who was a British soldier, here. They were irresistibly drawn towards each other by this fateful encounter. It culminated into a passionate moment, where "the world with its scorn and derision, receded, and she (Natalie) was left with Carmel's mouth, which was soft and warm and tasted of tears. For a moment, the ghosts around them, and within, fell silent" (para 42)

This simple, poignant story raises several issues. For instance, it indicates how queer subjectivities are forced to live in the closet; how society never endorses any form of sexuality that is not governed by the notion of compulsory heterosexuality; how gender solidarity is mostly a salutary fiction, and so forth. People like Natalie would have to forever conceal their queer longings as it is often considered to be a form of sexual perversion, unnatural and abominable. They would have to go on performing their designated gender roles, as the act of "coming out" would lead to upsetting the socially-constructed and conditioned notions of sexuality. Therefore, it becomes necessary to advocate the idea of gender

sensitisation, and in terms in which we understand gender not as a normative category, but as an entity that is subject to slippage, to metonymic displacements. This idea of gender performativity is wonderfully theorised by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*. Janice Pariat's "Secret Corridors" brings out the ambivalence surrounding LGBTQ longings in a suggestive manner.

Conclusion

Thus, from the discussion, it can be concluded that representation of gender in contemporary short stories from Northeast India has been done from multiple trajectories. These trajectories affirm that gender needs to be understood from different dimensions or intersections. These intersections at times problematise a coherent understanding of gender, and make us aware of the slippage, or the fluid nature of gender identity. However, such an understanding of gender is liberatory and emancipative, and in that sense enabling.

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THE MAKING OF JORHAT: UNDERSTANDING THE PATTERNS OF MIGRATION AND SETTLEMENT (2500 BC TO 1947AD)

Kishor Goswami
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Abstract

The history of migration and patterns of settlement are always important to understand social formation of a particular area. Multiple layers of our past as well as contemporary times are often built upon the forces released by human migration. With an interdisciplinary approach migration studies is now a popular academic enterprise both in humanities and social sciences engaging scholars to understand socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of our past. However, such an interdisciplinary approach to understand a particular region is not a popular historiographical norm in Assam. The present paper is a humble attempt to form an idea about the population structure and migration pattern of Jorhat, Assam from 2500 BC till to the colonial period. The paper, however, has limited its discussion to the Jorhat City as demarcated by John Peter Wade. According to Wade, Jorhat is bounded by river Dholi in the South, Bar Ali in the North, river Disoi in the east and Khutiapota in the west. Keeping in view this geographical boundary, an attempt has been made to understand the history of migration and settlement in this region. However, for the sake of contextualizing the discussion the first part of the paper has made an appraisal of entire Upper Assam and then tried to discuss Jorhat specific migration and settlement patterns.

Key words: *Migration, Settlement, Tibeto-Burmese language, river*

Introduction

Human history is basically an unending story of migration. Multiple layers of our past as well as contemporary times are often built upon the forces released by human migration. With an interdisciplinary approach migration studies is now a popular academic enterprise both in humanities and social sciences engaging scholars to understand socio-cultural, political and economic aspects of our past. However, such an interdisciplinary approach to understand a particular region is not a popular historiographical norm in Assam. The present paper is a humble attempt to form an idea about the population structure and migration pattern of Jorhat district of Assam from the prehistoric time till the colonial period. The paper also has limited its discussion to the Jorhat City as demarcated by John Peter Wade. According to Wade, Jorhat is bounded by river Dholi in the South, Bar Ali in the North, River Disoi in the east and Khutiapota in the west.[1] However, for the sake of contextualizing the discussion the first part of the paper made an appraisal of entire Upper Assam.

Making of the Upper Assam

Although there is no significant archeological discovery related to Paleolithic or Neolithic age of Upper Assam we can still assume that in this region there were no human settlement in early ages and human settlement only occurred relatively late. One of the main reasons for this relatively late human settlement is its unique environment. If we observe the satellite images of Brahmaputra valley, we find that it appears like a big den engulfed by mountains from three directions, with a single passage for water drainage. Sihabuddin Talish in 17th century has recorded that the place experience eight months of heavy rainfall annually with light showers for the four months of winter as well[2]. If we take a look at the annual rainfall for last 100 years, we find it to be decreasing. This suggests that, the more we go backward in time, the higher is the amount of rainfall. When human civilization settled around Indus Valley, at that time the Brahmaputra Valley was an excessively rainy, water logged bog, infested with flies. Slowly and gradually the amount of rainfall decreased and the valley became suitable for human habitation. In Upper Assam, Neolithic remains of the Austro-Asiatic (Mon-Khmer) speaking people are found from 2500 BC[3].

Understanding the patterns of migration and settlement in Jorhat

Linguistic evidence, socio-religious customs, the names of places like Teok, Tipam, words like 'Joha' 'Jopa', 'Tokona' are the evidence of the fact that the Autro-Asiatic speaking Khasis once lived in the plain of Assam, and the hills of North Cachar and Karbi-Anglong[4]. Hence it can also be assumed that the Khasis also settled in Jorhat, the centre of the plains of Assam. This Autro-Asiatic language speaking Khasi people migrated from East Campusia-Laos in 2500BC via Patkai hills and settled in the Brahmaputra valley[5]. The remains of Megalith culture of North East India are the contribution Autro-Asiatic Khasis. Till today megaliths in North East India have been found in Meghalaya, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland as well as in Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Rongkini of Karbi-Anglong. Even in places like Borabong, Kartang, Bulachand, Kubak of N.C Hills many megaliths have been found[6]. A group of researchers, guided by Dr. Dilip Kumar Medhi of the Department of Anthropology, Gauhati University, have excavated a total of 20 megaliths in the area covering from Hamreng to Jaintia Hills[7]. In December, 2004, another megalith was discovered in Mizoram[8]. Likewise, megaliths were discovered in Jamiri, West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh and Angami area of Naga Hills[9]. But no megaliths were discovered yet to the east of river Dhanshri including Jorhat. But the settlement of Austro-Asiatic language speaking Khasis in this area cannot be ruled out on this ground. In our opinion, the reason is geological. The stones suitable for the making of Megaliths are not available in the area from the eastern bank of Dhansiri to Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh and the Border area of Myanmar. Moreover, tools used for cutting the stones cannot be made from the iron nodules, the only source of iron are in upper Assam. According to John Henry Hutton, the Austric people brought the Megalith culture from Indonesia to this region[10].

The second line of migration to Jorhat as well as to Assam was the Tibeto-Chinese language speaking (with Burmese sub-language) Mongolian people. They entered Assam before 2000 BC in groups[11]. The Dimasa Kacharis, the Boro Kacharis and the Mech are the offshoots of these Tibeto-Burmese speaking people. These people entered Jorhat from Southern Tibet via Lower Assam from the west[12].

However, according to Gait, these Tibeto-Burmese speaking people entered Jorhat from east[13]. Austro-Asiatic language speaking Khasis were forced by the newly arrived Mongolian Bodos, to leave the plains of Assam, Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hills and settle in Khasi Hills.

TL dating of soil layer from beneath the Kamakhya Temple has proved the settlement of Indo-European language speaking people in Lower Assam before 2200 years[14]. We have some data about the influx of Indo-European language speaking people through Jorhat from west, even though their permanent settlement is doubtful. Gait has mentioned that these people went to Myanmar via Upper Assam plain (Jorhat) along the river Brahmaputra and they established a new kingdom. According to this source, an Indian king Samuda (Saumudra?) went across Brahmaputra valley and ruled in Myanmar in 105 AD[15]. There may be a relation between "Kalita Desh" of east as mentioned made in "Charit- puthi" and the kingdom established by King Saumudra.

There is also some evidence of the Tibeto-Burmese speaking people's settlement in Jorhat. In 1839, a British officer named E.R. Grange, while studying the History of Dimapur interacted with the Dimasa Kacharis of North Cachar. They told him that the city of Dimapur was built by the fourth Kachari King Chakradhwaj and they also further asserted that the capital of Chakradhwaj's ancestors was at Jorhat[16]. However, there are differences of opinion regarding the year of the establishment of the capital of Kachari Kingdom in Dimapur. According to Sonaram Thaosen, the year was 1086 AD[17]. However Upendra Chandra Guha stated it as 1150 AD[18]. Despite of these controversies, we can conclude that till 1086 AD Jorhat was dominantly settled by Kacharis and thus was a part of Kachari kingdom.But when the Ahoms entered Jorhat, the area was a swampy, waterlogged and very unhygienic place with sparse population. It is a mystery yet to be solved as to why the Kacharis left Jorhat without any war or conflict or how come a place which was a capital till the other day became unhygienic and unsuitable for human habitation all of a sudden.

Gait mentioned that once River Dihing flowed to the distant north of Dibrugarh and fell into the Brahmaputra[19]. At that time there was no trace of Majuli. The probable map of Upper Assam was as follows:
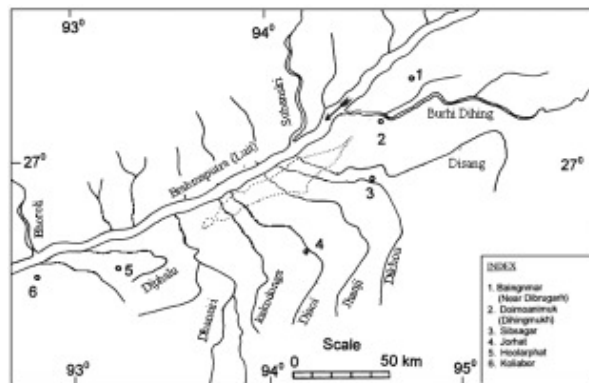
Fig. 1: Map of Upper Assam before 11th Century

In 11th century, the topography of Upper Assam underwent changes due to a sudden geological event. Actually there is an east-west trending fault just below the present course of the river Brahmaputra[1]. As a result of activation of this fault, the river Dihing changed her courses and flowed parallel to the Brahmaputra and merged into Brahmaputra at Lokhow near Bokakhat[2]. Because of this sudden geological change many areas of Jorhat submerged and converted to swampy land. Geologists have prepared the map of Jorhat after this fault activation episode.
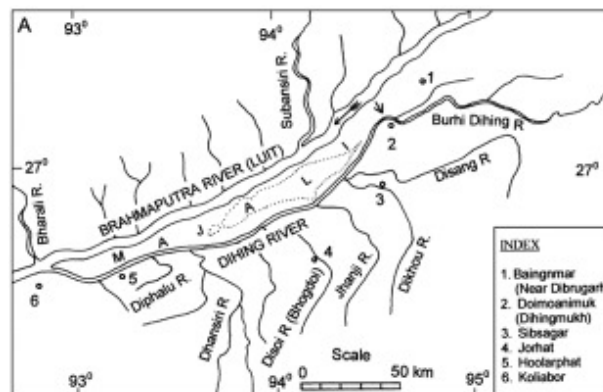
Fig: 2. Map of Jorhat after 11th Century
(Map prepared by J N Sharma and M K Phukan, Geomorphology, Vol. 60, Issues 1, 2, 3, May 2004)

Due to this geological change the landmass located between Dihing and Brahmaputra began to be signified as "Majali" (not Majuli). Jorhat remained a marshland with dense jungle until the big embankment named Bar-ali was constructed. It is clearly mentioned in chronicles that "Bar-ali" was build to prevent flood[1]. Later experts and researchers including John Peter Wade have also agreed on the importance of Bar-ali in flood control[2].

After shifting the course of river Dihing, Mirjumla, Jean Baptiste Chevalier or whatever else came for the preceding 700 years, all came following the upward course of river Dihing, parallel to the river Brahmaputra from Lakhow. There is significant information in the Ahom chronicles regarding this and interestingly up to 14th century, the Ahom did not try to cross the river Dikhow. In 14th century, there are several instances of Ahom invasions into the Kachari Kingdom by crossing the river Dikhow. But all these chronicles indicate the presence of Kacharis in and around Dergaon only[1]. But there is no record of any human settlement in the area between Dikhow and Dergaon, which infact substantiates our hypothesis.

Even for long, after the arrival of Ahom to Assam, at least till 1473 AD, Dikhow was the boundary between the Kachari Kingdom and Ahom territory. But during the region of Suhungmung, in 1526 AD, Kacharis were pushed back to Dhanshri Valley and Ahom established new border out post at Morangi. But there is no information about any organized human settlement in Jorhat area at that time. It was only after establishing their outpost at Morangi that the Ahoms started to settle in Jorhat area systematically[2]. During the Ahom rule though there was no large scale migration to Jorhat took place yet small scale migration under royal patronage was recorded. When King Suhungmung Dihingia Raja defeated the Chutias, he settled the blacksmiths and other artisans of Chutia Kingdom at Basha (old name of Jorhat)[3]. As mentioned earlier Bar-Ali was built by Suhungmung from Gargaon along the river Dihing (present day Brahmaputra) to prevent flood and facilitate a large human habitation[4]. However, most probably the construction did not reach up to Jorhat. The further extension of Bar-ali to Dergaon took place

under the aegis of King Pratap Singh[5]. The term "Bar-Ali" was popular from this time itself. Pratap Singh established a village called Gajpur which was to look after the training and temptation of royal elephants. Records say that Mirjumla found the village deserted with four chained elephant when he came to this place[6]. At this time small scale settlement was only concentrated along the bank of the rivers. Sihabuddin Talish, who came with Mirjumla in 1662AD mentioned in his note "Tarikh-i-Assam" about a large boat artisan's village (Naosaliya Gaon) on the bank of river Dihing and near the mouth of Kakodonga River[7]. At that time Kakodonga was connected with Dihing.

During the days of King Jaydwaj Singh, a "Khat" was given to Auniati Satra in the year 1653 AD on tract of land left by the Disoi river and few "Paik"s were also allotted. This "khat" was later known as "Karangakhat" as this place was overgrown with "karanga" grass. But still this place was sparsely populated and covered with dense forests. So king Godadhar Singh (1681-1696) exiled the vaishnavite saints to the Toklai area of Jorhat[8,9,10].   So till the last revolt of Moamoriyas (1785-1798), few settlements were made in and around the forest tract of the Basa Doiyang area. During the reign of King Rudra Singh, two Kayastha Bhuyans were trained as Goldsmiths and granted lands in Charigaon near Jorhat. Even during the reign of Rajeswar Singh, Latuwa Bordoloi was appointed by establishing a royal gold smithy near Kenduguri. The Kayastha goldsmiths of Jorhat are descendents of these three families.[11]

We have already mentioned that the main constraint for human habitation in Jorhat was the flood caused by the river Dihing. Till 1750 AD Jorhat was located on the bank of the river Dihing and Majuli didn't exist at that time. In 1750, a very big flood occurred and in the popular memory it is known as "Soka- sakini". During this flood, the narrow tract of land between Brahmaputra and Dihing was eroded and the Brahmaputra started flowing on the course of Dihing. As a result, the river island "Majuli" emerged and Jorhat took the shape of the present geographical setup[12].
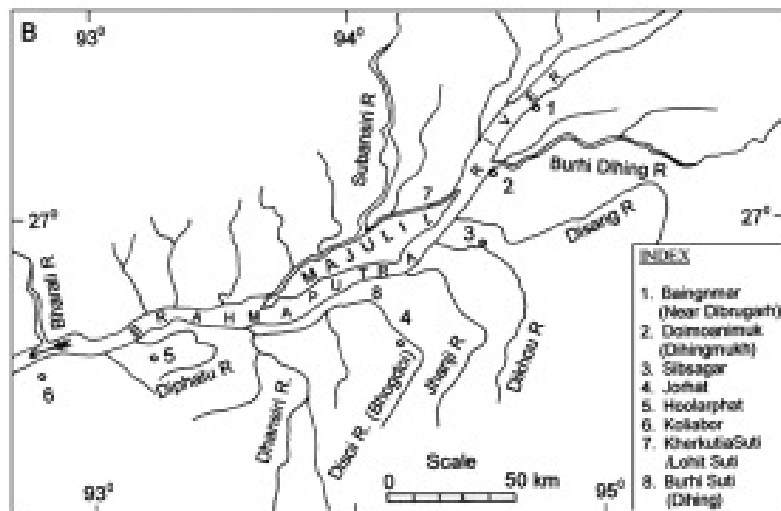
Fig: 3. Map of Jorhat area after 1750 A D.

Till 1827AD, the present day Brahmaputra was known as river Dihing. A map of Assam was drawn by a Flemish cartographer Phelippe Vandermaelen published from Belgium in 1827 AD, where the present course of river the Brahmaputra was shown as river Dihing[1].
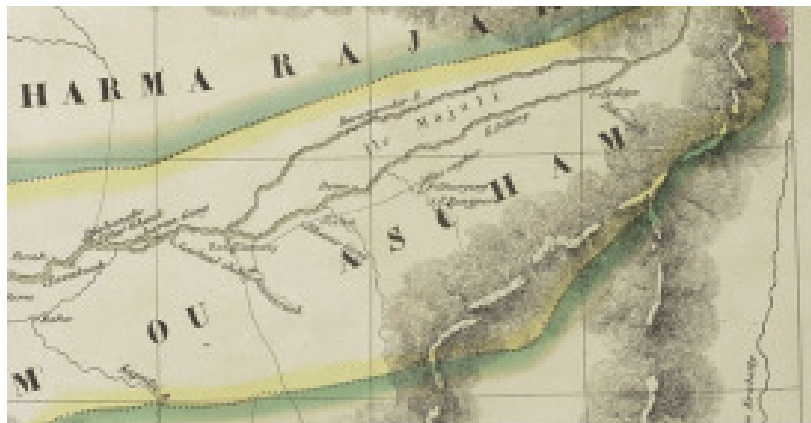
Fig. 4. Phelippe Vandermaelen's Map of 1827

French business man Jean Baptiste Chevalier visited Assam during 1756 A D. When he sailed along the river Dihing (present Brahmaputra) from Dergaon, he mentioned about thickly populated villages. Like Sihabuddin, Chevalier also mentioned about the big artisan's village on the bank of river Dihing. He then mentioned about Baligaon on the bank of river Dihing (present Brahmaputra) as a large village[1]. All these indicate that after the course change of the river Brahmaputra, the places nearby Jorhat became almost suitable for human settlement. During the reign of Rajeswar Singh, the places nearby Jorhat were thickly populated.

In 1802 AD, river Disoi was directed towards Jorhat city according to the plan of Purnananda Burhagohain[2]. Na Ali was also constructed from Jorhat City to Naga Hills during the reign of Kamaleshwar Singh. Similarly, a cannel was also constructed adjacent to Na Ali to facilitate water transport to Rajabahar[3]. The remnant of this cannel was seen until the seventies of last century near places like Ranibheta, Dholi etc. It was after the Ahom capital was shifted to Jorhat, the last systematic and planned migration under royal patronage had taken place. Though there is no thorough written record of this migration is available, but many oral information are available about that episode. Towards the end of the rule of King Gaurinath Singh and during the reign of King Kamaleshwar Singh, various officers such as 'Gohain', 'Phukan', 'Barbaruah', 'Cangrung', 'Buruk' and supervisors of agriculture, industry and trade like 'Baruah', 'Doloi', 'Borah', 'Saikia', 'Hazarika' were settled round the Jorhat city[4]. After this last large scale migration, the type of migration changed to individual level. So the proper and total documentation is almost impossible. However, we have some stray references mainly concerning to migration of certain distinguished families to Jorhat.

Considerable change in the population structure of Jorhat took place with the outbreak of Moamariya revolution and after the arrival of Captain Welsh. After the revolution, Purnananda Burhagohain placed Nasibchand and Fakirchand, two north Indian soldiers, permanently at Jorhat. The captives of Sadiya battle were also settled at the bank of Disoi during the reign of Kamaleshwar Singh[5]. However, he population of Jorhat was terribly affected during the days of the Burmese. People fled from Jorhat in all directions. Again a great change in the population structure

of Jorhat took place after the arrival of the British. Colonial penetration into Jorhat also brought peoples like the Marowaris, Bengalis, and tea garden laboures. When British established Purandar Singh as vassal king, he tried his best to restore the population pattern of Jorhat to its earlier days. We are yet to get the detailed record of Purandar Singh's effort. All we can gather from what is available is that when the East India Company installed Purandar Singh as the king granting "Lalbandi" of Upper Assam, he tried to settle the population issue appointing various officers. To carry out royal duties in Southern Jorhat, Purandar Singh created four posts, Buruk Baruah, Tipomiya Baruah, Khangia Baruah and Hati Baruah, and appointed officers in those posts along with land grants[6].

The intra-territorial migration to Jorhat in different periods of time was mainly associated with religious institution. When a 'sattra' (religious institution of Assam) used to shift from one place to another the people who were closely related with the institution also migrate along with it. The history of the 'sattras' and the migration are not yet thoroughly studied. After the first Moamariya revolution, the 'Sattradhikar' (Head prist) of 'Kansopar Majthai Sattra' shifted with the disciples and settled in southern Jorhat[7]. There is no remnant of the 'sattra' now left but the age old plot is still known as 'gosain bari'. During the period of Burmese invasion in 1820 A D few disciples of 'Kansopar Ujanithai Sattra' came from Dubaritoli of Nagaon and settled in Jorhat[8]. Many little known 'sattras' which were scattered in and around Jorhat such as 'Adhar Satra' of Caokhat, 'Owa Sattra' of Baligaon, 'Kathiyatali Sattra' of Potiya gaon', 'Kath Bapu Sattra' of 'Karanga, 'Soraibanhi Sattra', 'Sensa Sattra', 'Korchung Sattra', 'Khutiapota Sattra' etc shifted to Jorhat in different times. Systematic and detail study of the history of 'sattra's will throw new light to the history of the migration to Jorhat.

Another important migration to Jorhat was the migration of Muslims from the west. The Turk and Afghan origin people were collectively known as the 'Garya' in Assam. Proper identification of their Turkish or Afgan origin is difficult without genetic mapping of their blood. Many of the Afghans even got converted into Hindu and were ordained as 'Kayastha' class[9]. The impact of Turkish attack under Bakhtier Khilji in 1205 AD was limited to Lower Assam only. So the 'Turk' settled

in Assam, coming with Bakhtiar Khilji were originally confined to Lower Assam. In 1532 AD, an Afghan general named Turbak was killed in a campaign against the Ahoms. Later the war prisoners of his army were settled in areas surrounding Jorhat such as Naobaicha, Kakojan Mohbandha by the Ahom king Suhungmung[10]. In course of time they were known as the 'Mariya's. The army of Mirzumlah comprised of Turks, Iranians, Afghan, and Rajputs. It is sure that few of these people stayed back in Upper Assam. When 'Momai Tumauli Barbaruah' was arranging the villages in Ahom kingdom, he established at least two 'Gariya' families in every village[11]. In accordance to that few 'Gariya's had possibly came to Jorhat. King Pratap Singh and Rudra Singh also, during their reign, settled many people of Turk and Afghan origin who were technically skilled professionals[12]. There are still many 'Gariya' families in the outskirts of Nimati area. They fled from that area after the Assamese army was defeated by Burmese in the battle of Mohgarh (Kokilamukh) in 1822 AD. Since then the place is known as 'Gariyabhaga'. Likewise, names like "Griyabari' (near Charigaon), Gariyahabi (earlier name of Lohpohiya Tea Estate) etc give us an account of how old is the Gariya settlement in Jorhat[13]. The Gariyas of Balibat in Jorhat are the decedents of "Pharsiparhiya" post established by Ahom kings. Like wise two Gariya families near Macharhat area, were the descendents of Afghans of Rohilakhand who were brought to Jorhat in 1703 AD and were placed as stonecutter (Shilakuti). Bahadur Gaonburha along with the Gariya families of 'Birinashayek' area belonged to the 'Akhorkotiya' family. But it is yet unknown whether they are of Afghan or Turkish origin. Formud Ali, who participated in the 1857 revolt, belonged to 'Gunakotiya' artisan class. The 'Gunakatiya's settled at Gargaon during the reign of Rudra Singh. Later, when the capital was shifted to Jorhat they came and settled at Royal Road[14]. The famous ivory artisan of Assam, Fijnoor Gariya of Jorhat belonged to the family of Baktar Khanikar[15]. Above all 'Joola', 'Darjee', 'Nawab', 'Saiyad', 'Bagh', 'Melmora Hazarika' etc of Turkish or Afghan origin contributed to the development of Jorhat.

Even in British rule also, people belonged to different ethnic origin migrated to Jorhat. Some people migrated from East Bengal in the middle of 19th century for business purpose and later on permanently stayed in 'Dhakapatty'. The tea

garden labours also share a good percentage of the population of Jorhat. Though they have been left behind from the mainstream due to the circumstances; but their contribution towards the Assamese society is undeniable. The first tea garden in Jorhat was established in the year 1853 AD and later in 1892 AD the number of tea gardens rose to 110.

Marwaris are also inhabiting in Jorhat since long. There is mention of a shop by person named Nareng Keyan or Nauranga Ram Kedia in Jorhat during the reign of Purandar Singh . If we take this shop to have existed during the first reign of Purandar, then the shop can be dated back to 1818 AD. Nauranga Ram, the forefather of Jyoti Prasad Agarwala came to Assam in 1811 AD. Whether Naureng Keyan was Nauranga Ram is a matter of discussion and should be thoroughly studied. In 1840 AD, a shop 'Bargola' was started in Jorhat . In 1865 AD, there were 160 shops in Jorhat and among them 28 were owned by Marwari businessmen . A few Sikh and Bengali families also came to Jorhat for the purpose of business during the colonial period. Some Bengali Hindus were settled in the area which is known as 'colony' at Lichubari near Jorhat city. They migrated during the Bimala Prasad Chaliha's term as chief minister of Assam. At that time the whole area was full of dense forest and was known as 'refugee colony'.

Conclusion

From the prehistoric times till to the colonial rule Jorhat was a melting point of migrant people coming from different places carrying their own socio-cultural heritage. However, due to a sudden geological change after the 11th century Jorhat became swampy and unfit for human settlement. However, embankments and canals were constructed mainly by the Ahoms and by the 16th century again we have witnessed large scale migration to Jorhat. The present day demographic as well as socio-cultural composition of Jorhat is basically an outcome of a long drawn process of human migration. An interdisciplinary approach to migration study can further widen our understanding of the different layers of the history of Jorhat as well as Assam.

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DAM(N)ED THE KOPILI : REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Priyanka Sharma

Abstract

Damming rivers has become one of the focal components of development activities undertaken by the post-colonial state in India. Regarded as engineering marvels transforming the economy through a range of services like power generation, irrigation, navigation etc., dams are often seen as the panacea of development bringing qualitative changes in the lives of the people. The state of Assam which abounds in water resources already has two dams - the 275 MW Kopili hydroelectric power project and the 100 MW Karbi Langpi power project with more in the offing. Caught up in an intense struggle over damming rivers vis-à-vis its effects on the environment and livelihood security of the people, Assam has seen people's movements and resistance against dams. This paper is an attempt to highlight the experiences of the people with regard to the Kopili Hydro Electric Power Plant in Assam and reflect on the implications of damming the Brahmaputra.

Keywords: *Dams, Rivers, Kopili, Brahmaputra, State*

Introduction

> "It is an engineering marvel that has become a case study for large
> projects across the world."

> -Narendra Modi while inaugurating the Sardar Sarovar Dam, 2017

It has been observed that in the contemporary development paradigm with an inclination towards a neo-liberal outlook, damming rivers has become synonymous to development. Such a paradigm that rests on the premise of dominance and control over nature views nature as having to be 'managed' for the survival of humankind. In a way, it amounts to 'civilising nature' in a bid to control and tame its wilderness. Rivers are being perceived from an instrumentalist notion of instilling 'value' in them only if they can be tamed while untamed free flowing waters of rivers are viewed as 'resource wasted'. Hydraulic profit as such becomes the driving force behind damming rivers and the State having the legitimacy of control over resources becomes the major facilitating agency behind the flourishing dam industry aided by foreign capital. Although construction of dams generate livelihood opportunities to many but it comes at the cost of livelihood security of others, especially those who have lost their land due to submergence, those displaced and those who directly or indirectly depend on the river for their sustenance. Dams are responsible for resource depletion and resource extinction leading to not only the eradication of ecological spaces but also elimination of cultural spaces. Dams transform common property resources like forests and water into commercial resources eroding customary and community rights. Benefits accruing out of dams like irrigation, electricity or water supply though bring about qualitative changes for many but the spread of benefits is highly uneven. The role of the Indian State in the post-colonial period in the context of dams, point to the fact that the development strategy after independence of boosting agricultural production and developing the industrial sector in India necessitated huge investments in large dam projects for irrigation as well as hydropower generation. With the continuing march of industrialisation and integration with the global economy, the Indian State has

embarked on a series of hydropower projects to meet the growing needs of the economy and the populace as well as for strategic reasons. But little emphasis has been invested into the linkages between development and livelihood security. Dams as a part of the dominant development paradigm has come under intense criticism for the potential threat caused to the environment and the forced large scale displacement of people questioning the notions of human development and human security. A wide array of environmental and social issues that have been the points of discontentment gave rise to popular struggles against dams. Dams that were once hailed as 'modern temples', were later criticised as 'disease of gigantism'. Yet, notwithstanding the fact that people's resistance against these 'engineered' structures have been strong; there has been no stopping to the pursuance of dams as effective mechanisms of water resource management. In the advent of the Central Electricity Authority's (CEA) report (2001) that the North-eastern region of the country has the potential to generate about 43 percent of the country's total hydroelectric power potential , massive plans have been initiated by the Indian State to convert Northeast India including Assam into a 'powerhouse' for the country by tapping its hydropower potential to the maximum through construction of a series of hydro power projects. The National Water Policy, 2012, highlighting the need for utilising the water resources for ensuring food security of the region stated that, "in the water rich Eastern and North-eastern regions of India, the water use infrastructure is weak and needs to be strengthened in the interest of food security." Assam is considered as a bio-diversity hotspot and is home to diverse wildlife species including the world famous one horned rhino, elephants, tigers, wild buffaloes, pygmy hog and Gangetic river dolphins besides diverse and rich forest resources. Rivers assume tremendous significance for an agrarian state like Assam. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries form a major part of the landscape of the state facilitating agriculture, trade and commerce. Construction of dams solely for the purpose of generating hydro power to fuel the energy sector calls for urgent attention and need for introspection since blocking the natural flow of the river through development projects like dams is a threat to the entire ecological and livelihood security in the Brahmaputra valley.

Damming the Kopili: The Beginning

Kopili Kopili Pagoli Suwali
Manuhok koribi tran
Umrongsu joniu turei log laagi
Hobo siro jyotisman...

-Bhupen Hazarika (1978)

Originating from the Borail range mountains of Meghalaya, the Kopili is a south bank tributary of the Brahmaputra. It is an inter-state river with an altitude of about 1,600 metre and has a total length of 290 kilometers up to its confluence with Brahmaputra. The river is bounded by the Jaintia Hills in the west and the South Cachar and Mikir Hills in the east. Kharkor, Myntriang, Dinar, Longsom, Amring, Umrong, Longku and Langkri are its major tributaries in its upper reaches. After entering Assam the Kopili separates the Karbi Anglong district from the Dima Hasao district up to its confluence with Diyung River on its right at 135 kilometers. After the confluence with Diyung, Kopili flows into the Nagaon district in a north-westerly direction. The Jamuna River flows to the Kopili at Jamunamukh, Nagoan. The river then flows in western direction, and further downstream, the Umkhen-Borapani River which rises in the Shillong plateau and drains an area of 2,038 km2 joins Kopili at a distance of 254 kilometers from the left. The Killing River, known as Umiam in its upper reaches flows into Kopili from the left at about 280 kilometers. The Kopili River finally flows to Kalang, a spill channel of Brahmaputra, near Hatimukh, Nagoan after traversing a distance of 290 km. The total catchment of Kopili River is about 16,421 km2. The 275 MW Kopili project (KHEP) located on the river Kopili in the Dima Hasao district of Assam constructed by NEEPCO comprises of two concrete gravity dams: the Khandong dam (height 66 metres) on the Kopili river and the Umrong dam (height 45 metres) on the Umrong stream. The project has two corresponding reservoirs- Kopili reservoir (FRL 719.3 M) and Umrong reservoir (FRL 609.60 M) with two separate water conductor systems and three Power Stations (PS). These are :

    a)   Khandong PS (2 x 25 MW)
    b)   Kopili Stage II PS (1 x 25 MW)
    c)   Kopili PS (4 x 50 MW)

Water from the Kopili reservoir is utilised in the Khandong power station through a 2,852 metres long tunnel to generate 50 MW (2 X 25 MW) of power. The tail water from this powerhouse is led to the Umrong reservoir. The water from Umrong reservoir is taken through a 5,473 metres long tunnel to the Kopili power station to generate 200 MW (4 X 50 MW) of power. The first stage extension of the Plant envisaged setting up two additional 50 MW units at Kopili power station, provisions for which were already kept during the first stage development of the project. The Units III and IV under this extension scheme were commissioned in March, 1997 and June, 1997 respectively. The total installed capacity of the Kopili power station thus went up to 200 MW and that of the project as whole to 250 MW. The raising of the Umrong reservoir by 7.6 metres was taken up to meet the demand for more water for two additional 50 MW units of first stage extension. The second stage of the Kopili Hydro Electric Plant involves a powerhouse to generate additional 25 MW of power by utilising water from the Kopili reservoir through a 480 metres long water conductor system, provision of which was kept as a by-pass conduit from the surge shaft in the Khandong tunnel. The water from the second stage powerhouse will go to the Umrong reservoir for utilisation in the Kopili power station. The total cost of the project was Rs. 24,382.00 lakh for Kopili first stage, 13,448 lakh for stage-I extension and 95.02 lakhs for Stage- II extension. The project was developed in three stages:

Table-1: Stages of the Kopili Hydro Electric Plant

Power Station	Commissioning Date	Construction Phase
Khandong (2 x 25 MW)	Mar, May, 1984	
Kopili (2 x 50 MW)	June, July, 1988	1st Stage
Kopili (2 x 50 MW)	Mar, June, 1997	1st Stage Extension
Kopili Stage II (1 x 25 MW)	July, 2004	2nd Stage Extension

Source: NEEPCO data received under the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005 bearing number NEEPCO/ED (CP)/RTI/R-1/ (Part-23)/2016-17/194 dated 26.08.2016

Thus, since the first unit of the KHEP was commissioned in 1984 and subsequent commissioning of the Kopili PS and Kopili Stage II in 2004, the project with a total power generating capacity of 275 MW has been feeding power to the

North Eastern Grid and serving the North-eastern region. Being a large dam (since height of both the Khandong and Umrong dams is more than 15 metres as per ICOLD standards), the Kopili project has played a pioneering role in the development of the power scenario of the North-eastern region. The establishment of the project led to the development of the small town of Umrongso, a remote area in the Assam-Meghalaya border which has become well connected with roads, banks, postal services, telecommunications, schools, hospitals etc. Several cement factories have also been established in the area facilitating the development of the local economy. But the benefits have also come with certain social and environmental costs as mentioned in the following table:

Table-2: Details of Land Procured/Submerged and Population Displaced/ Rehabilitated

Sl. No	Description	Information
1	Total land procured for the project	11,904.70 acres
2	Total submerged land for Kopili Reservoir (at present FRL is 719.30 M)	3300.00 acres
3	**Forest land acquired for Kopili reservoir submergence:	
	a) Reserved Forest	550.40 acres
	b) Unclassified Forest	3784.00 acres
	c) Private Land	1203.50 acres
	Total of above (a+b+c)	5537.90 acres
4	Total submerged land in Umrong reservoir	
	a) Unclassified Forest	3000.00 acres
	b) Reserved Forest	673.80 acres
	Total of above (a+b)	3673.80 acres
5	Total number of land owner/population displaced by the project	749
6	Total number of population rehabilitated	Nil

** Dam height of the Kopili reservoir is being raised by installing gate and land for further submergence was acquired long back.

Source: NEEPCO data received under the Right to Information Act (RTI), 2005 bearing number NEEPCO/ED (CP)/RTI/R-1/ (Part-23)/2016-17/194 dated 26.08.2016

Dam(n)ed the Kopili: Whose river? Whose dam?
Subsequent studies found that although there were rare plant outages till 2006-07 since the commissioning of the power stations of the project, there have been reports of increasing outages since May, 2007. It has been observed that unsystematic coal mining in the upper catchment area of the Kopili has led to the exposure of the river water to organic sulphur. Open cast mining using traditional technology for coal excavation is being practiced in the upper reaches of the Kopili and the open pits are left unattended once mining was over. During monsoons these pits get filled with rain water which in turn forms sulphuric acid which is then carried by rain water to the reservoirs. The acidic content in the water leads to corrosion/ metal erosion in most of the equipments in the power stations.[1] The issue of acidic contamination in the Kopili River has become a major concern as it has serious repercussions not only for the life of the dam but also for the ecological balance of the region.

Table-3: Details of Outages before and after year 2006

Sl. No	Reason of outage	Till 2006	After 2006		
			Khandong	Kopili	
				Kopili P.S	Kopili Stage II
1	Cooler tube failure	Rare	27 times	50 times	4 times
2	CW line and fixtures leakage	Rare	24 times	2 times	9 times
3	Leakage/ break down of turbine component	Nil	15 times	12 times	1 time

Source: Kachhal. P., Sharma, P., Pathak, R.P., & Ratnam, M. (2013). Assessment of Durability of Coated Steel to be used in Manufacture of Hydro-Mechanical Equipments Operational in Acidic Hydro Environment. *International Journal of Research in Chemistry and Environment.* 3 (3), p. 102 (pp. 100-105).

Concerns over damming the river Kopili for development purposes reached new heights when the Lower Kopili Hydro Electric Project (LKHEP) was proposed in 2012. The project site is located at Boro Longku village in Dima Hasao district

and is to be developed by the APGCL. The Lower Kopili dam will be a concrete gravity dam with a height of 70.13 metres and will consist of two power houses. The first power house will have an installed capacity of 110 MW (2 x 55 MW) while the second power house will have an installed capacity of 10 MW (2 x 2.5 MW+1 x 5 MW) making the total installed capacity of 120 MW.[1] The catastrophic flood of 2004 in Assam that affected large areas in Nagaon and Morigaon districts of Assam resulting in loss of lives and property and the issue of acidic contamination of the Kopili water have generated consciousness regarding the harmful consequences of dams. It is argued that loss of agricultural land, submergence of forest areas, heavy flooding in the downstream areas might destroy the traditional livelihood practices of various ethnic communities in the region.

Dams are the symbols of the dominant development paradigm based on the principles of industrialisation and urbanisation as the prerequisites of economic growth. These massive engineered structures symbolise modernity, economic achievement and triumph over nature. The environmental and social impacts of such actions are generally held as 'given' which can be minimised and mitigated. But do dams as 'symbols of development' bring benefits to all? Do dams contribute towards livelihood security? Different sections of people have different opinions on the matter. Narratives collected for the study from local communities in Umrongso, Dima Hasao (location of the dam, upstream area) and Nagaon (downstream area) make the case more illustrative. Names of the interviewees are however changed maintaining research ethics. For locals like Ranjit, a Forest Guard, Panimur forest range, Dima Hasao, the river Kopili assumes a sacred place for the members of the Dimasa community. He remarks,

 '*the Kopili river is a sacred river for the entire Dimasa community particularly in the Umrongso region. The Kopili river was abundant with fishes before with the local population engaged in fishing activities which is one way of securing livelihood. But today there is no fish in the Kopili river.*

Ranjit has been working as a Forest guard in the area for a long period and has seen the changes that took place in the river after the construction of the project. Particular importance is the mention of the declining number of the fishes in the

river. Fishing is an important livelihood activity for the locals there, which has been impacted after damming the Kopili. In a similar tone, Devika, a college teacher based in Nagaon who originally hails from Umrongso, Dima Hasao and her father, a retired government official staying in Umrongso revealed the dissatisfaction of the local population with the Kopili dam. According to them,

> *'The Kopili river is the main source of livelihood for the Dimasa people with agriculture and fishing being completely dependent on the waters of the Kopili. But the construction of the dam brought about tremendous damage to the people. The reservoir submerged the low lying areas which were the prime agricultural lands. It is hard to find low lying areas in hilly regions which are more productive. Although electrification was guaranteed after the dam which also led to the emergence of the township of Umrongso but for many of the indigenous population, dam brought poverty and misery. They lost their land, their cattles, their agricultural produce....'*

Dams lead to submergence of land and forests, habitat destruction, displacement of indigenous population, flood in downstream areas due to release of excess water, especially during monsoons, reduced water flow downstream and a host of other problems causing tremendous distress to the local population which have been dealt with at length in the previous chapters. Flood has been a perennial problem in the Brahmaputra valley. The districts of Nagaon and Morigaon in Assam had experienced severe floods in 2004 due to release of water from the Kopili dam. For local farmers in Nagaon, the memory of the 2004 floods is still afresh in their minds. They remarked that people got very little time to prepare. Suddenly, within hours, the water of the Kopili was everywhere. People had to take refuge in the Highway. Many families were destroyed with lives and property lost and damaged.

But not all view such development in a negative manner. It has been observed that the construction of the Kopili hydro electric power project which led to the creation of a township in Umrongso also opened up avenues for securing livelihood opportunities for the people. Communication facilities increased as the town of Umrongso developed and with increased movement of people, livelihood

opportunities also increased. From a gender perspective, dams became an equalizer. For, many women view it as an opportunity to improve their standard of living. Rani, a Bodo woman shopkeeper in Borolangpher, remarked,

> *Earlier, women would be either confined to the house or would be involved in cultivation. Now, along with agriculture, women can also start small business and earn profit and look after the family.*

In a similar tone, Viren, a Hotel owner, 29 Kilo, Dima Hasao said that the dam has indeed increased his business prospects. He remarked,

> *With the dam being constructed here, there is increased mobility of people in the area. I get more customers now. Many people come to my shop to have food.*

According to Bishnu Hazarika, a contractor based in Nagaon, construction activities like dams generate income for them. They expressed dissatisfaction on the failure of the Government in generating employment opportunities for the youth. For them, many people are turning towards self-employment not only by choice but also due to compulsion and even have to survive as small contractors despite being academically qualified. He says,

> *If Government fails to create jobs, we have to create it for ourselves. Nowadays, a large number of young boys are becoming petty contractors despite being graduates or post graduates. Activities like dam construction opens up opportunities for them through which they sustain their families. A hungry stomach cannot think about environmental issues; it only thinks about survival issues.*

These words reflect the dilemmas of development. Access to health, education and a decent standard of living together with a safe and clean environment are identified as the basic parameters of human development but poverty stands as an obstacle to achieve these goals. These words "hungry stomach thinks only about survival issues" echoes in the minds and reflect the dilemma of what to do or not to do. Hence, the role of the Government assumes tremendous significance in

ushering in the goals of development – equity and sustainability. But the shift towards a capitalist model seems to have pushed these principles to the periphery where survival of the fittest in the competition takes precedence.

Prisoners of Uncertainty: Dams as a Need

The narratives point to the fact that dams as part of the contemporary development paradigm followed by the Indian State in the post-independence period have failed to strike a balance between economic growth and people's welfare. Conversations with the local communities in Dima Hasao and Nagaon reflected that though they have faced hardships through submergence of land and damage to life and property by floods caused by the construction of the Kopili Hydro Electric Plant, yet, they perceive dams as necessary. Contentment that their children are getting educational facilities and could study in homes with electricity instead of candle lights or earthen lamps or kerosene lamps make the environmental and social costs of dams looks smaller. Better connectivity, increased economic opportunities and a fear of uncertainty over further loss generate a feeling of acceptance of the benefits of the development process despite the inequities and unsustainabilities created. This reminds of the words of Kavita Philip (2003) who argues that the change in the attitude towards nature was not merely a 'cultural' shift from tradition to modernity but reflects an integral part of a shift in the modes of production and representation. The categories of labour, production and property were the key to understanding such a shift.[2] She further noted that the contradictions between scientific knowledge and pre modern modes of discourse should be looked at not as a "showdown between the dark forces of irrationality and the enlightened rationality of scientific knowledge, but as a historically situated process of conflict between two rational systems of knowledge about nature, undergirded by unequal structures of economic, political and social practice."[3]

The need for dams despite their flaws shows how people are entangled and imprisoned in the web of development. People become *prisoners of uncertainties*; there is conflict of uncertain future generated by a comparison between pre-modern (pre-dam) and modern (after-dam) scenario. Thayer Scudder's (2005) argument that 'large dams remain a necessary development option despite

their flaws' seems to hold true here. Scudder opined that dams as part of the development strategy which in the long run degrades critical natural resources, remain necessary, for in the short run, at least they provide benefits like supplying water for the rapidly expanding urban population, provide electricity to the populations and to the industries which generate employment opportunities, to increase irrigation in areas where small reservoirs dry up during drought and also to provide foreign exchange for development purposes by exporting hydro power.[4] This seems to be the tragedy of the present day development paradigm. There is definitely recognition of the environmental and social costs that projects like dams entail but at the same time, they become necessary to meet the needs of the ever growing human population as a measure for poverty alleviation and also as a support to the uncertainties that factors like climate change and global warming present. In fact, Cernea (1997) also categorically mentioned that the process of development will continue to make changes in patterns of land use and water use, thereby, making relocation of population at times unavoidable. But that does not mean that the inequitable distribution of the 'gains and pains' of development is inevitable.[5] A respect for people's rights, adherence to social justice and equity and attempts towards sustainability and inclusive development can create conditions for synergy between sustainable development and sustainable livelihoods.

Conclusion

The Kopili Hydro Electric Plant is a milestone in the area of energy security of the entire North-eastern region and an important marker of economic development of Assam. Dams, per se, is not seen as bad, but it is the policy of the State towards dam building in an unprecedented way with the main objective of hydropower generation and the failure of the institutional mechanisms to effectively look into matters of displacement, resettlement and environmental protection that is being questioned. Sustaining rivers and livelihoods by understanding, protecting and restoring ecosystems at river-basin level is vital to promote equitable human development and welfare of all. Given the fact that large dams have far-reaching consequences, it is imperative to integrate the issues of equity, distribution, rights and social justice in the planning and execution frameworks of the development process so as to obliterate the inequities inherent in the present frameworks.

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ROLE OF STATE IN ENABLING HEALTHCARE COORDINATION IN INDIA DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Pooja Sharma

Abstract

One of the most persistent and perpetual issues related to a sound and good living is the issue of health. Healthcare governance well designed and effectively executed can ensure people's right to a sound health. India has an extensive healthcare system, but it is still inceptive and lack of human resources, infrastructure and investment. India's healthcare system is associated with various issues, including low number of institutions and inadequate human resources for quite a while now. With the Covid-19 pandemic just around the corner, India's healthcare system has collapsed under the weight of the pandemic. The government of India has released Covid-19 Emergency Response and Health System Preparedness immediately after the declaration of the World Health Emergency in the world. However, India's healthcare sector is not equipped for the unprecedented rise of its devastation. Moreover, the significant inefficiency, dysfunctioning and acute shortage of the healthcare delivery system in the public sector are not able to meet the growing needs of the population.

Key words: *India, Healthcare system, Pandemic, Infrastructure, Emergency etc.*

Introduction

An available, affordable, and accessible health care system can only be achieved with an effective and sound system of Health Governance. An effective system of healthcare governance is instrumental in providing quality health care to the people. In countries like India, where basic health care remains a distant dream to many, the issue of receiving proper and quality health is a far cry. India spent only 1.28 percent of its GDP on health in 2017-18, one of the lowest in the world. India even after independence did not consider its priority to beef up defenses against contagious diseases. Very few investments were made regarding an overarching public health infrastructure. Given that the success of such measures is inherently negative. The public healthcare system in India is under-resourced, both from the infrastructure and staffing sides which poses a challenge to India in dealing with the present pandemic (COVID 19) situation. It requires special mention that a health right is an indispensable form of human right that enunciates the fact that everyone has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.

Governance in the health sector refers to a wide range of steering and rule-making-related functions carried out by governments/decisions makers as they seek to achieve national health policy objectives that are conducive to universal health coverage. Governance is a political process that involves balancing competing influences and demands. Beyond the formal health system, governance means collaborating with other sectors, including the private sector and civil society, to promote and maintain population health in a participatory and inclusive manner.[1] It includes: Policy making and implementation, Public health legislation, Policy, Strategy, Funding, Organization.[2]

Discussion

The issue of health is an important agenda of the Indian government. Health policies are formulated following the five-year plans. In the fifties and sixties, the entire focus of the health sector in India was to manage epidemics. Mass campaigns were started to eradicate the various diseases. These separate countrywide campaigns

with a techno-centric approach were launched against malaria, smallpox, tuberculosis, leprosy, filaria, trachoma, and cholera. Cadres of workers were trained in each of the vertical programs. Till 1983 India didn't adopt a formal or official National Health Policy. Before those health activities of the state were formulated through the Five-year Plans and recommendations of various Committees. For the Five Year Plans, the health sector constituted schemes that had targets to be fulfilled. Each plan period had several schemes and every subsequent plan added more and dropped a few.[3] The health care system was conceived after the independence in 1947 as a three-tier system that could cover the entire country. It was to have a primary care system at the village level, a secondary care system to cover smaller urban centers and tertiary care for specialized treatment. Over the years, though, the emphasis moved to for-profit tertiary care hospitals, mainly in big cities, with state-of-the-art that provided care mainly to the urban rich.

The healthcare allocation in the Union Budget of 2020-21 is just a modest increase of 5.7 percent to Rs 67,484 crore from the revised estimate of Rs 63,830 crore in the previous year and falls short of the target of spending 2.5 percent of GDP on healthcare. According to Dr. Azad Moopen, founder chairman of Aster DM Healthcare, "It is unfortunate that the allocation of Rs 69,000 crore for the sector is only just one percent of GDP, which will be highly inadequate for any major leap forward in the sector". A minimum increase of allocation in healthcare does not lead to too much increase in the health sector and thus on healthcare will continue to lag.[4]

India's struggle to treat corona virus patients is the result of chronic underinvestment in healthcare. The Indian government estimates it spends only about 1.5 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) on public health. That figure is higher than it was – about 1 percent in the 1980s and 1.3 percent five years ago – but India still ranks among the world's lowest spenders in terms of percentage of GDP. Public healthcare, in the last decade, has been a low priority for India with just 1.29% of the country's GDP in 2019-20 spent on healthcare. Contrast this with the global average of 6%. India's public expenditure on health as a percentage of the GDP is far lower than countries classified as the "poorest" in the world, as admitted by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.[5]

In the 2019 Global Health Security Index, which measures pandemic preparedness for countries based on their ability to handle the crisis, India ranked 57, lower than the US at 1, the UK at 2, Brazil at 22, and Italy at 31, suggesting it is more vulnerable to the pandemic than countries that have seen a high number of fatalities so far. India's investment in the health sector, dedicating only 1.3 percent of its GDP, is now making it vulnerable to COVID-19. It contrasts with other developing countries like Brazil, which spends 7.5 percent of its annual GDP on health; Bhutan, which has allocated 3.6 percent; and Bangladesh, which dedicates 2.2 percent. Among developed nations, South Korea has kept its healthcare expenditure at a whopping 8.1 percent, Japan 10.9 percent, and the US at 8.5 percent.[6]

Lack of adequate manpower fostering serious drawbacks in India's healthcare system

One of the core challenges of the Indian healthcare system is insufficient manpower. This problem became more vulnerable during this pandemic situation. India has a severe shortage of healthcare workers. There is 1 doctor for every 1,445 Indians as per the country's current population estimate of 135 crore, which is lower than the WHO's prescribed norm of 1 doctor for 1,000 people. India has 1154686 registered doctors in the specialty of modern medicine. At present, in India, on average, a government doctor attends to 10926 people, more than 10 times what the WHO recommends. In Bihar, one government doctor serves 28,391 people. Uttar Pradesh is ranked second with 19,962 patients per doctor followed by Jharkhand (18,518), Madhya Pradesh (16,996), Chhattisgarh (15,916), and Karnataka (13,556).[7]

A Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) report has said that the covid-19 pandemic is a "wake-up call" for India's health system. India's public healthcare system is chronically underfunded, and there are big gaps in primary healthcare delivery. The report titled 'strengthening public health delivery' stated that all public health activities required for covid-19 epidemic control – including testing, early detection of cases, and various preventive measures are being carried out by Primary Health Centre (PHC)-level staff, despite often being overburdened due to inadequate staffing in many states.[8]

As the primary health centers are already overwhelmed due to the public health crisis and face a severe shortage of resources, the report highlighted that inadequate health services due to lack of basic supplies and equipment, shortage of skilled workforce medical and Para-medical staff who are overburdened with long hour duties has further worsened the situation. The medical and paramedical staff includes doctors, nurses, midwives, auxiliary nursing midwives, ASHAs, and Anganwadi workers. India's healthcare infrastructure is incapable of dealing with this crisis today. Shortages in medical supplies and an inability to provide adequate testing are the major issues. [9]

***Deficient infrastructure tremendously affecting the healthcare system:***

The National health policy 2017 emphasis on the 'Health in All" and increased the rate of healthcare expenditure to 2.5% of GDP but this pandemic situation triggered a reality check on the Indian Healthcare system. Many questions are put across as to how the Government of India is ready to address this and prepared to translate the goal of NHP -2017 into reality. The Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics and Policy (CDDEP) and Princeton University have estimated the existing state-wise availability of hospital beds, intensive care units (ICUs), beds, and ventilators across India based on data available on the website of the Central Bureau of Health Intelligence(CBHI)under title" National Health Proûle 2019". According to CDDEP report published on (20 April 2020) and National Health Proûle 2019,

(i)   The total hospitals in India are 69,265, i.e., (public hospitals—25,778 and private hospitals—43,487)

(ii)   The total hospital beds—1,899,228 (Public sector-7, 13,986; and Private sector—1,185,242);

(iii)   The total number of ICU beds—94,961(Public sector—35,699 and Private sector 59,262);

(iv)   Total ventilators—47,481 (public sector—17,850; private sector—29,631).

As mentioned above, the information suggests that maximum of the healthcare centers in India lie in the private sector. In India, the available government

hospital beds and ICU beds are 0.51 and 0.025 per 1000 population, respectively; whereas, the available private hospital beds and ICU beds are 0.85 and 0.04 percent per 1000 population, respectively.[10]

In India, there is a major shortage in the availability of beds in hospitals. According to the Raghuram Rajan commission, some states like Jharkhand, Assam, Haryana, Bihar, Gujrat, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Manipur which is home to more than 70% of the total Indian population has the population to bed ratio even lower than the national average but some states like Kerala, Sikkim, and Tami Nadu has the better population to bed ratio. Bihar (one of the least-developed states) has 0.12 beds per thousand people, which is the state with the fewest beds per person. In the Northeastern part of India, Assam and Manipur have 0.32 and 0.48 beds, respectively, which is below the national average of 1.13 beds per thousand people. Other states of the Northeast and Southern India have a better capacity to serve patients – near to or above the national average which is shown in the graph (1&2) below. The states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh (the BIMARU states), where one in every four persons is below the poverty line, have less capacity than the national average and more than half of India's population lives in these (four) states.[11]
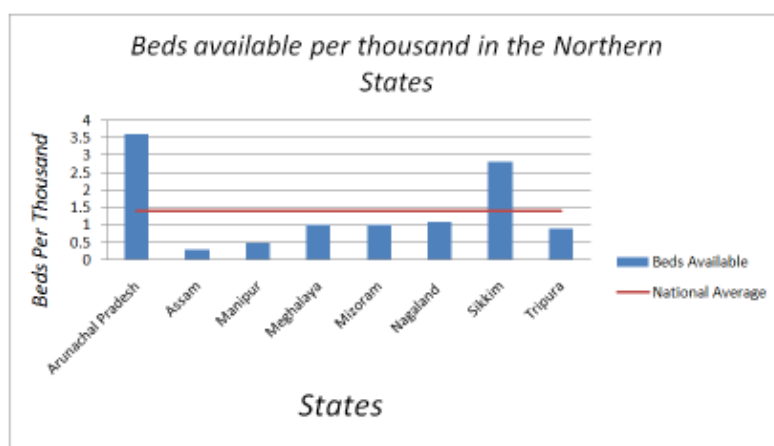
*Source – Data used from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and RBI's population data
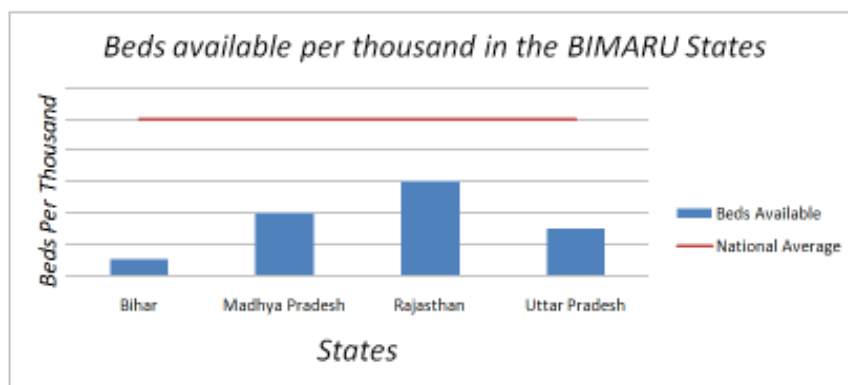
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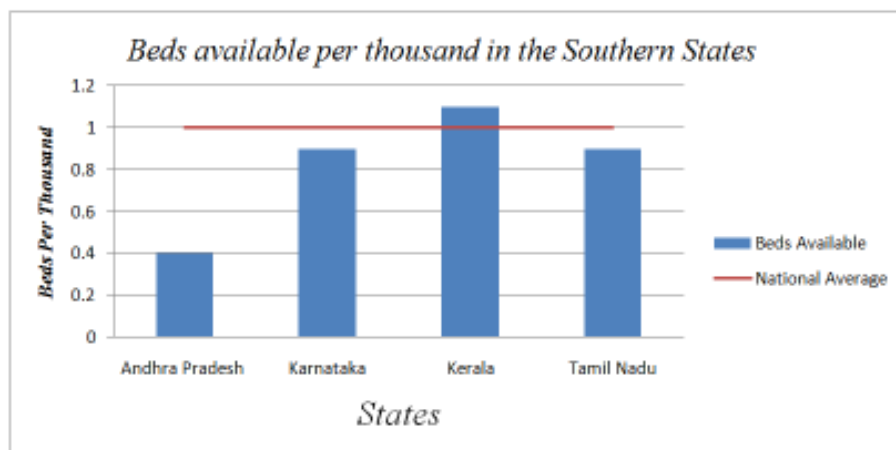
*Source – Data used from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and RBI's population data

The number of beds are used as an indicator of health infrastructure in general and the poor bed availability points to India's failure to expand its health infrastructure in keeping with the growth in population. Moreover, the significant inefficiency, dysfunction, and acute shortage of the healthcare delivery systems are leading people to struggle to save their lives. More than 80 percent of the population still does not have any significant health insurance coverage and about 68 percent of the population has limited or no access to essential medicines. The low level of public spending on health is the main cause for the poor quality, limited reach, and insufficient public provisioning of healthcare.

Millions of India's poor population rely on the public health system, especially in rural areas. The private health sector has been growing over the past two decades, especially in India's big cities, where an expanding class of affluent Indians can afford private care and it also accounts for 55 percent of hospital admissions. The pandemic has exposed the pathetic condition of India's healthcare system. During the second wave of Covid 19 or the ongoing condition, various challenges are comforting the healthcare system of India? The shortage of Oxygen supply, healthcare personals and shortage of vaccines, etc. There have been a lot of reports of a shortage of oxygen supply in Delhi, Maharashtra, etc. Maharashtra, which is home to India's financial capital Mumbai, is the hardest-hit state and also the epicenter for the second wave. The lack of oxygen to treat people with Covid-19 has drawn international attention. Many nations have also offered critical aid, including Belgium, Uzbekistan, Germany, France, Thailand, and the United Arab Emirates.

India's response while dealing with the pandemic

India's first Covid 19 case was detected just as the same day when WHO declared Covid 19 as a health emergency in the world. India alertly implemented surveillance as early as on January 17, even before the first cases officially detected. This was following by a series of travel advisories and restriction and a effort to repatriate and quarantine Indian nationals arriving from abroad. India has done various effort to deal with the situation when the pandemic out breaks starting from the 'Janata Curfew '. India went into full lockdown on March 24, at that time, India had just

500 confirmed Covid -19 cases and fewer than 10 deaths. The sudden lockdown had a severe impact on millions of low-income migrant workers and daily-wage earners. With no saving and little guidance or financial help from the government, these workers and their families faces food insecurity and hardships that led many to walk hundreds of miles to reach their villages. Migrant flight has serious implication on the already fragile rural health infrastructure.

After the end of first, Government of India loosen its restrictions and opened up every sector. At the end of February, India's election authorities announced key elections in five states where 186 million people were eligible to vote for 824 seats. Beginning 27 March, the polls would stretch over a month, and in the case of the state of West Bengal, be held in eight phases. Campaigning had begun in full swing, with no safety protocols and social distancing. No one was ready for the second wave. It caught everybody by surprise. In a very short time, it's turned into a major crisis. In less than a month, things began to unravel. India was in the grips of a devastating second wave of the virus and cities were facing fresh lockdowns. By mid-April, the country was averaging more than 100,000 cases a day.[1]

The second wave of the pandemic has hurt so hard in the healthcare system of India. It is worse than the first wave of the pandemic. It was largely because the crisis was made worse by a slow response from the government. Though some major steps have been taken in dealing with the first wave of the pandemic, the second wave turns out to be more challenging.

According to data shared by the Union ministry of health and family welfare, more than 70% of India's cases are being traced back to six states - Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Maharashtra was reporting almost 8 lakh cases every fortnight between April 8 and May 4, being at the top among states reporting high cases. Karnataka, UP and Kerala also added more than 4 lakh cases in a fortnight during that period. Delhi with three lakh cases was at the fifth position during April 21-May 4. Uttar Pradesh also has high of 3 lakh during the same period.[2]

There have been many cases of oxygen shortage in various stats. Delhi was one of the top states which has severely affected by the shortage of oxygen supply. The Delhi government as well as the chief minister requested the central government to supply them with sufficient number of oxygen supply. According to the New York Times Article (dated 31st 2021) stated that officially by late May, about 27 million infections had been confirmed and more than 300,000 people were dead, but experts said the actual figures were most likely much higher. At one point, India had been responsible for more than half of the world's daily Covid-19 cases and set a record-breaking pace of about 400,000 a day.[3] During this pandemic situation it can be observe that there are many reasons which collectively worsened the situation in India. Low level of testing , implementation , failure in containing the spread during lockdown , insufficient infrastructure, inadequate manpower as well as insufficient funding have serious impact on the health services. Unfortunately, the current approach in the healthcare sector appears to be 'business as usual' and the real threat has been that policy administrators have overestimated their ability and underestimate the virus and also the Indian citizens have taken the virus lightly and not followed strict compliance to Covid-19-appropriate behavior.

From the above discussion, it is very much clear that the Indian public healthcare system is not adequately sufficient to deal with the present health crisis. 30% of Indians do not have access to primary healthcare facilities. Millions Indian falls below the poverty line each year because of healthcare expenses. About 70% of Indians spend all their income on healthcare and drugs. The inability of the part of government is reflected in rather a poor visualization of the health system. Primary health centres (PHCs) in villages are supposed to screen and refer medical cases to hospitals in local districts or on to state-level specialist hospitals. However, PHCs are not sufficiently present and where the present is acutely undermanned. Moreover, as many as 18% of PHCs are entire without doctors. The only redeeming feature of the system is the committed cadre of Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANMs) who work at PHCs, and the accredited social health activists (ASHAs).

Ironically, India has been a success in eradicating smallpox and polio through targeted public intervention. India's Universal Immunization Programme

is renowned as one of the largest public health interventions in the world. The growing number of people requiring medical intervention is putting relentless pressure on the healthcare system, hospitals, and public healthcare agencies who are hard-pressed for time, investments, equipment and facilities, and train bed resources in successfully treating people.

Conclusion

The challenges that are presently faced by the healthcare system of India are emblematic of larger problems that will arise in near future. The ongoing inefficiency in the healthcare system of India is not only due to the present pandemic situation, there has always been incompetency on the part of the government to deal with a good healthcare facility around the country. This problem is not new to our concern but an age-old problem which India is facing for a long time. This isn't the first time that oxygen supply is scarce. Year after year, India's northern state of Uttar Pradesh sees outbreaks of Japanese encephalitis among children, a disease spread by the bite of a mosquito. In 2017, 30 children died suddenly at a hospital, likely due to a disruption in oxygen supply, though that could not be conclusively proven. It is, however, a reminder of what is happening in hospitals across India that have been running out of high-flow oxygen, resulting in deaths. Not only the supply of Oxygen there have been many issues that are creating a huge deadlock for the system. The issue of healthcare never had been in a forefront of any government since independence. There has been very limited investment in the healthcare system in comparison to many other countries of the world, even it is very less than its neighboring countries. The infrastructure, as well as the manpower in the healthcare system of India, is very much negligible. People of the ages are suffering due to insufficient healthcare. However this pandemic situation has worsened the healthcare system of India, it exposed the vulnerabilities of the system.

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MAKING OF TRADITIONAL RICE BEER AMONG TRIBAL COMMUNALITIES OF NORTHEAST INDIA WITH REFERENCE TO 'HOR-ALANG' OF THE KARBI COMMUNITY

Tarun Dutta

Abstract

In northeast India all tribal communities has their traditional beverages, either made from rice or from alternatives like fruits and using it traditionally for consumption as well as for worshiping of their deities and ancestors. Among these tribal communities Karbis of Assam, who occupied second largest community, traditionally makes a fermented rice beer, used as beverages and in worshiping, knows as Hor-Alang. The making process involves customary practices and used various medicinal herbs, which is enlighten in this paper.

Keyword : *Tribal, Tradition, Rice beer, Karbi, Hor-Alang,*

Introduction

India's Northeast, which comprises the eight states Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh (located between latitude 20° and 22° North and longitude 89°46' and 97°5' East) is a hotspot of diversity. Various ethnic groups (Appox. 225) live here with distinct cultural entities and bears rich traditional knowledge. The peoples' dietary habits are very interesting and a subject of study. People basically used natural products in most cases while they prepared their diet. Apart from food, one of their important beverages is fermented rice beer, which is traditionally prepared and almost all tribal communities of the Northeast consume it. The beverages are named differently by different ethnic groups.

Among these fermented rice beers *Aapong* is used by Mishing of Assam and Adis of Arunachal, *Bitchi* is brewed in the Garo tribes of Meghalaya *Lau Pani* and *Xaj* brewed by the Ahom tribe in Assam, *Yu* is prepared by Meitei community of Manipur, Zu is brewed by the Rabha tribe in Assam, Suje is brewed by Deori tribe of Assam, *Judima* by Dimasas of Assam, *Hor-Alang* is brewed by Karbi people of Assam, etc. The fermented rice beers traditionally prepared using locally available raw materials and other biological resources have been prepared for generations and is practiced even today by the descendants

Karbi- The Tribe

The Karbi tribes (in the colonial document they are known as *Mikir)* living in Karbi Anglong besides Dima Hasao, Kamrup, Kachar, Nagaon, Morigaon, Sonitpur District of Assam, and neighbouring states like Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland. Karbis are the second largest tribal community of Assam after the Bodos. The Karbi Anglong within the vicinity of a 10,434 sq km geographical area in the middle of the state of Assam is blessed with rich natural resources, flora and fauna, art and culture which is unique in its nature and is incomparable.

***Hor-Alang*- the fermented rice beverage of the Karbis**

Making of *Hor-Alang* is an antique tradition of the Karbis, which is prepared by fermenting boiled rice with yeast, the *Thap*, prepared locally, and

distilling the alcohol called *Hor A-rak* from the beer. The *Thap* contains leaves of Croton Joufra Roxb and raw rice. Some substitutes for C.Joufra are leaves of the Amomum Corynostachyum wall and bark of Acacia pennata. Adulterants such as Clerodendrum viscosum Vent, Zingiber Officinale rocs, Ricinus Communis L, Ananas Comosus [L] Merr, Artocarpus Heterophyllus Lam, Solanum Indicum L, Cymbopogon Citratus [DC] Stapf, jaggery, urea, charcoal and soot are used either to increase production of alcohol or to give strong taste. For historical reasons, a woman belonging to the section Bey-Ronghang of the sub-clan Bey and clan Hanjang, preparation of *Thap* is taboo.

Generally, rice of inferior quality is cooked and spread on an especially prepares bamboo mat called *an-tar* [*an*-cooked rice, *tar*-mat]. Cooked rice is then broken into fine grains and allowed to cool. An adequate quantity of powdered *thap* is thoroughly mixed with rice and the mixture is stored in pot [*tebuk*] or cooking utensil [*phole*] for 3 days during summer and up to 4 days during winter, for fermentation. For the collection of beer, a pit is usually made at the center where a cylindrical sieve made from bamboo splits called *hang-ru* is placed and *hor-lank* is retrieved with gourd shell called *lank jok*. The fermented rice excluding the beer before distillation is called *bechurang*. After the allotted period of fermentation and adequate quantity of water is added, mixed thoroughly and allowed to remain for 1 more night. This act of addition of water is called *hor kangthur*. The next day alcohol [*hor-arak*) is distilled from it. In the beginning, a very crude form of still called *bhot* was employed for distillation. It consists of an earthen pot with a swollen base and a long neck where fermented rice is placed an another earthen pot referred to as *bhot* with to lateral nozzles as outlets and whose mouth is tightly fitted to the mouth of the long – necked pot. Two bamboo tubes called *charang* are connected to the nozzles of the *bhot*, which separately leads to earthen pots, which are placed on condensers in the formed of saucers filled with cold water. *Charang* is usually made from *tereng* (neohouzeaua daullooa, Gamble A.camus) or *kaipho* (dendor kalamus hamiltonii nees and arn. Ex Munro) and consists of one or two internodes. The gaps between joins of the compartment of the still are shield with a mixture of paddy husk [bichurang and phek-e]. A little amount of *bichurang* is placed on top of the *bhot*. On hitting, the alcohol component

being volatile, formed vapour and reaches the *bhot,* which is collected as a liquid in earthen pots through the two *charang*. Completion of distillation is judged by the hardness of *bichurang*, placed on the *bhot* which of course requires a great deal of experience.

Bhot is an abandoned art and is replaced by an improved one at present. This consists of three components-the lower one is a metallic utensil which consists of the fermented rice; the middle part is an earthen pot which a perforated base called *Phule chekrak* [*phule*-cooking utensil; *chekrak*-perforated] and contains a small wooden bowl with tubular outlets called *chobak* to which the side tube *charang* is fitted. The *charang* in this case consists of a single inter-node and a node at one end. The upper part is actually a condenser in the form of a metallic saucer filled with cold water. The gap between the components of the steal is sealed with a mixture of *bichurang* and *phek-e.* On heating, alcohol forms vapour, passes through the perforated base of *phule chekrak* and reaches the cool base of the condenser where it becomes liquid and falls back on the *chobak.* The liquefied alcohol passes through the outlet and is then collected through the side tube [*charang*]. It is reported that when about 40 grams of *thap* is added to 5 kg. Of rice, about 5.5 liters of alcohol can be extracted. The fermented rice after distillation is now called *hor sera* or leftover. The latter is used as feed for pigs and sometimes as a fish attractant. It is, however, difficult to trace the origin of the primitive still, *bhot* as well as the improved still, but the latter is of common use among various tribes of Karbi Anglong District.

Rice being hard to come by, the hill Karbis uses other substrates such as eleusine corocana gaertn. [krem-malu or malu], ripe banana, jack fruit and citrullus vulgaris schrad. [Thoithe dumpre] for preparing hor. In this regard fermentation with C. vulgaris is worth mentioning. An appropriate hole is made on the fruit while it is still attached to the plant. The inner pericarp is scooped and to it, an adequate quantity of thap is added and mixed properly. The hole is then sealed with the part of the fruit removed earlier and allowed to remain for three nights. On the fourth day, the fruit is detached from the plant and the beer so formed is collected and consumed. Generally, distillation, in this case, is not carried out. In Karbi society, rice beer is divided into four types they are-

1. *Hor kangthir* or *Thap*: This type of wine is not drunk by the people. This is for *Hemphu arnam*. It should be kept in a clean and pure way.

2. *Horlang keman*: Rice bee [*Horlangr*] can be drunk by all people. This type of *Horlang* is made with cooked rice and mixed with yeast and keep it for 2 or 3 days at a hot temperature which later on produced *Horlang.* It is yellow in colour.

3. *Horpo keman*: This type of rice beer is white in colour after extracting the yellow liquid wine [*Horlang*] from the mixture of rice and yeasts. The mixture of rice and yeasts is again mixed with water, and again this water is extracted from rice and yeasts, which the water is called *Hor*po. This is not served to god this is only for people to drink.

4. *Hor Arak*: *Hor* is a very powerful intoxicating liquid. Karbi women make this type of wine [*Hor*] by the process of evaporation. The mixture of rice and yeasts with water will keep in the big vessel and heat it with fire, and the vapour which is produced is collected in another bottle and for this type of liquid is called *Hor Arak*.

The Karbi society and uses of *Hor-alang*

The Karbis are animists, worshipping surroundings nature, and natural objects like thick forests, big rivers, mountains, waterfalls, big trees, and even the moon and the sun. The Karbi society is blended with folklores, folk-song, and folk-tales. They follow some institutions generation after generation in oral mode and voodoos of mantras. And in each and every worship of the Karbis, including from birth to death ceremony, local homemade, Rice beer is very important. Without Rice beer, any rituals and worships of the Karbis cannot be done. Rice beer played a very important role in the lives of the Karbis. Rice beer is used in rituals and worships of the Karbis like-

- Worshiping of Rit anglong arnam, i.e. God of cultivation

- Worshiping of *Peng* arnam [God of household]

- Worshiping of Volok aseh or chinthong arnam [God of Law]

- At having Rongker [Great annual Village Festival]

- Worshiping of Habit aseh or Duikrai [God of Forest]

- At Sangkimi arnam kepi or ingtat kachejai [Offering of new rice to god]

- Worshiping of Chojun [God of heaven or Indra]

Conclusion

Hor-Alang is a traditional alcoholic beverage. It is produced by microbial fermentation of steamed rice with yeast and water. Different versions of this drink exist and they are locally known by different names. Although rice beer has been introduced to many other countries through trade and globalization, research into its characteristics and health benefits is still predominantly conducted in the regions of its origin.

Highly concentrated alcohol is locally preferred as *Hor-Acho* [*Hor-*alcohol; *acho-*pure/ concentrated]. *Hor-acho* is sometimes used as medicine in rural areas in cases like dysentery and pharyngitis. For this purpose one or two doses @ 10-50 ml. *Hor-acho* is taken to cure the ailments. During the 1960s and 1970s when there was an epidemic of cholera, people in rural areas used to rub *Hor-acho* on their bodies as a precaution. *Horlang* is often used as a preservative for dried fish [manthu]; dried fishes are first soaked in salt water and then sprinkled with *Horlang*. They are properly mixed and stored in a dried bamboo tube called *lang pong*. *Horlang* is reported to add aroma and flavor and increase the longevity of the food [i.e. dried fish]. When compared to traditional wine [made from grapes or other fruits], as well as beer, wine made from rice contains more alcohol. Its alcohol content can be in the range of 18% to 25%. In comparison, regular wine usually contains 10% to 20% alcohol, whereas beer ranges from 4% to 8% alcohol. Therefore, it is natural to assume that drinking too much of this wine –or any other alcoholic beverage for that matter might not be beneficial for the body. Moreover, because of rice wine's higher alcohol content, the familiar effects of alcohol- such as nausea, blurry vision, lost balance, lost muscle control,

and a hangover- might be felt earlier than consuming a similar portion of drink with less alcohol content.

However, there are also many documented health benefits of drinking rice beer. Rice beer is a highly nutritious beverage that contains an abundance of essential amino acids, sugars and organic acids, as well as vitamins and minerals. Since rice beer is a fermented product, it is not surprising that the drink also contains many strains of lactic acid bacteria, which are often considered probiotic. Although traditional home remedies can often have a therapeutic value, these examples show that generalizations can be dangerous. The Health benefits of rice beer should not be taken out of the context of scientific research. Uninformed applications can sometimes have a harmful effect, as seen in this example. Furthermore, and perhaps most important, many medical professionals believe that any potential benefits from the consumption of various alcoholic beverages are not worth the risks that are associated with ingesting ethanol.

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PROSPECTS OF GANDHIAN WORLD ORDER IN A VIOLENCE- STRICKEN WORLD

Dibyajyoti Dutta

Abstract

The present day the world order is marked by increased competitiveness and hostilities. The onward march of neo-liberal globalization facilitates widespread consumerism and individualism which incommodes collective-spirited society that the Father of the Nation, M.K. Gandhi envisioned. The essence of Gandhian thought stands on the edifice of non violence and freedom. Contrary to that, the contemporary world order is heavily driven by the Darwinian dictum of the 'survival of the fittest'. In view of this, this article examines the relevance of Gandhian worldview that intends to develop a egalitarian society.

Keywords: *Gandhi, Violence, peace, egalitarianism, inequality*

Introduction

> "The World will live in peace, only when the individuals composing it make up their minds to do so."

> -M.K. Gandhi (1995: 70)

The world has witnessed many wars, battles and hostility in the past whereby peace is strangled and tranquillity subdued. Such pernicious acts have happened at a time when scientific temperament and innovations endowed humanity with the roadmap of a rational world order. The onward march of neo-liberal globalization facilitates widespread consumerism and individualism which incommodes collective-spirited society that the Father of the Nation, M.K. Gandhi had envisioned. The essence of Gandhian thought stands on the edifice of non violence and freedom. Contrary to that, the contemporary world order is heavily driven by the Darwinian dictum of the 'survival of the fittest'. The gap between the rich and the poor and vulnerable has been widened; millions are victimised by varied patterns of violence; environmental degradation and cultural disruption have become necessary corollaries of economic growth while the weaker and dispossessed sections are being further marginalised. The recent surge of violence and intolerance gripping most parts of the world reflects a deviation from world peace, co-operation and stability sought to be achieved in the Post Cold War period through international institutions and international law. Against these backdrops, this paper makes an attempt to re-locate Gandhi to interrogate alternative means of re-establishing international cooperation and mutual inter-dependence in the contemporary world order.

Has Violence become a norm?

Violence, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), is 'the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation.'[1] This definition of violence includes within its ambit both inter personal violence as well as armed conflict. Threats or intimidations against persons

or communities which poses serious risks to their security and well being also resemble violent behaviour. There is no single cause of violence. There is a multitude of complex inter -connections of cultural, social, economic and political factors influencing violence.

Global violence has increased manifold in recent times. Global peace is being hampered with increased incidences of violence. Civil war, increased militarization, terror attacks, crime against women and children and the elderly has been on the rise. It was reported by the Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) that 2461 deaths and injuries from 257 incidents of explosive violence around the world were recorded in June 2018 where civilians accounted for 67% of the deaths and injuries recorded.[2] Homicides in Mexico rose by 16% during the first half of 2018.[3] Countries like Syria and Afghanistan have been torn apart by years of internal conflict. Military and security spending aimed at prevention of and containment of violence have had a considerable impact on global economy. At a time, when the countries have geared their policies towards sustainable development and have pledged to reduce global poverty, such staggering numbers of incidences of violence puts a question mark on their achievements. There is growing consensus that the world is on the brink of war. Rising violence in the aftermath of the Arab spring and the consequent mayhem in the middle eastern countries, rising fuel price, crisis in the European Union, brewing tensions between the US, Russia and China, trade war among countries etc. point to the rising insecurities in the world. On one hand there is power play in a multi polar world order with countries vying for protection of their sovereignty and national interests and on the other call for a greater democratization of public space. According to the Global Peace Index, 2018, the economic impact of violence to the global economy was USD 14.76 trillion in 2017 which is roughly 12.4% of world gross domestic product (GDP) or USD 1,988 per person.[4]

Violence has become so pervasive in the modern world that most of such incidents occurring on a daily basis attract scarce attention. We often debate about the spread of violence and how to contain it, but we end up prescribing more violence to address the wounds. The whole issue of arms proliferation is based on

the premise of promoting violence as a power and justifying use of weapons as a necessity to maintain peace, law and order. Is violence justified for a good cause? This is a critical question today and most people would react to it by pointing to terrorism, crime, the need for defence of vulnerable sections of society and so on. But history is witness to the fact that violence begets more violence.[5] There exist varied patterns of violence. Three categories of it are being discussed here:

Occurrence of Violence because of the failure of the State

A cursory look into the incidences of violence occurred in our own country would facilitate one to gauge the existence of varied pattern of violence. Violence occurs because of lawlessness and failure of institutions. It may of communal violence, mob lynching so on and so forth. According to Home Ministry data, communal violence is on the increasing trend. It has increased 28 percent over three years to 2017 – 822 "incidents" were recorded that year – but it was short of the decadal high of 943 in 2008 (IndiaSpend: 2018).[6] The National Crime Records Bureau reported that total cognizable crimes (as per Indian Penal Code) in India in 2016 alone stood at 29,75,711 (NCRB:2016), out of which 1,10,378 such cases are against women and perpetrated by husbands or other relatives.

Violence steered by the State

The state is a juridical entity, a legitimate power structure and authority. The prime responsibility of the state is to protect and preserve the interest of the people. We obey the diktats of the state as sacrosanct, also knowing the fact that state regiments us on many counts. Such regimentations sometimes become vicious and fatal. State resorts to the means of violence to stop 'violence'. In the name of addressing insurgencies, terrorism, left wing extremism and other forms of activisms, state insidiously resorts to violence. The case of Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958 is one best example. Still operational in the Northeast region and in Jammu and Kashmir, the provisions of the Act (section-4) allows an officer above the rank of a *Havildar* to shoot a person if s/he suspects somebody to be disturbing peace. This is a clear indication of the violation of Article 21 of the Constitution of India that enunciates 'Right to life' as a Fundamental Right. Home to more than 200

ethnic groups, with roughly 45 million people (4% of the population of India), the North-eastern states have experienced a different kind of atrocities being legitimised by the Indian state. There are 72 Armed Groups in the Northeast, Government recruits 5,00,000 armed personnel to tackle conflicts, 20,000 widows have been crying for justice in Manipur, all youths (19-40) are treated as suspects in the AFSPA imposed areas (Nepram: 2015).

Violence at the Global level

The onward march of globalization has brought into fore a new kind of world order. Collisions and competitions for power have wrecked civilizations. The market driven neo-liberal economy has on the other hand impacted heavily on the ownership, control and realisation of resources making the global power equations more complex and critical. After the Cold war, the humanity has seen Iraq invasion, destruction of Afghanistan, the Syrian crisis, Rohingiya crisis etc. Thousands of people were killed, thousands of homes destructed in the name of exercising unbridled power. Most of the states today possess 'nuclear second strike capacity', i.e. if a country is wiped out of the map, even then, the victim country can retaliate with equal destructive force.

Is there any antidote to violence?

The antidote to violence is clearly to promote the culture of non-violence, what Gandhi called as *Ahimsa*. If non-violence is promoted as the highest ethical value, the world will transform into a heavenly abode. Non-violence means absence of aggression, presence of negotiation and discourse; and peaceful settlement of disputes. Spiritual awakening can help us live in complete harmony with fellow humans and nature.[7]

Gandhi idealized three significant movements- (i) Civic Disobedience to express dissatisfaction against the colonial dispensation, (ii) Non-Cooperation to expound the power of the common man in running the country and (iii) quit India- the most significant and popular among them all to root out colonial domination from the soil of the country. In doing so, what Gandhi did is quite overwhelming. Gandhi spiritualised politics, which is in fact, the core of Gandhian philosophy.

Freedom to him is central for human emancipation. And he quite brilliantly professed that freedom is not absolute, it corresponds to diversity.

Gandhi was aware that violence begets violence. He at many instances commented that mankind's greed over resources and material wealth are sources of many discords and disagreements. We have seen in the past how resource rich underdeveloped countries are being targeted by the powerful ones in order to exploit resources.

Though non-violence is a significant remedy to redress violence, the theory of Trusteeship, though utopian is quite relevant these days to address violence to a considerable degree. Since, resource is the source of all conflicts (some way or the other), the remedy lies in its judicious and sustainable use. Gandhi noted-

"Supposing I have come by a fair amount of wealth – either by way of legacy, or by means of trade and industry – I must know that all that wealth does not belong to me; what belongs to me is the right to an honourable livelihood, no better than that enjoyed by millions of others. The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community. I enunciated this theory when the socialist theory was placed before the country in respect to the possessions held by zamindars and ruling chiefs. They would do away with these privileged classes. I want them to outgrow their greed and sense of possession, and to come down in spite of their wealth to the level of those who earn their bread by labour. The labourer has to realize that the wealthy man is less owner of his wealth than the labourer is owner of his own, viz., the power to work." -Harijan, 3-6-1939, p. 145

The onward march of capitalism has brought into being a consumerist culture embedded in individualism and market economy. Consumerism has become so rampant that many modern states have even engaged in capturing the resources of other states which is best explicated in John Perkins's "The Confessions of an Economic Hitman: The shocking inside story of how America Really took over the world" (2005).[8] Perkins illustrated how aid has been used by successive governments of the USA to control and manage the resources of the developing

and underdeveloped countries. Perkins highlighted that the 'US aid' often comes with the hidden expansionistic agenda of capitalism. Loans are granted initially at very cheaper rates only to entrap developing countries and then the resources of recipient countries are extracted. Perkins's contemplation corroborates the 'Dependency Theory' developed by Andre Gunder Frank. In his book 'The Development of Underdevelopment (1966), Frank explained that the rich countries are rich because of the resource exploitation by them from the poor countries.[9] Jaffrey Sachs explained that the foreign aid has been flowing to the countries reeling under massive poverty. The United States of America and other donor nations agreed in the Monterrey Consensus, to *"urge all developed countries that have not done so to make concrete efforts toward the goal of O.7 percent of gross domestic product as official development assistance"* as a matter of priority. Former U.S. President George W. Bush himself visited Monterrey to announce a surprising increase of U.S. foreign assistance in a new project known as the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA).[10] In sum, though aid politics is tricky and a means to enter into the developmental field of the resource rich countries, but one thing is manifestly clear that countries care for the other countries reeling under massive poverty, hunger and underdevelopment. If this is the case, Gandhi's theory of Trusteeship can be translated into reality (of course with modifications appropriate to the present requirements).

The final draft of the Trusteeship theory as envisioned by Gandhi reads as follows:

1. Trusteeship provides a means of transforming the present capitalist order of society into an egalitarian one. It gives no quarter to capitalism, but gives the present owning class a chance of reforming itself. It is based on the faith that human nature is never beyond redemption.

2. It does not recognize any right of private ownership of property except so far as it may be permitted by society for its own welfare.

3. It does not exclude legislative regulation of the ownership and use of wealth.

4. Thus under State-regulated trusteeship, an individual will not be free to hold or use his wealth for selfish satisfaction or in disregard of the interests of society.

5. Just as it is proposed to fix a decent minimum living wage, even so a limit should be fixed for the maximum income that would be allowed to any person in society. The difference between such minimum and maximum incomes should be reasonable and equitable and variable from time to time so much so that the tendency would be towards obliteration of the difference.

- Harijan, 25-10-1952 *

Under Gandhian economic order the character of production will be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed. In sharp contrast to capitalistic worldview, Gandhi idealised a society free from inequality and injustice. His contemplation on trusteeship chalks out a plan where property owning class surrenders their resources for a noble cause. The individualistic and consumerist culture would certainly stand as obstacle in its materialisation; however, if realised, it would certainly do away with the mad race. The world's eight richest billionaires control the same wealth between them as the poorest half of the globe's population, according to a charity warning of an ever-increasing and dangerous concentration of wealth. Oxfam reported that 'it was "beyond grotesque" that a handful of rich men headed by the Microsoft founder Bill Gates are worth USD 426 billion equivalent to the wealth of 3.6 billion people.'[11] The world's millionaires are expected to do the best in the coming years. There are now 36 million millionaires in the world, and their numbers are expected to grow to 44 million by 2022. Precisely 1% population own 50% of the total world's resources.[12]

Gandhi was concerned about such inequalities prevail in our societies. He visualised a means through which inequality could be abolished. Gandhi while answering the question 'whether the accumulation of capital possible except through violence whether open or tacit' (Harijan, 16-2-1947, p. 25) noted that such accumulation by private persons was impossible except through violent means but

accumulation by the State in a non-violent society was not only possible, it was desirable and inevitable.

Conclusion

Gandhi was a humanist, a true believer and practitioner of non-violence. Gandhi's worldview postulates freedom and egalitarianism as core values. The contemporary world witnessed divisive politics, fragmentations on the basis of caste, religion, language, sex and colour. Violence becomes the order and in order to contain violence 'more violent means' are being employed. In a way, the world has turned into a hotspot of violence. There are no remedies that can cure the ills unless people imbibe the principles of non-violence, peace and tranquillity- the core values of Gandhian philosophy. Gandhi's trusteeship theory today becomes more relevant where the rich denounces resources to the cause of humanity. Though utopian it seems, it has true potential to address challenges concerning humanity.

Notes :

[1] World Report on Violence and Health (2002), World Health Organization, Geneva, p 3 accessed from http://www.who.int/violence_injury_ prevention/violence/world_report/en/abstract_en.pdf on 20.08.2018

[2] https://aoav.org.uk/2018/explosive-violence-in-june-2018/

[3] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/23/mexico-crime-homicides-violence-up-report

[4] Global Peace Index (2018). Institute for Economics and Peace, http://visionofhumanity.org/reports

[5] https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/relevance-of-non-violence-in-today-s-times

[6] https://www.firstpost.com/india/communal-violence-rose-by-28-from-2014-to-2017-but-2008-remains-year-of-highest-instances-of-religious-violence-4342951.html

[7] https://www.speakingtree.in/blog/relevance-of-non-violence-in-today-s-times

[8] Perkins, John, "The Confessions of an Economic Hitman: The shocking inside storu of how America Really took over the world" Random House: London, 2005.

[9] Banerjee, Abhijit V. and Esther Duflo, (2011), *Poor Economics,* Noida: Random House India, p.4

[10] Sachs, Jaffrey. D, (2005), *The End of Poverty*, New York: The Penguin Press, p. 218

[11] https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/jan/16/worlds-eight-richest-people-have-same-wealth-as-poorest-50.

[12] https://www.cnbc.com/2017/11/14/richest-1-percent-now-own-half-the-worlds-wealth.html.

BOOK REVIEW
TROUBLED PERIPHERY - CRISIS OF INDIA'S NORTH EAST BY SUBIR BHAUMIK, NEW DELHI: SAGE PUBLICATIONS INDIA PVT. LTD., PAPERBACK EDITION, 2015; PP 305

Sun Gogoi

'*Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East*' authored by Subir Bhaumik, is a scholastic work on the roots and dimensions of the multifaceted post-colonial political crisis of the Northeastern India. It highlights how the aspects and issues centered on culture, ethnicity, ideology, religion, and economic marginalization have shaped the nature of popular dissent and insurgency in the region. Further, the author throws light on the obstacles in the path of development, and subsequently he envisions a road ahead to a better future for the Northeast, which in his view, is a peripheral zone of India. Northeast has a population of 39 million and about 475 ethnic groups and sub-groups speaking over 400 different languages and dialects of which 175 belong to the Tibeto-Burman group. The two largest dominant groups of the plains are the Assamese and the Bengalis consisting of about several million each. On the other hand, the tribal population of the region numbers only about little more than two million. Apart from ethnicity which dominates the political process of the region, the Northeast has always been subject to the complex interplay of 'ideology' and 'religion' both in the pre and the post independence period. While Hinduism and Islam are major religions in the plains, Christianity dominates the hills. The advent of colonization in Assam (1826) was followed by relentless migration of traders, workers, manual laborers and peasants from the rest of the Indian subcontinent, particularly the undivided Bengal and North India, which was an outcome of colonial political economy which was primarily aimed at

promoting capitalism in the newly conquered region. It sowed the seeds of the problems of demographic accommodation, cultural confrontation and conflict of material interests in the Northeast.

The nomenclature 'Northeast' was a colonial and administrative construct like the erstwhile 'North-Western Provinces' of India.[1] The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) led to the expansion of British Empire in the region. After the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys had come under the grip of the colonizers, their commercial interest in Assam gradually expanded and they felt the need of a stable 'Northeast frontier', a term used to denote the hill ranges of the Northeast inhabited by different tribal groups. The colonial masters overemphasized the 'absence of civilization' and 'warlike nature' of those groups to justify their incursions into the hills. As an outcome of this expansionist move, 'Eastern', the former connotation of this frontier region of Bengal was now shifted to the 'Northeastern', a new geo-political nomenclature in the early 1870s. The demarcation of the 'Inner Line' at foothills of the two valleys marked the limits of regular colonial revenue administration. This exclusionist policy in the long run added to the alienation of the so called 'unruly' hills from the 'civilized' plains and thus widened the cultural and political distances between their inhabitants. Beyond the Inner Line, the tribal people of hills were left out of the British revenue administration to manage their day to day affairs only being subject to 'good behavior' with the people of plains and the colonial masters. The colonizers were reluctant to bring those groups under a rigid polity. It is evident that during Ahom days too, the neighboring hill tribes were mostly left to their own devices and the degree of Ahom sovereignty over them had always been fluctuating. Amongst the ethnic groups and tribes of the South-East Asia, the political culture of 'self-governance' and 'evading state' was prevalent. James C. Scott argues that the dominant discourses of 'state making' – both historic and contemporary virtually pays no attention to the history of 'deliberate' and 'reactive' statelessness.[2] Down through the centuries, they have been fleeing the suppression of the state-making projects in the valleys. "Civilizational discourses never entertain the possibility of people voluntarily going over to the barbarians, hence such statuses are stigmatized and ethnicized. Ethnicity and "tribe" begin exactly where the taxes and sovereignty

end – in the Roman Empire as in the Chinese'', Scott said.[3] Ironically in the context of the both colonial and the post-colonial India, the birth of generic ethnic and tribal identities is connected with the process of colonial state-making and then post-colonial nation-building themselves. These identities are essentially modern and they do not necessarily exist beyond state sovereignty. A clear view of the people of the Southeast Asia, according to Scott, is blocked as most of their history is obsessed with 'state': classical, colonial and independent. Bhaumik too is looking at the matter within the purview of the Indian state. Those who are unfamiliar with this 'anarchist' history of the region and the sustained diversity and complexity, are not supposed to grasp the matter at first reading. The focus on comprehensive issues, particularly in the case of Northeast where a unified history never had existed before the advent of colonialism, requires lucid understanding of backgrounds before one understands the individual stories of the states in light of the Indian nation building process. The unique racial construct of the region helps its people to develop a sense of 'being different' from the rest of India.

Bhaumik highlights that after the partition, Gopinath Bordoloi, the erstwhile Chief Minister of Assam was pressured by the Centre to accept more than 600,000 Hindu-Bengali refugees by 1961. Nehru threatened Bordoloi with denial of federal development funds unless Assam agreed to share the refugee burden of India. Though the Assamese middle class and common masses joined hands with the Centre in the process of nation building, they were immensely resentful of the state's changing demography, land loss to Bengali migrants and uneven distribution of the resources exploited from the Northeast by the Centre. Today, separatist ideologues of the region frequently refer to the virtual withdrawal of Indian army from the region in front of the advancing Chinese in the early sixties followed by Nehru's farewell address: '*My heart goes out to the people of Assam*', only to justify their allegation that the 'heartland' Indians consider not only Assam, but the entire Northeast as its mere 'colony' in practice. They have even questioned India's moral right to exercise its sovereignty over the region.

The author notices that most of the ethnic groups of the region recognized the supremacy of the Indian Constitution without must protest after independence.

However, he holds the case of the Nagas as an exception as violence erupted in the Naga Hills district in the immediate aftermath of Independence. Being grappled with the crisis, the Indian Government introduced a draconian law named Armed Forces Special Power Act (AFSPA), 1958. It is a virtual murder of the democratic spirit of the Indian Constitution. Soyam Lokendrajit asserts that "AFSPA is a Black Law more draconian than the Asia Law Amendment Ordinance Gandhi opposed in 1906 with Satyagraha in South Africa".[4] AFSPA, empowering the army to shoot and kill just on the basis of mere suspicion engenders an atmosphere of terror, anxiety and violation of human dignity in different pockets of Northeast, thereby rendering the people incapable of discharging their developmental human instinct. The justice Reddy Commission (2004) in its review of the provisions of the act recommended that AFSPA should be repealed: "the Act, for whatever reason, has become a symbol of oppression, an object of hate and instrument of discrimination and highhandedness".[5] Bhaumik lays heavy stress on the need for Indian state's response to the widespread public demand for withdrawal of AFSPA and implementation of the recommendations of official committees that suggest alternative less draconian measures.

Bhaumik throws light on how the tribal groups of the region as an outcome of their forced incorporation with the Indian state before and after Independence, were reluctant to share a common Identity with the people of mainland India. The author emphasizes the common identification of this region as the 'Mongoloid fringe' of India, thus placing an anti-thesis to the politically dominant Aryan Caste-Hindu culture that prevails in the mainland India and the Brahmaputra valley of Assam. It is evident that the politics in Northeast witnessed the Mongoloid-Aryan dichotomy during the last days of the British-Indian Empire. The objective behind the formation of the All Assam Tribal League in1933 was to bring the Mongoloid tribes and communities together on a common platform and to exert political power for their all round socio-economic uplift. In the recent decades, the Northeast has been experiencing the growing tendency of asserting generic identities among different ethnic groups, which were introduced in the last colonial days and cemented in the early days of nation building. In view of the author, the material advantages that follow the recognition as Scheduled Tribe (ST) have motivated

'political tribalization'. The author cites the instance of the Lashkars or the *Deshi Tripuras* who preferred to be recognized as 'local Bengalis' during the princely rule in Tripura, but later on sought recognition as a ST to secure politico-economic benefits.

However, this journey of shifting identities has never been as straight for all the ethnic groups of the region as shown by Bhaumik. For instance, most of the educated Ahoms, a socio-politically advanced group amongst the Mongoloid communities of the Brahmaputra valley, were happy to be recognized as 'Hindus' during the colonial days. Unlike several other ethnic communities of the region, they were reluctant to seek political privileges from the colonial state by identifying themselves as 'tribal'. On the other hand, representatives of several other groups from both the hills and plains of the Northeastern India like Nagas, Mikirs (Karbis), Kacharis (Bodos), Deories and Miris (Misings) met the Simon Commission that visited Shillong in 1929, seeking special political privileges from the colonizers, which would be later on materialized under the Government of India Act, 1935. Instead, some leaders of the Ahom Association in the early 20th century had been seeking socio-cultural recognition as *Kshatriya* which means the *Varna* or group of the 'rulers and warriors' in traditional Hindu society.

In the early 18th century, the *sanskritized*[6] Ahom elites including the *Swargadeo*s[7] (Monarchs) were branded as *Anarya Hindu* (non-Aryan Hindu) by the *Bhattacharyya* Brahmins of Bengali origin who gave them initiation. Thus, even at the zenith of their political power in the Brahmaputra valley, the Ahoms remained theoretically alienated from the mainstream Aryan Hindu society of the valley. On the eve of independence, however, the desire of the Ahom middle class was thwarted by the opposition of some upper caste Hindus of the Brahmaputra valley. The *Auniati Satra* and the *Dakhinpat Satra*, two prominent stake-holders of the egalitarian *neo-Vaishnavite* culture of Assam, approved a literary work named *Repunjoy Smriti* (1934), which was published under the initiative of Tirthanath Goswami, the erstwhile *Satradhikar* of the *Dhalar Satra*.[8] Goswami was also the president of the first session of the *Asom Satra Sangha* in 1925. This book was all about the hierarchical Hindu social order and it placed the Ahoms within the fold

of other socially alienated castes of Assam such as the Kaivartas. The book was circulated in whole Jorhat region and its copies were easily available in bookstalls. Consequently in Dibrugarh, the All Assam Ahom Council held its meeting which witnessed heated discussion about the matter. The Ahom leaders totally lost their confidence and trust on the so called upper Caste religious mentors of Assam, and the meeting decided that all Ahoms would strictly follow the *Chaw-Klong* ceremony for marriage and would not depend anymore on the above mentioned people.[9] Subsequently the Ahoms too sought 'tribal' recognition along with several other ethnic communities of Assam in the aftermath of independence.

Apart from the issues of 'material consideration', therefore, the tendency for tribalization was further accelerated by the exclusionist casteism amongst a section of the 'ethnic Assamese', a term used by several researchers to denote the Assamese speaking forward castes of the region. This nomenclature itself is an exclusionist one as it tends to alienate not only the population groups of immigrant origin from Bengal or the rest of India, but also the indigenous tribal population and other ethnic groups of the state. Sanjib Baruah remembering his interactions with a mainland Indian army officer in the 1990s has written that "For instance, I was taken aback when I first heard what was then a rather new term, 'ethnic Assamese'……The gentleman asked me if I was an ethnic Assamese. Until then I was used to saying that I am an Assamese, just as in India a Bengali, a Gujarati or a Malayalee would identify him- or herself. But why the odd qualifier 'ethnic', I wondered".[10] The growing tendency for tribalization in the aftermath of independence is not necessarily to be interpreted only in terms of economic determinism/material aspirations. Superiority complex of the dominant section of the 'Assamese' society psychologically thwarted some other tribes of the valley like the Bodos, the Deories and the Misings, largely keeping them away from the mainstream society and politics.

Thus, if one observes with a micro-perspective within the 'troubled periphery' of Assam, it will be substantiated that virtually another periphery exists (within the greater periphery) where lies the tribal groups, and other Mongoloid communities of Assam who have adopted Hinduism, but ironically remained

alienated from the *Varna* /caste system; which has been the lifeline of Vedic Hinduism since time immemorial. In practice, the *Sanskritized* Mongoloid communities of Assam have often been treated like *Shudras*, the group of people that exists at the bottom of the traditional caste hierarchy. Such dichotomies have led to identity crisis and clashes not only amongst the ethnic groups or between the ethnic groups and the state, but within some of the ethnic groups as well. The identities pertaining to several of them can be located in an ambiguous and fluctuating position between the traditional ethnic traits and the process of *Sanskritization.*

Bhaumik subsequently highlights the interconnection of religious ideology with the politics of regional nationalism and separatist movements. Muivah, much less a practicing Christian than the erstwhile National Socialist Council of Nagaland: Isaac-Muivah (NSCN-IM) Chairman Isak Swu, introduced the phase 'Nagaland for Christ'. The senior leaders of the Mizo National Front (MNF) went ahead in championing Christianity by personally conducting church services in rebel camps. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) on the other hand, remains silent on the question of religion as it would not be conducive in pursuing their dream of a *Swadhin Asom* (Sovereign Assam). The ULFA was reported to have contained communal riots in the Hojai region of Nagaon district by displaying arms openly soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid at the hands of the Hindu Chauvinists forces in December, 1992.

The author throws light on the 'ethnic imbalance' in power sharing as a cause behind the quest for retribalization within the ethnic groups. The internal contradiction within the groups confines the growth of regional ethnic nationalism as an anti-thesis to the broader Indian nationalism. A nation (ethnic group), according to Benedict Anderson, is an 'imagined political community'. It is imagined as 'limited' because it has finite (if elastic) boundaries, beyond which other nations exist. No nation imagines itself 'coterminous' with mankind and hence, is exclusive in nature.[11] The Naga nationalism has been weakened by the rivalry between the Tangkhuls and the Angamis, and thus has remained an incomplete process till date. This rivalry can be considered as an outcome of fragmented political

imagination backed by the power politics of Naga hills. The quest for hegemony made Muivah, the Tangkhul Naga leader of the NSCN-IM to brand the Angami Nagas as the 'revolutionary traitors', whereas the Tangkhuls, his own group, as the 'revolutionary patriots'. It is noticed on the other hand that the Tangkhuls living in Manipur, Indo-Myanmar frontier and the Upper Myanmar are labeled as *Kaccha Naga* (impure Naga) by the rest of the Naga people.

The experiences of 'forced assimilation' with the so called mainstream deepened the tribes' sense of cultural marginalization and political alienation. The politically ambitious emerging middle class and intellectuals amongst the tribes from both hills and plains raised their voice and mobilized their influence over the respective communities to resist the authoritarian behaviour of the state which was virtually being controlled by the dominant upper caste-Hindus of Assam. He emphasized the role of 'language' as an instrument of the politics of socio-political polarization that is starkly evident in Assam and Tripura. Resenting the imposition of Bengali language (1837-73) the Assamese middle class developed a sense of linguistic chauvinism in the following decades. In the late 1950s, the government of the erstwhile undivided Assam legally, but forcibly introduced Assamese over all other communities and tribes. This big-brotherly attitude of the ethnic Assamese dominated state government paved the way for breaking away of most of the hill tribes and their respective territories from Assam during 1960s-1980s.

The Assamese speaking population is increasingly insecure about its survival as a dominant group. The so-called mainstream Assamese and the tribal communities of the region still fear cultural subordination at the hands of the Bengali 'middle class' (Hindu), and demographic conquest at the hands of the Bengali 'peasantry' (Muslim). The strategy of language imposition has been at work in Tripura where the Bengali migrants now overwhelm the indigenous tribal population to impose the Bengali language and scripts and wrest political and social control. On the other hand, this tendency proved to be threatening and provocative for the tribal groups of the undivided Assam across the hills and plains. The author highlights how the decision of the state government undermines the distinct linguistic identity of different ethnic groups, and garnered a separatist tendency among the

Bodos who had formed their own *Sahitya Sabha* (1952) which in the late 1960s would play a decisive role in linguistic politics of the state by recommending the abolition of the Assamese script and its replacement as a medium of instruction with the Roman script. When in 1974, the Bodo primer *Bithorai* (written in Roman script) was introduced in the schools of Bodo-dominated areas, the state government stopped financial grants for Bodo primary schools. It resulted in a massive movement in the Bodo areas. After the negotiation with the central government, the *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* agreed to adopt *Devanagari* script for the Bodo language. But it increasingly divided the Bodos along a religious line as the Christian Bodos and the most of the Bodo students educated in Shillong strongly advocated the use of Roman script enjoying the backing of the separatist National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB). This language-centric internal rivalry thwarted the quest for a united Bodo nationalism to a great extent.

The issue of land alienation remains a root of conflict in the region which sows the seeds of ethnic hatred first at the individual level and then it is transmuted to the level of collective or group. Makiko Kimura traces the root of the infamous Nellie Massacre (1983) in long standing land alienation problem of the Tiwas in light of the fear psychosis amongst the indigenous communities and the ideology of the Assam Agitation.[12] Bhaumik too holds the issue of land alienation responsible for the massacre of the Muslims of Bengali origin. However, being a journalist in practice, the author throws light only on the outcomes or the 'ends'; and unlike Kimura, Bhaumik seems to be less interested in highlighting the complicated interconnection amongst the issues of land alienation, the ideology of the Assam Movement and the event of Nellie. Whether the leadership and the goals of the Assam Agitation were genuinely in favor of the tribal people, hitherto it has been a debated question. A section of scholars like Kimura believes that the leaders of the agitation raised the issue of land alienation amongst the tribes only in order to back their claim that the influx of foreigners created socio-economic problems in Assam. The incident has been generalized by Bhaumik as a 'tribal attack' on the Muslims executed mainly by the Tiwas (traditionally known as 'Lalung'). However, now it is substantiated that apart from the Tiwa tribesmen (being the preponderant participants of the attack), the local Koch and other marginalized Assamese communities too joined the Tiwas to execute the event.

The post-Assam Accord (1985) socio-political scenario of Assam was marked by communal colorization of electoral politics. The six year long Assam Movement and the subsequent victimization of the Muslims of East Bengal origin ruptured the ongoing assimilation process converting them overnight from the *Na-Asamiyas* (New-Assamese) to *Miyas* or Bangladeshis (foreigners). It was like a paradigm shift in the way of Assamese nationalist imagination. In recent years the East Bengali Muslims have asserted themselves more as Muslims rapidly polarizing the state politics in communal line. Such polarization has facilitated the advent of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the Brahmaputra valley as a pro-Hindu antithesis to the minority consolidation, and finally the saffron party with its regional allies formed government in Dispur winning the assembly election of 2016.[13]

The author remarks that in Northeast, the outbreak of insurgency has been more frequent than elsewhere in the country. The recourse to armed-struggle has often been the first, rather than the last option of a frustrated or relatively deprived ethnic group or tribe. Armed rebellion in Northeast is a typical language for these groups to express their disillusionment and grievances. The problem lies mostly in the failure of Indian state to address the regional economic grievances and political aspirations. Moreover, the strategic geo-political location of Northeast too encourages different groups of the region to resort to armed struggle as a primary path. Kautilya's four principles of *Sham* (political reconciliation), *Dam* (monetary inducement), *Danda* (force) and *Bheda* (split) has been applied amply in dealing with the insurgent groups of the region. However, till date these policies have succeeded only in bringing about partial solutions to the long standing crisis. The author emphasized the case of Mizoram as an exception in this context. The Mizo Accord (1986) was a 'durable' one as it was recognized and approved not by a fraction of MNF, but by the entire leadership of the organization. Unfortunately in the cases of NSCN, ULFA and some other insurgent groups of the region, it can be noticed that the emerging fractions in leadership and the consequent ambiguity has become an obstacle in the path of peace making for both of the insurgent groups and the Indian state.

The author throws light on the role governments and the non-state actors of the neighboring foreign countries in the sustenance of insurgent groups and

proliferation of insurgency in Northeast. The majority of the leadership and the cadres of those organizations are trained in the frontier regions of the countries like China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh. The rebels have made their camps in hills and jungle terrains across the international borders. He holds the Sino-Pakistani Axis responsible for the growth of insurgency during the 1950s and the 1960s. After 1971, the newborn Bangladesh allegedly backed almost all militant groups of Northeast. This nexus is marked by the working of criminal syndicates of guns, drugs and other contrabands. This illegal trade network is encouraged by cheaper foreign goods of China and Southeast Asia, corrupt local authorities and the difficult terrains of the border regions.

Bhaumik has contested the long lasting dominant discourse of the region that the centre's indifference towards the economic development of Northeast is one of the major causes behind ethnic unrests in the region. He highlights that the peripheral Northeastern states have received a very high rate of per capita central assistance, several times more than poor heartland states like Bihar, as they have been as 'special category'. However, due to sustained political instability, lack of proper planning and advent of rampant corruption in both political and administrative domains, the developmental schemes introduced in the region are not broadly facilitating the marginalized sections.

The author further focuses on various interconnected political issues of the region in light of recent elections held in the state and the vested interest of political parties, civil society organizations and the insurgent groups. He emphasizes that the insurgent groups that in the past were more inclined towards boycotting the elections, are now providing strategic support to the political parties on some calculated grounds, and vice versa. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) reportedly used the ULFA as its military arm in the 1980s and the 1990s to annihilate the Congress the so called 'collaborator' of Delhi. In response the Congress pushed for President's rule and sent armed forces into Assam. He recognizes the major role played by the students' organizations of the Northeastern states like the All Assam Students Union (AASU), the All Arunachal Pradesh Students Union

(AAPSU) and the Naga Students Federation (NSF) in the process of political socialization and mobilization of the respective states. The author goes on to suggest some measures to resolve the crisis of this peripheral region. It can be noticed that Indian state's approach to conflict resolution in the case of Northeast is marked by an approach of both conflict management and suppression. In negotiations with the insurgent groups, smaller tribes and ethnic groups of Northeast, Delhi is comfortable talking about power sharing and money, but not resource sharing and autonomy. Thus, the factors of alleged economic exploitation of the periphery and political marginalization remain untouched and result in development of the syndrome of 'relative deprivation' amongst the minds of indigenous groups against the heartland India. The author lays stress on bridging the psychological distance between the so called Northeastern periphery and the Indian heartland, which according to him, would be possible through changes in attitudes, policies and a vision of a prosperous shared future, whereas the physical distance can be bridged by development of transport, infrastructure and use of modern technology. Nevertheless the way to conflict resolution is not as smooth as straight as envisioned by the author. The genesis of the trouble in the region appears to lie more in political disagreement and less in economic consideration. The Centre should search for a political solution to the crisis as a matter of priority. Political stability has always been preceding economic development and prosperity down through the centuries across the globe. The author contends that the pressure groups like the students organizations may play a vital role as negotiators to resolve the ethno-political crisis of the region. All the important groups of the region have to work in collaboration to find out a viable road ahead. The look East Policy, in the words of Rajiv Sikri, a former Secretary East of the Ministry of External affairs, "envisages the Northeastern region not as the periphery of India, but the centre of a thriving and integrated economic space linking two dynamic regions with a network of highways, railways, pipelines, transmission lines crisscrossing the region".[14] The author reminds the reviewer of the reality that India's proposed Look East Policy as mission of collaboration with the Asian Tigers would never be fruitful until and unless Myanmar remains a military state. Therefore, India, apart from overcoming the democracy deficits in its Northeastern region, has to play a pioneering role in

resolving the crisis of democracy in the immediate neighborhood. The proposed mission, according to Sanjib Baruah too, in effect, has been 'hijacked' by the military establishment and security concerns.

The author lays stress on solving the long standing problem of land alienation of indigenous people. Bhaumik cites instances of how the tribal people across the Northeast have lost their land and livelihood to money lenders and migrants, to the government agencies and the military bases. The land, water and forest resources which are traditionally regarded as 'communal property' by the tribal people now have virtually become property of the state and subject to ecological degradation due to the building of river dams, widespread and uncontrolled mining of the natural resources by private entrepreneurs. The author emphasized the need for stopping illegal migration into the region from the neighboring countries, and discouraging rampant migration from the rest of India. A strict national labor policy is to be implemented for protection of the interest of the indigenous groups of people.

The author himself reveals in the Preface that the work is generated from nearly three decades of his personal experience as a journalist and academic researcher in Northeast and in its neighboring regions and that he had the benefit of covering the most important events at very close quarters. The work is affluent with factual information. The author seems to be vigilant enough to address each of the various issues to trace the origins and different dimensions of the existing multifaceted crisis, leaving the readers inquisitive with a number of issues to ponder on. One can argue that reading of the work '*Troubled Periphery: Crisis of India's North East*' is conducive to develop a 'macro' outlook towards the understanding of long standing troubles that keep on haunting the region and contradictory discourses on the process of peace making and nation building.

Notes :

[1] The North-Western Provinces was an administrative region in British India which was established in 1836. In 1858, the kingdom of Oudh was annexed and merged with this region to constitute 'North-Western Provinces and Oudh'. In 1902, this province was reorganized to form the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. XXIV, 1908, p. 158).

[2] Scott, James C. *The Art of Not being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2010, p. x.

[3] Ibid., p. xi.

[4] Lokendrajit, Soyam. *Who is Terrorist?* Imphal: Waba Publications, 2013, p. 76.

[5] Retrieved from: http://manipuronline.com/features/the-conspiracy-of-silence/2010/11/03- files on April 2, 2020 at 6:00am (IST).

[6] The term 'Sanskritization' was first introduced by M. N. Srinivas. Sanskritization is basically letting the lower caste individuals perform rituals and adopt various methods of living as like those of upper caste people by abandoning the disgrace associated with caste-based domination and oppression. Also, the concept of Sanskritization helps lower castes to elevate their position in the social hierarchy. In the study performed by Srinivas, he noticed the behavior changes in lower castes and how they are adopting the living style of Brahmins to be superior and indulge in various reputed ceremonies.

[7] "*Swargadeo*" was the 'Hindu' Royal title of the Ahom Monarchs: *Swarga* meaning 'heaven' and *Deo* meaning 'a divine person' or 'owner').

[8] The *Satras* are basically monasteries set up to propagate Vaishnavisim in the Brahmaputra valley. Sankaradev, the famous Vaishnava saint of Assam, is said to have established his first *Satra* at Bardowa (Nagaon district). The abbot of a *Satra* is traditionally called *Satradhikar* in Assam.

[9] Retrieved from: https://www.endangeredalphabets.net/alphabets/ahom/ - files on January 15, 2022 at 5:00pm (IST).

[10] Baruah, Sanjib. *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, p. xvii.

[11] Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2015, p. 7.

[12] Kimura, Makiko. "Agency of Rioters: A Study of Decision-making in the Nellie Massacre, Assam, 1983", in *Beyond Counter-Insurgency: Breaking the Impasse in Northeast India*. Edited by Sanjib Baruah. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 188-204.

[13] In the Assam Legislative Assembly elections of 2016, BJP and its allies have won an absolute majority. BJP won 60 seats on its own in the 126 member House. Its ally Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) won 14 seats, while another ally Bodoland Peoples Front (BPF) bagged 12 seats. This thumping win of the saffron party can be seen as its expanding political influence beyond its traditional heartlands of Northern and Western India.

[14] Ghoshal, B.D. "India's Look East Policy and the Northeast", in *Pentagon's South Asia Defence and Strategic Year Book*. Edited by Harjeet Singh. New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2010, p. 79.