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Fundamentalism, Jihad and Islam

Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed

Fundamentalism, jihad and Islam and their impact on society and democracy are some of the most discussed issues in the contemporary world that keep scholars, policy makers and political practitioners absorbed. Ever since the rise of Ayatullah Rohullah Khomeini in Iran in 1979, and more particularly after the terrible strike on the twin towers of the WTO on September 11, 2001, many studies and discussions on these issues tend to submit that Islam is a religion of the fanatics, always ready to fight and kill non-Muslims whenever and wherever possible. There are, however, certain positive developments in the recent years. Iran has started learning from the terrible experience under fundamentalism and is trying to overcome from the horrors of the sordid past. Afghanistan is also trying to emerge from the devastating image created by the Taliban. Algeria and Indonesia are showing their fists to Islamic extremism. These developments need attention and support. There lies the future of the religion, which is yet to be studied and understood properly. How can Islam be narrowed and caged within the framework of fundamentalism, when the first versse of the Holy Qur'an starts with a praise to Allah the creator of all world? The paper discusses some of the issues relating to Islamic fundamentalism.

Fundamentalism, jihad and Islam and their impact on society and democracy are some of the most discussed issues in the contemporary world that keep scholars, policy makers and political practitioners absorbed. Ever since the rise of Ayatullah Rohullah Khomeini in Iran in 1979, and more particularly after the terrible strike on the twin towers of the WTO on September 11, 2001, many studies and discussions on these issues tend to submit that Islam is a religion of the fanatics, always ready to fight and kill non-Muslims whenever and wherever possible. There are reasons for such simplifications. First, many of the scholars in the West writing on Islam do not know the Arabic language in which the religious scriptures like the holy Qur'an and Hadith are written. This leads to the misinterpretation of the sermons stated in the scriptures and the practices followed by the Muslims, especially in the Arab world. The opinions of the Western scholars form the basis for the ideas of others in the world about Islam and the Muslims. Throughout ages, many of the scholars and thinkers have painted Islam as a religion of the fanatics. For example, Voltaire (1694-1778) equated Islam with despotism (*Mahomet, or Fanaticism,* 1745). Charles-Louis de Montesquieu (1689-1755) and Francis Bacon (1561-1626) followed the

same line of assessment of Islam and equated it with terror, backwardness and primitivism.[1] Second, many of the Islamic clerics, with their tinted perception and inadequate knowledge of their own religion, misinterpret the verses of the Qur'an and the text of the Hadith, and thus, present a negative image of Islam. Most of them are anti-reformists, and therefore, argue that there cannot be any question of modernization of the Islamic society, which, they argue, is transcendental, evergreen, ever holy, universal, and needs no reform or change. To quote a cleric: "Those who think of reforming or modernizing Islam are misguided, and their efforts are bound to fail...Why should it be modernized, when it is already perfect, pure, universal, and for all the time?"[2] They erroneously tend to equate the five principal sacredotal functions (accepting *Kalma*, performing *namaz*, observing fast in the month of *Ramzan*, and offering alms and performing Hajj by well-to-do Muslims) with other social, secular and political activities.[3] Third, rulers of some of the Islamic countries have been using religion to sanctify their repressive and undemocratic regimes. This is an example very often referred to by the critics to equate Islam with autocracy. Fourth, others conveniently forget that neither Islamic revivalism nor reformism nor fundamentalism has emerged out of vacuum. There are historical roots and settings for such emergences.[4] Fifth, the Islamic world located in West Asia and North Africa had suffered under repressive colonial powers of the West. Many of this part of the world bear tremendous resentment against the West for creating the state of Israel in the land of the Palestinians, continuous support to this Jewish state and conniving with the stunningly destructive and repressive measures of the Israeli government against the Palestinians. The anger and frustration of the Muslims in this region manifested in acts of violence against the West are construed as acts of terrorism symbolically associated with the religion. Consequently, the general tendency to misunderstand Islam is widespread and profound.

I

The rulers, the elite and the common man in the Islamic world failed to adjust with the changing international environment since the beginning of the 20th century. They also failed to follow the developments in the rest of the world in right perspective of modernization and democratization and arrogantly remained bound by the dictates of retrogressive *mullas*. This left the Muslims in total disarray. These are some of the prime reasons for all the troubles presently faced by the Muslims in general.[5] The clash between forces of religious resurgence and democratization sharpened the voice of the fundamentalists in the last of quarter of the 20th century, which was raised primarily to challenge the authoritarian rule in Algeria and Iran. While the fundamentalists succeeded in Iran to capture political power, they failed in Algeria. But the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), a fundamentalist organization, became the strongest

challenger of the ruling National Liberation Front and continued to represent the political opposition in Algeria.

In the modern times, Iran is the birth place of Islamic fundamentalism. The popular movement against the regime of Reza Shah Pehlawi was based on Islamic fundamentalism. In February 1979 the Islamic fundamentalists led by Ayatullah Ruhullah Khomeini captured power in Iran. It was the starting point of the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism.[6] Iran became a role model for the fundamentalist forces operating in different parts of the world. The power of petro-dollar was used to export fundamentalism in different regions. The first victims of this exercise were Algeria and Egypt. Both are Islamic dominated states, practicing partially the western democratic principles of election and people's participation in governance. But the regimes are autocratic and alleged to have indulged in widespread corruption and to have failed in implementing welfare measures to improve the conditions of the common man. This attracted the people towards an alternative model, the model suggested by fundamentalists. The collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and the crisis in communism created a vacuum, which facilitated the emergence of the fundamentalists as a strong force to fill in the vacuum. From West Africa to Indonesia the Islamic fundamentalist forces began to operationalize their extremist agenda by striking terror in the non-Islamic world and by coercing fellow Muslims to fall in line. All this led some western scholars, most notably Samuel P. Huntington, to argue about the emergence of a new cold war between the Christian and the Oriental worlds that he called the clash of civilizations.[7] Many western scholars began to consider Islam as a threat to the democratic and western countries.[8]

At any rate, Islamic fundamentalism is wrongly equated with Islam. In the common parley of usage and meaning the term denotes a religious concept demanding strict adherence to the dictates of Qur'an and Shariat in both public and private life. It rejects copying Western ways of social and political life and affirming instead the comprehensive and effective nature of Islamic message. Some would like to term it as 'Islamism'. If interpreted in the moderate form, it would mean an intellectual effort to construct an "Islamic modernism", the kind of which the Egyptian scholar Mohammad Abduh advocated. It took some shape in the 19th century, when some Islamic clerics and their forums used the concept to fight against the reformist movements in Islamic countries and to make it a plank to oppose democracy and western political theories. They led a frontal attack on secularism and democracy arguing that these values diluted the basic tenets of Islam, and therefore, were obscurantist and misleading. Since the governments in some of the Islamic states were apparently based on western values and at the same time they were generally autocratic and corrupt, they became the targets of Islamist attack. As an alternative to the western model the

latter presented an ideology based on the principles of Qur'an and Hadith, which would not only ensure a puritan social and political life but also an oppression free and truly welfare state. To achieve this end they advocated the principle of Muslim brotherhood. Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (born in Iran 1837-1897), Muhammad Abduh (born in Egypt 1849-1905) and Syrian born reformer and writer Mohammad Rashid Rida (1865-1935) were the first few *ulemas* to steer an 'Islamic modernism' on this line.

At this point of time some of the *ulemas* tried to bring forth a difference between *ijtihad* (reason) and *taqlid* (imitation/authority) and argued that one should not blindly follow/imitate whatever tradition or predecessors had once established. To follow tradition and preaching of the past blindly would amount to close down the intellectual opening for all time to come. This would invite self-destruction of the Muslim community. Such a discourse was inherited from the writings of an Indian scholar named Shah Wali-Allah (1703-1762)[9] who had developed a considerably more humanistic response to customary tradition than the revivalists. Based on the argument for rationalistic approach to religion, a call for a movement uniting the Muslims of the world was raised in Egypt through a platform created by Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949) in 1928 named Islamic Brotherhood. But the rational basis of the organization was, unfortunately, demolished within a couple of years to make it a forum for Islamic revivalism having political overtones.

It is noteworthy that the original thinker to spread the message of revivalism was Ibn Taymiyya (1268-1328), who was born in Iraq but left the country for Damascus at the time of the Monghul invasion. He is one of the most discussed persons among the key figures professing Islamic fundamentalism.[10] He gave a call to wage a jihad against the Monguls, and thus, turned the religious revivalism into an aggressive political and military doctrine. In the 18th century similar extremist fundamentalist campaign was spearheaded in Mecca by Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-1791). His politico-religious idealism known as Wahhabi movement gained popularity in Egypt and other Islamic countries. A broader framework for institutionalizing it could be seen in the efforts of Sayyid Qutb (1903-1966) and Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), who established the " Muslim Brotherhood" in 1928[11]. On the same line of thought, in India, Maulana Sayyid Abdul A'la Mawdudi (1903-1979) formed Jamaat-e-Islami in 1941. Certain significant commonalities are found in their perceptions. They opposed not only European colonialism as they believed that the West had meticulously planned and executed their design to subjugate the Muslims, and thus, to inflict the gravest injury on the future of Islam. They also opposed the liberal Muslims. Their contention centered around the putative assumption that the world of Islam had been facing crises mainly because of the slackness in practising and adhering to the fundamentals of Islam.[12] It is noteworthy that

their efforts to persuade people to follow their ideals of strict observance of the principles of Islam and to give up liberalism altogether did not gain much popularity. The common Muslim preferred modern education to the traditional and conservative preaching of the fundamentalists. But it would be wrong to argue that the appeal of the fundamentalists to the common masses died down. The voice of the fundamentalists against imperialism, oppressive rulers in Muslim dominated countries and also against anti-people policy of certain democratically elected regimes was kept alive. Consequently, it continued to exist not only in many of the Islamic countries but also in countries where the Muslims constituted a sizeable section of the population.[13] In India the liberal ideas of Sir Sayiid Ahmad Khan, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Mohammd Iqbal had wider appeal and acceptance[14]. At the same time the seeds of fundamentalism, so long under half germination, did not take a long time to emerge menacingly. The last quarter of the preceding century witnessed the resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism, which used all its strength and resources to unify the entire community of the Muslims under its banner. It started attacking not only liberal political ideas but also science, art and architecture, music and culture branding these vital agencies of human civilization as un-Islamic, and thus, dangerous manifestation of the Satan.

The turning point of the Islamic resurgence was the defeat of the Arabs in the Six-day war of 1967 at the hands of the Israeli forces. In the common parley of the Muslims of the West Asia the defeat in the war was attributed to the deviation of the Muslims from the 'true' path of Islam. The call to wage a war (jihad) against Israel on one hand and for uprising against the ruling class in Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Sudan and Syria on the other hand became popular among the common masses in these countries. The fall of Reza Shah Pehlavi of Iran in February 1979 and the establishment of a religious cleric rule there was the first dramatic event in the modern history of Islamic fundamentalism. It became a source of inspiration for those who wanted to capture political power by preaching a violent and fundamental face of Islam.

II

In the contemporary time the tendency to simplify their understanding of Islam by picking up jihad as the core component in the practice of Islam has led the critics of the religion to brand it as a jihad-loving, anti-modern and extremist religion. Those who believe that jihad is a monolithic fanatical ideological tool of Islam argue that since jihad is the focal point in the Islamic faith, Islam is virtually against the theory and practice of democracy. Such an assumption is not entirely baseless. In most of the Islamic countries the regimes are either autocratic or absolute monarchies or repressive even though they are elected by the people. There are certain Islamic countries where the democratic system of governance has been always challenged by the terrorist activities spearheaded

by the fundamentalist forces. In such democracies, the common man is always trapped in the conflicts between the government forces on one hand, trying to destroy the fundamentalist forces and the Islamic extremists, which, on the other hand, are trying to dislodge the government by violent means. The Islamic world too is caught in between the two extremes.

Jihad became a most romantic and appealing terminology in the vocabulary of Islamic fundamentalism. It symbolized terror. It stroke dangerous signals to the opponents not only within the world of the Muslims who abhorred it but also to the non-Islamic liberal world. The term has different meaning to different practitioners. The Islamic Salvation Front of Algeria used it to legitimize its war against the elected government. The Hizbul Muzahidin and Hamas operating from Lebanon and some parts of West Asia used it to rationalize their armed attack on Israel. The Afghan Muzahidins had fought a jihad against the Soviet occupation of their land. The Taliban and the al-Qaeda declared a jihad against the United States of America. The Iranians waged a jihad against Iraq. The militants operating in both halves of Kashmir have taken up their arms in the name of jihad. The Islamic scholars tend to view the interpretation of jihad from two distinct angles. One, jihad is a struggle or a war against some one who launches an act of aggression against the Muslims. They refer to the command of the Holy Qur'an (Surah al-Tawbah 9:38) that the believers must fight for Allah. These scholars find a mass appeal and voluntary nature in the actions of those who wage a jihad in defense of Islam. Two, those who participate in jihad must be prepared to sacrifice their life in the name of God and for that they must purify their soul and become a 'true' Muslim. Then only one can become a jihadi.[15] The protagonists of jihad simplified the interpretation of the term within the framework of a political slogan – Islam in danger; so the *ummah* (the community) must come forward to die for the cause of Islam, if necessary. On this slogan rests the tenets of Islamic fundamentalism. Those who were identified to be the sources of danger to Islam became the victims of the armed fundamentalist militants. Majority of them were Muslims. There is no empirical data on the persons killed in Algeria to Indonesia at the hands of the fundamentalists. It is widely believed that the number of Muslims thus killed outnumbers those killed by non-Muslims. It is mainly because countries where the Muslims constitute more than 90 per cent of the population have become the hub of Islamic fundamentalists

In the midst of confusion created by divergent forces to interpret and justify their militant activities, jihad becomes one of the most wrongly understood terminologies closely associated with the tenets of Islam. While the fundamentalists consider jihad as a sacred duty of the Muslims to sacrifice themselves in defence of Islam and to perpetuate force against non-Muslims,

the West tries to understand it as an armed and expansionist methodology of the militant Muslims.

It is important to understand the term jihad from historical perspective. The term has come from an Arabic word called *johd*. The English equivalent word is struggle. It denotes struggle within one's self to purify one's soul, to take recourse to truth and justice in every day activities. Its application as a strategic devise to motivate Muslims to defend their religion originated on the 17th day of the month of *Ramzan* in 624 AD when Prophet Muhammad with 300 soldiers faced the massive brigade of his enemies at the battle of Badar. He inspired his followers to wage the jihad in defence of Islam which finally led to the victory of his forces.[16] It is widely believed that the battle of Badar gave birth to the concept of jihad.

The pertinent point here in this discourse is that jihad has a reactive connotation. It is understood in defensive terminology. Its application lies in a situation when a war is thrust upon on Islam. In the holy Qur'an it is commanded to wage jihad only in the backdrop of act of aggression. The second important point that needs attention is that just after the battle of Badar the Prophet sermonized that the type of jihad waged at Badar was smaller one which had to be participated by true jihadis. To be a true jihadi was indeed a difficult task. One has to struggle long to purify one's body and soul. That is a greater jihad, which is difficult to accomplish.

Contrary to the original notion of jihad, the term has been used to justify senseless and brutal killing of innocent civilians who are not aggressive belligerents. Who are the victims of jihad in the modern era? The shocking answer is more than sixty thousand civilians in Algeria, forty thousand in Afghanistan, countless in Kashmir and other parts of the world, who belong to the fraternity of Muslims, besides of course, several thousand civilians including those who were crushed to death on September 11, 2001. To that extent jihad has become a dangerous tool in the hands of those whose killing spree knows no justification, limit and barrier. In the land where jihadi dictates rule, women and children have become the worst victims. Afghanistan under the Taliban stands as a glaring example. Such examples of Islamic terror visibly evident from Algeria to Indonesia provide the intellectual basis of the theory of clash of civilization.

III

Is the entire Islamic world really fanatical, intolerant, war-mongering and anti-progressive which allows no space for liberal thought, understanding and practice? There is a liberal face of Islam, which does not receive due publicity. On the contrary the revivalist and the extremist segment of the Muslims secure

wider attention of the media and the political plank of different organizations. For instance, the undemocratic and despotic ruling class has been trying to legitimize its rule within the framework of *touheed*[17], and it receives enormous attention of the scholars who are too eager to brand Islam as an anti-democratic creed. A discordant voice against fundamentalism, forcefully raised since the last decade of nineteenth century by Syrian thinker Jamal al-Din al Qasimi (1866-1914), does not find appreciation. These liberal thinkers from time to time have been arguing that *taqlid* is like a leprosy, which has the potentiality to kill the body system slowly. *Taqlid*, as the liberals argued, could do nothing except pushing the community to backwardness, ignorance, fanaticism and darkness. The liberals could arouse a protest voice against the proponents of *taqlid*. A number of personalities spearheaded the movement against the fundamentalists in different parts of the world. Most outstanding among them are, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817-1898), the founder of Oriental Muslim College at Aligarh which later on became the Aligarh Muslim University, Mehdi Ali Khan (1837-1907) and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad (1888-1958 of India; Rifa'a Rafi al-Tahtawi (1801-1873) and Muhammad 'Abduh (1847-1905) of Egypt; Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838-1897) of Iran; Shhab al-Din Marjani (1818-1889), Ahmad Makhdum Danesh 1827-1897), Ismail Bey Gasprinskii (1851-1914), Numan Chelebi Jihan (1885-1918) and Musa Yarallah Bigi (1874-1949) of Russia; Wang Haoran (1848-1918) Ha Decheng (1888-1943) of China; Kiyai Haji Ahmad Dahlan (1869-1923) and Ahmad Surkati (1872-1943) of Indonesia; Shaykh Muhammad Tahir Jalaluddin (1867-1957) and Sayid Syekh al-Hadi (1867-1935) of Malaysia. All of them had their education at the theological schools in different countries including Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Therefore, they had a greater appeal than the West-educated liberal Muslims among the common people. The trend dominated the Islamic world in the three decades of the last century.

These liberals could not go far to consolidate their position in the Muslim world. The freedom movement started in most of the third world countries such as Algeria, India, Indonesia, West Asia against European colonialism. The idea of jihad was used to mobilize the Muslims in the freedom movements. This offered a unique opportunity to the fundamentalists to creep into the political movements. Although with the end of the colonial rule in the post-World War II era the fundamentalist forces lost their ground and retreated to their religious domain, the jihadi motivation and approach to politically contentious issues did not die altogether. Similarly, the liberal ethos of the Muslims, which gained prominence in the first three decades of the last century, remained confined to the urban areas. The liberal thought and the writings could not penetrate deep in the rural areas, where the common Muslims lived. Their children could not go for modern and western education, which was mainly available in the urban areas, as they mostly go to the low cost education made available in the

Madrassas, where the tender mind is moulded by untrained teachers with outdated syllabi, full of fundamentalist overtone. The vast rural Muslim population living in an underdeveloped world (barring the oil rich countries of West Asia) from Algeria to Malaysia, are dangerously exposed to fundamentalism.

As against the emergence of the fundamentalism in the Muslim world since the six-day Arab Israeli war, a number of Muslim scholars have been trying to present the true face of Islam which is undoubtedly the liberal face of this religion. One of the prominent scholars, who citing Islamic tradition, culture, the holy Qur'an and the Hadith, have been projecting the liberal face of Islam, is Mamadiou Dia, who was born in 1911 in Senegal. He taught in a school and retired as the Head Master of the school then took up journalism and eventually joined politics. He tried to put forward strongly the theological bases of Islamic humanism and liberalism and felt that the interpretation of Islam must respond positively to the modern world.[18] He wrote: "Islamic authenticity requires a return to the sources, that is to the Qur'an and to the [sunna], not to take shelter there to drown current cares there, but to draw from thence elements for motivation and revitalization of Islamic philosophy".[19] Other scholars who followed the line of argument of Dia are Rafiq Zakaria of India (born in 1920), Ziauddin Sardar (born in 1951) and Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988) of Pakistan, Yusuf Al-Qaradawi (born in 1926) and Fehmi Huwaydi (born in 1937) of Egypt, Mahmoud Mohamed Taha (Sudan 110-1985) who opposed the revivalist interpretation and was eventually executed for alleged apostasy. Fuad Zakariyya of Egypt (born in 1927) who wrote: 'The important element of [the revivalists'] rosy dream is that the application of the *shari'a* will automatically evaporate all the problems from which we suffer. How? No one knows. Most seen to believe deep in their hearts that divine providence will guard us in the application of the *shari'a*. Afterwards, the force of heaven will intervene to solve our problems without anyone making effort".[20] Many of them faced persecution leading even to execution including Mahmoud Mohammad Taha of Sudan, Mohammad Sa'id and Abderrazak Redjam of Algeria, who were executed by the militants for their strong opposition to jihad. Muhammad Khalaf-Allah of Egypt (born in 1916) and Mehdi Bazargan of Iran (1907-1995), Muhammad Shahrour of Syria (born 1938) were hounded and tortured. Their writings were burnt. There has been steady emergence of institutional infrastructure propagating successfully the 'non-fanatical' liberal face of Islam. It started in Malaysia where multidenominational organizations began to grow from 1970s onward. Various such oraganizations operating from Islamic and other western countries have begun to disseminate liberal perspectives. These efforts gaining ground in the latter part of the last century may be called an international movement of liberal Islam.

It is relevant to cite liberal ideas enshrined in the Holy Qur'an, which has been bestowed to the mankind as precisely mentioned in Surah Nash (mankind). The Holy book in a number of occasions has warned against discrimination of man in matters of education, employment, public service, offering donation and alms (Surah 2 Al-Baqarah: 272-273 and Maun). How beautifully the Holy Book states in Surah 49 al-Hujurat: 13 which ordains "O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of male and a female, and made into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (Not that ye may despise each other)". Again Surah 11 Hud:118 states "If thy Lord had so willed He could have made mankind one people". To quote still another (Surah 10 Yunus; 19) "Mankind was but one nation, but differed (later)"[21]. There is a caution in the Qur'an "O people of the Book! Exceed not in your religion. The bounds (of what is proper), trespassing beyond truth" (Surah 5 Al Mai'dah: 77). While the fundamentalists believe in the doctrine of force to score a point, to pursue their expansionist agenda, the Holy Book warns: "Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects Evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy handhold, that never breaks".[22]

There are references to tolerance and respect for differences and human life. Some of these are noteworthy. "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us in that which came down to you; our God and your God is One and it is to Him we bow" (Surah 29 Al Ankabut: 46). There cannot be more beautiful narration about respect for various Holy Books and Prophets than this: "Say: 'We believe in Allah, in what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail; Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes, and in (the Books) given to Moses, Jesus and the Prophets, from their Lord: we make no distinction between one and another among them, and to Allah do we bow our will" (Surah 3 Ali Imran: 84). Jihadis not only discriminate among people but also man and woman, which goes against the basic tenet of Islam. For, in Islam the equal status of the sexes is not only recognized but also insisted on as evident in Surah 3 Ali Imran: 195 which reads: "And their Lord hath accepted of them, and answered them: 'Never will I suffer to be lost the work of nay of you, be he male or female: ye are members, one of another'". It is too tempting to resist the desire to quote the marvelous decree of the Holy Book: "Take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law" (Surah 6 Al An'am: 151)[23]. Those who propagate wanton violence and killing in the name of Islam conveniently forget the dictates of the Qur'an: "Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not transgress your limits, for Allah loveth not transgressors" (Surah 2 Al Baqarah: 190).[24] It is not difficult to understand whether the protagonists of jihad are bound by the dictates of the Qur'an which reveals God's compassion so pointedly, "My mercy extendeths to things" (Surah 7 Al Araf: 156) or are mere prisoners of a narrow political agenda to be achieved by means of senseless violence.

It is important to note that the idea of jihad had been in currency among the Arabs much before the advent of Islam. It had been a widely accepted view that instead of subjecting oneself to attack and thus humiliation, one should wage a war against the aggressor for self defence.[25] Prophet Mohammad had two perspectives of jihad – smaller and greater jihad, which do not figure in the common parlance jihad. As stated already, and the repetition sounds relevant, the Prophet commanded that only true jihadis could wage a jihad. To be a true jihadi one has to struggle within oneself, which is greater jihad. In this greater jihad, one has to struggle to purify the soul, to be righteous, to adhere to the principles of equality, fair play and justice. The greater jihad is more difficult a task than the other (Bukhari 25: 4). But within a few decades of the death of the Prophet the true concept of jihad disappeared and it degenerated to mean a senseless war against the infidels. [26] It is unthinkable that the text of a Holy book or a Prophet would preach violence and take recourse to force and murder to propagate a faith. The Medina document, prepared after the migration of Prophet Muhammad with his followers to Medina, is a testimony of Prophet Mohammad's desire to have the existing social structure of 10,000 people living in Madina, which included 1,500 Muslims, 4000 Jews and 4500 Polytheists undisturbed. The harmonious social arrangement was probable based on the Sura 109, Verse 6 which tells of "To you your religion, to me my religion".[27] The Document endorsed the autonomy of social groups, transcended the kinship ties, ensured political union among various shades of population of Madina consisting of the Muslims, the Jews and the Polytheists in which there was no scope for discrimination among the people on the basis of race, language, sect and ethnic origins (Articles 1, 2, 16 and 25). From this angle one can argue that the liberal face of Islam is clearly enshrined in the document, an unprecedented example indeed, which is now defaced by a brand of intolerant, weapon wielding fundamentalists.

There are certain positive developments in the recent years. Iran has started learning from the terrible experience under fundamentalism and is trying to overcome from the horrors of the sordid past. Afghanistan is also trying to emerge from the devastating image created by the Taliban. Algeria and Indonesia are showing their fists to Islamic extremism. These developments need attention and support. There lies the future of the religion, which is yet to be studied and understood properly. How can Islam be narrowed and caged within the framework of fundamentalism, when the first versse of the Holy Qur'an starts with a praise to Allah the creator of all world? ■

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19. For details see Mamadiou Dia, "Islam and Humanism" translated from French by Charles Kurzman in his *Liberal Islam: A Sourcebook* (New York: Oxford, 1988) pp 295-303 quotation from p. 295.
20. David Sagiv, *Fundamentalism and Intellectuals in Egypt, 1973-1993* (London: Frank Cass, 1995) p. 117
21. Abdullah Yusuf Ali interprets this verse in the following manner: "All mankind was created equal and Allah's Message to mankind is in essence one, Message of Unity and Truth. But as selfishness and egoism got hold of man, certain differences sprang up between individuals, races and nations, and in His infinite Mercy he sent messengers and messages to suit their varying mentality, to test them by His gifts, and stir them up to emulate in virtue and piety" See *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Brentwood, Maryland: Amana Corporation, 1989) p.484.

22. Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes: "Compulsion is incompatible with religion: because (1) religion depends upon faith and will, and these would meaningless if induced by force; (2) Truth and Error have been so clearly shown up by the mercy of Allah that there should be no doubt in the minds of any persons of good will as to the fundamentals of faith; (3) Allah' protection is continuous, and His Plan is always to lead us from the depths of darkness into the clearest light". *ibid*, fn 300 p. 106.
23. "It is not only that human life is sacred, but all life is sacred. Even killing animals for food, a dedicatory formula 'in the name of Allah' has to be employed, to make it lawful." *ibid,* fn 977 p. 339.
24. "War is permissible in self-defence, and under well-defined limits. When undertaken it must be pushed with vigour (but not relentlessly), but only to restore peace and freedom for the worship of Allah. In any case strict limits must not be transgressed: women, children, old and infirm men should not be molested, nor trees and crops cut down, nor peace withheld when the enemy comes to term". *ibid*, fn 204, p. 76.
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Regional Self-sufficiency in Production for Food Security: The Case for India's North Eastern Region

M. P. Bezbaruah

Issue of food security involves a vast array of critical aspects, which invites insightful examination. The issue when looked from a regional perspective raises questions as to the desirability and feasibility of food security with enormous policy implications. The issue should not be viewed as a production issue alone, but the distribution part must be considered for a holistic discussion on the subject. With this approach in view the paper goes on to discuss about the appropriate intervention in achieving regional food security with particular reference to the northeast.

I

The term food security, as understood today, implies both physical and economic access to balanced diet for each household and for all members in a household. As a report of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN puts it, food security implies that 'all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food they need' (FAO, 1983: p 33). Specifying further World Bank (1986) states that food security means 'access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Its essential elements are availability of food and the ability to acquire it'. The bank has also drawn a distinction between chronic and transitory food insecurity. Chronic food insecurity reflects 'continuous inadequate diet caused by the inability to acquire food. It affects households that persistently lack the ability to either buy food or produce their own.' The transitory food insecurity is defined as 'temporary decline in the household's access to enough food. It results from instability in food price, food production and household income – and in its worst form, it produces famine.'

Food security is thus concerned with both production and distribution of food. To achieve sustainable global food security, first of all there must be enough current and future food production to meet world population's need for adequate nutrition. Given that there is adequate global production, the different countries of the world should be able to acquire their required supply either from their own share in the world production or through trade. Given that there is enough national supply, the households in the country must enjoy the entitlement for their minimum food requirement. This entitlement will depend

on a household's own resource position, the way it decides to use its resources, as well as on external factors such as the price of food and the value its own resources can fetch from exchange (Sen, 1981, Ch 1).

Adequate world food production in itself therefore is no guarantee for food security even at the national aggregate level, leaving alone household and individual levels. A country that is not self sufficient in food production may not enjoy enough entitlement for its food security if it lacks the economic and political strength to acquire its requirement through exchange from the surplus nations. Some measure of self-sufficiency in food production may therefore be a justifiable national goal irrespective of sufficiency of world production. In fact countries cutting across levels of economic development are so cautious about food security that even developed market economies are found to be bearing the burden of subsidisation and high consumer prices to protect their uncompetitive agriculture.

Thanks to the Green Revolution or the HYV seed bases technology, many developing countries including India have been able to achieve sustained increase in domestic food production over the last three decades or so, thereby securing for themselves enhanced entitlement of food at least at the national aggregate level. Given this self-sufficiency in production of basic food at the national aggregate level, should the different regions of the country strive for regional self-sufficiency in production? So long as there is no real restrictions - physical, economic or legal - on the movement of food across the length and breath of the country, the answer in general is 'no'. Given that the goal of adequate national food supply is fulfilled, to maximise GDP the different regions of a country should in principle diversify and specialise in lines of production in which they enjoy comparative advantage. Indeed with the huge pile of surplus food-grain stocks, the issue of food security in India today is more of enhancing the accesses of the poverty-stricken people to this stock than of increasing production further. However a strong case for an exception for the North-Eastern region of the country can be made.

II

The first and most obvious argument for regional self-sufficiency in production for better food security of the region arises from its location and poor connectivity with the rest of the country. Its narrow road and rail links with the rest of the country being prone to disruption from both natural and man made conditions, dependence on other parts of India for bulky essential supplies like food-grains can at times prove to be an unsafe proposition. Even without the disruption of links, the high transport cost of bulky imports into the region adds significantly to the social cost of maintaining regional food security without regional self-sufficiency in the production.

The second argument arises from the policy changes affecting Indian agriculture that have been necessitated by the change in national and global economic environment in the last decade or so. It has now become abundantly clear that the self-sufficiency in food-grain production in the post Green Revolution period has come at a heavy economic and environmental cost. The approach paper to India's 10th Five Year Plan sums up "The policy approach to agriculture has been to secure increased production through subsidies in inputs such as power, water and fertilizer, and by increasing the minimum support price rather than through building new capital assets in irrigation, power and rural infrastructure. This strategy has run into serious difficulties. Deteriorating state finances have meant that subsidies have 'crowded out' public agricultural investments in roads and irrigation and expenditure on technological upgrading. Apart from the inability to create new assets, the lack of resources has eroded expenditure on maintenance of canals and roads..... Excessive use of subsidized fertilizers has created an imbalance between N, P and K, whereas excess use of water has produced water logging in many areas." (Government of India, 2001: p. 26) Repeated increases in procurement prices, on the other hand, resulted in ballooning of cost of maintaining price support, procurement and public distributions of food-grains. Further, rising procurement prices contributed to high open market price of food-grains in spite of gluts in production. In a bid to contain food subsidy within limits, issue prices of food-grains for public distribution have been raised from time to time which resulted in narrowing the gap between PDS price and open market price of food and consequent low off-take of food-grain for PDS. Both these factors have obviously contributed to curbing entitlement to food of the sections of population at the lower end of income distribution. Meanwhile opening up of the economy as a result of conscious policy change and also due to WTO obligations has also made it imperative for the Indian farm sector to strive for cost reduction and competitiveness[1]. The production oriented strategy without much concern for environmental and economic cost-efficiency might have been justified in the days of severe food shortage of nineteen sixties and seventies. But in the contemporary economic environment the strategy is due for alteration.

The policies of input subsidy and public procurement of food-grains are now giving way to rational pricing of inputs and greater private role in trading and storage of food-grains (Government of India, 2001: p. 31-32). These policy changes, working through changing economic calculations of farmers, are likely to effect significant changes in cropping patterns and also in the regional composition of India's total food-grain production. For instance, in the post Green Revolution years much of the increase in India's rice production took place in non-traditional rice growing areas of Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh where farmers took to growing of high yielding rice varieties as

rabi crop under irrigated conditions. Rice produced in this region is mostly offered for public procurement because of limited local consumption of rice. (Sidhu and Singh, 1986) But with weakening of government procurement and price support and phasing out of water and electricity subsidies, cultivation of water intensive rice is unlikely to remain attractive in these areas and hence rice is likely to be replaced by crops that will be more remunerative in the changed circumstances[2]. The mantle of sustaining production growth of rice for the sake of maintaining of food security of the country then will have to be taken on by the traditional rice growing areas such as Eastern India, which earlier lagged behind in successfully exploiting the potentials of the HYV seeds-fertilizer technology. The approach paper to the 10th Five Year Plan further points out, "The intensity of private capital is increasing at a faster rate for green revolution areas and for large farmers. The weight of fertilizers, pesticides and diesel that accounted for mere 14.9 percent of total inputs in 1970-71 in the country increased to 55.1 per cent in 1994-95. For a large farmer in commercialised region it could be as high as 70 per cent.... Whereas the need for resources to purchase these inputs has been increasing, the marketable surplus has been increasing at a slower rate to absorb this. It is not surprising that repayment of loans is such a problem in Indian agriculture and has even led to suicides in some cases. A better strategy would be to concentrate on small and marginal farmers and on eastern and rain fed areas where returns to both labour and capital are high." (Government of India, 2001: p. 28) In this context the North-Eastern region, with its largely unutilised potentials, should not only strive for achieving self-sufficiency in production of the region's staple food rice, but can contribute significantly to sustain India's total production of this important food-grain.

Yet another argument for regional self-sufficiency in food-grain production in the North-East emanates from the necessity of some urgent strategic move to curb the increase in rural poverty in the region. While the head count ratio for rural poor declined everywhere else in the country during 1993-2000, available statistics do not show similar decline in the North-East (refer Table 1). In fact the ratio registered an increase for Assam, the only state in the region for which National Sample Survey based estimates are available (Deaton, 2003). Nationwide decline poverty in the nineteen eighties and nineties corresponds to the faster growth GDP during that period than in the first three decades of economic planning in India.. Absence of concomitant decline in poverty in Assam and the North-East similarly corresponds to the absence of the step up in the rate of economic growth in the region. Moreover as a result of the poorer growth performance of the region, the gaps between the all-India per capita income and the per capita income of the region as a whole and also of its more populous states of Assam, Manipur and Tripura widened over the period (refer Table 2). In the smaller (in terms of population) states of Arunachal Pradesh,

Mizoram and Nagaland of course the growth rates have been higher and these states have had higher per capita NSDP than the all-India per capita income in most of the years since mid 1980s. However this apparent sign of prosperity in these states is misleading. Detailed analysis has revealed that the observed high growth was not propelled by growth of agriculture or manufacturing or even trade and commerce but by expansion of such activities as public administration and construction which was necessitated by the expansion of the administrative apparatus in these newly formed states and financed by liberal fiscal transfers from the centre to these special category states (Bezbaruah, 2001). More recent data indicate that the growth impetus from such source has already slowed down and per capita income levels even in these states have fallen behind the all-India level

At the time of independence the region had a significant industrial base. But the industrialisation process could not be sustained in the years after independence due mainly to partition inflicted geographical isolation of the region and indifference of the central government in that period of state controlled industrialisation (Sarma, 1966; Goswami, 1981). The brief revival of industrial growth in the 1970s came to a halt in the 1980s and has shown no signs of picking up again in the post liberalisation period, notwithstanding the announced fiscal incentives for the region. Given the industrial scenario and the natural resource base of the region, and in view of a relatively larger proportion of population here being dependent on agriculture, growth in the agriculture sector can be a major contributor to the process of economic development of the region. Moreover agriculture led growth process can automatically secure wide popular participation, which in turn can contribute to rapid decline in rural poverty. The goal of regional self-sufficiency in food-grain production can provide the necessary impetus to agricultural growth to spearhead this process of development.

III

These arguments for regional self-sufficiency in food-grain production are however not intended to suggest that farmers everywhere in the region should specialise in production of food-grains. In fact all parts of the region are neither suited nor required to concentrate in production of food-grains. In plain areas, which are better suited for the HYV seed – fertiliser technology, intensive use of improved inputs with better water management can greatly enhance production of food-grains[3]. Hills are however better suited for horticultural and plantation crops. In the absence of easy access to market network many households in the hills still depend on traditional *jhum* or shifting cultivation for subsistence. The system of *jhum* cultivation may not have endowed the people with great riches, but the system traditionally ensured a minimum food security in most times to the people living the remote hills (Ramakrishnan, 1992). But

with *jhum* cultivation gradually losing sustainability because of shortening *jhum* cycles forced by population growth and reduced availability of land for shifting, the food security associated with it is also getting endangered (Dasgupta, 1996). On the other hand, with the changing conditions, especially in communication, alternatives to *jhum* cultivation are also gaining viability. Finding the new alternatives profitable, a section of hill population traditionally dependent on *jhum* cultivation has already adopted cultivation of commercial crops, especially in areas in which better communication links and market access have been established[4]. But for the hill farmer to make a complete and successful transition from a subsistence *jhum* cultivator to a market force guided commercial farmer, connectivity will have to improve even further, so that markets get integrated and Public Distribution System (PDS) or some alternative network of distribution of essential supplies reach out to areas now considered too interior. Without such developments however it will be unrealistic to expect *jhum* cultivation to phase out quickly. For, in the absence of improved communications, farmers would obviously not have the market outlets to sell the produce of their commercial crops, nor would the basic food supply be available to be procured in exchange. Giving up subsistence farming for growing commercial crops would then jeopardise whatever food security the *jhumia* communities currently enjoy.

Interventions need to be stepped up in organising the necessary infrastructure support, especially in the areas of road communication, irrigation and storage. As such supports come up, the farmers in the hills and plains of the North-East can specialise in mutually complementary cropping patterns securing for the whole region not merely food security but general agricultural prosperity and a widely shared broad based pattern of economic growth leading to quick reduction in rural poverty.

Notes:

1. *As Radhakrishna (2002: p. 57) puts it, "If India is to benefit from the emerging opportunities opened up by liberalised agricultural trade, major reforms have to undertaken on the domestic front... India should depend on cost reducing technology through domestic reform, promote agricultural diversification and put pressure on the developed countries to open up their markets for our agro-processed production."*
2. *Well documented reports of high environmental cost of rice cultivation in Punjab have come out (Singh and Kalra, 2002) and there are also calls to reduce area under rice cultivation in that state to prevent further damage to its natural resources, particularly ground water reserves. (Sidhu, 2002)*

3. *The recent spurt in rice production in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam following a crash programme of installation of one hundred thousand shallow tube wells for irrigation confirms this belief.*
4. *This observation is based on the author's findings in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam during a research project entitled 'Towards a Strategy for Economic Development of Karbi Anglong'. The author was an Advisor in the Reform Committee on Economic Affairs of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council which carried out the project and submitted the report in June 2000.*

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Tables

Table 1: Head Count Ratios of Rural Poor with Suitable Adjustment for Comparability of 43rd, 50th and 55th Rounds of NSS data

States	Head Count Ratios			Changes in the Head Count Ratios		
	1987	*1993*	*2000*	*1987-1993*	*1993-2000*	*1987-2000*
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Andhra Pradesh	35.0	29.2	27.9	–5.8	–1.3	–7.1
Assam	36.1	35.4	35.7	–0.7	0.3	–0.4
Bihar	54.6	48.6	39.3	–6.0	–9.3	–15.3
Gujarat	39.4	32.5	20.4	–7.0	–12.1	–19.1
Haryana	13.6	17.0	6.5	3.4	–10.5	–7.1
Himachal Pradesh	13.3	17.1	12.5	3.9	–4.6	–0.7
Karnataka	40.8	37.9	30.3	–2.9	–7.6	–10.5
Kerala	23.8	19.5	11.6	–4.3	–7.9	–12.2
Madhya Pradash	43.7	36.7	31.2	–7.1	–5.5	–12.6
Maharashtra	44.3	42.9	30.8	–1.4	–12.1	–13.5
Orissa	50.4	43.5	41.3	–6.9	–2.2	–9.1
Punjab	6.6	6.2	2.8	–0.5	–3.4	–3.9
Rajasthan	35.3	23.0	16.2	–12.3	–6.8	–19.1
Tamil Nadu	49.0	38.5	25.6	–10.6	–12.9	–23.5
Uttar Pradesh	34.9	28.7	20.8	–6.3	–7.9	-14.2
West Bengal	36.3	25.1	22.7	–11.2	–2.4	–13.6
All-India	39.0	32.9	25.3	–6.0	–7.6	–13.6

* Source: Economic and Political Weekly, January 25, 2003 p 368

Table 2: Per Capita NSDP at Current Prices of North Eastern States as Percentage of India's NNP Per Capita at Current Prices

YEARS	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Megha-laya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Tripura	N E Region
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
1980-81	96.37	78.77	87.05	83.49	79.07	88.83	80.18	80.38
1985-86	124.64	95.67	85.05	82.41	97.36	94.90	74.17	93.25
1987-88	117.67	93.14	97.74	88.94	124.09	103.03	73.72	93.19
1988-89	114.70	83.39	85.94	80.01	104.79	96.51	78.47	84.38
1989-90	102.63	85.66	82.25	88.25	95.13	99.71	73.28	85.70
1990-91	108.31	85.91	79.79	87.80	89.79	98.33	67.63	85.23
1991-92	116.44	83.58	83.17	87.29	106.03	99.77	65.70	84.22
1992-93	120.06	79.42	80.22	84.19	105.39	100.18	60.41	80.59
1993-94	123.22	81.01	82.52	82.59	104.63	107.59	59.18	82.08
1994-95	113.71	72.20	79.00	77.30	93.50	103.24	52.72	74.09
1995-96	108.73	68.98	67.74	81.60	107.92	108.95	67.28	72.64
1996-97	94.01	63.94	68.84	75.97	105.59	102.08	70.12	68.92
1997-98	92.26	62.69	77.43	76.08	97.53	102.72	76.01	68.98
1998-99	91.20	61.58	72.96	77.04	93.63	86.19	76.49	67.08
1999-00	85.45	62.20	81.41	77.20	95.41	80.60	84.46	68.51
2000-01	87.19	61.04	76.75	78.49	N.A.	N.A.	85.88	N.A.

Notes

1. Basic data taken from various issues of the Economic Survey of the Government of India.

2. The estimates for the years from 1995-96 are based on the New Series of National Income statistics. Hence the series show some discontinuity for some states at the year 1995-96.

Abortion: The Dynamics of Women's Right to Choose

Indranee Dutta

This paper focuses on the issue of induced abortion as a women's health problem, which is inextricably connected with issues around women's sexuality, reproduction, autonomy, gender and power relations and their social and legal bearings. The whole abortion question in its varied dimensions: physical and mental hazards, legal and societal impediments and their impacts upon the over all welbeing of women have been discussed. The emphasis is on providing quality abortion care and creation of a health care system conducive to women's reproductive needs, leading ultimately to reduction of the need to abort.

The problem

One of the physical realities of womanhood is pregnancy and childbirth. This unique and otherwise gratifying experience often turns into a curse when it is unwanted. Varying situations in the life of a woman establish the unwantedness of the conception or the fetus within her. A woman with unwanted pregnancy faces the urgent need to terminate the same, by seeking abortion procedure by adopting any means available to her, whether safe or unsafe, legal or illegal. Unsafe abortion is a major cause of maternal death around the world. The predicament of unwanted pregnancy often pushes the woman into accepting terms, which are not only crippling and life threatening but also dehumanizing and demeaning for the woman. Pregnancy, which symbolizes sexual activity, does not always enjoy the social sanction, nor is abortion perceived from the perspective of women's health (or right) in ordinary parlance. This renders the whole question of abortion more complex. The stigma attached to it due to moral, ethical and religious issues and the hidden nature of the matter, even where it has social or legal approval, makes it less prone for open discussions. Thus the term does not easily reflect the embedded dimensions of the problem for the women. However, a closer look reveals that the issue does not only relate questions of women's physical and mental health but also a wide range of matters related to their overall welbeing. It is inextricably connected with issues around women's sexuality, reproduction, autonomy, gender and power relations, and their social and legal aspects.

It is only recently that the world bodies have become conscious about the issue of abortion as a vital aspect of women's reproductive health. At the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo in 1994, the participating governments recognized unsafe abortion as a major public health concern, and placed their commitment to reducing the need for abortion through expanded and improved family planning services, while at the same time recognizing that, in circumstances where not against the law, abortion should be safe (U.N. 1995). The ICPD+5 (United Nations General Assembly review and appraisal of the implementation of ICPD in 1999) further agreed that, "in circumstances where abortion is not against the law, health systems should train and equip health-service providers and should take other measures to ensure that such abortion is safe and accessible." (U.N. 1999)

Some statistics

The global statistics testify the phenomenal nature of the abortion scenario. Of the 210 million pregnancies that occur each year, about 46 million (22 per cent) end in induced abortion and, globally, the vast majority of women are likely to have at least one abortion by the time they are 45 (Alan Guttmacher Institute 1999). This corresponds to 35 abortions per 1000 women aged 15-44, per year (HRP 2002-2003 plan of work). In India an estimated 6.7 million abortions take place annually (Chhabra and Nuna, 1994). In India, like in many other parts of the world, the abortion data is difficult to come by. The abortion figures vary widely and there are also allegations of gross under estimation in government statistics on MTPs and inaccurate reporting in surveys. Based on indirect estimate with NHFS – II data, Mishra and Dilip (2003) records the incidence of induced abortion as 189 per 1000 live births, of which 74 abortions occur due to sex selection. Abortion being a sensitive issue with negative connotations, accurate figure is difficult to obtain and more so when obtained from illegal providers in clandestine manner. It is observed that data from abortions occurring outside the legal framework are rare and unreliable. The estimates for non-legal/unsafe abortions are largely speculative and range from 2 to5 to 10 to 11 illegal abortions for every 1 legal abortion (Hirve, 2003a). Thus, one can imagine the enormity of the problem.

Unsafe abortion: Whether legal or illegal, health consequences of these occurrences are huge. Women who resort to unskilled providers put their health and lives at risk, as they are likely to undergo unsafe abortions. Unsafe abortion is defined as a 'procedure for terminating an unwanted pregnancy either by persons lacking the necessary skills or in an environment lacking the minimal medical standards or both' (WHO 1992). Statistics of unsafe abortion around the world speak of the magnitude of the problem. Of the 46 million abortions that occur each year, roughly 20 million are preformed under unsafe conditions because of untrained or poorly trained providers, unsanitary circumstances, and

crude and dangerous methods used by the providers or by self for self-inducement. The incidence rate is 13 unsafe abortions per 1000 women of 15-49 age group (WHO, 1997). According to a WHO (1998) report every day, 55,000 unsafe abortions take place — 95 percent of them in developing countries.

Abortion complications: The World Health Organization estimates that between 10 and 50 percent of women who undergo unsafe abortion have complications (WHO 1998). Most common complications are incomplete abortion, tears in the cervix, perforation of the uterus, fever, infection, septic shock, and severe hemorrhaging. Other serious long term health consequences faced by women who have unsafe abortions include chronic pelvic pain, problems getting and staying pregnant, infertility, tubal blockage, and ectopic pregnancy (Fact Sheet PPFA).

In India, the most frequently recognized complications from unsafe abortion are: pelvic infection, incomplete abortion, hemorrhage, uterine injury and cervical injury (Berge et al. 1997; Kerrigan et al. 1995 in Johnston, 2002). Studies have revealed that Indian women are presenting to medical facilities with grade III sepsis, including sepsis associated with generalized peritonitis, septicemia, septic shock, acute renal failure and disseminated intravascular coagulation. Gas gangrene, tetanus, severe adhesions and renal failure associated with the use of Fetex Paste are also reported (Mathai 1998 in Johnston 2002).

Induced abortion at any period of gestation exposes a woman to some risk; serious immediate complications are generally rare with abortions performed in medical settings. (Chhabra and Nuna, 1994). However, data from all over the world indicate that second trimester abortion is more hazardous than first trimester. The stage of pregnancy at which abortion is performed affects the risk of mortality and complications; regardless of the legal status and medical care, the risk of mortality rises with increasing gestation.

Moreover, adolescents, particularly the unmarried adolescents, who are more stigmatized for being pregnant, face, fear and anxiety and tend to delay securing abortions or to have clandestine or illegal abortions. Studies have revealed that they are more vulnerable as a group to suffering 2nd trimester abortion complications. Of adolescents who sought abortion in the second trimester almost one in four suffered complications, compared to only one percent of those who underwent abortion in the first trimester (Aras 1987, in Johnston 2002).

Morbidity and mortality: Each year an estimated 80,000 women die from complications of unsafe abortions, i.e., 57 deaths per 100 000 live births,

accounting for at least 13 percent of global maternal mortality (WHO, 1997). Worldwide, the maternal mortality rate due to unsafe abortion is 0.4 per 100 unsafe abortions. The highest rates occur in the developing world — 0.6 in Africa and 0.4 in Asia. The risk of dying from an unsafe abortion is minimal in the developed world, i.e., one in 3,700 procedures (Mundigo and Indriso, 1999). The risks become higher when we go down in the development ladder.

Information on maternal mortality due to unsafe abortion in India is difficult to come by. Moreover, like abortion figures, maternal mortality figures in India too, are reported to be grossly underestimated. MTP reports from health facilities are also not regular. Chhabra and Nuna (1994) observed that the share of abortion in maternal death causes, which was showing a decreasing trend after mid eighties, has more than doubled in the nineties from 5 percent in 1988 to 11.8 in 1990. This is a cause of concern. Two studies from a large number of teaching hospitals across the country put maternal death due to abortion at 15 percent, which is calculated to be 15,000-20,000 a year (*ibid*). The review of literature made by Johnston records that 18 percent of maternal death in India result from abortion and that from unsafe abortion ranges from 4.5 to 16.9 percent. Adolescents are particularly prone to abortion related morbidity and mortality. In 1995 almost 50 percent of deaths among women age 15-19 were abortion related. This implies that around twenty percent of abortion related deaths occur among adolescents (Johnston 2002). This is a serious matter and needs immediate attention.

The Facts

Abortion figures present the intensity of the problem but what they do not reveal are the subtle intricacies and complexities of the women's lives surrounding it. The abortion question is not confined to the act between the abortion seeker and the abortion provider, but it involves a whole range of issues that ultimately determine the nature and dimension of abortion procedure and its subsequent effect upon women. Starting with women's sexuality and abortion needs to legal and substantive provisions of reproductive health matters including access and cares are all important edges of the problem.

Why abortion?

Women, regardless of their socio-cultural, economic or nationality barriers, do face the need to stop the unwanted pregnancy from being born. It is a desperate situation for the women. It is a fact of life and has been happening from time immemorial. Anthropological studies and the vedic scriptures have reference to it. But the moot question is why is it taking the dimension that the figures speak despite all the medical advances and concern about women's reproductive health?

WHO 2003 cites four basic reasons leading to abortion: (1) millions of men and women either do not have access to appropriate contraceptive methods, or do not have adequate information and support to use them effectively; (2) no contraceptive method is 100 percent effective; (3) high rates of violence against women including at home and in war lead to unwanted pregnancies; (4) changing circumstances, such as divorce or other crisis, can result in a wanted pregnancy becoming unwanted.

Three interrelated factors having huge implications are societal attitude towards the issue (also women), governmental health policies (abortion policies in particular) and women's condition in life. More importantly it is the woman's real life situations in the sociopolitical domain, her socioeconomic capabilities, power and control over her own body/life and her surroundings, to a great extent determine her need to abort a pregnancy and the subsequent fall out.

Researches on Indian women seeking abortion revealed a number of reasons for seeking abortion services. They are financial reasons; already having too many children or having too many female children; becoming pregnant after too short a birth interval; experiencing health problems during pregnancy; becoming pregnant at an older age; becoming pregnant soon after marriage; suspecting husband's fidelity; having an extra marital pregnancy and becoming pregnant as a result of rape (Berge et al. 1997; Jejeebhoy 1998; Sinha et al 1998)

Sex selective abortion is another reason for necessitating induced abortion in some parts of India. Many women in India, whether rich or poor, rural or urban, undergo subjugation of all kinds in the milieu of patriarchal gender relations. They do not wish to give birth to a female child and let her go through the same sufferings. Certain cultural factors in the society also lead to strong son preference. For example, birth of a son is essential to continue the family name because of the system of patrilineal descent. Also the need for marrying out the daughters and the economic cost of dowry associated with it cause aversion to girl child. All these factors coupled with increasing availability of the ultrasound facilities for detection of sex of the foetus a large number of women go for sex selective abortion, especially in Northern part of the country. Although the use of prenatal diagnostics is not allowed for sex identification in India since 1994, yet it is widespread in the country. In 1989, 11 percent of abortions were thought to be to abort female foetus (Indian Council of Medical Research 1989). This practice is widely prevalent even today. In one study conducted in rural Maharashtra, forty five percent of women openly approved of abortion of female foetuses (Gupte et el.1997). Not only in India, countries like Nepal and Pakistan, with restrictive abortion laws may have sex selective abortions (Ganatra and Johnston, 2002).

More recent qualitative studies (Visaria et el. 2003) conducted in certain small geographic areas of the states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Haryana, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu reveal some interesting reasons for seeking abortion. Among the married women of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, three predominant reasons for seeking abortion are to avoid giving birth to a child soon after marriage, to limit family size and to space childbirth. The study in Gujarat reported that if girls who were married to Non Resident Indians (NRIs) became pregnant soon after marriage, they opted for abortion because of fear that an immigration visa may not be granted if they are pregnant. Some young unmarried women workers in the pharmaceutical industry in Tamil Nadu had to go for abortion to comply with the contract with their employer which clearly stipulated that they could not get married and could not get pregnant during the contract period. Poverty and economic compulsions for women to work were also cited as reasons for abortion. Besides, physical and psychological violence also pressurised women into having an abortion (especially sex selective abortion) by their husbands or the conjugal family members. Moreover, many women in the same study made direct link between non-consensual sex, unwanted pregnancy and abortion. Myths about conception in inauspicious months and order of birth that might bring bad luck are also reported to be some reasons for opting for abortion.

Thus the whole question of a woman's need to abort a foetus is in fact determined by a lot of factors in her existential realities rather than arising as a result of her own independent decision related to her sexuality or as her conscious reproductive choice. And in her attempt to abort, many women risk their lives with unsafe abortion accepting life long complications or death.

How safe is the abortion procedure?

Medical and surgical abortion when performed correctly by trained health care providers with proper equipment, correct techniques and sanitary standards is extremely safe and deaths and complications from unsafe abortions are entirely preventable. It becomes unsafe when induced by the woman herself, or by non-medical persons or by health workers in unhygienic conditions. Unsafe abortions are mainly caused by insertion of a solid object (usually root, twig or catheter) into the uterus, an improperly preformed dilation and curettage procedure, ingestion of harmful substances, or exertion of external force (WHO 1998a). Such practices are prevalent all over the world.

Abortion providers may be grouped into two broad categories, viz, legal and illegal. Legal providers are the trained medical professionals performing abortion procedures in government run health units and registered private clinics. Legally only a certified allopathic doctor at authorized health center could provide abortion services. Illegal providers are the unregistered and

uncertified providers. The uncertified abortion providers may be trained medical doctors and nurses in hospitals, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANM), ayurvedics, homeopaths, dais or traditional birth attendants, family health workers, village health practitioners, pharmacy shopkeepers and village women.

However, it has been observed that not all the illegal (uncertified) abortion providers are offering unsafe abortion. Studies have revealed that in India a number of unregistered and uncertified providers have been providing induced abortions, ranging from completely safe- provided by trained medical doctors in appropriate facilities- to life-threatening- provided by a range of providers in various settings (Mathai 1998; Kerrigan *et al.* 1995; Johnston 2002).

From the perspective of woman the likelihood of safe or unsafe abortion will depend upon a number of factors. They could be her marital status, socioeconomic conditions, place of residence (rural/urban), physical status (period of gestation and other health conditions), financial and decision-making autonomy, and acceptance or non-acceptance of abortion in the society (legal and socio cultural barriers).

Although induced abortion is legal on broad medical and social grounds in many countries, law in many others restricts it. For women under restrictive abortion laws having access to safe abortion care facilities (ACFs) is difficult. Abortion needs are urgent and desperate and women have to take recourse to whatever mode of pregnancy termination available at that point of time. It may entail going to the quacks and unqualified abortionists or trying out self inflicted abortions endangering one's life. Even when laws are liberal women do face the difficulty of access. The social stigma, religious, moral and ethical values associated with the procedure compels women to seek clandestine ways. Moreover, sexual activity outside of marriage is stigmatized and hence unmarried adolescents, single, divorced and widowed women become vulnerable and are often led to obtain abortion in clandestine manner. Similarly, even in a seemingly conducive atmosphere where the public health facilities may be adequately equipped to provide safe abortion the women may suffer from other constraints to avail the same.

Some other reasons for which the Indian women opt for unsafe abortions have been summarized by Johnston (2002) as, because certified providers are geographically inconvenient; staff at certified facilities tend to not respect women's confidentiality; because women are unaware of certified facilities; because registered facilities often do not have a trained provider and /or the necessary equipment to provide safe abortion services; and many women are unaware that the abortion is legal and publicly available. Cost, coercion, moral dilemma, late knowledge of pregnancy and unmarried status are some

additional reasons. Some providers do not approve of elective abortion and scold the client as they provide treatment; the pressure to accept sterilization or other long-term contraception after an abortion discourages women from using registered facilities. Therefore, the abortions continue to become unsafe.

Imperatives of safe abortion: the quality of care

The need for quality of care in the health care services has been widely recognized. In case of abortion the quality of care received often determines the difference between life, death or severe to mild complications. The concept of quality of care from the clinical point of view and from the point of the women may however differ. Quality of abortion care (QAC) for the medical profession tend to imply standards of performance, while for the women it means having access, affordability, confidentiality, pre and post abortion support from the providers, rather than the technical standards. There is a need for fusion of both these perspectives.

Concern for quality of care in medical science is not new. Ernest Codman articulated the core idea of quality of care, especially in health care way back in 1910 (Donabedian, 1989 in Bandewar 2002). His idea was guided by 'end result', which he expressed as 'satisfied and relieved patient'. Working further Donabedian formulated the structure-process-outcome model of quality of care. He gave emphasis to relationship between patients and provider, which should be characterized by privacy, confidentiality, informed choice, concern, empathy, honesty, tact and sensitivity. User- provider interface was considered important. Thus, Abortion care may be delineated as clinical and non-clinical. However, the abortion care delivery takes place in context of existing health care system, the legal status and the socioeconomic and cultural conditions of the women.

The quality of abortion care model (QAC) used by Bandewar (2002) that takes into account the structure, process and outcome of the system, helps one understand the intricacies of abortion care from medical, legal and women's perspectives. The structure component is represented by accessibility, physical standards and human power. Accessibility may be physical, social and financial. Physical access is a moot question in health care utilization. Location of the health care unit and its connectivity with the modes of transport is one criterion, which determines its access by the women. While considering the accessibility we have to look into the questions of availability (existence& adequacy), approachability in terms of distance to ACFs, approach roads and transport facilities. The abortion seeker residing at a remote area, without financial resources, cannot access the abortion facilities unless specific provisions are made. In the state of Mizoram for instance, where the multicentric facility study was conducted, it was found that although abortion

care facilities were conveniently located within less than a kilometer distance from the main road, more than two thirds of them were not connected by bus, which is the cheapest mode of transport (Dutta 2003). Thus in effect the ACFs in Mizoram are not easily reachable by the poor women. Similarly in Maharashtra (CEHAT 2003) it was found that abortion seekers in rural areas and lower socio-economic groups are at disadvantage due to poor physical access and being forced to depend upon private sector for abortion services.

Social accessibility is another factor determining utilization of ACFs. Social accessibility would mean women friendliness of the atmosphere at the ACFs. It entails sympathetic, humane and respectful behaviour with assured privacy and confidentiality, which is mostly lacking in the Public Health Care facilities. Moreover, often there is also language barrier when the providers do not have proficiency in the local language. In addition, the public health facilities have a tendency to put pressure on women to accept sterilization or a long acting contraceptive like intrauterine device (IUD) after an abortion (Passano 2002, Khan et al. 2001, Ganatra et al. 1996 in Sundar 2003). These act as deterrent for women to approach ACFs in the public sectors.

An abortion seeker also has to overcome financial and other socio- cultural barriers, before actually availing herself of this service. This fact was brought out in the study by Duggal and Amin (1989) and showed that despite higher prevalence of illness in remote rural areas, health care services were underutilized due to poor accessibility and low purchasing power of the people there. Thus, affordability is another vital issue, which determine women's access. Expenses usually include the travel cost, fees for abortion care, cost of medicines, diagnostic tests cost and other costs incurred in stay, food etc. Thus, even when a facility may be physically present it may not be assessable or affordable. Not only the private clinics where the cost of abortion is prohibitive, even the MTP centers run by the government is not free and women do incur some expenditure. Economic constraints are faced not only by the poor women but also women who have to obtain abortion in secret and young unmarried ones who cannot turn to their families for support.

The cost of abortion services also vary depending on a number of factors such as the number of weeks since conception, the method used for abortion, the client's marital status, the kind of anaesthesia used, whether linked to acceptance of some contraception, whether it is a sex selective abortion, whether any diagnostic tests like pregnancy test, sonography, lab test and so on are carried out, medications given, the location of the clinic, whether the provider and/or clinic is registered, whether hospitalization is required, the nature of competition and so on (Duggal 2003). Although until recently abortion services were provided free of charge at the public hospitals, based on

several recent studies Duggal concluded that induced abortion in public health facilities cost on an average between Rs300 and 500. In private clinics early abortions cost Rs1000, while late abortions cost around 3000 per abortion. The traditional *dais* who try various methods of abortion are not particularly inexpensive. They may charge anything between Rs800-1000 (Sundar R. 2003). What is not known however, is the cost per unsafe abortion in terms of post abortion care. Moreover, cost of abortion varies with method of abortion used. Cost is higher with dilation and curettage (D&C) method than that of manual vacuum aspiration (MVA). One of the major causes of late abortion and abortion related complications including mortality are inaccessibility of this service by the women whether physical, social or financial.

Besides accessibility, the QAC also depend upon the physical standards of the facility including human power. Equipment, instruments, drugs, quality of space etc. constitute physical standard and human power include adequate and qualified staff. In fact the physical standards to a great extent determine the 'clinical care' for women undergoing abortion. For providing high quality abortion services certain procedures like, diagnosis of pregnancy, provision of information and counseling, selection and provision of an appropriate abortion method and care after abortion are needed. Adequate and qualified staff contributes to safe health care delivery.
However, the above provisions alone do not ensure quality care, if the 'process' component is not in place. It is the interpersonal relationship between the client and the provider that makes the entire process easy or difficult. For best results the process should not be driven by power relations, cultural and knowledge gap but based on mutual respect and regard. The quality process entails less waiting time, respectful conduct, and adequate information about the health condition and pregnancy status of the abortion seekers, proper delivery of pre abortion counseling so as to allow informed choice of method and post abortion counseling for observance of necessary precautions after abortion to avoid complications and to prevent unplanned pregnancy.

Thus a woman has better access when services are available within geographical proximity, are affordable and delivered in a timely manner without undue logistical and administrative obstacles. Disrespectful, abusive or coercive behaviours by providers limit women's access. Regardless of her economic, marital, age, educational or social background and sexual behaviour, the abortion seeker must receive proper services.

Existing policies: bandage or bondage?

Now the question is how much does the government policies take care of the women's abortion needs. In almost all countries (98%) law permits abortion to save the women's life. In more than three-fifths of countries, abortion is

allowed to preserve the physical and mental health of the women and in about 40 percent, abortion is permitted in cases of rape or incest or fetal impairment. One-third of the countries allow abortion on economic or social grounds, and at least one-quarter allow on request (United Nations Population Division 1999). Thus, although conditional in virtually 73 percent of the countries, the women should have access to safe abortion services where the law permits.

In India the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act. approved in 1971 and enacted in 1972, permits abortion (or MTP) for a broad range of social and medical reasons, including: to save the life of the women; to preserve physical health; to preserve mental health; to terminate a pregnancy resulting from rape or incest and in cases of fetal impairment. Contraceptive failure is also sufficient ground for legal abortion (United Nations 1993). It defines 'when' 'where' and 'under what conditions' abortion services may be allowed. The Act offers full protection to the registered medical practitioner against any legal or criminal proceedings for any harm or injury caused to a woman seeking abortion, provided that the abortion has been or intended to be done in good faith under the provisos of the MTP Act. The Act allows medical termination of pregnancy up to 20 weeks of gestation.

The MTP Act, which legalized abortion in India, actually did not come about as result of well thought out agenda for women. Rather it was initiated as a government's population limiting strategy. Thus, the Act has aspects, which instead of bandaging the wounds of disadvantage restrict women's access, which are of course not necessarily intentional. The Act has been critiqued on the ground of 'over medicalization' and 'physician only' policy with strong medical bias. It has not taken into consideration the socio-political aspects of abortion, which still push women to seek illegal abortion despite it being legal. Researchers (Bandewar 2002, Ganatra 2000, Hirve 2003a and 2003b) point out many such drawbacks in the Act that lead to denial of abortion care to women in need, especially the more vulnerable amongst them. Some of the shortcomings articulated by them are discussed here. A 'physician only' policy excludes mid-level health providers and practitioners of alternative systems of medicine from the purview of legal abortion, where there is a need for training and facilitating such providers in safe methods to take care of the growing abortion needs. Though abortion law allows for termination of pregnancy for a wide range of reasons construed to affect the mental and physical health of the woman, it remains with the doctor (and not the woman) to opine on the need for such termination. She will not be given the service just on request, but has to justify her reason. This often compels the woman to lie about her situations surrounding her unwanted pregnancy, to fit into one of the situations stipulated in the Act. Focus of safe abortion care for women in the 'marital' context imply denial of such care to an unmarried woman in need of terminating an unwanted

pregnancy. Misinterpretations like need for spousal consent for termination of an unwanted pregnancy often stand barrier to abortion access.

Abortion policies recognize all public health institutions as abortion facilities by default and as such not subjected to regulatory process like the private ones. This often led to quality compromise and lack of transparency. On the other hand cumbersome registration process deter private providers from seeking registration and hence remain illegal. The amended MTP rules 2003 attempts to address some of the issues of administrative delays by decentralizing the administrative and legislative process from the state to district level.

Another critique is that monitoring of post abortion contraceptive use (rather than contraceptive counseling) results in public sector provider coercing the woman to accept contraception. The Act is said to reflect the overall mindset of the state to 'control' rather than 'facilitate' abortion. It is also pointed out that the MTP rules define 'person' and 'place' requirements but lack a reference to any national or international technical guidelines for safe abortion care. In the absence of guidelines for good clinical practice, providers continue to use unsafe abortion practices like sharp curettage, check curettage following a vacuum aspiration, general anesthesia, different drug dosage schedules and protocols for medical abortion, etc.

One good thing about the amended MTP rules 2003 is that it permits a registered medical practitioner (e.g. a family physician) to induce medical abortion (which are proved to be safe and effective) in his/her clinic using mifepristone with misopristol up to seven weeks gestation provided that the doctor has either on-site capability or access to a facility capable of performing surgical abortion in the event of a failed or incomplete medical abortion.

Another controversy, which came into focus in the recent times, is the 'supposed' conflict between the MTP Act and the Prenatal Diagnostic Techniques (Regulation and Prevention of misuse) Act (PNDT Act) of 1994 by the Government of India has also affected the women's access to safe abortion. The PNDT Act provides for the regulation of the use of prenatal diagnostic techniques and for prevention of its misuse for the purpose of prenatal sex determination leading to female feticide. It prohibits the use of any such techniques to determine the sex of the fetus and advertising of such use. Following this and the public debate against sex determination and female foeticide, the effect in some states was an overall ban on abortion. This resulted in denial of abortion services even to women with legitimate need for terminating an unwanted pregnancy, forcing women to take recourse to illegal and unsafe abortion. However, the Supreme Court's latest judgment of 10th

September 2003, following the Writ Petition filed by CEHAT against the Union of India and Others, now de-linked abortion from PNDT Act.

The remedial road map

Even after more than three decades of liberalization of abortion in India, women have not been able to access safe abortion care. Illegal and unsafe abortions continue to dominate the scene. Abortion is still thought to be unlawful by a large section of women. Millions of Indian women of reproductive age remain largely unaware of their right to legal abortion and of where to obtain safe, legal abortion services. Neither the abortion seekers nor the providers have internalized abortion from the women's rights perspective. In fact the abortion policies in India do not give the women the right to abortion, as it is not provided to women 'on request' or 'on demand' per se. Majority of providers continue to display contempt for the abortion seekers and continue to ill-treat (or at least do not show respect) the women. Spousal consent is still sought although it is not required as per the MTP Act. Pre and post abortion counseling, which are two important ingredients of safe abortion care is still lacking. There is dearth of trained providers and the inequitable concentration of legal abortion facilities in urban areas. Mismatch between availability of trained doctor and equipment also prevail, especially in the rural areas. Abortion service delivery certification is restricted to obstetrician – gynecologists or physicians who must undergo cumbersome certification program. Coarser and out dated methods of abortion procedures are still in use although modern more effective, safer and less expensive techniques have come about. Jesani and Iyer (1993) argue that liberalization of abortion law has neither resulted in reduction in the magnitude of illegal abortions nor an improvement in the women's health.

The road ahead surely has to be based on the present scenario. Efforts are on by different conscious bodies non-medical and medical, governmental and non-governmental, to secure for women safe abortion care as a backup for reproductive health. Women in the developing countries and so in India have constraints of different kind to safe access.

The different international policies like the World Population Conference 1974 and 1984, International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), Cairo (U.N.1994), World Conference on Women (U.N.1995), Key actions for the further implementation of the Program of Action of ICPD (U.N.1999), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (U.N. 1979), Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (U.N. 2000) and the National Population Policy and Action Plan (2000) have all created environment for abortion

advocacy to secure safe, low-priced, accessible abortion service for all women in need to regulate pregnancy.

We need to look at the situation in a realistic manner as to what we can do within the existing system. Since the question is of having universal access to all categories of abortion seekers the first task would be to increase the number of safe abortion providers and its spread in especially disadvantaged areas. As Sharad Iyengar rightly observed (presentation at the dissemination meeting of AAP-I, November 25-26, 2003) highly qualified providers cannot survive the rural interiors of India. By contrast less qualified providers that successfully combine access, skills, courteous behaviour and affordable costs are able to thrive. Instead of looking for specialists in obstetrics and gynecology (who are less likely to serve in the backward areas) it would be well to do with the medical graduates with required training, experience and skill, who can do the job equally well. Moreover, the mid level health professionals like, nurses, midwives, dais can be properly trained and engaged in providing abortion care. Bangladesh has been successful in expanding the access to menstrual regulation service to a great extent by training paramedics in menstrual regulation and stationing them at the primary care level since late 1970s (Akhter H, 2001 in Ganatra and Johnston, 2002). The International Confederation of Midwives (ICM) upholds that a midwife be prepared to appropriately treat, refer, and counsel women who have had induced or spontaneous abortions (International Confederation of Midwives 1996). In a number of countries midlevel providers such as midwives and other skilled health care workers who are not physicians have been trained to deliver quality post abortion care and abortion care. A comparative study has shown no difference in complication rates between women who had first trimester abortions with manual vacuum aspiration performed by a physician assistant and those who had the procedure performed by a physician (WHO 2003). Thus there is a strong case for training of midlevel health workers in India to increase access, as trained doctors are not sufficiently available, especially in rural areas.

It is a fact that abortion is often a choice that is derived from lack of alternatives, especially access to contraception. Contraceptive failure and unmet need for contraceptives are two vital reasons for unwanted fertility, which is resolved (or at least attempted to be resolved) by induced abortion. In other words there is a close connection between contraceptive use or non-use and abortion. The health care system must provide good quality family planning information and services, including emergency contraception to minimize the unwanted pregnancy. Studies (e.g. Malhotra A et. al. 2003) have revealed that strong unmet need for contraception may be dealt with by providing women safe and effective forms of temporary contraception. It has been increasingly felt that there is a strong need for pre and post abortion counseling that provide

medically accurate information about abortion, contraceptive information and services to reduce the need for abortion. It is equally important to ensure that women are apprised of their legal rights and how and where to obtain legal abortion care services for them.

One vital element for safe abortion care is appropriate technology. There are certain preferred methods worldwide leading to safe abortion at different stages of pregnancy. The preferred methods are manual or electric vacuum aspiration, or medical methods using a combination of mifepristone followed by a prostaglandin. Vacuum aspiration (manual/electric) by specially trained providers is now regarded as the safest and most cost effective technology up to 12 completed weeks of pregnancy and for treatment of abortion complications and other indications. The International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics (FIGO) and WHO have issued the following statement supporting MVA: "Properly equipped hospitals should abandon curettage...and adopt the aspiration methods, selecting manual evacuation and/or electric aspiration, according to the expertise available" (Final Report, FIGO/WHO Task Force, Brazil, March 1997). There is wide scope for promoting MVA in India for increasing access to early (1st trimester) abortion, as it is less resource dependent and safer. A task force of WHO and FIGO has endorsed MVA as a particularly appropriate technology for decentralized settings. Mifepristone followed by prostaglandin has been found to be safe and effective up to 9 completed weeks of pregnancy. This technology has been successfully piloted in India for early elective abortion in urban clinics with backup surgical services (Ganatra et al. 2002). Mifepristone and misoprostol were approved for distribution in India in March 2002. This abortion technique is a welcome introduction as it addresses a number of women's personal issues. It is a less expensive non-surgical technique, which is convenient because women can avoid the invasive instruments or anesthesia, retain their confidentiality and at the same time avail safe and effective procedure, of course, under medical supervision.

Conclusion

What is needed at present is a woman-centered comprehensive abortion care that situates the woman within the ambit of her physical, mental and personal circumstances. She needs to be understood in terms of her power to decide, control over resources, capacity to react to coercive action and her general welbeing. She not only has the right to seek abortion, but also the right to access affordable and safe abortion services, as also the right to information about the availability of such safe abortion services. The more vulnerable population, including the unmarried and the adolescent, call for particular attention. However, abortion in no case should become the only alternative to reproductive choice. Her choice must be well informed by complete and

accurate information as to under which circumstances abortion is permitted and how to get appropriate care and also the nature and type of contraception and their source. The providers also need to be well informed about the provisions of different policies and as well as women's position, so that they do not create unnecessary barriers to access and care.

The strategies needed are as disperse as change of government policy at legal and operational levels, change of attitudes of bureaucrats and health professionals, change of attitude of common men and women, building of clinical skills and strengthening of public and private health system. There is an urgent need to turn into reality the strategies spelt out by India's National Population (NPP), 2000 Action Plan to improve abortion situation, which include educating communities; decentralizing abortion services; adopting new technologies; simplifying provider certification requirements; and increasing the number of training centers. The essence lies in improving the over all reproductive health of women, with initiatives entrenched in 'rights perspective', leading ultimately to reduction of the need to abort. ■

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Re-examining the Proposal of Transferring the Surplus Waters from Brahmaputra – The Major River System in the Northeast

Ratna Bhuyan

"While taming nature, it is most important to give it the respect it deserves. Instead of guarding it, allow the water mass to flow the way it wants to. That is the best way to avoid floods". -Dr. S. Sarkar

Notwithstanding some of the glaring failures of human efforts to tame nature in the world, India is deliberating on the question of augmenting the supply of water resource in the deficit parts by diverting the natural courses of some of the important rivers. The paper, therefore, tries to look at the whole idea of river basin linking, seeking an understanding of the term 'surplus water' relating it to the northeastern part of India's requirement of such a massive linkage and tries to justify the notion of 'living with floods'.

Southeast Asia today is considering redefining the flow of some of the great rivers of the world. The temporal and spatial variations in availability of water, including surface water, ground water and rainfall, make the problem of harnessing water resources quite complex and call for strategic planning and management. Deliberations on linking the major river basins within India, and also with the neighbouring countries, have been on the cards, which has of late drawn the attention of not only the intellectuals but also the layman in India. The whole concept of joining the river basins is based on the idea of providing water supply in the water scarce regions of the country by carrying the surplus water from the regions with surplus water and at the same time controlling the menace of floods in these water surplus regions. Here perhaps, one can really try to define the 'water scarce regions' and 'water surplus regions' in the country. While it is too easy to point out the water scarce regions of the western and the southern belts of the country, a good deal of thought must go into declaring the northeastern part of the country as a water surplus belt.

The River Brahmaputra

The Brahmaputra, one of the biggest rivers of the world, is an international river having a length of 2880 km, out of which 1625 km flows in Tibet (China). In India, the river flows for 918 km of which 650 km flows through Assam. The total catchment of the river basin extends over an area of 580,000 sq km, of

which 2, 93,000 sq km is in Tibet, 194,413 sq km in India, 47, 000 sq km in Bangladesh and 45,000 sq km in Bhutan.

Originating at 30°31′ North latitude and 80°80′ East longitude in Tibet between the Kailash range and the Himalayan range, lying at an altitude of 5150 metres, it comes out of a glacier called Chema-Yung-dung. At the source the river is known as Matsang Tsangpho or Tamchok Khambab-'the river that gushes from the mouth of a horse'. Lower down, it is known as Tsangpo, which means 'the purifier'[1]. After flowing through Tibet the river enters into Arunachal Pradesh near Korba sweeping southward around the easternmost Himalayan peak of Namcha Barwa. It then crosses the Lesser Himalayan ranges in the name of Siang in Arunachal Pradesh through deep gorges, rapids and cascades. In the mountainous path itself, the Brahmaputra is joined by the two left bank tributaries, the Yang Chang Chhu and the Yomne and a right bank tributary, the Siyom. Thereafter, it flows for another 200 km in this region and appears in the plains near Pasighat as the Dihang. Then it flows through the braided channels for about 35km to meet the Dibong from the north and the Lohit from the east near Kobo. From this trijunction the river assumes a vast proportion and takes the name of Brahmaputra. The river then rolls down the plains of Assam from east to west for a distance of about 640 km up to the Bangladesh border. The river flows first towards southeast and then west through braided channels. Its breadth from one bank to another is sometimes 10km. About 120km downstream from its trijunction with the Dibong and Lohit, just below the confluence of the Burhidihing, the Brahmaputra bifurcates producing a fairly large branch known as Kherkatiya up to the confluence of the Subansiri and then as the Luit. The branch receives several large tributaries in Lakhimpur and reunites with the Brahmaputra at Luitmukh about 100km down stream. In between this branch and the Brahmaputra lies the world's largest river island Majuli.

The Brahmaputra river basin covers the whole of Arunachal Pradesh, the northern part of Assam, north of the Barail range, northern part of Meghalaya and the northwestern part of Nagaland.

As is well known, the Brahmaputra is one of the largest braided rivers of the world, characterized by large sediment load and frequent erosion of bank leading to migration of the channel. Again, the Brahmaputra receives many tributaries throughout its length. The north-bank tributaries of the Brahmaputra have steeper slopes, shallow and braided channels and coarse sandy beds. On the other hand, the south-bank tributaries have comparatively gentler slope, deeper channels from foothills, are clayey and hence have more stable beds and banks.

The river Burhidihing is the largest south-bank tributary of the Brahmaputra. This tributary was much larger in the past. Then known as Dihing, it flowed as a very big meandering river from the foothills near Miao of Arunachal Pradesh in a westerly direction north of Digboi. In a later period, the river bifurcated into two. The new branch Maijan flowed in the original direction as a medium sized river through present Makum, Dinjan, Mohanbari, and Maijan to meet the Brahmaputra. The other branch, which was a bigger one, flowed in southwesterly direction through Margherita and Jaipur to meet the original course near Naharkatiya. In subsequent years, the Maijan altered its course to flow in northeasterly direction through the course of the present Dangori River. While in the north-bank the Subansiri is the largest tributary which had a meandering course till 1950.

The Brahmaputra along with its tributary system has been providing livelihood to the people of Assam since the formation of the Brahmaputra plains. The tributary system of the river has made the valley fertile by depositing fine silt and clay. In the Pasighat district of Arunachal Pradesh, the river carries 340 metric tons of sediments per square kilometer. At Pandu in Guwahati, the load of the sediment carried is 804 million metric tons. The daily mean sediment load at Pandu during the floods is 2.12 million metric tons. The two banks of the river have been providing silting and therefore have been making the soil fertile from time immemorial. The river has been making the crop fields productive and also checking the soil depletion due to heavy down pour. The river therefore provides valleys and plains suitable for human settlements. In the Indian region itself, the river supports 30 million or three crore people, the average density being 145 persons per square kilometer[2].

The Stark Reality of Missing Link – The Earthquake of 1950 and Floods Thereafter

The northeastern part of India having one-third of the country's water resource potential has been declared as a water surplus belt. The annual ritual of floods, which has been wrecking the region, especially Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, for quite sometime has helped in declaring the region as a water surplus one. The idea of carrying this surplus water to the deficit areas in the country is a noble one, only if the policy makers are able to justify their proposition that the northeast belt of India is a water surplus region and carrying away of this so called 'surplus water' would in no way affect the socio-economic life and the bio-diversity of the region.

Today, while talking of the floods in the northeast, one cannot but look back at the great earthquake of 1950. It is the earthquake of 15th August 1950 which not only brought catastrophe to almost the entire region, but most important of all, the earthquake went on to decide the future course and flow of the river

Brahmaputra. The earthquake disturbed the topography of the upper reaches of the Himalayas, particularly in and around the Siang and Dibang river courses and the plains of upper Assam. This great earthquake caused a topographical disturbance in the riverbed and raised the bed of the Brahmaputra by bringing down the silts of the landslides, uprooted tree trunks from the hills and branches from the badly damaged mountains. The aggressive nature of flooding in the valley made a quantum leap after the great 1950 earthquake.

It was not that floods did not occur in the northeastern part of India prior to 1950. However, the frequency and intensity of the floods was not as rigorous as it had turned after 1950. A natural balance was being maintained and the people held the river with high reverence. The river Brahmaputra enriched the culture of the place to a large extent. Parasuram Kunda, Tameshwar Mandir, Bishwanath, Tezpur, Singari, Silghat, North Guwahati, Sualkuchi, Netaidhubuni, Kamakhya at Mankachar were all culturally associated with the river Brahmaputra. Relevance of Ashoka Astomi, the ceremonies of Churakaran, Upanayan etc were all closely associated with the river Brahmaputra. People also welcomed the occasional flood which enriched their cultivable land with flood–spill silt deposition, locally known as 'palash', during the short duration of inundation which helped in reaping an invariably good harvest. Moreover, the agrarian economy of the region was adapted to the eventualities caused by the floods. The people were wise enough to sow and harvest the dry season ahu paddy well before the monsoon set in. On the other hand, the summer paddy sali was planted late to avoid the floods. Once the flood receded the people returned to their normal chores[3].

However, the earthquake of 1950 as already mentioned became the turning point. As the floodwater completely swept away the town of Sadiya and erosion along the banks increased, engineering activities were speeded up in and around the riverbanks of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Humankind's response to floods has always been influenced by the technological choices available. The readily adopted measure in general to control flood in the region after 1950 has been the building of the embankments and dykes. Several dykes were built across the river to divert the dangerous under current along the riverbank of the Brahmaputra to control erosion. Unknowingly perhaps, man was intruding into nature's boundary. In the years that followed, the river ecology changed drastically with more and more dykes and embankments being built up. The fishing communities living in and around the riverbanks were displaced and they had to seek livelihood elsewhere. The worst was yet to follow. These embankments, unable to resist the pressure of the surging waters, started giving away at many places causing flash floods. The entire agrarian structure including the cropping pattern of erstwhile flood affected areas of Assam underwent changes under the protective umbrella of embankments and bunds.

These embankments and dykes increased the siltation on the riverbeds and gradually the water holding capacity of the rivers declined.

Initiation of construction of the artificial dykes took place in 1954 and since then Assam has had the longest system of dykes constructed so far in India. Most of these dykes have been constructed very close to the river and with sandy loose materials. Today, Assam alone has more than 5000 km of embankments out of approximately 16000 km in the country, which is about 32 percent of the country's total. As these dykes are not properly maintained, they get breached or flushed away, not to mention that these embankments have become a major cause for intensification of the flood hazards in the recent times. It is sufficient to say that when a silt-laden river like the Brahmaputra is embanked, the silt gets trapped between the embankments leading to a rise of the bed that further intensifies floods. Recurring breaches in the Dirok-Sumoni Bund in the Tinsukia district of Assam which has led to heavy losses to the life and property of the people besides changing the entire socio-economic scenario of the region is an eye opener to the disastrous consequences of these embankments. This bund was made with the hope that just in case the Noadihing overflows, the paddy lands which are on the western belt of the Noadihing will not be flooded and damaged. However, on being breached, excess volume of Noa-Dihing water not only flooded the paddy fields and damaged the standing crops but also caused an onrush of water flow from the river Brahmaputra which had high gradient generating high velocity of water flow in both Dholla and Dangri rivers and thereby cut beds of these rivers deeper than the existing bed of the Brahmaputra. This subsequently caused on-rush of water flow from the Brahmaputra towards these two rivers. The Brahmaputra River carried harmful sediments towards these rivers and the surrounding paddy fields making these uncultivable due to deposition of sediments. The breaching of Dirok-Sumoni Bund has made it possible for the Brahmaputra water to flow through the smaller rivers which has resulted in further hazards[i]. Again, the Assam floods of 1998 had seen over 128 breaches in the embankments. Even more frightening are the recent breaches taking place around the Nowgaon and Morigaon districts. Another grave problem associated with these embankments and which is on the rise in the entire stretch along the Brahmaputra and its tributaries is water logging. Further, these flood-control embankments constructed in Assam have been responsible for the shrinkage of feeding and spawning grounds of many prized fish species and the disappearance of many spawn collection centres[4].

Defining Surplus Water

Water resource cannot be considered in isolation from the land through which it flows. The same holds true for the River Brahmaputra and the northeastern region. The river is the source of life in the region.

The northeast region drained by the Brahmaputra and its tributaries possesses about 30 percent of the total water resource of the country. For those voicing this as surplus water from the centre, the concept of surplus water perhaps needs a detailed deliberation. The gigantic project is envisaged to bring out the backward regions of the country from the clutches of poverty by creating more employment avenues. If this is so, why for decades the northeastern part of the country despite possessing this excess water has been fighting against mass poverty and unemployment? Hence, even if one does not consider the difficult political problem of securing consensus among different states on the availability of water surpluses, the designation of a basin as surplus or scarce for designing a water transfer system has little practical relevance until the potential of basin efficiencies is fully realized [5].

The two river systems of the northeast India, i.e., Brahmaputra and Barak, together have the highest average annual run off of 585.60 b.c.m i.e., 31percent of the country's total surface water run off. The reality is that the hilly physiographical setting of the region, together with heavy annual precipitation and the narrow basins of the Brahmaputra, have reduced the scope of utilization of this run-off water to a great extent. The live storage capacity of the utilizable flow, an important indicator of water resource management, is only 1.10 b.c.m for the Brahmaputra- Barak River Basins (BBRB). Besides, the total replenishable ground water potential for Brahmaputra-Barak River Basin is roughly around 45.39 b.c.m / year. Thus, a total of 69.39 b.c.m water resources including both surface and ground, are available for Brahmaputra-Barak River Basin which accounts for 6 percent of total utilizable water resources of the country[ii].

The river basin linking process is to be considered keeping in view the importance of water resource in any region, as the rivers act as potential power houses, offer possibilities of irrigation, act as conveyors of commerce, and also sustain fisheries. In respect of hydro power, an estimate of Central Electricity Authority reveals that the hydroelectric power potential in all the major river basins of the country is assessed at 84 thousand MW, of which the Brahmaputra basin alone has the potential of 35 thousand MW i.e. 41.67 percent of the total potential in the country. However, this huge hydro-potential of the northeastern region is yet to be tapped. Only around 3 percent of the total capacity has been installed till date (Table 1 & 2). The result is that the states in the region having the water potential to generate hydroelectricity are languishing in darkness and in the states like Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya, almost fifty percent of the villages are yet to experience Edison's discovery (Table 3). This indicates that the potential powerhouse of the country is itself far behind in the utilization of the full potential and is lurking in darkness. The region, therefore, inspite of having the highest hydropower potential generates very negligible amount of it

and the per-capita consumption of one of the most demanding sectors, i.e agriculture stands at only 1.7Kwh.

The dominant activity in the northeast for livelihood is agriculture, which again is the largest absorber of water. The Net Sown Area (NSA) for the northeastern region is 3.9 m. ha, which is about 15 percent of her total geographical area of 25.5 m. ha (Table 4). In spite of being blessed with abundant water resources, agriculture in the region suffers from lack of irrigation facilities, as only 21 percent of Net Sown Area (NSA) in the region is covered by irrigation. This indicates the paradox of the region. Only 0.85 million ha. (34 percent) of the ultimate irrigation potential (UIP) of 4.26 million ha. in the region has been tapped (Table 5). This wide gap between the utilisable irrigation potential and the utilised irrigation potential only goes to indicate the nascent stage of water resource development in the region. This scenario further questions the region being declared as a water surplus region.

Taking Assam as a representative case of the region, it has been found that the state is yet to develop and harness the full hydropower potential, irrigation potential and navigational facilities. The position of Assam in respect of creation of irrigation potential is even worse than the achievements made in the region. 71 percent of the Net Irrigated Area (NIA) of the northeastern region falls in Assam but it has created only 30 percent of its UIP. The irony is that 21 percent of the ultimate potential created in the state is wasted. In the northeastern region the percentage of wastage stands at around 19 percent, while for the country as a whole it is approximately 13 percent (37.12 mha out of 42.77 mha)[6]. This obviously puts a question mark the water resource management scenario in the region and also raises doubt on the future necessity of creating more irrigation potential in the region as put forward by the central government.

In so far as the navigation facilities go, the less said is better. During the British days, the railway line served only as the feeder line, the main route of communication was the riverine route through the Brahmaputra. The Brahmaputra once served as the only route for transport and communication and trade and commerce. Using the water system as the main means of transportation indirectly maintained the Brahmaputra water system as the most efficient and healthy drainage system. But even during the earlier times, the steamers could not operate regularly because of the frequently changing angles of the hydraulic-thrust-vectors. Since the introduction of the steamer service in 1847, tea as a plantation crop assumed commercial importance. The tea companies and the tea gardens would not have started without the existence of the river Brahmaputra itself. Because of the presence of the river, many *ghats* were introduced in the state and the region as a whole. Again, the flourishing of the tea trade led to the monetization of the economy in Assam. The business

was mostly carried on with the help of the hundis supplied by the Marwari businessmen at the ghats. Over the years, particularly after independence, river transportation lost its importance as against the speed of rail, road and air transportation. The negligence of the river transportation in Assam became obvious after the earthquake in 1950, when the riverbed of the Brahmaputra and many of its tributaries were raised and rivers became braided as compared to its previous one channel characteristic. As a result of navigational difficulties the main line service was terminated70 kilometres downstream of Dibrugarh[iii], the main tea producing region, and only feeder services were operated to Dibrugarh. Thus, on the pretext of difficult river navigation after 1950, it tended to become a forgotten subject with utter negligence of the benefits inherent in it. The water route from Sadiya to Dhubri which was declared as the National Waterway No.2 has remained grossly underutilized till date. Therefore, whatever little navigation is carried on the Brahmaputra today might completely become impossible in the dry season if the water from the Brahmaputra is released as envisaged by the River Linking Project.

Despite having this huge water resource potential, majority of the states in the northeastern region face the acute problem of water shortage during the post monsoon season. Local water shortage problem is escalating with each passing year. The states like Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and even Assam in the region have to cope with the water shortage problem during the months from January to April. Of late, the culture of multistoried buildings has been gripping the urban-centres of the region, and these buildings having being permitted to drill, driven or dug well or tube well by the municipal authorities are depleting the level of the ground water fast, the shortage of water during the post-monsoon months have become a matter of serious concern. As commented by Professor Md. Taher, one of the eminent geographers of the region, perhaps given the state of affairs, the time is not far away when this so called 'water surplus' region of the country will experience a real drought like situation[7] . There is definitely a need to define the term surplus water in this context as well.

It should therefore be made clear by the central government as to what criterion has been adopted to define the term water surplus. If the centre has declared the region as water surplus based on the excess water as generated by the floods in the region, it needs to think twice. Looking at history, there are numerous instances to show that the onslaught of floods is not necessarily always because of heavy rainfall and the lack of capacity on the part of the rivers to carry this excess water. The northeast has also experienced the phenomenon of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) which took place in the Pasighat district of Arunachal Pradesh in 1991, there is therefore the need to take a serious study on this aspect. Forewarning from the science fraternity of 50 high altitude Himalayan lakes on the verge of bursting its banks and many other unknown

ones at similar critical stages across the Himalayas certainly demands a comprehensive study of India's glaciers and glacial lakes[8]. From the perspective of the people ravaged by the perennial floods in the region, the proposal to carry the excess water of the Brahmaputra might seem to be a welcome relief, however, to the majority section earning their livelihood from the same river, perhaps, the age old notion of living with floods is more appealing. For the people carrying on cultivation in the low-lying areas, it is the floodwater inundating their fields which helps them to reap a good harvest without facing the problem of water scarcity. It is again this floodwater only which is sustaining a section of the populace living below the poverty line. The receeding flood water which always leave behind an alluvial layer, helps the growth of leafy vegetables in the wild such as *dhikia, khutura, manimuni, videli lata,* etc which sustain a huge percentage of the rural populace living below the poverty line. Considering these facts, if the government is defining the term surplus water in terms of this floodwater in the region it clearly needs a redefinition.

Apart from sustaining the human lives, the floodwaters in the region have also been sustaining the ecology of the region. Therefore, another aspect, which one has to consider before coming to any conclusion on the matter relating to joining of the different river systems, is the question of preserving the biodiversity in the region. Assam is a part of a global bio-diversity hot spot (Myers). Assam has widely differing habitats. The state is very rich in biodiversity having around 6000-7000 plant species. Throughout the Brahmaputra and the Barak valleys there are a large number of bills and hoars with swamps and marshes in the fringe areas. During summers all such areas remain under floodwater giving rise to abundant growth of trees. In the floodplain zone of the Brahmaputra and the terai belt, along the foot of the Himalayas, wet savannah grasslands are to be found. Some such grassland pockets are found in the sanctuaries of Kaziranga, Orang, Manas, Kobo chapori and Dibru-Saikhowa. The main species of grasses found in such grasslands are khagori or khag, nal, ikora, ulu kher, meghela or bhutang, kohua or kash. Some trees like bogori, koroi, and simul or silk cotton are found scattered in the grasslands. Along the banks of the larger hilly areas and streams the riverine or riparian fringing forests are seen. A few large trees with a large number of shrubs, both evergreen and deciduous with grass on the ground, characterize this type of forest. The sissoo and the khair are the characteristic trees of such type. On the chars and chapories of the Brahmaputra and its larger tributaries, pine like shrubs grow abundantly[9].

The water bodies which are distributed in the riverine tract of the Brahmaputra along with their very rich aquatic resources always act as the central axis of attraction for a large number of animals and birds, particularly during the winter, assuming thereby additional significance in the regional ecosystem of the state

and the northeast as a whole. Large rivers often function as effective barriers in the distribution of mammals. The wildlife diversity in the state has been evolved on the basis of the forest and 4000 wetlands, ponds, beels and the Brahmaputra and the Barak river systems. In Assam, the Brahmaputra River has played a key role in determining the distribution pattern of many mammalian species[iv]. The river has been an effective barrier to the movement and dispersal of the Hoolock gibbon, Stumptailed macaque and the pigtailed macaque. Assam also has the wild Asiatic water buffaloes. Moreover, together with the mighty Brahmaputra, the other smaller rivers such as the Manas and the Sankosh have proved to be very effective physical barriers restricting the distribution of the species. Crocodiles, snakes, terrapins and monitor lizards with their various species represent the reptiles of the region. Crocodiles are now found mainly in the Brahmaputra River, but they have become extremely rare. The fact is that these natural water bodies are replenished by the floodwaters every year. Perhaps, the metabolism of the animals in these beels and wetlands and even, the water bodies inside the wildlife sanctuaries like the Kaziranga, Manas, etc is to a large extent effectively supplemented by the mineral contents of the floodwater. If this excess water is carried to the other river basins in India as proposed by the GoI, this might negatively tell on the health of the animals here. It has also been recorded that species composition in the flood plain lakes to a great extent depends on the intensity of floods. There is the fear that if the intensity of the floods in the region lessens with the construction of the upstream dams, it will affect the auto-stocking of the lakes, and, the impoundment of water will also not allow the flushing out of the profuse pre-monsoon growth of the aquatic weeds. This will in turn affect the aquatic biota. The region therefore cannot sacrifice this eco system by allowing the so-called excess floodwater to be taken away.

Rivers with regulated flows lose their ability to support natural processes. Pati, a type of mattress which is used by those below the poverty line in the region mostly as sleeping mattresses and by the rich as a decorative item in their homes, is made from certain type of reeds, which grow abundantly in and around the beels under a particular water level well maintained by the incoming and the receding flood waters of the Brahmaputra. Carrying away of the flood waters from the region will therefore entail snatching away one of the important needs of the poor in the region. Looking back now one can think of perhaps realizing this potential of the Brahmaputra-Barak system within the region, and then exporting the surplus potential created and not the surplus water, after meeting the local needs, to the other parts of the country. In terms of augmenting economic growth, there should definitely be a shift to maintaining and managing the existing water supplies of a region. A proper understanding of the riparian system of the northeast along with the economic significance of the estuarine parts in the region would help dispel the simplistic notion of waters going waste to the sea.

Impact of the Dams and Embankments: So Far and Hence Forth

Construction of the multipurpose dams for harnessing hydroelectricity, creation of irrigation facilities, controlling floods, etc has in the recent years become a part of development process all over the world. Together with it, the development related displacements have become a common phenomenon. The present proposal of linking the river basins also includes the idea of constructing a number of dams. One of the arguments placed for large dams in the eastern Himalayas is their value as a flood-control measure. These dams are again to be located in thick forest areas with perennial river courses which are rich in aquatic biodiversity. There will, therefore, be the submergence of vast forest tracts and hence disturbance to wild life. Considerable displacements of communities and lifestyles will emerge. There will be changes in water quality and micro climatic conditions. The dams and reservoirs will result in fragmentation and stagnation of rivers which in turn will lead to destruction of ecology and fish species and finally extinction of already endangered plant and aquatic species. Worst of all, a filled reservoir of a dam can change the river ecosystem forever.

And, most important of all, by controlling flooding, dams deprive alluvial plains downstream of fertile soil for agriculture. The whole of the northeastern region being an agrarian economy, in no way can the region afford to lose these alluvial deposits at the cost of the large dams. Another stark reality associated with the dams is the issue of submergence. The Central Electricity Authority has identified 149 projects for the northeast and has ranked them on the basis of reform and restructuring aspects without giving any consideration to the impacts of these projects on the biological diversity of the region whatsoever. To quote Vagholikar and Firoz, 'It was only in the middle of 2001 that we were acquainted with certain facts about the proposed Lower Subansiri hydroelectric project on the Arunachal-Assam border, which made us take notice: over 3,400ha. of submergence in the eastern Himalayas; 42ha. of the Tale Valley Sanctuary to be submerged; possibility of crucial elephant corridors being lost; serious legal violations by the project proponents...' [10]. The people from the hills of the northeast, who mostly practice shifting cultivation and are dependent on their common property like the forests, cannot think of their lands being submerged in the name of development. The tribes residing in the hills of the region do welcome development, but not at the cost of sacrificing their culture. In case of submergence of the subsistence lands in the hills the government can hardly think of any alternative lands in similar cultural and ecological setting. Moreover, the people living downstream in the plains, particularly those depending on the flood plains will also suffer as the future productivity of their lands will be at stake, thus raising serious concerns about their livelihoods. It is seen that the government does not officially recognize project affected displaced people. There is, therefore no known resettlement and rehabilitation scheme. India's experience

in resettlement and rehabilitation of project-affected people is abysmal. Under such circumstances, proposing to construct 226 dams in the region in the name of linking the river basins in the country can be called into question.

Leaving aside the man made dams, the region has already faced the worst experiences of natural dams. One of the glaring instances of how dams can bring unprecedented floods is the one of 1950 which induced heavy landslides in the eastern Himalayas. One of those landslides blocked the channel of the Subansiri near Sipumukh to create a dam. Water was impounded in the dam for three days in the monsoon season which reached to a great height. The river dried up in its downstream due to lack of supply in the upstream end. But due to heavy pressure of the reservoir water the dam breached and caused an unprecedented heavy flood to flush away hundreds of villages on its way. This flood had not only changed the course of the Subansiri but also converted the river from a meandering river to a braided one[v].

In recent times, the natural dam breach in the upper reaches of the Himalayas had caused flash floods in Arunachal Pradesh in the year 2000 wreaking havoc in four districts of the state. This also implies that a serious assessment of the feasibility of the dams is required in the northeast. Moreover, it would be imprudent to go in for high dams in the northeast considering the fact that the region lies in the highly seismic belt (Table: 6). Historical data on past earthquakes is very meager. Further, their return periods are not well constrained. The Brahmaputra valley has faced as many as 2500 earthquakes in the period between 1970 and 1988 and many more thereafter. Also, in the region, it has been observed that a number of earthquakes occur at the same epicenter indicating intermittent energy release in the area[11]. Added to it, there will also be the fear of Reservoir-Induced Seismicity (RIS). The weights of the reservoirs proposed in the region can create the sorts of pressures that could result in an earthquake. Active faults and discontinuities in rock masses and fissures created by the water seepage from the dams into the ground can also create earthquakes. The occurrence of RIS is now a well accepted fact. RIS has been reported from 75 dams across the world, of which 17 cases are from India. India has already experienced the world's most devastating reservoir induced earthquake which took place in Koynanagar in Maharashtra in 1967[12]. Therefore, the centre cannot take the risk of constructing these huge dams and putting the lives of millions in and around the Brahmaputra valley at jeopardy. One can really question here, development, but at what cost? Given the likes of such instances, the creation of artificial dams in the region is a serious question.

Conclusion: Reaching at Consensus Through Conflicting Scenarios

In the global context, the overwhelming changes brought about in different fields, by intruding into nature's virginity and redrawing nature itself, in the

name of human progress, are multi-dimensional. The spectrum of social, ecological, environmental changes is transforming the world into a place, which perhaps will fail to sustain any living creature in the near future. Confronted with this truth, instead of learning from the experiences in and around, the world is on a competing foot to gain the maximum out of the minimum resources available.

The maxim goes-think global but act local. Contrary to this, India has chosen the path of travelling on the same raft with the world. Faced with the twin problems of water shortage and perennial floods, India has taken recourse to the idea of joining the major river basins within the country to arrive at a permanent solution to the problems. The country seeks to find solutions to many other problems like removal of poverty, meeting the increasing demands for water resource for irrigation, generation of required electricity and of course, generation of more employment opportunities in this gigantic project of joining the major river basins. Notwithstanding the fact that the west has already tasted the worst consequences in their endeavour to join some of the major water bodies, India has pursued with the idea of joining its own river basins. The death of the Aral Sea due to the diversion of two rivers in the erstwhile Soviet Union that flowed into it is perhaps the most famous disaster from a river diversion scheme. This sea had 1 m^3 of water but because of huge water diversions, particularly for irrigation, the sea has met with this cruel fate. The falling water level of the Caspian Sea also coincided with the major diversions from the Volga River and other rivers emptying into the Sea. This Sea can be saved only by restoring back the volume of water carried from the Volga River. The previously wild and the grand Colorado, drained through canals for years, today no longer reaches the sea. The river now carries only salt. In our neighbourhoods, China too has suffered the devastating results of its interference in the Yangtze and Yellow River headwater regions[vi].

India is considering carrying the surplus waters from the eastern Himalayan region to the water deficit areas of the western and southern belts of the country. The thinking is noble but must be accepted with a little vengeance.

- One has to study the flood plain management aspect, the positive and the negative impacts of the river control measures and the intensity of the river resource utilization in any region before one can think of the prospects of joining the river basins. For certainly, floods do have some beneficial effects such as fertile silt deposition on agricultural fields, recharge of soil moisture, increase in the fish population and washing effect on dirty environment. It is a fact that most of the flood-prone areas in the region do not have any sort of irrigation facility. Nevertheless, the flood plain zone of the Brahmaputra Valley has been providing the ahu and bao rice fields from remote past. The alluvial soil is extensively distributed over the Brahmaputra plain.

Because of the alluvium left by the river after leaving the hills and flowing through the plains these soils receive high fertility.

- Secondly, the whole concept of surplus water as already stated in the paper, needs clear and yet deep consideration and redefinition in the light of the issues raised. There is a need on the part of the authorities to make public the weighing parameter of the concept surplus.
- Thirdly, if put into effect, the massive project will require the construction of a large number of dams across the country and mostly in the northeastern region. Given that the National Commission did not discuss the Himalayan component in detail as because the data relating to the Himalayan Rivers are classified as confidential, the after effects of the big dams seem to be questionable. This apart, the country is already experiencing the effects of the large dams like the Narmada and Tehri under various stages of construction on the human population, environment and the eco system. Since 1970, the construction of new dams has fallen by 60 percent in the world. After experiencing the dams, the recent trend in the world has been to roll back the dams. Therefore, the GoI should be transparent whether the social and environmental factors have been given the same significance as the techno-economic aspects in assessing the various options on the question of construction of the big dams, which are a part of the gigantic project to generate power ten times more than the projected demand of same in the northeastern region of the country.
- Fourthly, the country is moving ahead with the idea of joining the river basins with an investment that is two and a half times the annual tax collection of the country. To borrow the words of the people at the centre, 'If links causes more damage to ecology than bringing benefits, then it will be abandoned'[13]. There is definitely a price attached to all action and inactions. The authorities at the helm of affairs therefore, need to be transparent whether in case of any kind of failure in the project, whether the country can restore back the river basins to their original positions by delinking the same and not only facing the losses, but also perhaps, pumping back more resource.
- Fifthly, given the raging controversies over in appropriate assessment of environmental and social impacts of the project, and added to it, the lack of transparency on the part of the government, the situation calls for large-scale participation of the people who will be affected by the project. There can be no justification at all in planning development projects for the region without letting the citizens of the region have access to information and documents. There is a mass feeling that non-transparency on the part of the government is leading to project proponents being getting away with poor and half done

assessments, thereby, ensuring poor socio-economic and environmental decision making. There is therefore the need to probe deeper into the social and environmental aspects in the northeast.

For the northeast, had the Brahmaputra not been there, floods would not have occurred in the region, but it is again for this river Brahmaputra that the marshy lands are replenished today in the region. Specific coveted fish would not have survived in the region but for this mighty river. The need of the hour is land use planning for the flood affected areas in the region. There should be the readjustment of crops if required. The plantation of the sali paddy should be stopped. One of the options to compensate the loss of rain fed crops during the flood period is to take up cultivation in the non-flood period by introducing the minor irrigation schemes. There should be the introduction of environmentally benign and cost-effective methods like small localised irrigation projects, which are sustainable and at the same time environment friendly.

Nature should also be given its space. There is a need for understanding the natural processes. The vagaries of nature can be fought and overcome if one does not go contrary to the laws of nature. It is the human factor that counts more [14]. People in northeast have lived and survived with floods. The marshland habitations, affected by the perennial floods can live with boats, embankments and raised platforms. Monolithic water resource planning cannot help. The planners can perhaps take up a study of the traditional ecological crisis management systems in depth with respect to the recurring floods and drought in the country. The government can also focus on more worthwhile schemes of water-harvesting and decentralized watershed development, wherever possible. A plan can be taken up in the line of the traditional water conservation system through the construction of water tanks. It is high time that the Indian planners realise that adherence to the notion of small is beautiful will only pay in the long run and also help India to avoid the mistakes of the western world. India should respect the notion of small is beautiful. As far as the flood affected regions are concerned, instead of trying to tame floods, nature should be allowed to have its own course. People in the past have lived in flood with natural balance; human remedies have only aggravated the flood situation. They have failed to tame the fury of floods. ■

[Note: The paper is based on a presentation made in a National Seminar on River Link Water Management- Its necessity and Feasibility in East and North-East India With or Without Bangladesh at Jadavpur University, Kolkata in December 2003]

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Tables

Table: 1 Hydro-power potential in the northeastern region, Prime mover wise installed capacity on 31st March 2002 and electricity installed capacity (utilities)

(In mega watts)

STATES	HYDRO-ELECTRICITY	ELECTRICITY (THERMAL AND HYDRO)
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	30	45
ASSAM	2	622
MANIPUR	3	31
MEGHALAYA	187	189
MIZORAM	8	37
NAGALAND	20	22
TRIPURA	16	85
NER	366	1031

*Source: CMIE, March 2003

Table: 2 State wise energy requirement and peak demand projections by CEA 16th power survey for the Northeast, 2002-03

STATES	ENERGY REQUIREMENT (Mkwh)	PEAK LOAD (mw)
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	232	77
ASSAM	3954	740
MANIPUR	708	172
MEGHALAYA	693	144
MIZORAM	361	102
NAGALAND	291	75
TRIPURA	695	176
NER	6934	1486
INDIA	562572	90510

*Source: CMIE, May 2003

Table: 3 Number of villages electrified in Northeast India as on 31st March 2000

STATES	TOTAL NO. OF VILLAGES	NO. OF VILLAGES ELECTRIFIED
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	3257	1625
ASSAM	22005	21385
MANIPUR	2035	1580
MEGHALAYA	4874	2315
MIZORAM	724	517
NAGALAND	1112	1099
TRIPURA	4727	3228
NER	38734	31749

*Source: Census 1991

Table: 4 Net Sown Area (NSA) and Net Irrigated Area (NIA) in Northeast India (In thousand hectares)

STATES	NSA	NIA	% OF NIA TO NSA
ARUNACHAL PRADESH	185	36	19.46
ASSAM	2701	572	21.18
MANIPUR	140	65	46.43
MEGHALAYA	221	48	21.72
MIZORAM	109	9	8.26
NAGALAND	261	63	24.14
TRIPURA	277	35	12.64
NER	3894	828	21.26
INDIA	142598	57053	40.01

Table: 5 Ground water resource of the northeastern region

States	Total ground water resource	Domestic, industrial and other uses	Available for irrigation	Used for irrigation	Gross draft estimated of porata basin	Net Draft	Gross balance	Level of ground water development
AP	0.14385	0.02158	0.12227	0.11005		0.12227	0.12227	
ASSAM	2.24786	0.33718	1.91068	1.71962	0.20356	0.14249	1.76819	7.46
MANI	0.3154	0.0473	0.2681	0.24129	Neg	Neg	0.2681	Negative
MEGHA	0.05397	0.0081	0.04587	0.04128	0.0026	0.00182	0.04405	Negative
MIZO	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
NAGA	0.0724	0.0109	0.0615	0.05535	Neg	Neg	0.0615	Negative
TRIPU	0.06634	0.00995	0.05639	0.05075	0.02692	0.01885	0.03754	33.43
INDIA	43.38593	7.12655	36.25938	32.63345	19.29173	13.50404	22.73145	37.24

*Source: India, 2003

Col 4: Ground water Resource-Provision of Domestic, Industrial and other uses
Col 5: 90 % of Column 4
Col 6: Gross Draft is the total withdrawal from ground Water Resources for Irrigation
Col 7: 70 % of Gross Draft (bulk of the losses return back to the ground water reservoir)
Col 8: Column 4 minus Column 7 in net terms
Col 9: Level of Ground Water Development (Col 7/Col 4) 100*

Table: 6 Major Earthquakes in the northeastern region (1920-1979)

MAGNITUDE ON RICHTER SCALE	NO. OF EARTHQUAKES
5-6	237
6-7	161
7-8	15
8 and above	3

*Source: Development of North East Region

Accommodating the 'Extra-urbanites': Transitional Agenda for Spatial Planning

Mapping India's Urban Policy onto Global Changes and Challenges

Joydeep Baruah

Global cities are no longer considered as social evils, but are potent and dynamic nerve centres of all sorts of development activities. The character of these cities has also undergone a metamorphosis – as these are turning out to be service cities as against the earlier notion of productive cities. This change in character demands restructuring of the mechanism of municipal finance along with that of urban governance as well as management. Understanding locality within a global framework again raises questions of space-society relations. Emerging new forms of social space and spatial relations and their relevance at local levels might require insightful examination. Fundamental question is, therefore, given the existing framework of urban structure and governance in the country, how to respond rationally and intelligently to the global changes and challenges. The Paper tries to delve into this question.

Urban Questions

Urbanisation, as a demographic phenomenon, more particularly in the post Second World War period, has caused much stress in the overall patterns of population distribution across the globe. Urbanisation and its attendant social ills are even more acute in the Third World cities than elsewhere. Faced with the twin constraints – constraints of economic resources (i.e. capital) and constraints of physical resources (i.e. space), it becomes increasingly difficult for these cities to accommodate the growing urban population within the existing urban settlements. In 1950, 38 percent of the world's total urban population was living in the Third World cities (UN, 1980). In 1995 the figure has gone up to around 66 percent (UN, 1995). The United Nations estimates that by the end of 2025, the figure might well be some where near 80 percent. The issue emerged consequent to the fast and ever increasing size of these urban agglomerations is how the Third World cities will cope and survive – economically, environmentally and politically – with such heavy concentration of people. While admitting the cost reducing advantages of agglomeration economies and various forms of economic and social externalities in the urban areas, one must also consider the social and economic costs of such

'congestions', let alone the 'quality amenities' for their residents (Todaro, 2000).

Recent urban studies almost unequivocally admit that cities are social systems and as such, they react to any changes that result from both local and /or global developments. With the intensified currents and crosscurrents of globalisation, urban issues and questions are resurfacing with changing dimensions in recent years. If earlier interest in the ills of urbanisation has waned, it has of late been replaced by increasing interest in the benefits of urban centers. Such repositioning of theoretical understanding almost invariably points to a new agenda for urban studies and policy analysis.

Globalisation itself has generated many contests than consensus. Without being confined to any single thematic framework, globalisation is best thought of as a multidimensional set of social processes affecting social life and organisation in various degrees. Local actions are viewed as a reaction to global changes in order to contextualise locality within the broad landscape of globality. In fact, the 'local' and 'global' form the endpoints of a spatial continuum whose central portion is marked by the 'national or regional' (Steger, 2003).

Against this change in theoretical understanding of social change, urban questions also invite certain repositioning and reevaluation. Given the global economic restructuring, the increased competition among the cities and waning of the concept of welfare state might force cities to pursue entrepreneurial policies and strategies for urban development. Many of the shifting tendencies of urban planning like private partnership in urban development, emphasis on local finance, devolution and decentralization of the development process might well yield significant results when viewed in the changing context. As such 'growth policy' might replace 'redistributive policy' so far the Third World urban policies are concerned.

Way back in 1988, the United Nations Report on the Population Policies in the World revealed that 73 out 158 countries in the World found the geographical distribution of their population 'highly unacceptable'. Many have blamed the 'misguided policies regarding urban planning' in these countries for such 'dissatisfactory growth' of their urban spheres. Under the changing global environment, management rather than regulation of the urban sphere has assumed greater significance. The critical issue, therefore, may be responding intelligently and rationally at the local levels to global changes so that the process of urbanisation remains within the 'acceptable limit'. The issue of designing and deriving an appropriate role for the state and a suitable intervention mechanism along with private partnership, therefore, occupies a central position in recent urban research.

This would invariably call for a thorough understanding of the development dynamics of a region within the broad perspective of the urban process. Linking it with the global dynamics of a fast and ever changing environment, perhaps, would help in a better understanding of the competing urban questions of our time. The emerging issue of accommodating and managing the so-called 'extra-urbanites' in the age of globalisation is, therefore, very much in order.

Understanding the Urban Process

Historically, urbanisation as a significant demographic process started from the 19th century onwards along with the industrial revolution, albeit the role of urban centres was evident even in the early periods of human settlements, however to a limited extent. The urban process in the developing countries, too, started gaining pace only in the late 19th century, which got more intensified during the 20th century reaching the peak in the later half of it.

Two broad but distinct approaches have surfaced in the comparative urban studies in the recent past, which try to understand the urban process in the developing countries – modernisation theory and dependency theory (Sreekumar, 1993). Modernisation theory starts with a subsistence agrarian rural sector and traces the growth of urban centres as 'sequential process'. It finds that with the movement of time intra-regional specialisation of primary activities develops followed by an inter-regional development of trade activities. This forms the nuclei of industrial developments accompanied by a well-developed transport network. The process culminates in development of a quality and highly diversified service sector in the urban centres, which increasingly tends to absorb the surplus population of the rural spheres. Ultimately the fruits of development slowly flow back to the rural sector maintaining a consistent rural-urban continuum, thereby withering away the rural-urban differences at some definite points of time.

The major critic of the modernisation framework is that it views the urban process of the industrial west and the third world as synonymous barring the fact the they are greatly separated in time and space. This, however, continued to be a dominant scheme of analysis in the comparative urban literature till 1960s. Starting with the 60s, there has been a gradual realisation that the historical process of urbanisation in the third world is distinctly different from the industrial west (Sreekumar, 1993). Safa (1982) further states that the class structure and the ecology of the third world also greatly differ from their western counterparts.' Unlike the industrial west, third world urbanisation is hardly explained by industrial expansion; on the contrary, these countries are mostly characterised by low and rather weak industrial base. One very significant aspect of the third world urban process is the direct shift from primary to tertiary sector, making the urban process itself highly unsustainable.

The modernisation theory, thus, fails to account for the 'historical specificity' of social development in the third world; rather it looks at the process of 'social change' as a movement between two fixed points (Slater, 1986).

'Over linearity' and 'ahistorical idea of social change' as evident in the modernisation framework have resulted in a contesting framework, which is collectively referred to as the dependency model. In the dependency framework the underdevelopment of the third world is viewed as a negative effect of 'external dominance'. It looks into the character of a society as a historical legacy of imperialist domination at certain points of history. Such an analytical shift in urban questions started with Castells (1977) when he argued that the process of urbanisation was the 'expression of the social dynamics of the penetration of the capitalist mode of production historically formed in Europe into the remainder of the World'. He identified three types of domination – colonial domination with direct administration of an intensive exploitation of resources and affirmation of political sovereignty, capitalist commercial domination through unequal terms of exchange and imperialist industrial and financial domination. The approach, hence, is linked closely with the analysis of pre-existing social structure in the 'dependent society' along with the structure of the 'dominant society' and the 'forms of domination'.

Attempts to locate the urban issues, particularly those of the third world, within the dependency framework are evident in later writings as well (Roberts, 1978; Safa, 1982; Slater, 1986). Late entry into the global capitalist system, dependency on advanced countries for capital, market and technology etc. are being offered as plausible explanations for the urban growth in the less developed countries. Another common aspect of these analyses is the core-periphery interaction to look at the issues of urbanisation in time and space. The major critic of this dependency scheme is that it recognises, generally, urbanisation as one specific 'feature' within the broad overall formulations of dependency hypotheses. Therefore, problems or issues associated with the process of urbanisation are viewed as only resolvable through 'breaking of the dependency relations and actuation of a process of revolutionary transformation' (Slater, 1986).

Agreeably, the dependency thesis is an improvement over the modernisation theory both in terms of analytical rigour and explanatory power, many would argue that any theoretical formulations, which tend to ignore the ecological and other historical differences that exist among as well as within the third world countries influencing the production and growth of spatial forms, would lead to partial and highly reductive conclusions (Sreekumar, 1993). He further remarked that this methodical imprecision could be minimised by

understanding the actual process, which generate specific spatial forms at several analytical levels.

A substantial body of literature on third world urbanisation points out three distinct features of the urban processes in these countries; namely, phenomenal growth of the large cities, primate urban structure and migration being the single most important driving force behind the process of urban proliferations. Interestingly, the same set of literature also indicates the declining trend of all these three features over last couple of decades (Bhattacharya, 2002). Growth rates of the large cities are declining 1975 onwards (Sinclair, 1978; Bhattacharya, 2002). Similarly, the urban primacy as a hallmark of the third world urban size-class distributions is fast losing ground as the size-distributions are increasingly becoming dispersed in these countries since 1970 (Villa & Rodriguez, 1996). The decline is more evident in Latin America, which is referred to as 'polarisation reversal, with secondary cities growing faster than the giant ones (Richardson, 1980).

Literature suggests three main reasons for increase in urban population in a country. Natural growth rate of urban population is, of course, one of them. Reclassification of earlier rural areas as urban is another. The third is the net gain of population from rural to urban migration. As an extension of it, in some cases, net gain from migration from other countries could also be important. The relative importance of these components varies in time and space. Theoretically, in a country already highly urbanised, natural growth rate of the urban population assumes greater significance than net gain from migration, even if rural to urban migration rate is high, since absolute number of rural out migrants are quite insignificant. By contrast, in a low urbanised country, low rural out migration rate may turn out to be a highly significant factor of urban growth. It is, however, not always possible to separate all these factors in a convincing way.

While looking at the global trend of migration, Williamson (1988) has noted that rates of migration in the developing countries as a group has been quite comparable to those in developed countries. Over time the share of immigration in urban population has shown a declining trend as it did in the developed countries. A major trend in rural-urban migration in recent years has been the increasing participation of women. Observed initially in Latin America and Philippines, highly 'feminised net urban migration' is now appearing in other developing regions as well (Bhattacharya, 2002). The trend is now visible even in Asia and Africa.

How is the Indian scenario given the global trend? How can we locate the case of Assam within the broad urban landscape of the country?

As per 2001 Census, there are 4368 towns/ urban agglomerations in India with a share of 27.78 percent urban population. During the 1991-2001 decade, urban population has recorded an annual average exponential growth rate of 2.73 percent. These are significant figures as, given the liberalised regime at various policy levels, many proponents of the structural reforms have anticipated an accelerated rural-urban migration, which proved to be rather naïve in the recent census. Common belief was that linking India with the global economy would encourage massive capital investment from outside and also would lead to increase in the level of domestic investment. This would, in turn, give an impetus to the process of urbanisation since much of these investments and consequent increase in employment would be either within or around in the existing urban centres. Even when industrial units are located in rural settlements, in a few years, the later would acquire the urban status (Kundu, 2003). Critics of liberalisation, however, pointed out employment in the organised sector was going to be low. In its attempt to lower the budgetary deficits government would be forced to reduce the public sector investment, like those on the infrastructure, which would ultimately contain the agricultural growth. This, coupled with an open trade policy, would result in 'contraction of purchasing power' and destabilisation of agrarian economy, causing high unemployment and an exodus from rural areas (Kundu, 2003). Thus, the protagonist as also the critics of the economic reforms converged on the proposition that the urbanisation in the post-liberalisation period would be high.

On the contrary, census 2001 figure reinforces the declining trend of urbanisation in the country. During 1961-71, the annual exponential growth rate of urban population was 3.21 percent, which reached the all time highest of 3.83 during 1971-81. The trend started declining in 1981-91 with 3.09, which further continued in the 1991-2001. The trend goes not only against the popular projections of urban explosion but also questions the theoretical link between urbanisation and globalisation. At the same time, it also offers scope for looking closely at the issue from the point of view of time and space. Important issue is whether initial period of ten years of economic reforms provides sufficient evidence to dismiss the theoretical arguments of 'urban explosion' or should the entire perspective of urbanisation is to be further re-examined for unearthing a more meaningful relations between urbanisation and globalisation.

An analysis of the distribution of the urban population across the size-classes reveals that the process of urbanisation in India has been large city oriented. This is manifested in a high percentage of urban population being concentrated in class I cities, which has gone up systematically over the decades in the last century. The share of the class I cities has increased considerably from 26 percent in 1901 to 68.7 percent in 2001. One fundamental reason for such a phenomenal dominance of the class I cities is the continuous graduation of the

lower order towns into the class I category. It may be observed that number of class I cities has increased from 24 in 1901 to 393 in 2001, which explains largely the increase in the share of population in this size-categories over time. However, in addition to the factor of increase in the number of large cities, the importance of a faster demographic growth in these cities, in making the urban structure top-heavy, cannot be aptly ignored (Kundu, 2003).

Despite the relative primate structure of the urban structure in India, several researchers find no distortion in the Indian urban structure and talks of a 'stable morphology' (Rakesh Mohan and Pant, 1982). They hold that the population growth across the size-classes is more or less uniform. This has been questioned by Kundu and others and they show that the growth of population in the class I cities has been distinctly higher than in the other classes. However, they have treated class VI towns as special category towns, which are mainly industrial townships, centres of pilgrimages, also having a higher growth rate of population.

The pattern of growth has remained more or less unaltered over the past three decades in all size-classes. This implies that the over all trend of deceleration as evident in the census figures is reflected in all size classes. Kundu (2003) has shown that decline is more in the lower size classes and he has proved the fast demographic growth in the class I cities by taking common towns in successive censuses and estimating the growth rates.

Higher demographic growth in the class I category is normally attributed to two factors – natural expansion and migration. These cities report emergence of a large number of satellite towns in their vicinity. Many of these have become part of the city agglomeration over time. There are also outgrowths, which have been treated as parts of the agglomeration by the census. Further, there has been expansion in the municipal boundaries of the class I cities. Class I cities attract migrants from all over the country due to their stronger infrastructural and socio-economic base. As per a study conducted by the office of the registrar general, New Delhi, East West Centre, Honolulu, and Bureau of the Census, Washington (1993), the contribution of rural-urban migration in the incremental urban population has declined significantly over the past decade and stood at 22.6 percent in the 1980s. Interestingly the rate of decline is more in case of male migrants than their female counterparts. Given this declining trend, in India, many urban researchers are contemplating a low down in the process of urbanisation in near future.

In a slightly different way, Kundu tried to decompose the incremental urban population in a decade into four components – a) natural increase, b) new towns less declassified towns, c) merging of towns and jurisdictional changes and d)

rural-urban migration. This has resulted in a few interesting results. He has proposed that the urbanisation process in India, away from the existing agglomerations and urban regions, has become sluggish. He has found that the third component; i.e., merging and jurisdictional changes is becoming more important along with time indicating 'a considerable dynamism around the existing agglomerations' (Kundu, 2003). He has estimated that about 21 percent increment in the urban population in the 1990s was explained by rural-urban migration, which was marginally lower than the earlier period. Given such trends, he dismissed the possibility of 'slowing down' in the urban process in the country.

One obvious result of such in-migration is the birth and growth of a huge informal sector in the urban economy. There are several models that try to explain the urban migration phenomenon. Traditional models like those of Todaro (1969), Harris-Todaro (1970), however, fail to attend most of the issues relating to informal sector. These models treat the informal sector as being essentially stagnant and unproductive, only a temporary shelter for migrant job seekers on their way to the formal sector.

In sharp contrast to this, a vast majority of recent empirical literature increasingly sees the informal sector as a vibrant, highly dynamic sector full of hidden entrepreneurial talents. There are attempts to incorporate the informal sector in the theoretical analysis of rural-urban migration (Bhattacharya, 1994; 1998; 2001). The implications of such new models are vividly different from those of the earlier ones. In any case, the point is that in order to arrive at a meaningful conclusion about the rural-urban migration the whole issue is required to be re-examined taking into view the informal sector and its role.

The immediate problem of capturing this role of the informal sector lies in designing an appropriate framework of analysis. One way to do this would be to look into the changes in the workforce structure and then to explain such changes in terms of the process of urbanisation. Slowing down in employment generation in the formal, organised sector, more particularly in the post liberalised regime, has been evident in the recent survey of the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSS, 55th round, 2001). This is mainly because a large part of employment growth in the urban economy is taking place through a process of sub-contracting, using casual and contractual labour, that has a high incidence of poverty. This is often referred to a flexible labour market and researchers would tend associate it with the structural adjustment process itself (Ghose, 1995; Das, 1999). Another significant development of the process is that many of these workers are classified under the service sector, resulting in a decline in the share of manufacturing employment and increasing the share of the service sector. This would imply that the growth dynamics of the urban

areas and the spill over effects thereof, therefore, has to be considered in understanding the whole process of urbanisation in the country.

Regional variations in the distribution of urban population in India have also been significantly pointed out in many studies. Kundu (2003) has argued that the pattern of urban growth across the Indian states is significantly different from that of the levels of urbanisation. He has pointed out that since independence, until 1991, relatively developed states like Tamil Nadu, Punjub and Karnataka (having a high percentage of urbanisation) had shown medium or low growth of urban population. In contrast, less developed states had registered a comparatively high urban growth. Based on this finding, he contends that urban growth and economic development are related in a negative fashion. However, this type of linear relation cannot be expected at every level and needs further objective and rigorous empirical testing before coming to a definite conclusion.

Against this setting of the over-all Indian urban scenario, the urban process in Assam can be examined within the broad perspective of regional development dynamics. As per 2001 census Assam has 125 towns/ urban agglomerations with 12.72 percent urban dwellers. The annual exponential growth rate of the urban population stands at 3.14 percent, above the national rate. Though the process of urbanisation in the state is comparatively low than some of the states in the country, considering the phenomenal increase in the percentage of urban population during the post independence period, 1951-2001, (i.e. 196 percent), the state's urban future definitely calls for some serious observations.

The Old Epoch

Roy Turner's classic book 'India's Urban Future' (1962) deals with several urban questions and issues the country has been confronting in the post-independence period. Acute concentration of people in a few urban areas could be a catastrophe, or sometimes, when managed in responsible and rational way, could turn out to be a highly productive and efficient social and spatial system. At the policy level the set of policies, specifically designed and implemented at the urban level for achieving the later, is called urban policy (McCann, 2001).

There are two varied forms of looking at the possible impacts of urbanisation on the process of economic growth. The positive way to look at the issue is to view urbanisation as interplay of certain natural forces. Normative explanations, on the other hand, seek to rationalize the role of the government in the urban sphere with strong policy implications. The normative exponents believe that there are certain elements within the urban sphere in the Less Developed Countries that legitimately invite a government role and such intervention takes place as a routine. The normative analysis ultimately leads to the possibility of

estimating how different the optimum is from the actual amount of activity observed and how great the gain would be from policies to rectify the situations (Tolley and Gardner, 1974; 1979).

Public intervention in the urban sphere is usually justified on three grounds – efficiency, equity and development. In the formal neoclassical general equilibrium framework optimality is arrived at the market equilibrium when a set of three market conditions are fulfilled (Pareto's three efficiency conditions). These conditions are consistent only when marginal cost pricing (prices are set equal to the marginal costs of production) is valid in the constituent markets. Government intervention on the efficiency ground is justified in such a scheme only in the absence of the required market conditions.

The fact is that actions of one economic agent impose cost or confer benefits on others (commonly known as the problem of externality, which is particularly common in the urban sphere), cannot be accommodated in the traditional analytical framework of the neo-classicists. For instance, locating a firm contributes to general agglomeration economies, or an entering resident possibly aggravates congestion for other residents. This entails the breakdown of the result that market, based on private behaviour, ensures social efficiency, and formally invites a role for public policy in the urban sphere.

Another rationale for government intervention is based on the equity principle. Industry, wherever it locates, creates well-paid jobs, and in the absence of full ability or desirability of movement of people to these jobs, the dispersal of jobs to people in selected regions will have the effect of improving income distribution in favour of the residents of the region to which dispersal is directed. Often, more particularly in developing countries, spatial policies might be the result of a formally articulated national commitment to rural-urban equity or regional balance or they may be the result of the bargaining interplay of regional political forces wielded by state and local jurisdictions.

Lastly, LDC governments may intervene for what one might want to term developmental reasons. Often, these may be loosely defined, as for example, the aim of 'achieving the spatial integration of national economic activity'. This set of interventions might be seen as having its immediate basis in the adoption of an overall developmental strategy or plan which may necessitate or imply certain types of changes in a country's settlement pattern.

This set of justifications for intervention constitutes a special category for poor countries, since (a) developing countries are observed to share a commonality of inefficiencies, inequities and inadequacies of market institutions and (b) most

do have a conscious commitment to implement some developmental model or the other.

Analysis of policies occupies a prominent position in most of the urban study literatures. Mills and Becker (1983) aptly comment that optimum city sizes and desirability and effects of programmes to control city sizes are subjects on which there is much more government action than serious economic analysis. They also point out that misguided attempts to reduce the sizes or growth rates of large cities could do a great harm. The greatest danger is that desperately needed industrial production will be made unavailable or will be unable to grow to its full potential because it is forced or induced to locate in the wrong place by misguided government decisions. Government programme to alter city sizes should be studied with greatest care as to their desirability, various means of achieving their goal and benefits and costs of doing so.

National urban policies in the LDCs can be classified under two broad categories. These policies may be explicit (intentional) or they may be implicit (incidental). Migration policies, strategies for controlling primacy, intermediate city and growth centre strategies, industrial dispersal policies, urban infrastructure policies (in the form of new capital cities) all represent instruments governments use that are designed to reallocate a country's population. In addition, many actions of governments implicitly have strong spatial ramifications. A country's overall development strategy or policies connected with the implementation of sectoral objectives are almost certain to have an impact on urbanisation. The same can be said of measures designed to correct economic inequalities. Examples of such policies that might impinge differently upon various segments of a country's settlement pattern are trade policies that result in the protection of urban industries and minimum wage legislations that are enforced only in the organized urban sector.

There has been a large body of literature on public policy in India, more particularly during the post-independent period, which addresses a number of areas and issues affecting India's economic future and the lives of millions of its people.

The urban sphere, despite a good number of policies at various pints of time, remained somewhat untouched by these policies simply because most of them have remained ineffectual on the ground. This is particularly true of the small and medium size towns and cities, which have grown in their own ways and have their own growth dynamics. The corpus of policy designed to intervene the urban sphere of the country relates to the major and the largest cities in the Indian urban system.

The structure of urban legislation and administration in India needs careful examination and review for a proper policy analysis. Indian Constitution puts urban policy and planning in the domain of the State functions (XII Schedule of the Constitution lists out 12 activities relating to urban development and governance). The central government, therefore, cannot regulate the urbanization process in the states, neither it can directly design urban policy for the states. The centre at best can issue directives, provide advisory services, set up model legislation and fund various programmes.

Despite this constitutional straitjacket, some of the Indian states have taken initiatives in this regard, and much of the existing policy has come from the centre. The five-year plans of the country contain the general philosophy of an overall urban policy and form the basis for state policy directions (Ramachandran, 1989; Shaw, 1996).

While appreciating the urban policy and planning in the independent India it is however important to examine the political economy of the country during this period. It is worthwhile to understand that the government's choices regarding the urban sphere have been restricted by several factors, which have changed from time to time. Up till 1960s, building a broad political consensus over issues of economic development was relatively easy compared to the seventies and thereafter.

During the early part of the post-colonial era the planning process seemed to be preoccupied with the problem of capital accumulation for economic development. It was also evident that the capital accumulation was primarily concentrated in the modern sector, which contained a sizeable urban component. Urban areas, even today, particularly the large cities, are the nerve centres of industry, trade and commerce. The urban areas represent a large proportion of the dynamic element of the spatial economy of the country. In the 1950-51 the urban sector accounted for 27 percent of the GDP, which increased to 47 percent in 1980-81 and to 60 percent by the year 2000 (Eighth Plan, Vol. II). Capital accumulation, therefore, has been an underlying principle in the urban policy and planning in the early phase.

Since mid-1960s, broad political consensus became increasingly difficult. As some writers have pointed out, such consensus was possible only through *appeasement of demands*. Two driving forces, therefore, can be identified in India's urban policy: first is the capital accumulation in the 1950s and early 60s and the second is the demand politics from mid 1960s onwards.

The rationale of capital accumulation has an urban bias, and has resulted in increased concentration of economic resources in the urban areas impeding the

progress of the vast majority of the rural areas. This has further accentuated the problem of income inequality and invited state intervention in the matters of urban growth and regulation. The Task Force in 1983 and National Commission on Urbanisation in 1988 have tried to address these issues. The 74th amendment of the Constitution in 1992 further provides greater power to the local bodies to manage and control the urban sphere.

In the first three five year plans, being preoccupied with the problems of reorganisation of the national economy after independence and partition, it can be observed, urbanisation was accorded rather low priority. Urbanisation, by and large, did not appear to be a problem worthy of any serious attention (Ramachandran, 1989). However, the first two plans observed that urban growth in India was *haphazard* and had been caused by inadequate legal powers to control use of land and construction of buildings. Consequently, during the third plan, for the first time, the country had seen the formulation of a concrete urban planning and land policy. The policy, driven by the broad objective of *balanced development*, clearly stated that 'new industries should be established away from large and congested cities' so as to reduce the gap between rural and urban. The policy called for certain directions to correct the pattern of urban growth. These included first, the control of urban land values through public acquisition; second, physical planning of the land use and preparation of master plans for urban areas; third, the defining of minimum tolerable standards for housing and other services; and fourth, strengthening of municipal administration for providing quality urban services to the residents.

Rationalising the urban growth in the country with such a policy framework inherited certain characteristics of the urban planning experiences in Britain. The practice of the early phase of town planning in the country, emulating the British model of design, had already indicated a tendency to override existing and indigenous forms of spatial organisations. The preference of *order* and *homogeneity* over *congestion* and *crowd* had reshaped most of the urban organisations existing in the country. Pleasing living environment, thus, replaced *productive efficiency* in urban restructuring during this phase. Many, however, criticised the efficacy of such *outmoded* and *unrealistically designed* policy for Indian urban environments (Shangloo, 1992).

Urban policy in the country, fourth plan onwards, concentrated mainly on providing financial assistance to the state governments towards better urban basic services including housing. There was a growing concern about the financial conditions of the cities. Ways were searched for generating surplus for urban governance and management. Decentralisation as a solution emerged

strongly and Sixth Plan highlighted it further by observing that a national urban policy should involve *specific consideration of regional problems*.

The period of the eighties and nineties showed marked departure from the earlier ones. Though dispersal of industrial activities persisted even in this phase, the distinct watershed could be observed in redefining the role of the state in urban development. The seventh plan (1985-90) emphasised the need for greater devolution of funds (and power) to urban local bodies for the revitalisation of the civic bodies and for greater community participation. It further opened up private partnership in providing urban basic services observing that without such an effort providing these services to everyone would not be possible. It also stressed on the additional resource mobilisation by the local bodies themselves to meet the required financial target. This set of new orientations in urban governance resulted in a reform in urban agenda. Eighth plan carried out this changed agenda maintaining that financing of urban development should be through self-sustaining internal sources. For that matter, it argued in favour of 'strengthening the regulatory and organisational base of the urban local bodies).

Many scholars of the urban studies, however, tend to see this emphasis on financial reorganisation as a consequence of the central government's the own financial crisis during this period (Shaw, 1993). In any case, this provided the prelude to the changes forthcoming in the liberalised era, which started in the early nineties.

The New Order and Transitional Agenda

India formally joined the race for globalisation by initiating economic liberalisation in 1991. The term *globalisation* may acquire different connotations relative to time and space. However, the concept of globalisation makes sense only in terms of the economic interest of the *national state*, of sovereignty (Harris, 2003). What distinguishes globalisation from the earlier state of affairs is the dichotomy of political sovereignty and economic sovereignty. Earlier, at least at the level of theory, political sovereignty of a state is equated with economic sovereignty. It is commonly held that economic decisions are in full command of the territorial authority. The most significant change that the globalisation has brought about is the change in this perspective of governance by reducing the economic sovereignty of the state.

The domination of the state, in the earlier state of affairs, ensured primacy of politics over economics and of public discretion over markets. Civil society virtually disappeared into state with governments directing the resources at the national interest, assuming responsibility of the housing, health, water supply and sanitation, education and employment. Consequently, the sizable public

sector and publicly protected monopolies were the hallmark of the system. Plans occupied a central place within such a system, often trying to anticipate the future. The state controlled sector was so sizeable that future results could be well predictable and even targeted objectives could be achieved through rational manipulations of the public sector (Shonfiled, 1964; Samuelson, 1971). This was precisely why the planners could think of even master plans for 20 to 25 years.

Capital was considered to be the main scarce resource in economic plans, attempts and attention were focused mainly on augmenting and allocating it in a manner that would yield best *national results*. In physical plan, land was treated in a synonymous fashion, often making judicious arrangement to settle population on it. Control of the location of new housing and industry with zoning etc. could be rationalised on this ground.

In this scheme of thought, cities were viewed as ills and the reason was believed to be the high density of population, rather than failure of public policy. Much of the scholarship was devoted to obtain an *optimal city size* that would minimize the ills associated with increased concentration of people on space. Many talked of *benevolent hierarchy of settlements* that would reduce the social horror of the primate cities.

Things have undergone a radical change in the age of globalisation. With the reduced economic sovereignty, because of global economic integration, internal decision making of a state is no longer independent of exogenous factors. This, in turn, makes prediction highly irrational and inaccurate. As such, mechanisms like long term planning (like five year ones), master planning are fast losing significance. This is why concepts like local governance, local management, and decentralised finance are resurfacing in the context of globalisation.

Global cities are no longer considered as social evils, but are potent and dynamic nerve centres of all sorts of development activities. The character of these cities has also undergone a metamorphosis – as these are turning out to be service cities as against the earlier notion of productive cities (Harris, 2003). This change in character demands restructuring of the mechanism of municipal finance along with that of urban governance as well as management. This might call for a stronger state-society synergy and social partnership. The interesting issue is, in fact, how to ensure such a synergy at local level. Understanding locality within a global framework again raises questions of space-society relations. Emerging new forms of social space and spatial relations (like those analysed by Boudier, Lefebvre and others) and their relevance at local levels might require insightful examination. Fundamental question is, therefore, given the existing framework of urban structure and governance in the country, how

to respond rationally and intelligently to the global changes and challenges. Is it possible for the local urban systems in the country to gain sustainability? If yes, then how is to ensure a quality urban life for the urban dwellers? It is time that one should search answers to these questions. ■

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Religious and Ethnic Politics as Impediments to Nation-Building in South Asia

Partha S. Ghosh

Nation building is a tortuous process. During the 17th and 18th Centuries when the process was on in Europe and nation states were emerging on the political map of the continent, religion and ethnicity played the most important role. In South Asia, as in other parts of the developing world, states came first and efforts followed to build nations around them. During this process also religion and ethnicity played significant roles. Being both pluralistic and poor the region provides dangerous possibility of their being used for political purposes, which can be extremely violent and socially destabilizing. This paper focuses of this variable keeping all the nations in South Asia in mind.

Introduction

Nation building is a tortuous process. During the 17th and 18th Centuries when the process was on in Europe and nation states were emerging on the political map of the continent, religion and ethnicity played the most important role. In this process, the printing press of course contributed significantly which Benedict Anderson has so brilliantly analyzed.[1] The process, however, was not peaceful. It was full of societal tensions, which often became violent. In the aftermath of de-colonization in the middle of the 20th Century, there was yet another wave of nation building. This time the theatre was not Europe, but the Third World, Asia and Africa in particular. The process of nation building that this vast region was expected to witness, could not have followed the European pattern. There was one basic difference between the two situations. While in the European experiment nations emerged first and then came the nation states, in the Third World nation states were conceived prior to having any clear idea in mind as to who their constituents were supposed to be. This anachronism was bound to have its own tensions, thereby complicating the whole experiment itself.

The sudden emergence of a large number of states on the political map of the world posed a massive challenge to the respective leaders of these newly born

[1] Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

states. The multiplicity of religions and ethnicities that constituted these states raised the question about the policies that they should follow so as to ensure the territorial and emotional unity of their newly liberated lands. Since the question of majority and minority was inherent in the circumstances the most mind-boggling policy question was how much weightage could be given to the former in the process of nation building and correspondingly how much protection the minorities were entitled to that could be acceptable to the majority. Since for historical reasons there were undercurrents of tensions amongst these groups, which during the colonial period had been accentuated both on account of imperial interests as well as developmental reasons, the question was bound to assume some serious proportions. No wonder that during the nationalist struggles when the end of the colonial yoke seemed probable, if not imminent, they erupted into open conflicts, which the colonial masters, understandably, did not fail to stoke into infernos.

Empire building had its own logic of expansion that had necessitated the incorporation of vast areas within a given geographical territory. The power of the gun ensured the imperialists that diverse groups living in their empires remained peaceful so that the former could maximize their economic gains. But modern education and corresponding enlightenment, which colonialism had brought in its train, led in due course of time to the growth of nationalism, which hit at the very core of those imperial interests. To beat the threat, the imperial rulers found it expedient to create tensions amongst the communities using the age-old political strategy of divide and rule. Since there were the undercurrents of tensions already, their job was not all that difficult. Logically, therefore, both nationalism and separatism progressed simultaneously. The most glaring example of the process at work was India. The British de-colonized India but saw to it that it was partitioned between India and Pakistan.

Following India's independence and Pakistan's creation the challenge of nation building haunted both the ruling establishments. Given the tortuous process of the freedom struggle and the Hindu-Muslim conflict that came to occupy the centre stage of that struggle towards the end, it was clear to both nations that religion and ethnicity which had played such an important role in nation building in Europe in the previous centuries should not be employed in the Indian subcontinent for they were inherently divisive. To operationalise the idea in political terms was, however, extremely difficult, particularly for Pakistan. Given the different trajectories that the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League had followed during the nationalist movement it was not easy for Pakistan to endorse the concept of separation of state and religion and treat all its citizens equally.

In tune with the ethos of the Indian National Congress India chose to go for secularism as the state policy with emphasis on the theory of separation of religion and state as well as equality of all citizens before the law. Minority rights were legally protected and even no impediment was put on their holding the highest offices of political authority. But for Pakistan to do so, which it actually tried to do to start with, was rather anachronistic because of historical reasons. The entire Pakistan movement was based on the two nation theory and the idea that was popularized with those Muslims who were to later constitute the Pakistani nation was that Islam was the only binding force amongst them and that it was not possible for its adherents in the subcontinent to co-exist with the Hindus. Against this background it was quite expected that in spite of all those lofty sentiments expressed by Quaid-i-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah in the initial years of Pakistan that the state in Pakistan would be secular, the Islamic forces could eventually overpower all the secularist forces. That Pakistan would be an Islam-oriented state was, therefore, a foregone conclusion.

But its constitutional commitment to separation of religion and state notwithstanding, India could not get rid of the fact that it was a Hindu majority state. Its politics, therefore, continued to be influenced by this reality and correspondingly the minority question remained acrimonious. The divergent experiences of India and Pakistan were shared by other nations of South Asia too in some form or the other. In this paper an attempt has been made to assess the amount of damage that religion-centric and ethnicity-centric policies followed by the regional elites have caused to the process of nation building. On the normative plane the conclusion that it tends to draw is that until and unless the regional elites, belonging to both the majority and the minorities, rise above their narrow sectarian mindsets and think of their nations as plural social formations in which equal respect should be given to all segments of the population within the broad framework of human rights and rule of law, the project of nation building would remain incomplete and violent.

SOUTH ASIAN SCENE

Barring India, no other South Asian country is secular in the constitutional sense. In Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan the thrust is on Islam, in Sri Lanka and Bhutan on Buddhism and in Nepal on Hinduism. Even the restoration of democracy in some of these states has not changed this reality. In Nepal, a new constitution that was introduced in 1990, declared the state as a Hindu state. We would first do the stocktaking by each nation and then identify the broad trends that are noticeable. At the end some normative courses would be suggested. Since India is the only secular nation, we would take up India first, followed by Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, in that order. We have excluded Bhutan and the Maldives from our purview because not only are they tiny, the first is a monarchy, though probably 'progressive', and the second

is a euphemism for democracy. It is actually a single-party authoritarianism, though probably 'benevolent'.

India

In India, in spite of the state's emphasis on secularism in constitutional terms, religion and ethnicity play an important role in politics. In the heartland of India, that is northern India in a broad sense, the religion has become a political commodity that is being subjected to ruthless and unscrupulous exploitation by politicians. It was not meant to be that way to start with. The emphasis was more on peaceful co-existence of religions and respect for community consciousness. The majority of Indians did not dispute the fact that since all kinds of religions had thriven side by side in the country for centuries they would not only remain relevant but they would also be politically vibrant for after all there was a politics of scale operating in the country. But the emphasis was never on hate politics, which is noticeable these days.

Secularism as it is classically defined was not probably what the founding fathers meant when they conceived of the Indian constitution based on the theory of separation of religion and state. The state was certainly not conceived as atheistic notwithstanding the fact that the first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was known to be an agnostic. But even he had felt that secularism was probably too much to expect from the deeply religious Indians. In the absence of a better word to suit the Indian conditions he said that what India stood for was secularism. It may be underlined that the Indian Constitution did not use the term at all to start with. It was incorporated into the constitution much later, as late as in 1975, when India was under the spell of Indira Gandhi's internal emergency. Ostensibly, it was for political reasons.

Religion having a significant influence on Indian life does not mean that majority religion has an edge over other religions. Similarly, it should not be argued either that secularism does necessarily proscribe all political discussions on religion. Sociologist Madan is right in arguing that it is not advisable to 'turn a blind eye to the conflicts between religious communities [in India] which have for so long caused untold sufferings to innocent people everywhere, but rather understand them as unrealized promise of cultural pluralism'. According to him the Indian history has witnessed both syncretism among religious traditions as well as conflicts amongst them. If both these processes are studied carefully they would give us enormous insight into our understanding of the co-existence of religions which is much more important to

understand than such simplistic notions as secularism which has hardly worked anywhere.[2]

Immediately after independence the task of showing equal respect to all religions, or ensuring their peaceful co-existence, was extremely difficult. India had been just partitioned on communal lines and large-scale Hindu-Muslim riots had taken place. Still it goes to the credit of the Indian National Congress that in the teeth of popularly charged Hindu sentiments against the Muslims in general it stuck to its avowed ideal of treating all its nationals equally and refusing to allow India drift towards becoming a Hindu state. It did not mean that the party became unrealistic to think that ethnic and sectarian considerations would not be relevant in electoral terms. It was for the same reason that the party did not take any chance even with such an eminent Muslim party leader like Maulana Abul Kalam Azad while allotting him a parliamentary constituency. The Muslim-majority Rampur constituency in U.P. was considered to be a safe constituency and he contested from there. Nehru was aware of these hard political realities although he was not happy that many of his party members suffered from some deep seated communal sentiments. In 1958, he had gone on record to lament on this phenomenon. On the whole, however, he did not allow the Congress ideology to deviate from its core commitment to secularism.

After Nehru's death in 1963 that commitment gradually got diluted resulting in a free for all situation in which every one started brandishing one's communal political card. Indira Gandhi was certainly not communal (but so was not Jinnah), but the way she started handling her politics, for example, in the Jammu and Kashmir assembly elections of 1982, it tended to justify the use of communal card. Hindu nationalists who were waiting in the wings to make their bid to political power did not miss the opportunity. Of course there were several factors that contributed to their rise, which need not be gone into here for I have discussed them at length elsewhere.[3] It would suffice here to mention that now on it was not merely communal consciousness or a policy of equi-proximity to both Hinduism and Islam, which we have noticed during the Nehruvian era, but it was a politics of negativism—the so-called hate politics, or, an aggressive majoritarianism. A deliberate and concerted effort was made to denigrate the Muslims, and sometimes also the Christians, to score a point or two in favour of Hindu nationalism. And it was not to be done locally but on a

[2] T.N. Madan, 'Religion in India,' *Daedalus* (Cambridge, MA), 118(4), Fall 1989, p. 117.

[3] Partha S. Ghosh, *BJP and the Evolution of Hindu Nationalism: From Periphery to Centre* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1999).

large national scale.[4] Consequently, there were growing evidences of intolerance among certain sections of the Hindus, which militated against the popular belief in India that Hindus, unlike others, Muslims in particular, were tolerant. Of course, conservative Muslim postures sometimes contributed to this development. Some such examples were the controversy over the movie *Bombay,* the banning of allegedly objectionable books from time to time, rowdy attacks against beauty pageants, Valentine Day celebrations, prohibiting beef eating in the country, etc. The movie *Bombay*, which was based on a positive theme of Hindu-Muslim marriage against the background of riots that rocked Mumbai (earlier Bombay) in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri mosque, was subjected to criticism by both the Hindu and Muslim conservatives. For example, G.M. Banatwalla, leader of the Indian Union Muslim League, argued that the film depicted the Muslim community as 'arrogant and hostile'.[5] Probably, Banatwala was right, otherwise the Hindu Chauvinistic Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray would not have stood firmly behind the movie: 'It seems some fundamentalists are preparing for another partition but they should realize that there is no Nehru or Gandhi to back them now.'[6]

The Hindus criticized the ban imposed on Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* because they alleged that it was done under Muslim pressure. But they did not remember that they themselves also like the Muslims had earlier asked for the proscription of books like *Riddle of Rama and Krishna* by B.R. Ambedkar; *Rama Retold* by Aubery Mennen, *Nine Hours to Rama* by Stanley Wolpert, and *Itihasar Sri Chaitanya* by Amulya Ratan Sen. Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* was unofficially banned just because in the book there was a dog named Jawahar and a character who closely resembled Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray. It may be noted that during Nehru's time also there was a controversy over Nobokov's *Lolita.* Nehru had personally found the book objectionable because it was obscene but he saw no reason to ban it. The fear of the Indian Government of hurting the Muslim sentiments was so strong that even the shooting of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* by BBC's Channel 4 was

[4] During the Nehruvian period also the Congress had played its Hindu card but it was localized. It has been argued that it was for this reason that the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, the forerunner of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), could not make any dent in the Congress base. See B. D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 256.

[5] *Asian Age,* 6 April 1995.

[6] *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 9 April 1995. For a scholarly argument in support of the Banatwala type of view, see Madhu Prasad, 'Bombay: Love Among Communal Stereotypes', *Jigyansa (A Journal of Social Science)* (New Delhi), 1(1), October 1996, pp. 81-6.

not allowed. In March 1977, the Karnataka government under Section 95 of the Cr. P.C. ordered seizure of copies of *Dharmakarana* which was selected by the state's own Sahitya Akademi as the best novel for the year. The ground for the order was that the novel had offended sections of the Veerashaiva community in the state. The point that is being made here is that the state instead of taking a modernist and progressive position has succumbed to all kinds of conservative pressures whether emanating from the Muslim or the Hindu right. The political leaders instead of educating the masses in progressive ideology have surrendered to retrograde pressures thereby giving legitimacy to obscurantism.

During the so-called miracle of Lord Ganesh sipping milk from Hindu devotees that took large parts of the nation by fever in 1995, the *Hindutva*-oriented parties tried to take political mileage out of it. Giriraj Kishore, joint general secretary of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, issued a statement saying, 'it was a clear sign that this was the start of the Hindu century and the beginning of a new Hindu awakening'. The 'miracle' was a slap in the face of atheism, he said, and felt that it would help spread faith in Hinduism and improve the character of the entire society. At the BJP party office in New Delhi reporters were told that the 'miracle' unfolded at a small temple inside the compound of the office and that among the BJP stalwarts who offered milk to the god was the party President, L.K. Advani.[7]

Against this background there is a clear danger of social, if not official, censorship of anything not in tune with the Hindu communal philosophy. We have noticed it happening in Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, and now the same seems to be happening in India as well. In the context of the cow slaughter controversy we have seen how the freedom of speech and research has been attacked. Prof. D.N. Jha of the University of Delhi, an authority on ancient Indian history in his own right, came out with his thesis that it was not true that in ancient India beef was not eaten. Basing his argument on Brahmanical texts and shastric traditions he argued that beef constituted a part of Hindu diet in ancient times. But the intolerant *Hindutva* forces did not like his thesis, which went against their carefully crafted *Hindutva* agenda. They threatened him with dire consequences. It was just like Muslim fanatics who threatened to kill Salman Rushdie for his *Satanic Verses* even without reading it. The following passage from Jha's Preface to his book would tell about the prevailing Hindutva mood:

> Its original publisher [?] 'suddenly' discovered 'excessive *sang-de-boeuf*' in the manuscript in the final stages of printing and recanted from his

[7] *The Hindu*, 22 September 1995. For a liberal and rational critique of the whole drama, see Partha S. Ghosh, 'Science versus Superstition: Reflections on the Milk Miracle', *Mainstream* (New Delhi), 33(45), 30 September 1995, pp.5-6.

> professional commitment under pressure. Shortly afterwards, I began to get threats from unidentified callers asking me not to go ahead with the publication. Undeterred by all this, Matrix Books, a new and enterprising publishing house based in Delhi, mustered enough courage to publish the book promptly in the first week of August 2001. But some right-wing politicians and groups of Hindu and Jaina fanatics, without reading a single page, termed it 'blasphemous', and demanded my arrest and succeeded in obtaining a court order restraining the circulation of the book. There are no *fatwas* in the Hindu religion, but a self-appointed custodian of 'Hinduism' sentenced me to death. The atmosphere in India became charged with communalism. Intellectual terrorism became rampant. Hence the necessity to publish the book abroad. I am grateful to Mr. Tariq Ali and Verso for agreeing to bring out a world edition of the book, protect my right to academic freedom and defeat all attempts at censorship.[8]

These militant pro-Hindu sentiments have found virulent expression in politics, or, more appropriately, interested politicians have appropriated these sentiments to their best possible advantage. Ever since the early eighties there is a clear trend in Indian politics indicating the emergence of Hindu right on the political scene. The rise of the Hindu nationalistic BJP (currently heading the NDA ruling coalition) with active support of militant Hindu organizations like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena has instilled a sense of insecurity amongst the Muslims.

The destruction of the Babi mosque on 6 December 1992 was a watershed in Indian politics. On that day a large number of fanatic Hindus pulled down the four hundred year old structure despite elaborate police arrangements and despite political commitments made at the highest levels to defend the mosque. If the Muslims have lost their trust in the Indian State's capacity to protect them from Hindu vandalism they have their reasons. Often the Hindu right is vitriolic in its condemnation of Muslim disloyalty to the nation and in the context of Pakistan they tend to see Indian Muslims being hands in gloves with that country. Even the government's attitude towards them, notwithstanding the fact that the present one belongs essentially to the Hindu right, is seen as unnecessarily placatory. The VHP, the Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena are in the forefront of this tirade. In early May 2003 when there was some hope of restarting peace talks with Pakistan, the VHP leader Pravin Togadia made a frontal attack on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and said: 'We do not want bus-yatras or Samjhauta Express. Our military tanks should be in Lahore, missiles in Rawalpindi and the saffron flag in Karachi.' Indirectly taunting Vajpayee for his concept of integrative *Hindutva*, he said: 'We are being told

[8] D.N. Jha, *The Myth of the Holy Cow* (London: Verso, 2002), p. xii.

about Swami Vivekananda's *Hindutva*. Do I have to learn Hindutva from spineless people who cannot defend the country from jihadi terrorists.'[9]

In the context of the Hindu-Muslim divide, Indian Muslims feel that the ghost of the Partition still haunts most Hindus. As a result Muslims are looked at with suspicion even if they have nothing to do with Pakistan. They lament that the Hindus have no idea as to how the Muslim leadership had accepted secular India as the Darul Aman, meaning a land of peace and as such any doubt in respect of their disloyalty to India did not arise. In the same vein it is completely glossed over that the Urdu press is as much concerned with the growth of Islamic terrorism in India as the national press. The general impression that is created, even at the highest political levels, is that Muslims are not sufficiently critical of terrorists. The Muslims feel sad that it has never been highlighted either by the Indian press or in political circles that while all kinds of nationalities, including of course Pakistanis, have been found amongst the captured or killed terrorists in Kashmir not a single Indian non-Kashmiri Muslim has figured in those lists. What is worrisome is that if the Hindu-Muslim cleavage is not contained effectively through genuine doses of developmental endeavours, India might face Islamic terrorism in a much bigger scale in years to come. They are quite sore that whether it is a *Hindutva* oriented party or a secular party, they all use the Muslims as fodder in the vote bank politics without bothering the least about their welfare. As a result of all this, Muslims have been reduced to a ghettoised community with an obsession with politics, electoral politics in particular, with least concern for their own welfare. It is a vicious circle and they find themselves in a bind from which they find it difficult to extricate them.[10]

The problem with the Hindu nationalists is that that they are mostly concentrated in northern India and they view India from the prism of north India alone although they claim to be true nationalists having concern for entire India. They tend to forget that India has a vast land mass and at places the people are neither Hindu nor do they represent the north Indian (or even pan-Indian) mindset. The controversy over the building of a Ram temple at Ayodhya, or, the recent pronouncement by the Supreme Court that the state should soon enact a uniform civil code for all communities of India, or, the recent decision of the Union Cabinet to table a bill in the parliament (later deferred) to ban cow slaughter in the entire country are reflective of this north Indian mindset. To be

[9] *Asian Age*, 5 May 2003.

[10] Based on author's detailed and frank discussions with Mr. Mohammad Afzal, former Member of Parliament and Secretary, All India Congress Committee (Minority Department), and editor-in-chief of weekly, *Akhbar-e-Nau*, and Navaid Hamid, Secretary, Minorities Council, People's Integration Council and All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushwrat, on 30 April 2003 at author's residence in New Delhi.

sure the Ram temple controversy has relatively little popular appeal south of the Vindhyas, in the entire North East including Hindu Assam, Manipur, Sikkim and Tripura, in West Bengal and, for obvious reasons, in the Kashmir Valley and Ladakh. Even in the Hindi belt, as well as in Gujarat and Maharashtra, its shine has faded as a large number of Hindus have realized that the BJP rode the Ram temple bandwagon in the nineties purely for electoral purposes and that its commitment to the cause is as cosmetic as Indira Gandhi's to socialism.

So far as the uniform civil code is concerned, there cannot theoretically be any debate that all democracies must treat their citizens equally before the law and civil law is merely a component of the entire legal fabric. But democracies do not thrive in the vacuum. Since they are social contraptions, societal realities do matter. How many Indians can think of a civil code that is totally detached from their religious and customary practices? Even the Indian Penal Code and the Indian Evidence Act, which are secular, give credence to swearing by a witness in the name of his holy scripture—Bible, Geeta or Quran. How many Hindu marriages are solemnized on secular basis even after fifty years of the passage of the secular Special Marriages Act? Would Hindus be willing to demolish the concept of the Hindu Undivided Family when it would come to income tax assessment or introduction of agricultural income tax?

The whole debate on the Uniform Civil Code has gone on tangent, as if it is progressive Hindus versus retrograde Muslims. In the whole debate there is seldom any mention of the customary laws of the tribes, which account for about seven per cent of India's population and a sizeable portion of that is concentrated in India's North East. The union cabinet talks of a Uniform Civil Code but its extended arm in the North East, the North East Council, is busy codifying the customary laws of the regional tribes. The Law Research Institute, housed in the Guwahati High Court, which is doing the codification, has no mandate that the exercise should only be a prelude to incorporating them into the proposed Uniform Civil Code. Roughly there are 210 tribes and even more sub-tribes. Each one of them has a separate set of customary laws. Since there is an umbilical connection between these laws and their identity it is virtually impossible to impose the Uniform Civil Code on them. Even if one can think of bringing the Muslims within the fold of a uniform code it is almost impossible to rope in these and other tribes within this umbrella. What probably is the only solution, as suggested by B.G. Verghese, is to have two sets of codes, one, a uniform national code, and the other comprising personal and customary laws of various groups. Every individual would have the choice to opt for either, although that solution is also fraught with all kinds of complications.

The issue of ban on cow slaughter is yet another north Indian subject and throws India's federal commitment into the wind. It is a state subject and it should remain so. Let individual states decide on the issue. It is already banned in most of the states, including the Muslim majority J&K—a legacy of the Dogra rule. No Muslim in Kashmir has ever demanded the sale of beef in the valley. Vegetarianism and non-vegetarianism have various forms and have much to do with one's personal preference and any imposition of any kind amounts to intrusion into one's personal life style which particularly a plural state like India can ill afford. The cultural argument put forward by many Hindus is flawed. On the one hand they cannot live in a country where only 5 per cent at the most eat beef, then on the other they do not mind migrating to or settling in another, say America, where not less than 95 per cent eat beef. The amount of protest the proposal to ban cow slaughter has generated in parts of North East has underscored the point.

The Chief Ministers of Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland have categorically stated that they would not accept any legislation that clashed with the indigenous cultures of their states. Zoramthanga, the Chief Minister of Mizoram, said: 'India is a multi-ethnic state. If a bill banning cow slaughter is passed, it could set the ball rolling for efforts to ban the slaughter of pigs. But both beef and pork are part of the food habits of the hill people. So it will not be feasible to implement such measures and we will oppose them, if need be.' Apart from these three predominantly Christian states the sizable non-Hindu population of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh also eat beef. D.D. Lapang, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, was more candid: 'It is impossible to change our food habits. The northeast as a whole does not have a very high per capita income and the majority of the people cannot afford an expensive alternative to beef. The dietary pattern of our people has evolved over a long time and cannot be eliminated overnight.' The regional dimension of the question was dramatically demonstrated when even the state unit of the BJP opposed the ban.[11] North India based Hindu nationalists should first know their India before displaying their aggressive cultural patriotism.

From the above discussion it may be concluded that more a particularistic strategy is followed to build the Indian nation upon, the more provocative it becomes for other communities resulting in avoidable societal fissures. Hindus constitute about 85 per cent of India's population and as such they would remain the dominant community any way, but as soon as it is aggressively projected it becomes a liability for the nation. On the one hand it unnecessarily creates a communally charged climate that results in frequent inter-communal riots, mostly between the Hindus and the Muslims, and on the other, it comes in

[11] *The Telegraph Northeast* (Guwahati), 12 August 2003.

the way of rule of law becoming the governing principle of the nation. Otherwise, the state had enough wherewithal to prevent the destruction of the Babri mosque had it followed the rule of law honestly. The days of religion working as the only cementing social force is under serious threat from globalisation and information revolution and sooner the Indian elites understand this reality the better.

Simultaneously, it must as well be underlined that if Hindu nationalism is a threat to India's nation building process, the ethnic and communal sentiments expressed by other groups, big and small, are not helping the process either. It is not true that majority communalism is a greater threat than minority communalism. Communalism of any hue is dangerous, including those represented by smaller ethnicities, for they thrive at each other's success. Ethnicity formation, identity projection and cultural assertions have become too much of a fad, which in its worst form has assumed militant forms. It is common knowledge that many of the militant groups are no better than local thugs who extract money from innocent people. So successful is their industry now that they have developed vital stakes in the continuation of the mal-development of their areas for only that way they can sell the logic that their militancy is on account of the central government's neglect of their regions. This author is aware that this sounds simplistic, but it is not untrue. For paucity of space it cannot be elaborated here. The recent ban on Hindi movies announced by nine militant organisations operating in India's northeast is a case in point. If anything has contributed most palpably to India's national integration, at least in the sense of India being one, that too from a pluralistic standpoint, it is these Bollywood movies. By banning them, these organisations, which claim to carve out a separate identity, is neither contributing to India's nation building, nor their own. The logic that in the process it would encourage the growth of local film industry is flawed. No industry grows by keeping off competition; it grows by emulating the competitor first, and then, if possible, by posing a challenge to the competitor. The northeast film industry certainly cannot pose a challenge to the Bollywood by being different. It can survive only by emulating it as other regional film industries have done. If the logic is that they want to keep off the Indian 'mainstream' cultural influences then the strategy is even more flawed. In this age of satellite communication any physical ban can at best be only partially successful. One should not forget that the Soviet Union tried to ban the electromagnetic waves from the West to make Communism secure but it eventually led to the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and also its economic collapse.

Pakistan

In Pakistan religion and ethnicity have done even greater damage to nation building than in India. In India at least the forces opposed to the use of these variables for the purposes of nation building are still in minority. As a result, in spite of BJP's pro-*Hindutva* rhetoric it has not dared to deviate from secularism as a policy. On the contrary, it has popularized the slogan: 'genuine secularism'. Moreover, it has, notably, unequivocally committed itself against declaring India as a Hindu state. In Pakistan, in contrast, in spite of its being almost totally Muslim and as such having no reason to do so, it has declared the state as Islamic. What is even more surprising is that it has made it constitutionally impossible for a non-Muslim to become the head of state, which any way is politically impossible.

Islam as a factor in Pakistan's politics is rooted in the very creation of Pakistan. Although Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Father of the Nation, became opposed to making Pakistan an Islamic state after the state was created but by that time it was too late. His death in September 1948 diluted even that commitment, howsoever cosmetic it was. The first constitution of Pakistan that was promulgated in 1956 declared Pakistan as an 'Islamic Republic.' During the Ayub Khan regime (1958-69) some efforts were once again made to secularize the state but they also did not succeed. For example, his 1962 constitution, in spite of its Islamic clauses, had declared Pakistan a 'Republic' and not an 'Islamic Republic'. But within a year he was forced by Islamic forces to agree to rename Pakistan as an 'Islamic Republic' with greater thrust on the use of Islamic ideology for the purposes of governance. Like Ayub Khan, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto (1972-77) too started with the promise of secularizing Pakistan polity but relented before long.

In General Zia-ul-Haq, who ruled the country from 1977 to 1988, the Islamic ideology of Pakistan found its staunchest champion. Immediately after he captured power on 5 July 1977 through a military coup he declared: 'Pakistan, which was created in the name of Islam, will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country.' Within a few days, Martial Law was declared and several Quranic punishments were introduced. Indeed, notwithstanding all that Zia did, he could not go to the extent of making Pakistan completely theocratic. The Federal Shariat Courts that he introduced lacked jurisdiction over the Constitution, over the Muslim personal law and the personal laws of other communities, and over the laws relating to court procedures and fiscal rules. The Hudood ordinances relating to criminal justice remained mostly on paper. No wonder that the recent imposition of Shariat Laws in the North West Frontier Province have not made any effective

difference in the situation. Although it was hyped up as the beginning of theocracy in Pakistan, a closer look at the laws would show that they were merely the literal translation into Urdu of the Enforcement of the Shariat Act adopted by the federal parliament and gazetted on 18 June 1991.[12]

But the tenor of Pakistan politics right from the beginning has been such that any modernist approach to politics, which even remotely advocates separation of religion and state, becomes an anathema for the political class. In its extreme form the latter considers only that person as the true Pakistani who is a Sunni and also preferably a Punjabi, or, at least a Sunni Pathan. Ahmediyas are not considered as Muslims and the Shias who form a minority are often on the receiving end as frequent anti-Shia violence indicates. In this sort of climate it is no wonder that of late the Pakistani state is countenancing a serious challenge from the so-called jihad 'industry'. Although under strong US pressure in the aftermath of the Nine Eleven the present regime of Pervaiz Musharraf is trying its best to cope with the problem but it is a Herculean task. Musharraf has banned several extremist groups and has tried to exhort his people about the true concept of Jihad as war against poverty and social evils but probably it is too late for him to extricate Pakistan from the Frankenstein of religious politics.

It seems Pakistan has not learnt any lesson from its Bangladesh experience. Islamic ideology was of little help to contain the disaffection of the predominantly Muslim East Pakistan. Had the state instead followed the democratic practice of handing over power to the party that had won the largest number of seats in the general election of 1970, that is the East Pakistan based Awami League, Pakistan would not have been dismembered. India's help to the disgruntled East Pakistanis was just incidental, not central to the development. Unfortunately, many Pakistanis still feel that that was the central cause of Bangladesh. What is more surprising is that after the creation of Bangladesh the Islamic ideology has got even more entrenched in the politics of Pakistan. The socio-political climate now is disturbingly backward looking. There are between 40,000 to 50,000 madrassas in Pakistan, which, according to Moinuddin Haider, the former Interior Minister of Pakistan, preach that brand of Islam, which is not good for the country. In the garb of religious teaching they fan sectarian violence. His efforts to get them registered yielded little result. Only about 4,350 responded positively. As there is a complex nexus between these madrassas, religious extremism and international Islamic

[12] For a critical analysis of the NWFP enactment, see I.A. Rehman, 'Another Fling at Shariat,' *The Dawn* (Karachi), 8 June 2003.

funding, something like a 'Jihad International, Inc.' has emerged, which is extremely difficult to be done away with.[13]

President Musharraf seems to be at his wits end. The Jamaat-i-Islami has made it clear that all his efforts to make Pakistan even remotely secular would be fiercely resisted. In the elections held on 10 October 2002, the Islamic parties substantially increased their popularity. The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), the alliance of six religious parties, formed the government in the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and became a partner in the ruling coalition in Balochistan. In the National Assembly, it captured as many as 45 seats as against Pakistan Muslim League (Q)'s 77, and Pakistan People's Party's 63.

A more close look at the election results reveals yet another story about that the MMA victory. It showed an emerging regional dichotomy in Pakistan politics. The MMA virtually was confined to the NWFP and Balochistan. These two provinces accounted for as many as 35 seats of the total of 45 that the combine won. Punjab and Sind were hardly taken by the wave. In other words, of the 3.19 million votes the MMA polled, 2.8 million came from these two provinces. In so far as the provincial assemblies were concerned, it mustered the majority in NWFP with 52 seats in an assembly of 99. In Balochistan it got 14 seats out of 51. In contrast, in Sind it got only 8 seats out of 130, and in Punjab only 9 out of 297.[14] In a large country like India these regional variations in the electoral performances of respective political parties do not matter so much but in Pakistan, which is relatively small, and where the federal experiment is still not so successful, the trend is not conducive to political integration of the country. It is particularly so because the combination of religion, ethnicity and regionalism often proves to be a witch's brew in a situation of political underdevelopment.

About the Jihadi forces threatening the Pakistan state Rasul Bakhsh Rais may be correct that the state's coercive powers would ultimately cow the Jihadis down for although these groups have the capability to do mischief (like

[13] One may trace the origin of international Islamic funding to the ideological conflict between the Shiite 'revolutionary' Iran and the Sunni Wahabi Saudi Arabia in the 1980s for the leadership of the Islamic world. Saudis succeeded because of their financial strength by supporting madrassa education in many Muslim countries and also by projecting Iran's Shiaism as an anathema to the Sunnis. See Graham E. Fuller, 'The Future of Political Islam,' *Foreign Affairs* (New York), 81(2), March-April 2002, p. 55.

[14] Suba Chandran, 'Rise of Religious Parties in Pak.,' *The Hindu* (New Delhi), 29 November 2002.

sectarian killings), still they cannot destabilize the state.[15] But that itself is a bad omen for nation building. Coercion is employed only when the democratic means of accommodating competitive political forces are unavailable. Since there is no democracy in Pakistan and since religion is intimately ingrained in Pakistan's politics one wonders how this can be achieved. The concept of an Islamic democracy, popularized from time to time by the political-military class in Pakistan, is a contradiction in terms.

The Islam-based nation building strategy of Pakistan has completely cast aside the minorities from the process as if they do not exist at all. Non-Muslim minority groups are very small in number. According to the last census conducted in 1981, the Hindus are 1.5 per cent of the population, the Christians 1.6 per cent and the Ahmediyas 0.1 per cent.[16] Hindus are not only small in number they are socially and politically marginalized. Most of them live at, or below, the poverty line. According to the Karachi-based journal, *The Herald*: 'Since Hindus are not "people of the book," most Muslims consider them to be inferior. Even today as the twentieth century comes to a close, most Muslims will not eat or drink with Hindus, nor will they touch Hindu's eating utensils. This Intense discrimination is manifested at all levels and in all forms. Thus, Hindus form one of the poorest and most exploited communities in the country.'[17] In spite of the virtually impossible situation that the Hindus would ever matter in politics the constitution of the nation prevents a Hindu, or for that matter any non-Muslim, to aspire for the top political positions in Pakistan. Here a contrast may be drawn with India. In India too there are many Hindus who do not trust the loyalty of the Muslims yet not only does the country's constitution guarantee them equal opportunity to aspire for the highest political positions in the country, it actually happens. In 55 years of India's independent existence it has three Muslim presidents and several Muslim and other minority chief ministers of states let alone many more ministers and political functionaries.

Bangladesh

The experience of Bangladesh is comparable to that of Pakistan but on a lesser scale. The first constitution of Bangladesh, which was promulgated in 1972, had declared the state as secular. But after five years, in April 1977, it was

[15] *Times of India*, 20 March 2002. Also, Rasul Bakhsh Rais, 'Pakistan's Changing Domestic and Foreign Policy Environment: Old Dilemmas, New Options,' sent to this author for his use.

[16] It may be noted that the population of Hindus has gone down significantly over the years. According to the 1951 census they constituted 12.7 per cent of the population. See Ervin Birnbaum, 'Some Theoretical and Practical Aspects of the Islamic State of Pakistan', Memoir No.1, Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi, 1956, p.6.

[17] *The Herald Annual* (Karachi), January 1993, p. 87.

amended to become Islam-oriented. President Zia-ur-Rehman, who was instrumental in this change, dropped secularism, enshrined in Article 12 of the 1972 constitution, in favour of Islam. He said that Bangladesh would from now onwards be guided by the principles of absolute trust and faith in the Almighty Allah, nationalism, democracy and socialism. The 'Joy Bangla' slogan, which was an expression of secular Bengali nationalism, was discarded as 'un-Islamic' and in its place the slogan 'Bangladesh Zindabad' was popularized. Simultaneously, a new thrust was introduced in the country's foreign policy. It was enumerated in the amended provision that the 'state shall endeavour to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity'.[18]

The Islamic thrust of Bangladesh politics continued even after the assassination of Zia-ur-Rehman. Lt. Gen. Hosain Mahammad Ershad, who captured power some time later, sought political legitimacy through his Islamic credentials. He proposed the setting up of a Zakat fund (Islamic Welfare Fund), the introduction of Islamic principles of interest-free loans in the banking system, and to declare Bangladesh as an Islamic state. He went to the extent of even down playing the Martyrs' Day (21 February), which represented Bengali linguistic nationalism, in favour of Islam.

But Islam has hardly contributed to the resolution of the Bengali-Bangladeshi dichotomy of the national politics. So far as the minorities like the Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, as well as the tribals are concerned, it has made them insecure. The persistence of Bengali-Bangladeshi cleavage and the resultant polarization of national politics continues to threaten the stability of any government thereby disallowing all long-term policies for the economic uplift of the country. During Ershad's time the forces of Bengali nationalism put up stiff resistance to his Islamic policies for it was feared that the General was pushing the country towards a civil war. A joint statement signed in 1983 by 23 opposition leaders warned: 'We would like to clearly state that people will steadfastly oppose and defeat this attempt to nullify the achievements of the February 21 Movement, change the basic state policy and promote the interest of a group and a person in the name of Islam.'[19] These secularist forces fear that if in India the *Hindutva*-dominated politics continues to thrive it would be extremely difficult for them to resist the popularity of the Islamic forces in Bangladesh.

[18] *Asian Recorder* (New Delhi), 14-20 May 1977, p. 13733. See also Rounaq Jahan, *Bangladesh Politics: Problems and Issues* (Dacca: University Press, 1980), pp. 215-17.

[19] For details, see Partha S. Ghosh, *Cooperation and Conflict in South Asia* (New Delhi: Manohar, 1989), pp. 68-72.

Expectedly, the demolition of the Babri mosque in India on 6 December 1992 had provoked violent reactions in Bangladesh in the forefront of which were the pro-Islamic forces. Hindu temples and other properties were destroyed in Dhaka and other parts of the country. Pro-Islamic and anti-Islamic forces in Bangladesh politics got further polarized and gave the handle to the 'Bengali nationalist' Awami League to hit at the Jamaat-i-Islami and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) for their own brand of religious politics, which was alleged to be no different from that of the BJP in India. A resolution jointly passed on 8 December 1992 by several parties said that 'the anti-liberation and anti-democratic fascist Jamaat-Shibir [student wing of the Jamaat] elements in Bangladesh are involved in a heinous conspiracy to gain its political design by capitalizing on the barbaric act of extremist forces in India'. The resolution also stated that Jamaat leaders had meetings with the BJP and both had joined hands to plan communal disturbances in their respective countries.[20]

In spite of the fact that secularist forces are still quite strong in Bangladesh, they are seemingly losing ground to the political opponents dominated by Islamic extremists. Although the hardcore elements amongst the latter are represented by such organs as the Jamaat-i-Islami and its student wing, the Chhatra Shibir, the two major political parties, namely, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Jatiya Party, also willy-nilly subscribe to the Islamic ideology. They do not view secularism as conducive to the legitimacy of the state. The controversy in the early nineties over the Pakistani national Golam Azam, a Bihari Muslim and the leader of the Jamaat, and over the novel *Lajja* written by Taslima Nasreen, demonstrated the political clout of these forces.

In the Islam dominated politics of Bangladesh the minority Hindus are increasingly finding themselves irrelevant. This is reflected in their constant out-migration to India. Unlike West Pakistan where the Hindu population has been reduced to an insignificant minority, in Bangladesh they are still in sizeable numbers. But their ratio in the population is constantly on the decline. In the fifties and sixties there were frequent anti-Hindu riots that resulted in exodus of Hindus to India. After the creation of Bangladesh nothing of that sort has happened, but it has assumed a subtle form. The promulgation of Vested and Non-Resident Property (Repeal) Ordinance during Ziaur Rehman's time offered an opportunity to the government officials and land grabbers to occupy landed properties of Hindus who had left Bangladesh for India, but not necessarily with the intention of not returning. Revenue officials at the district and sub-divisional levels were not only empowered to declare any land held by the Hindus as non-resident property and allot them to Muslim citizens, these officials were even

[20] See Partha S. Ghosh, 'Bangladesh at the Crossroads: Religion and Politics'. *Asian Survey* (Berkeley), 33(7), July 1993, p.708.

suitably rewarded for their promptness in disposing the cases. The policy continued with some modifications during the regimes of Ershad and Khaleda Zia.[21]

The psychological impact of the Vested Property Act on Hindus has been devastating. It has been calculated that on an average every day 538 Hindus have 'vanished'.[22] Ranabir Samaddar's survey amongst the Hindu migrants has revealed the interesting fact that democracy has actually exacerbated inter-communal disharmony: 'Hindu migrants ... told us repeatedly that their position was better in the Pakistan era than in independent Bangladesh; that even in independent Bangladesh, the Hindus felt more secure under Army rule than under a democratically elected government, for "attitude towards the Hindus and (therefore) India determine [sic] the fate of a political party during elections".'[23] This political connection between communalism and Hindu migration finds reflection in other spheres of government policies as well. There is evidence of officially sanctioned discrimination against Hindus living near the India-Bangladesh borders. They are debarred from applying for bank loans on the ground that they would migrate to India after availing themselves of the loans. While there is some truth in these allegations, the fact is that there are numerous Muslim defaulters too. But seldom any such fear is expressed about these bad loans. In the election of 1996 and thereafter the controversy figured as an electoral issue aimed at maligning the Hindu minority.[24]

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka there is a strong undercurrent of Buddhism oriented politics in which the clergy plays an important role. It may be noted that in the crystallization of Sinhala-Tamil ethnic cleavage during the 1950s, the political role played by the Buddhist fanatics was the most crucial. During this decade Buddhist revivalism in the political sphere found its most militant and determined expression. There were two main pressure groups in the forefront of this movement: the Buddhist monks and laymen appointed by the All Ceylon Buddhist Congress in 1954 to enquire into the state of Buddhism in Sri Lanka,

[21] Ranabir Samaddar, *The Marginal Nation: Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal* (New Delhi: Sage, 1999), pp. 92-93.
[22] Ibid., p. 93.
[23] Ibid., p. 132.
[24] Meghna Guhathakurta, 'Communal Politics in South Asia and the Hindus of Bangladesh,' in Monirul Hussain and Lipi Ghosh, eds., *Religious Minorities in South Asia: Selected Essays on Post-Colonial Situations, vol. I, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Manak, 2002), p. 81.

and the Ekasth Buddhist Peramuna (EBP)—the United Front of the Buddhist monks.[25]

In 1956, the Buddhist Committee of Enquiry published its report under the title *Betrayal of Buddhism*. It was a severe indictment of the ruling United National Party (UNP) for its neglect of Buddhist interests and for its pro-Christian bias. Its major demands were: the creation of a Buddha Sasana (administration) Council, the repeal of the section in the constitution dealing with protective clauses pertaining to the minorities; the take over of all government-aided schools and training colleges by the state; the replacement of Sunday by *poya* as weekly holiday and the termination of the services of Christian nuns working in government hospitals.[26]

In the same year, another major event took place, which also signified Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. It was the celebration of the Two Thousand Five Hundredth Anniversary of the passing away of the Buddha and that of the arrival of the Sinhala race in the island. The importance of the celebrations as an assertion of the legitimacy of the Sinhala Buddhists to rule the country cannot be over-emphasized. Buddhism was projected to have a special meaning in the life of the island and the Sinhalas were supposed to have the actual legitimacy to guide the destinies of the country being the original race on the island. These ideas were not specifically announced, but the way the celebrations were held with government patronage and the way the government pursued pro-Buddhist policies in subsequent years did not leave any doubt about this Sinhala Buddhist racial assertion.[27]

S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike of the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) romped to power in 1956 riding the bandwagon of this Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism. Sometime ago he had converted himself from Christianity to Buddhism. During the campaign he identified himself with the 'charismatic rulers of the past glorified in the chronicles' and agreed to abide by the Ten Commandments

[25] For a detailed account of these developments, see W. Howard Wriggins, *Ceylon: Dilemmas of a New Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), Chaps, 7 and 9; Donald E. Smith, 'The Sinhalese Buddhist Revolution', and A.J. Wilson, 'Buddhism and Politics, 1960-65', both in Donald E. Smith, ed., *South Asian Politics and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966).

[26] S.V. Kodikara, 'Communalism and Political Modernization in Ceylon', *Modern Ceylon Studies* (Peradeniya), 1(1), 1970, p. 102.

[27] One is convinced of such thrusts if one reads documents such as, the Lanka Bauddha Mandalaya (The Buddhist Council of Ceylon) and the Government of Ceylon: The Ministry of Home Affairs, *An Event of Dual Significance* (Colombo, n.d.).

drawn up by the Buddhist clergy.[28] These commandments were a sort of ten-point charter with witch the devout Buddhists were supposed to test the political candidates. The salient categories were dedication to Buddhist values in their private lives, commitment to make Sinhala the only official language and acceptance of the Buddhist Committee report. The establishment of a Ministry of Cultural Affairs in 1956, for the first time in Sri Lanka's history, clearly indicated Bandaranaike government's commitment to institutionalize its efforts towards reviving the past.[29]

In these developments the seeds of a future Sinhala-Tamil ethnic conflict were sown. On 19 August 1956, the Federal Party, the principal Tamil party, at its Annual Convention held at Trincomalee, made the demands to replace 'the present pernicious constitution by a rational and democratic constitution based on the federal principle and the establishment of one or more Tamil linguistic state or states incorporating all geographically contiguous areas in which the Tamil-speaking people are numerically in a majority as federating unit or units enjoying the widest autonomous and residuary powers consistent with the unity and external security of Ceylon' and to restore 'the Tamil language to its rightful place enjoying absolute parity of status with Sinhalese as an official language of the country.'

The Sinhala-Tamil relations continued to deteriorate and in 1983 culminated in the worst anti-Tamil riots in recorded history. It rocked the nation from its bottom. Riots had taken place earlier also but the 1983 riots were unprecedented in the sense that in this case even the elite members of the Tamil community were not spared. The die was cast and the Sri Lankan nation-building trauma followed the predictable course.

Viewed objectively, both the Sinhala and Tamil ethnic rigidities have made it virtually impossible to resolve the ethnic tangle. While the political conflict between the two communities had its origin in the colonial period, which was accentuated during the fifties that we have discussed, lately the intransigence of the Liberation Tigers of the Tamil Eelam (LTTE) has made it difficult to find a mutually acceptable solution. The LTTE's demand for a unified Tamil province, if not an independent Tamil Eelam, comprising almost 30 per cent of the nation's territory and 40 per cent of its coastline when the community itself comprises of only 12 per cent of the total population of the nation is as unreasonable as the

[28] H.L. Seneviratne, 'Affairs of a New Nation,' *Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies* (Peradeniya), 8(1&2), January-December 1965, p. 94. See also, Heinz Bechert, 'S.W.R.D. Bandarnaike and the Legitimization of Power through Buddhist Ideals,' in Bardwell L. Smith, ed., *Religion and Legitimization of Power in Sri Lanka* (Chambersburg, PA.: Anima Books, 1978), pp.199-211.

[29] Seneviratne, 'Affairs of a New Nation,' pp. 95, 102.

demand of the Sinhala chauvinists in the fifties to declare the state as a Buddhist state. Both religion and ethnicity have, therefore, proved to be the biggest impediments to Sri Lanka's integration as a nation.[30]

Nepal

Nepal does not face much of a nation-building challenge both on account of religious and historical reasons. Historically it is a predominantly Hindu area and as such there was no controversy when the new constitution, promulgated in 1990, declared the state as a Hindu state. Still, it may be argued that in such a situation the minorities, most notably the Muslims, would ever remain as second-class citizens, politically speaking. The Muslims are the second largest minority after the Buddhists. According to 1991 census, they constituted 3.5 per cent of the population, numbering 6,53,218. It is, however, believed that the actual number is more, about 6 per cent. Nepal is the only Hindu nation in the world and it may, therefore, be instructive to see how does a Muslim identity survives in a Hindu nation and how does it adapt itself.

Since Nepal is a Hindu state, not only its social structure is caste based, even the legal system is so. Broadly, the Nepali Hindu society can be classified into three segments—the upper castes, the middle castes and the so-called untouchables. Canonically, the Muslims, like the Christians, should not figure anywhere as they are outside the Hindu fold. But having primarily originated from amongst the native people, they cannot think totally outside the Hindu fold nor are they conceived that way by the latter. As a result the Nepali Muslims have acquired a peculiar social status, which is neither within the Hindu fold nor totally outside of it. Anthropological studies have shown that on the basis of such criteria as acceptance of water and food from them, touching them, and having sexual intercourse with them, the Nepali Muslims though have a distinct identity because of their religious beliefs and practices, figure somewhere in the middle between the caste Hindus and the so-called untouchables. A Nepali Hindu would not mind taking water from him but would refuse to touch water supplied by an untouchable. Previously, even the Hindu personal laws based on shastric traditions used to apply on Muslims as well. But during the last century or so they are allowed to follow their own personal laws based on Islamic traditions. By and large there is no untouchability amongst the Muslims but those who converted into Islam from being an untouchable within the Hindu fold are still treated as untouchables by fellow Muslims. More of less the same situation holds good amongst the Indian Muslims.[31]

[30] For a detailed treatment of the subject, see Partha S. Ghosh, *Ethnicity versus Nationalism: The Devolution Discourse in Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Sage, 2003).

[31] Marc Gaborieau, 'Muslims in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal,' in T.N. Madan, ed., *Muslim Communities of South Asia: Culture, Society and Power* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001), Third Enlarged Edition, pp. 205-27. This is a reprint of an earlier article written in 1972.

Nepal's Muslims live mostly in the Terai region that abut the Indian states of Bihar, U.P. and Uttaranchal. Of late there is a growing sense of Muslim identity largely as a response to the activities of the Hindu chauvinistic groups like the Shiv Sena, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the Bajrang Dal, coupled with the machinations of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI). Amongst the Muslim groups, the Islamic Yuva Sangh (IYS) and Muslim Ekta Sangh (MES) are most active.[32] In spite of these political responses, it may be argued that the Muslims of Nepal are probably much less confident about their status than their Indian counterparts. This can be attributed it to three factors—one, they are numerically small, two, Muslims never ruled Nepal as they did in India, and three, Nepal, unlike India, is a Hindu state with no strong mass-based tradition of democratic movement for national emancipation.

Yet, given the fact that during the India-Pakistan wars the Nepali Muslims have supported Pakistan[33] the ISI has been using Nepal as an important base for its anti-India activities. Because of the open border of 500 miles between India and Nepal it is not only easy to smuggle contraband into Indian territory but also to coordinate the subversive activities of the secessionist groups operating in Kashmir, Punjab and the north-east. One does not know for certain, however, as to how much actual support Pakistan has amongst Nepal's Muslims. There are some cases of Muslim youth being lured by money and Islamic ideology to indulge in subversive activities. Salim Ansari, a Terai Muslim leader, attributes it largely to the socio-economic backwardness of the community in which situation they become tools in the hands of foreign conspirators.[34] According to a report in the Indian press, in recent years madrasas have mushroomed in the bordering districts of Nepal some of which have become prosperous overnight, thanks to the massive grants made available to them by the Islamic Development Bank.[35]

Some broad trends

In the entire South Asian region an uncanny crisis of identity seems to be haunting all the constituent nations. Pakistan has the problem that if it gives up Islam as its sheet anchor of nationalism it would get mixed up with India and no body would be able to recognize it as a separate nation. Bangladesh's crisis is

[32] Mollica Dastidar, 'Muslims of Nepal's Terai,' *Economic and Political Weekly* (Mumbai), 35(10), 4 March 2000, p. 768.

[33] Gaborieau, 'Muslims in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal,' pp. 205-27.

[34] Dastidar, 'Muslims of Nepal's Terai,' pp. 768-69.

[35] Pervez Iqbal Siddiqui, 'Madrasas Multiply as Foreign Funds Flow in,' *Sunday Times of India* (New Delhi), 4 November 2001.

that if it highlights the secular Bengali nationalism it would get identified with West Bengal, which as a component of a continental India has larger clout in the overall subcontinent. Both Pakistan and Bangladesh, therefore, make Islam their identifying marks to differentiate them from the colossal presence of India in the neighbourhood. Sri Lanka's story is also comparable. If it does not use its distinguishing racial and religious marks—Sinhala and Buddhism—people would confuse it as an extension of the Indian subcontinent, or, to be more precise, the South Indian peninsula. Once Bernard Tilakaratne, the former foreign secretary of Sri Lanka, had narrated to this author a story of one of the biggest embarrassments of his diplomatic career. In a diplomatic party somewhere in Europe when he had introduced himself as the Foreign Secretary of Sri Lanka his interlocutor wanted to know in which part of India was it situated. Nepal's tension is of a different kind. It is predominantly Hindu and predominantly Nepali in ethnic terms. But neighbouring India too is Hindu and almost as many ethnic Nepalis live there—in Sikkim, Darjeeling (West Bengal), northeastern districts of Assam and Uttaranchal. Its nation building strategy, therefore, must highlight its not being an extension of Indian culture, which is possible only through an aggressive anti-Indianism that gets reflected during the elections and diplomatic posturing or sharing of common resources like river waters.

From the foregoing one may conclude that India is the common threat to all these nations' identity projections and that India itself does not suffer from any crisis of identity. That is not true either. In India the conflict is between the protagonists of its civilizational identity and those of its cultural identity. The former school argues that the historical perimeters of India as understood from time immemorial, in which Hinduism played an important role but not the only role, is a civilizational and geographical concept. It is, therefore, a nation of various nationalities, all having their rightful claim over it. The concept had caught the imagination of the great Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore who underlined the unbounded hospitality of India by calling it 'this Supreme Ocean of Humanity' in his celebrated poem 'Bharat-Tirtha', meaning India, the pilgrimage. The cultural school, however, does not agree with this civilizational/geographical concept of India. For its protagonists the thought and practice of Hindu religion are at the core of Indian culture from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and from Gujarat to Arunachal Pradesh. The non-Hindus are divided into two categories—the Indian religionists like the Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs, and the non-Indian religionists like the Christians and Muslims. For the first category there is no problem because they are the offshoots of Hindu religion but for the second category the problem is that these faiths are imported from abroad. According to the cultural school, even for the second category also there is no problem provided they agree to the fact that they are essentially Hindu because they all got converted from Hinduism at some point of time or the other. The Christians and Muslims do not mind subscribing to

this basic idea but they resent the tone and tenor of this argument, which has a clear majoritarian arrogance. This arrogance is reflected in the latest Hindutva phenomenon that has been tremendously influencing the national politics of late dividing Indians on communal lines.

These competitive quests for identity in South Asia have neither ensured societal peace nor have they contributed to regional co-operation. At the core of the failure of the SAARC experiment is this crisis of nation building.[36] The reluctance of the majority to give equal importance to smaller ethnic, linguistic or religious groups in the nation building project have contributed to these groups' developing suspicions about the intentions of the majority, both actual and perceived. Almost all the ethno-separatist movements dotting the region can be attributed to this formulation. In India it is the Indian/Hindu central government versus the Muslims, Christians and tribals, in Pakistan it is the Sunni/Punjabi dominated state versus the Shias, Balochis, Pathans, Sindhis and Mohajirs, in Bangladesh it is the Islam oriented government versus the Christians, Hindus and Buddhists, in Sri Lanka it is the Sinhala/Buddhist state versus the Tamils (latter's being predominantly Hindu is not relevant as such), and in Nepal it is Nepali nationalism versus its perceived detractors, the pro-India forces. These cleavages coupled with poverty and underdevelopment of the region have given rise to such undemocratic notions like benefits to the sons of the soil, cultural exclusivism, regional disparity and absence of social mobility.

Conclusion

Nation building essentially boils down to territorial integrity. How to ensure that is the greatest challenge for all governments. There are two ways of ensuring that, one by enlisting the support of major nations both in the neighbourhood as well as on the global scene, and the other by working out such a political development strategy that would prevent the marginalisation of any community to the extent of its asking for secession. In South Asia so far only one country has been dismembered and that is Pakistan. The reason for its failure was that the then government of General Yahya Khan could manage neither the domestic front nor the external front. On the one hand there was the massive East Pakistani rebellion against Pakistani highhandedness, and on the other, there was a hostile India willing to take advantage of Pakistan's predicament. In this paper we have dealt only with the former variable and tried to show how particularistic nation building strategy can spell disaster to a nation, which Pakistan exemplified. The fact that no other country has experienced dismemberment does not mean that they have done very well and have reasons to be complacent. All the nations that we have

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[36] Explained in detail in one of my earlier works, Ghosh, *Cooperation and Conflict in South Asia.*

analysed exhibit symptoms of societal disharmony, which, if not contained at the appropriate time, can lead to insurmountable integrational crisis in the future.

It is naïve to think that religion and ethnicity would not play their roles in politics. South Asia being both pluralistic and poor provides even larger possibility of their being used for political purposes. But what is desired is to draw a fine but firm line demarcating religious politics from hate politics. In this paper this distinction has been highlighted in the context of Indian politics as during the Nehru era and the same as is being practised now. Hindu-Muslim riots had taken place in the Nehru era also but the recent riots are qualitatively different. In Nehru's days there was never any allegation that the state machinery was hand in glove with the Hindu rioters but now it has become common, whether it were the Mumbai riots of 1993 or the Gujarat riots of 2001.

This brings us to the fundamental question of rule of law, or, in other words, the sanctity of state institutions. So long as the institutions of state are above sectarian motivations all communities have faith in them and the rules of the political game are well known and everybody knows his limits. But sectarian politics has the most dangerous potential to destroy this fabric of belief system. And lastly, once again drawing from what has been just said, minorities must be treated at par with the rest in so far as the democratic ball game is concerned. They must have the right to contest, even if it is merely theoretical, for the highest political post in the land, no matter that such a probability is virtually nil in the real sense. Symbolism has it own importance in constitutionalism and this must be given its due. ■

Citizens and Denizens: Ethnicity, homelands and the crisis of displacement in Northeast India

Sanjib Baruah

The US Committee for Refugees in its 2000 report estimated that there were 157,000 displaced persons in northeast India. A large number of "tribal" people entitled to protective discrimination under the Indian Constitution live in those states. The rights of "non-tribals" to land ownership and exchange, business and trade licenses and access to elected office are restricted. A number of these tribal enclaves now are full-fledged states. One of the unintended effects of this regime of protective discrimination is that the notion of exclusive homelands for ethnically defined groups has become normalized in the region. In a context of massive social transformation that attracts significant numbers of people to the region, this has generated an extremely divisive politics of insiders and outsiders that have led to these displacements.

In 1997 the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council passed the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill. The body has constitutional jurisdiction over Khasi "customary law." The Khasis have a matrilineal kinship system and the bill sought to codify their system of inheritance through the female line. But the bill became highly controversial. A number of organizations, including the influential Khasi Students Union and the Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai (literally, "Association of New Hearths") opposed the measure and argued that instead of codifying the "outdated system" of matrilineal succession, the Khasis should "modernize" their kinship system. They proposed a change that would have allowed only children of two Khasi parents to be regarded as Khasi.

Why did legally establishing who is and who is not a Khasi become so important? Because the Khasis are designated as one of the scheduled tribes [STs][1] in Meghalaya and the lion's share of public employment, business and trade licenses, and even the right to seek elected office are reserved for members of the STs. Nearly 85% of the public employment in Meghalaya is reserved. 55 of the 60 seats in the state legislative Assembly are reserved for the STs. While the historical disadvantages that the tribal peoples suffered account for this elaborate protective discrimination regime, the status of non-tribals in Meghalaya as well as in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland where such a protective discrimination regime exists, is best described as that of denizens.[2] In all these states, the rights to land ownership

and exchange, business and trade licenses and access to elected office are restricted. This protective discrimination regime is the result of incremental policy-making going back to colonial times when policy instruments were devised to protect vulnerable aboriginal peoples living in isolated enclaves -- once described as "backward tracks." Under the Sixth Schedule of the India's postcolonial Constitution many of these enclaves became autonomous districts and autonomous regions within those districts – often identified with particular titular STs. Subsequently many of these territories became full-fledged states, and the protected minorities turned into majority groups in these states. However, thanks to the trend of demographic change inherent in economic development policies, their majority status is under increasing stress. In three of the states -- Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland -- the continuation of the colonial institution of the Inner Line gives an even stronger layer of protection against potential settlers. Anyone entering those territories is first required to secure an official permit. One of the unintended effects of this process of incremental policy-making is that the notion of exclusive homelands, where certain ethnically defined groups are privileged, has become normalized in the region.

In recent years internal displacements caused by violent ethnonational conflicts in many parts of northeast India have attracted the attention of refugee advocates. Most observers agree that there have been episodes of conflict producing significant levels of internal displacement in this region. However, estimating the precise number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has not been easy. Mahendra Lama describes the nature of the problem in India as a whole. Political sensitivities prevent the government from releasing data on displacement. But without "a central authority responsible for coordinating data from central and state governments regular monitoring is not possible in such a huge country." The "nature, frequency and extent of the causes of internal displacement" in India, are so varied, Lama writes, that it would be a "herculean task to monitor and record them" (Lama, 2000: 24-26). The Norwegian Refugee Council's profile of internal displacement in India in 2000-2001, based on its Global IDP Database, is illustrative of the wide divergence that exists between various available estimates of IDPs in northeast India and it also points to the absence of data in some cases. The available estimates of the number of IDPs in the state of Assam in 2000-2001, for instance, varied between more than 200,000 to more than 87,000 persons. The estimates of Reangs displaced from Mizoram and living in the refugee camps of Tripura varied between 31,000 and 41,000. The profile cites one estimate that at least 80,000 Bengalis were uprooted in Tripura since 1993. In Manipur conflicts between tribal groups led to the displacement (at least temporarily) of as many as 130,00 Kukis, Paites, and Nagas since 1992, but there were no estimates of the number of IDPs in Manipur in 2000-2001. In Arunachal Pradesh as many as

3000 Chakmas had become internally displaced, but the number of those who have left the area was unknown [Norwegian Refugee Council, 2001: 31-34]. The US Committee for Refugees in its report for the year 2000 estimated that there were 157,000 displaced persons in northeast India (USCR, 2000).

Despite the absence of precise figures, these estimates underscore the magnitude of the IDP crisis in northeast India. In this paper I will not make a fresh attempt to provide numerical estimates of the number of IDPs in the region. Instead my goal is to describe the particular historical conditions and institutional context in which some of the typical ethno-political conflicts of the region take place and why these conflicts have proven to be particularly conducive to episodes of ethnic violence and displacement.

Northeast India is one of South Asia's last land frontiers and through much of the twentieth century these sparsely populated areas have attracted large-scale migration from the rest of the subcontinent. The protective discrimination regime, outlined earlier, arose partly as a response to these demographic trends. Many of these tribal societies have been going through a process of transition from shifting cultivation to settled agriculture, from clan control of land to commodification of land, urbanization and cultural change associated with the process of "modernization." The new economic niches created in this process of social transformation attract many denizens to the region. I would argue in this paper that (a) the normalization of the idea of exclusive homelands for ethnically defined groups generates a kind of politics that is in dissonance with the actually existing political economy of the region; (b) the emerging pattern of class differentiation taking place within the framework of the protective discrimination regime of these transitional economies is complex. While some settlers exploit indigenous tribals, others occupy the most marginal of economic niches. While the protective discrimination regime has enabled some tribals to do well, it has not stopped the process of proletarianization of other tribals; (c) This is the context in which the idea of exclusive homelands – expressed in the institutional language of autonomous district councils or separate statehood – has shaped the political imagination of tribal as well as non-tribal activists of the region.

This particular configuration of institutional legacy, demographic trends, and political discourse in northeast India has shaped an extremely divisive politics of insiders and outsiders that have led to the incidents of displacement. While this combination of circumstances is unique to this part of India, the introduction of similar ideas of exclusive homelands in demographically mixed situations have produced similar conflicts -- with the attendant risks of ethnic violence and internal displacement -- in other parts of India as well. In the new state of Jharkhand for instance, the summer of 2002 saw significant unrest over

the state government's new "domicile policy", which would have made ancestral roots in the territory based on the 1932 land records a requirement for public employment. The new domicile policy led to protests and political polarisation of the state between pro-domicile and anti-domicile groups. A *bandh* (general strike) called by pro-domicile groups turned violent claiming a number of lives. The scope of this paper, however, is limited to the seven states of northeast India: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. An eighth state, Sikkim that was added to the key policy-making institution, the North Eastern Council in 2001, is outside the scope of the paper. I argue in the concluding part of the paper that the way out of the dilemma in northeast India is not a regime of undifferentiated nation-wide citizenship and the elimination of all controls over immigration into the area. Instead I propose a way of defining political communities in civic rather than ethnic terms that could incorporate the ethnic outsider – at least beyond the first generation – and bring the citizenship regime of the region in line with the actually existing political economy of the region.

Returning to the controversy in Meghalaya over Khasi succession rules, the authority of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council to decide on Khasi succession rules is derived from the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. According to its sponsors, the goal of the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage bill was to stop non-Khasis from adopting Khasi surnames to take advantage of opportunities reserved for STs. The Khasi activists opposed to the measure would hardly disagree with that goal. However, the attempt to codify "customary practice" drew public attention to the liberal way in which the Khasis have traditionally incorporated outsiders into their fold. The practice by which children of a Khasi mother and a non-Khasi father can become a Khasi came up for special scrutiny. The opponents of the bill argued that the system allows too many people to pass off as Khasi and take advantage of opportunities reserved for Khasis. Thus the President of the Syngkhong, Keith Pariat was quoted in the press as saying that the matrilineal system no longer serves contemporary needs and that, if it was allowed to continue, the "pure Khasi tribe" will become extinct in another ten to fifteen years (cited in Shridhar 2000). The bill, however, did not become law because it did not receive the Governor's assent – a constitutional requirement aimed at moderating the legislative powers of state legislatures.

By raising questions about the way "outsiders" have historically been incorporated into the Khasi fold, the controversy had the effect of putting under the cloud the rights -- including rights to property ownership, public employment and to seek elected office -- of significant numbers of people living in Meghalaya, some for generations. And since the proposed reforms would have denied those rights to people who had some claim to being a Khasi, the

climate generated by the controversy could only have been worse for most denizens -- residents of Meghalaya who had no claim to being a Khasi or a member of one of the other STs.

This paper, I wish to emphasize, is not an argument for a universal model of national citizenship. I agree with the view expressed recently by two political theorists who have examined various kinds of differentiated citizenship in the world. "Critics of minority rights," write W. Kymlicka and W. Norman, "can no longer claim that minority rights inherently conflict with citizenship ideals; defenders of minority rights can no longer claim that concerns about civility and civic identity are simply illegitimate attempts to silence or dismiss troublesome minorities" (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 41). The regime of citizens and denizens that has evolved in northeast India has to be understood in a historical context. It began as an attempt by the colonial state to insulate some of the peoples organized in pre-capitalist social formations from the devastation that the initial onslaught of global capitalism had brought. Given this history, one can argue that a model of formally equal citizenship would only reinforce discriminatory outcomes and that the only way to protect such vulnerable groups of peoples is a regime of differentiated citizenship. But whether a particular regime of differentiated citizenship can achieve its intended goals has to be a matter for investigation. For the costs of sacrificing the basic principle of equal citizenship are high; and there are intended as well as unintended consequences of regimes of differentiated citizenship.

From excluded areas to exclusive homelands

Attempts to deal with "aborigines" by creating protected enclaves where they can be allowed to pursue their "customary practices" including kinship and clan-based rules of land allocation go back to the earliest period of British colonial rule in India. It is worth remembering, however, that the idea of protection came only after the phase of enormous violence that was let loose on some of the same people by the early colonizers in the course of pacification campaigns of "savage tribes" and, after it became clear that the initial onslaught of colonial transformation had led to the massive dispossession and displacement of many of these peoples organized in pre-capitalist social formations. For many, whatever protection came along, was too little and too late.

As early as 1874 the Indian legislature had passed a scheduled districts act. The Government of India Act of 1919 empowered the Governor General in Council to declare any territory to be a backward track where laws passed by the Indian legislature would not apply. The Statutory Commission, which in 1930 had examined the political conditions in British India and proposed constitutional reforms, observed that there was a "complete statutory bar to the legislative

authority of legislatures within every backward track" (cited in Ghurye 1980: 109). The Commission did not like the term "backward tracks," but it agreed with the notion that such tracks should be outside general constitutional arrangements. It proposed a change of name from backward tracks to excluded areas. The Government of India Act of 1935 therefore provided for excluded and partially excluded areas – so called because they were excluded from the operation of laws applicable in the rest of British-controlled India.

Some of the potential problems, especially the dangers to non-aboriginal people living in those areas were anticipated by the debates about these measures even in colonial times. One of the best-known critiques of colonial-era tribal policies is G.S. Ghurye's 1943 book *The Aborigines—So Called – and their Future.* "The acknowledgement of the right of the so-called aborigines to follow their traditional pursuits, like the practice of shifting cultivation, without any reference to the needs of the general community," wrote Ghurye in reference to the recommendations of the Statutory Commission, "was the most dangerous doctrine endorsed by the Commissioners. " The Commissioners, he charged, had not considered the impact on non-aborigines living in those areas and "much less did they give their thought to the proportions of such people in the various areas, unless we discover it in the distinction of the two categories of excluded areas made by them." If the distinction between excluded and partially excluded areas was indeed based on the proportions of non-aborigines living in those areas, he wrote, it was too broad a distinction to be useful (Ghurye 1980: 111). About the Government of India Act of 1935, Ghurye wrote that in its "eagerness to do something for the tribals," the British parliament barely considered the condition of

> the non-tribals in whose midst the protected aborigines live and on whom they depend to some extent for their livelihood. That these non-tribals, too, have rights, that their good will and cooperation, next only to the conscious and deliberate internal organization of the tribals themselves, are the most essential factors for the present welfare and future development of the so-called aborigines, failed to receive adequate consideration.

That some non-tribals may have indeed taken "unfair advantage of the simplicity and ignorance and simplicity of the aborigines," Ghurye argued, was no reason to write off their contribution to "socio-economic development," and much less to treat all of them as a "right-less population" (Ghurye 1980: 126-29).

Nevertheless the Constitution of India of 1950, retained most of the provisions of the 1935 Act, though the nomenclatures and some of the institutional forms were modified. Not surprisingly, Ghurye could reprint the same book with a

few changes and a new title in 1959. Most importantly, from our perspective, the Constitution made a distinction between the tribal areas of Assam (five of the seven states of today's northeast) and those in the rest of the country. While the tribal peoples of the rest of India came under the Fifth Schedule, the Sixth Schedule provided for the administration of the tribal areas of northeast India.

The chairman of the subcommittee of the Constituent Assembly that drafted the Sixth Schedule, Gopi Nath Bordoloi in presenting its proposals justified them by referring to the uncertain political conditions in the region at the time of independence. Bordoloi stressed the need for continued protection because of the doubts among the tribal people of what a postcolonial dispensation would bring; he spoke of the need to "integrate" these peoples in a Gandhian way (cited in Chaube 1974: 86-87)). The fear of being swamped by outsiders, once the colonial era restrictions were suddenly removed, was indeed a concern expressed by leaders of these peoples. That the Naga revolt broke out soon after independence – and continues till this day – indicates that anxiety expressed by Bordoloi was far from theoretical.

The Sixth Schedule distinguished two sets of tribal areas of (undivided) Assam using the administrative categories that were then in effect: (a) the districts of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills (excluding Shillong), Garo Hills, Lushai Hills, Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills and (b) the North East Frontier Tracts and the Naga Tribal Area. The first set of areas today comprise the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and parts of Assam, and the second category consists mostly of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and a part of the state of Nagaland. The Sixth Schedule institutions were meant for both sets of areas, but the latter set of territories – which were mostly un-administered during colonial times – were considered to be not quite ready at that time for such self-governing institutions. The administration of those areas were going to be carried out directly from Delhi – with the Governor of Assam acting as the agent of the Indian president.

The Sixth Schedule provided for autonomous districts and autonomous regions within those districts with elected councils which enjoy powers to levy some taxes, to constitute courts for the administration of justice involving tribals and law-making powers on subjects including land allotment, occupation or use of land, regulation of shifting cultivation, formation and administration of village and town committees, appointment of chiefs, inheritance of property, marriage and social customs.

The Sixth Schedule, however, was not intended to protect all the STs of northeast India. Only those that were considered to be relatively concentrated in the old excluded and partially excluded areas, and for which the Constitution

used the term tribal areas, came under the purview of the Sixth Schedule. The Bordoloi sub-committee did not consider the situation of other STs. Among them were groups such as Bodos, Misings and Tiwas that are described today as plains tribes to distinguish them from the hill tribes that came under the Sixth Schedule. In the Constituent Assembly, the special needs of the plains tribes were the responsibility of a separate subcommittee, which was in charge of minority rights. A Bodo politician, Rupnath Brahma, was a member of the Minority Rights sub-committee.

The process of formation of Autonomous District Councils, however, did not quite proceed the way Constitution-makers had anticipated. The outbreak of the independentist Naga rebellion for instance, meant that political conditions for holding elections to the Naga Hills District Council did not exist. Instead in1963 the state of Nagaland was created. The North East Frontier Tracts where the Sixth Schedule was eventually supposed to be in place also went through a different process of institutional change than the one anticipated prior to the Indo-China war of 1962. The area is now the state of Arunachal Pradesh, where tribals enjoy protection at the state level. On the other hand, the Sixth Schedule has been extended to Tripura in response to tribal militancy, where the Tripura Tribal Areas District Council was formed.

It is not accidental that Nagaland was created in 1963, a year after India's war with China. I have argued elsewhere that the Chinese invasion exposed India's vulnerabilities in the region. Already the Naga independentist rebellion had begun to make officials of the postcolonial Indian state anxious. There were stirrings of unrest in other parts of the region as well. Beginning with the China war, the managers of the Indian state began to see the external and internal "enemies" in this frontier region coming together and constituting a looming threat to national security. Extending the institutions of the state all the way into the international border – nationalizing this frontier space – became the thrust of Indian policy ever since. Over the next few years, the governmental structure of the region was fundamentally redesigned to create what I have called a cosmetically federal regional order. Thus with the creation of Nagaland, statehood in northeast India became de-linked from questions of fiscal viability and of its implications for the constitutional architecture of the larger polity. Building on the elementary apparatus of state institutions created by the Sixth Schedule became a good way to ensure both the penetration of the state and the creation of local stakeholders in the pan-Indian dispensation. Apart from consolidating the idea of exclusive homelands, organizing the region into a number of mini states, all of them with the formal institutions of any other Indian state government, also had the effect of imposing a particular developmentalist paradigm. There is, after all, a standard vision of development which is contained in the routine practices of the bureaucracy of a

developmentalist state that allocates funds to departments such as Public Works, Rural Development and Industries; and that vision only gets bolstered by the patronage politics of an electoral democracy. In the sparsely populated parts of this frontier region, these economic trends have invariably meant more immigration (See Baruah 2002).

The most significant aspect of this new regional order, from the perspective of the theory and practice of citizenship, however, is that the vast majority of seats in the state legislatures of the mini states – indeed all but one seat in the case of three legislatures -- are reserved for candidates belonging to the STs. Table 1 gives the number of reserved seats in the state legislatures of northeastern states and also gives the percentage of the ST population.

Table 1: Northeast Indian states: Reserved seats for Scheduled Tribes in state legislative assemblies

States	ST as % of Population*	Leg. Assembly Total Members	Leg. Assembly Seats for STs	Leg. Assembly Unreserved seats
Arunachal	63.7	60	59	1
Assam	12.8	126	16	102 **
Manipur	34.4	60	20	40
Meghalaya	86.6	60	55	5
Mizoram	94.8	40	39	1
Nagaland	87.7	60	59	1
Tripura	31.0	60	20	33***

** based on 1991 census data*
*** 8 reserved for scheduled castes*
**** 7 reserved for scheduled castes*

In the Legislative Assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland all but one seat are reserved for STs. In Meghalaya 55 of the 60 seats are reserved. Apart from the issue of the denizens not being able to contest elections, the principle of one-person, one-vote, one-value has had to be undermined in other ways as well in order to achieve such a weighted system of representation. Generally, the norm about ensuring the equality of the relative weight of each vote in a democracy requires that in electoral systems with single-member constituencies, the electorates in all districts be roughly of the same size. That could not done if the legislative assemblies were to have such a weighted system of representation. As a result, Nagaland's largest urban center, Dimapur, for instance, – which has a very high concentration of denizens – is divided into two constituencies and one of them is the sole unreserved (non-

tribal) seat in the Nagaland Assembly. This unreserved constituency has many times the number of voters of each of the other constituencies in the state.

Through another constitutional amendment the balance between reserved and unreserved seats in the assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland has been frozen in order to ensure that delimitation of constituencies in light of demographic changes in future does not change the current balance.

Whatever the philosophical dilemmas these arrangements present to the theorist of citizenship, the emergence of elected state governments under the control of tribal politicians and of a visible well-to-do tribal elite in those states has captured the imagination of tribal as well as non-tribal ethnic activists in the region. There is a perception that the STs in the states with the most comprehensive protective discrimination regimes have done well economically and have been relatively successful in insulated themselves from being swamped by immigrants. While a homeland has become something to aspire for on the part of those ethnic groups (STs as well as others) who don't have one, ethnic activists of the existing homelands have become zealous defenders of what they see as their statutory entitlements. We saw that exemplified in the case of Khasi activists in Meghalaya.

Postcolonial Changes: Economic transformation and class differentiation in a land frontier

The idea of protecting the aborigines of excluded or partially excluded areas, as I have said above, was a problematical proposition even when these policies were originally conceived. As Ghurye had argued, the economic structures of those societies were more complex and varied than the image of isolated aboriginal peoples that shaped those policies. In the half century since India's independence, the process of economic and social transformation -- significantly propelled by the postcolonial state's development initiatives -- has brought about far-reaching changes. One significant change is in the rate of population growth in these areas. For instance, between the 1991 and 2001, the population growth rate in the state of Nagaland was 64.41% -- the highest in India. Table 2 gives the populations growth rates of the northeastern states.

Table 2: Northeastern states: Population Growth Rates, 1961-2001

States	Population 2001	% Growth 1991-2001	% Growth 1981-91	% Growth 1971-81	% Growth 1961-71
Arunachal	1,091,117	26.21	36.83	35.15	38.91
Assam	26,638,407	18.85	24.24*	23.36*	34.95

Manipur	2,388,634	30.02	29.29	32.46	37.53
Meghalaya	2,306,069	29.94	32.86	32.04	31.50
Mizoram	891,058	29.18	39.70	48.55	24.93
Nagaland	1,988,636	64.41	56.08	50.05	39.88
Tripura	3,191,168	15.74	34.30	31.92	36.28
India	1,027,015,247	21.34	23.86	24.66	24.80

** There was no census in Assam in 1981. These figures are based on estimates of Assam's 1981 population made by India's census department.*

Source: Census of India

Except for Assam and Tripura – where the growth rates were very high in earlier censuses – all the other states show growth rates that are above the national average during the 1991-2001 decade. In addition, in the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland as well as in Assam's two autonomous districts (Karbi Anglong and North Cachar hills), STs as a proportion of the total population is on decline. However, at the moment, except for the Karbi Anglong district, the majority status of STs is not immediately under threat. This trend of population growth is, of course, the rationale for freezing the present balance of ST representation in the states Assemblies.

Too often the demographic change in the region has been seen only from the perspective of what scholars of migration call "push factors." But it is important to bring in the "pull factors" as well – the economic transformation and process of class differentiation in these states that have provided significant economic opportunities to new immigrants – some of which may be hidden from the gaze of the law. Since the protective discrimination regime in place restricts what denizens can legally do, numerous informal arrangements have emerged in the ownership and control of agricultural land and in business practices. Denizens have become integrated into the economies of the region in substantial, but often quite informal ways. Those informal niches are sometimes positions of advantage vis-à-vis a person belonging to a ST and at other times the ST person may be at a position of advantage. In the Karbi Anglong district of Assam, for instance, while there is no transfer of land from tribals in a formal sense, field-studies reveal that agricultural land belonging to STs are often cultivated by non-tribal denizens. In one area, while ownership rights are in the name of tribals, Bengali and Nepali denizens are the real owners (Bordoloi 1986. Cited in Karna 1990: 36). This should hardly be surprising. As shifting cultivation declines, largely as a result of official policy discouraging it, the shifting cultivators of yesterday can hardly be expected to transform themselves overnight into viable settled cultivators without sustained assistance. Under these circumstances selling the land that has been allocated to him or her would have been the obvious option. But since the protective discrimination regime restricts selling of land to denizens, the cash-starved former shifting cultivator

tends to turn actual control of his land to immigrant denizens -- Nepalis and Biharis in this case -- in exchange for cash. These denizens typically are better adapted to cultivate these lands because they bring with them some cash, agricultural implements, and their prior experience in settled cultivation.

Furthermore there are informal ways in which denizens acquire *de facto* property rights that are likely to become *de jure* rights in future. A recent report by a local human rights group relates the ethnic violence in parts of Karbi Anglong to the tensions generated by this transition. Even Indian security forces, ostensibly there to deal with the security threat posed by insurgencies, have become appropriated by partisans of the local conflicts generated by the informal practices that govern the emerging pattern of property relations. In the parts of Karbi Anglong that was surveyed, Hindi-speaking denizens whom the indigeneous Karbi people refer to as Biharis (though they are not all from Bihar) have acquired informal control over what is formally designated as public lands. These denizens who have consolidated a "considerable amount of economic and political power" In Karbi Anglong now are seeking the formal change in the status of those lands and formal land titles (MASS 2002, 11-13).

According to the report, the loss of land by tribals to denizens was the source of ethnic conflicts, rise of insurgent groups, counter-insurgency operations and human rights violations. While the indigeneous Karbi youth had come under the influence of the United People's Democratic Solidarity (UPDS) -- a rag-tag band of Karbi militants --, the Bihari denizens had the informal backing of Indian security personnel stationed in the area to fight the UPDS, because of shared ethnic ties between these soldiers and the denizens. Thus in a violent conflict in July 2000, according to the investigation of this fact-finding team, the central government's elite counter-insurgency force, the Black Panthers "killed four of the deceased in cold blood and the settlers gunned the other two down" (MASS, 2002: 21).

While in this case, Karbis lost actual control of land to Hindi-speaking denizens, the process of transition from shifting to settled cultivation has been far too complex for the tribals/non-tribals dichotomy to neatly coincide with a notion that the former is always exploited by the latter. In Meghalaya, for instance, a class of Khasis has been able to extend substantial control over both urban and agricultural land. There has been a capture of what is formally clan-controlled land by powerful individuals. Chiefs and headmen have been issuing land deeds to non-Khasis and Khasis alike charging a fixed rent and cash payment (Karna 1990: 35). A recent report on rural indebtedness in the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya describes another aspect of the emerging pattern of class differentiation "The money-lender is no longer the foxy non-tribal taking advantage of the simple tribals as it used to be. Today the *mahajans* (trader-

moneylender) are as tribal as the village-folk are and as cunning as the old non-tribal moneylenders of the old days" (Grassroots Options 2000: 11).

This is not limited to Meghalaya. In various forms, such a process is occurring in most tribal areas of the northeast. "It is no longer surprising," writes sociologist M. N. Karna of the North Eastern Hill University, "to come across a Naga or a Garo owning a thousand acres of land. Nowhere in these areas would customary practices have permitted such a concentration of land, but new linkages have brought with them hitherto unknown phenomena like absentee landlordism, realization of rent from land, sharecropping, land mortgage, landlessness and so on" (Karna 1990: 36). Such land grab has also been made possible by official development policies that have encouraged plantation crops such as tea, coffee and rubber.

In Assam's North Cachar Hills, the Autonomous Councils have been encouraged by official agencies to grant individual deeds of land control to enable banks to extend loans. Villagers in the 1980s formed loose knit "committees" -- headed by influential individuals -- with the blessings of official agencies. These committees then secured land deeds from the headman or the Autonomous District Council. According to Sanjoy Barbora, the result of this process at the end of 20 years is that there are today Dimasa (a ST of the area) individuals, "usually well heeled in terms of education and access to political power" owning 700 bighas (approximately 233 acres) of land and the experimental homestead plantations abandoned by the tea, coffee and rubber board because of falling prices (Barbora 2001, See also Barbora, 2002).

It should come as no surprise then that the other side of this privatization of clan-held lands is the emergence of a poorer group of people eking out a living by working as agricultural workers or sharecroppers or by whatever other means possible. To be sure, most of them are local tribals, who despite the protection given to them as members of STs, lack the social and political resources to benefit from privatization of clan-lands or to be able to hold on to lands allocated to them. But occupying these economic niches, are also a large number of denizens -- Nepalis, Biharis and Bangladeshis among them. Indeed a tribal landowner may even find it safer to informally lease out his land to a denizen because, as Karna puts it, "it may not be difficult to handle them if disputes arise" (Karna 1990: 34).

Modern India, according to Upendra Baxi, has achieved "national integration without achieving national integrity." India's 'developmental politics,' he points out, has forged national markets for large numbers of unorganized migrant labor crisscrossing the country. In these labor markets, he writes, Indian citizens have become, "subjects without rights" all over again. What

Baxi had in mind is migrant construction workers building "monumental state projects" such as the physical infrastructure for the Asian Games in New Delhi, roads and flyovers in large cities, and housing estates across urban India for wealthy Indians; migrant labor in the power-loom sector of the textile industry in Gujarat; and "the staggering forms of migrant labour from the destitute regions of east India" that had made the green revolution in Punjab possible. Baxi calls this phenomenon "unconstitutional national integration" (Baxi, 2001: 925-926).

Perhaps the postcolonial social transformation of northeast India, taking place under the protective cover of the Sixth Schedule, is slowly making the region a part of this grid of "unconstitutional national integration" in somewhat unexpected ways. The Bangladeshi and Nepali presence in the region points to a significant transnational dimension of this grid as well. At least a part of the significant rise of population of northeast India has to be explained by this migrating proletariat meeting the labor demands of the building boom in the region -- made possibly partly by the state resources pumped into the area and the substantial leakage of funds through corruption -- and the class relations in the emerging forms of post-shifting cultivation agriculture. Their presence in these economic roles is certainly very visible to any visitor to northeast India today.

Slowly but steadily, the dispossessed tribal of northeast India is sure to join this mass of humanity on the move. Thus if the Bihari denizen in Karbi Anglong takes advantage of the misery of the poor Karbi to take effective control of his land, a tribal landlord in the Naga foothills, often empowered and enriched by positions in or connections to the state government of Nagaland, may be in a position of power and dominance vis-a-vis the Bengali denizen sharecropper informally leasing his land. Questions of social justice in northeast India are significantly more complex today than what the regime of protection was originally designed to accomplish. The informality of the arrangements exposes a large number of poor people to a more vulnerable legal position than that already implied in the marginal nature of the economic niches they occupy.

Homelands and the politics of displacement

There is a disturbing relationship between conflicts over homelands that turn violent and displacement. These conflicts are not only between tribals and non-tribals. The discourse of homelands creates in every territorial entity -- existing and potential – groups that belong and those who do not. Thus denizen communities as well as minority groups of all kinds – tribals as well as non-tribals – face the danger of falling victim to this politics of displacement. The urge to protect an existing homeland against the homeland claims of a rival group, the project of creating a new homeland or the fear that one ethnically

defined group's homeland or a part of it can be claimed by another are typically the subtexts of these conflicts. The aspirations for homelands are typically expressed in the Sixth Schedule's language of Autonomous Districts and in the newer language of separate statehood since the cosmetically federal regional order came into being. Bringing an ethnically defined group scattered in many states into a homeland, maintaining the territorial integrity of a homeland that exists, creating a new homeland for a group that does not yet have one are all part of this political discourse.

To return to the Meghalaya example, some of the numbers cited by Khasi activists about non-Khasis living in Meghalaya are telling. Keith Pariat, President of the Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai, for instance, said that full two thirds of the 1.8 million people living in the Khasi hills were non-Khasis (cited in Shridhar, 2000). How the figure was arrived at and the categories Pariat used are not above question. But the perception itself is significant. A few years earlier, a Khasi Students Union leader had said that in a number of electoral constituencies in the Khasi Hills Bangladeshis outnumber locals, while in the Jaintia coal belt Nepalis and Bangladeshis are a majority (Cited in Verghese 1996: 203). There is little doubt that there has been a steady influx of people from Bangladesh – with questionable legal status – into Meghalaya and other parts of the northeast. But the national and ethnic labels are hardly accurate since they do not distinguish between primary immigrants and their descendants who may be even generations removed. This rhetoric – not untypical in today's northeast --illustrates the potential adverse impact of homeland discourse on hundreds of thousands of ethnically labeled people.

In the 1980s the logic of entitlements for ethnically defined groups and the norms and laws of Indian citizenship laws came to a head as a result of some displacement of ethnic Nepalis in Meghalaya. The displacements became the catalyst for a major political upheaval in the Darjeeling area of north Bengal – which historically has had a large concentration of ethnic Nepalis.

The settlement of ethnic Nepalis in northeast India as well as the Darjeeling region has an old history that goes back to colonial times. However, quite separately from that history since India's independence, there has also been a significant movement of people across the Indo-Nepal border. This movement of people is governed by the India-Nepal Treaty of1950. According to the treaty, Nepali citizens can freely establish residence, own property and engage in trade and commerce in India just as Indian citizens can do in Nepal. The Gorkha National Liberation Front, an organization of ethnic Nepalis of the Darjeeling region, now interprets the displacement of ethnic Nepalis in Meghalaya as evidence of a danger implicit in the Indo Nepal treaty for India's ethnic Nepali population.

The treaty said the GNLF, turns the ethnic Nepalis of India into aliens. For in effect, it puts the bonafides of the ethnic Nepali Indian citizen in doubt. Indeed the GNLF's preference for the term Gorkha to describe the ethnic Nepalis of India is significant. The GNLF believes that while the term Nepali implies citizenship of Nepal, the term Gorkha -- popularized by the British to describe soldiers recruited from the Gorkha Valley of Nepal – does not carry the same baggage. Along with the creation of Gorkhaland, the GNLF therefore demanded the abrogation of Indo-Nepal Treaty. A separate state called Gorkhaland, the GNLF argued, will demonstrate that "we are not here in India in accordance with the 1950 Indo-Nepal agreement, but we have been here in this land since 12th century" (cited in Sonntag 2002: 172). Of course, an ethnic homeland for Nepalis in north Bengal that GNLF secured did not quite change the conditions of the ethnic Nepalis in Meghalaya, where the rhetoric of ethnic entitlements portrays all non-tribals as outsiders. Indeed in due course all ethnic Nepalis may even be assumed to belong to Gorkhaland and hence outsiders in other homelands.

Among recent episodes of conflict-induced displacements in northeast India are: Paites, Kuki and Nagas who were displaced in Manipur; Reangs displaced in Mizoram; Bengalis and various Tripuri tribes displaced in Tripura; and Chakmas displaced in Arunachal Pradesh. The political upheaval that became a model for the recent wave of ethnic entitlement campaigns in the region is the Assam movement of 1979-85. This episode of political protest was important because it involved a community that was not seen historically as one needing protection. Indeed the ethnic Assamese of the Brahmaputra Valley are the very epitome of a plains people against whom colonial officials had assumed that tribals needed protection. On the other hand, the developments in Assam indicate that the statutory distinction between tribals and non-tribals was hardly adequate to conceptualize and manage conflicts between settlers and indigeous peoples of this frontier region. Among victims of displacements during the Assam movement were mostly ethnic Bengalis – Hindus as well as Muslims --, and ethnic Nepalis. The Assam movement's focus on "foreigners" – the legal ambiguity of the status of people who had migrated to the state from what was East Pakistan and became Bangladesh -- touched a chord among ethnic activists all across the region.

Let me give some details of a few of these conflicts to show the relationship between the politics of ethnic homelands and displacement. The displacement of Reangs (also known as Brues) in Mizoram relate to the demand by the Brue National Union for an Autonomous District for Reangs in Mizoram. The Reangs have a large presence on the tribal belts in Tripura, as well as in Mizoram. Mizo politicians and organizations like the Young Mizo Association vehemently oppose the demand and see the Reangs not as indigenous to

Mizoram, but the bulk of them as recent immigrants. They see the demand for a Brue homeland as a conspiracy to split up Mizoram. But from the Reang activist's point of view, the demand for a Reang homeland is justified. As a supporter of the Reang demand said, referring to the fact that there already is the Autonomous District Council for Chakmas in Mizoram, "If the 60,000 Chakmas can have their own Autonomous District Council in Mizoram, why not the Reangs with a population of about 90,000?" (Cited in Ali, 1998).

One of the major elements in the Kuki-Naga clashes that have led to the displacement of Kukis and Nagas in Manipur is the Kuki demand for the creation of a Sadar Hills (Kangpokpi) district. The demand for a separate district by bifurcating the Senapati district of Manipur is framed in terms of the inconveniences of the people living far away from the present district headquarters. However, the proposal is read by Nagas as the beginning of the process of creating a Kuki homeland in an area of Manipur that the Nagas claim as theirs, and which Naga militants would like to see some day become part of greater Nagalim.

A conflict that has produced some widely reported displacements in the late 1990s centers around the demand for a homeland for the Bodos on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. While the memory of ancient Bodo kingdoms, and of a past when Bodo culture may have been uncontaminated by Assamese or Bengali culture (See Baruah, 1995) animates the demand, Bodo speakers today are only 1.1 million or 11.5 per cent of the population of the north bank where the Bodos want their homeland to be. Furthermore, while there are areas where Bodo-speakers are relatively concentrated, they do not constitute a relatively contiguous area. This reflects both a history of ethnic change and of demographic change as a result of immigration. Indeed today's demographic picture is hardly surprising; after all, it is precisely because of it, that this territory was not designated as either an excluded or a partially excluded area in colonial times; nor did it become part of the Sixth Schedule's tribal areas. True the inability to extend protection to them was itself to a large extent, a function of demographic changes brought about by colonial transformation when the Bodos had lost control over much of their land to tea plantations, government enclosed forest areas and to migrant groups settled in those areas by official policy. In that sense they were probably one of those groups for whom the colonial discovery that the "aborigines" might need protection came too late.

Nevertheless in an attempt to respond to the demand for a Bodo homeland, an agreement signed between Bodo activists and the Assam state government in 1993 provided for the formation of a Bodoland Autonomous Council. However, the precise territorial jurisdiction of the Council was left open to be settled later. Disputes over the precise jurisdiction eventually led to the collapse

of the agreement. On the other hand, the continuing public discussion about a dissonance between what Bodo activists see as a historically Bodo area and the contemporary demographic reality of overlapping ethnicity has fueled violence against "outsiders." East Bengali Muslims and Hindus, Nepalis and Santhals have been victims of the displacements that have followed.

Now a homeland for a non-tribal community?

One of the ironies of the career of the idea of protecting tribals in northeast India is that over time, as the economic and ethnic landscape has become more complex, the not-very-subtle distinctions originally made between tribal groups in different levels of isolation – implied in categories like excluded and partially excluded areas, and the distinction between tribes living in such areas and those living in mixed areas -- have been lost. Now traditionally unprotected groups demand the same kinds of protection once extended to groups that were thought of as the most isolated. Perhaps the most interesting example of this process is the current discussion among All Assam Students Union [AASU] and the central and the state governments about ways to extend protection to the " indigenous peoples" of Assam.

The issue goes back to the Assam movement that ended with an accord signed between the Government of India and the All Assam Students Union in 1985. The Assam accord signed between Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and the AASU leaders not only acknowledged that Assam has a problem with "foreigners"; it agreed on certain formulas for identifying, expelling and disenfranchising some of them. After the accord, the student leaders of the Assam movement formed a political party and contested elections to the state Assembly and won. But since constitutionally citizenship is under the federal government's jurisdiction, there was not much the state government could legally do. A law passed by the Indian parliament in response to the Assam movement made the task of proving that someone is an illegal alien in Assam, extremely difficult, if not impossible. And once faced with the tasks of winning elections and staying in power, the electoral logic of Assam's demography soon made these student leaders significantly modify their position on the issue of "foreigners. "

The non-implementation of the Assam accord therefore has remained a live issue in Assam politics. Clause VI of the Assam Accord had promised "constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, social, linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people." The formulation had angered Bodo activists in the late 1980s, who argued that it might legitimize the imposition of Assamese language and culture on Bodos and other tribal groups. Yet in the most recent discussions on the implementation of the Assam Accord, a proposal made by AASU that was actively considered would reserve hundred percent of the seats in the local

elected bodies, and the state legislative Assembly in Assam and all the seats for Assam in the national parliament for "indigenous peoples."

According to press reports, representatives of the Assam government and of the Government of India had agreed "in principle" with the proposal. The student leaders have defended their proposal on the ground that Indian citizens from other parts of India living in Assam will continue to have all other rights except that they will not be able to contest elections in the state. Obviously the proposal is modeled on the near-total reservations of seats for STs in the tribal states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, but this time for a category of people that would include non-STs.

The proposal, especially the concept of "indigenous people, " has become highly controversial. Among the most vociferous critics of the proposal, not surprisingly, are Assam's tribal activists. Since the term indigenous people in international human rights discourse has historically been seen as being synonymous with what in India are called scheduled tribes, the extension of the word "indigenous" to include a non-tribal people – especially one that is itself in loggerheads with some of Assam's STs – has aroused deep suspicion. Daleswar Bodo, Vice President of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, said that the notion deprives the "aboriginals/autochthons of Assam, like Bodos and Misings, of their due protection and safeguards from the intrusion of the new-comers under the guise of '*khilonjia*', that is, indigenous" (cited in Das Gupta, 2000). In other words, he fears, that the Assamese by calling themselves an "indigenous people" will manage to obscure their presence in tribal areas. Another important Bodo organization All Bodo Students Union said that the reported understanding has created "lots of doubts, confusion and misunderstanding" (Das Gupta, 2000). Tribal activists from Karbi Anglong and North Cachar districts have challenged AASU credentials to unilaterally engage in a project to defend the interests of "indigenous peoples" of Assam. It called for a dialogue among different sections of Assam's population to arrive at a consensus definition. ABSU called for a meeting of experts to define the categories indigenous and non-indigenous peoples of the state (Das Gupta, 2000).

Organizations representing minority groups such as Bengali Hindus – many of them refugees of the Indian partition of 1947 -- and Bengali Muslims have also expressed misgivings. A Forum for Linguistic Minorities of Assam was announced in order to "safeguard the interest of the people belonging to the various linguistic minority communities." Its public statement emphasized that "all citizens of the State, irrespective of their language and religious affinity" must continue to "enjoy equal rights as guaranteed by the Constitution" (Das Gupta 2000).

Yet the AASU proposal has been taken seriously enough for mainstream political parties to develop positions on it. The chief of the state's Congress Party, who is now the chief minister, Tarun Gogoi said that his definition of indigenous people is simply: those "`who accept the Assamese language and culture and Assam as their own land" (cited in Das Gupta, 2000). It is not clear, however, how such a definition would be used to decide who is eligible and who is not, to contest elections in Assam. Other political parties have proposed formulas that were used in the Assam Accord to define a "foreigner." No matter how serious the problem of immigration into this frontier region, the cavalier way that a basic political right of citizenship of hundreds and thousands of people – to stand for elections – is becoming a matter of negotiation -- is rather extraordinary.

Looking ahead: From ethnic subjects to citizens

But the formidable difficulties that AASU faces in operationalizing the concept of indigenous peoples show how anachronistic the homeland idea has become in the context of the actually existing political economy of northeast India today. More than any other case, the displacement of Santhals in Kokrajhar district in the late 1990s -- victims of violence by Bodo militants -- dramatized this incongruity. The Santhals in Assam are descendants of tea workers brought to Assam as indentured workers – many of them of them more than a century ago. Their displaced forefathers provided the muscle for the tea industry that marked the arrival of global capitalism in Assam in the 19th century. That such a group could be displaced for the second time in the course of an indigenous group's search for an ethnic homeland – no matter how tragic the story of their immiserization -- brings home the absurdity of the way insiders and outsiders are framed in the homeland discourse of northeast India. The discourse today has become a serious challenge to the foundational principles of citizenship. It cannot be expected to provide a framework for the struggles for social justice of today and of the future

Minimally we need a framework that does not involve the state forever categorizing groups of people in ethnic terms and making descendants of immigrants into perpetual outsiders. While mechanisms to control immigration are no doubt necessary, so are rules about incorporating the descendants of immigrants – no matter how restrictive. And at least a generation or two later, they have to become full citizens. I would suggest that the notion of dual citizenship, not unknown in federal systems – i.e. citizenship both of India and of a state – might be able to provide such a framework. Such a notion of a regime of dual citizenship would be a variation in the theme of the differentiated citizenship regime that exists in northeast India. But its purpose would be to replace the ethnic principle with a civic principle and to give the

right to define the rules of inclusion and exclusion to territorially defined political communities.

A quick review of the language in which the citizenship laws of countries are framed illustrates how the logic of the citizenship discourse necessarily differs from that of the discourse of homelands for ethnically defined groups. In principle, most countries recognize three ways of becoming a citizen: birth within the territory of a country (*jus soli*), descent from a citizen (*jus sanguinis*) and naturalization. If *jus sanguinis* incorporates the principle of citizenship gained through blood ties to citizens, the other two principles can incorporate the ethnically or culturally different outsider. In contrast to that, the homeland discourse tends to define political communities in static and exclusively ethnic terms. Of course, in reality countries vary enormously on how much of the *jus soli* principle is applied to the claims to citizenship of children of immigrants born in the country and on the degree of difficulties that are involved in obtaining citizenship through naturalization. Indeed in countries like Israel and Japan, *jus sanguinis* remains the predominant way of acquiring citizenship. Yet the openings for new members that exist in principle makes the discourse of citizenship different from the exclusionary logic of the discourse of exclusive homelands.

Certain recent developments in the citizenship policies in Europe may illustrate my point. Despite the political rhetoric against foreigners in Europe today, the trend in most European countries has been to extend the right of citizenship to second-generation immigrants. The labor demands during the latter half of the 20th century had induced a major part of Europe's recent immigration. Originally the migration was thought of as temporary – as illustrated by the notion of guest worker that guided official policy in some countries. However, as many temporary migrants became permanent settlers, countries have had to respond creatively to the reality of a growing number of foreign non-citizen residents living in their midst. Most states seem to be "unwilling to tolerate, generation after generation, large numbers of non-citizens without an entitlement to citizenship" (Hansen and Weil 2001: 12-13). Whatever their degree of economic and social integration, lack of citizenship had tended to separate immigrant groups from the broader community in significant ways and implicitly justified xenophobic and exclusionary rhetoric. Thus it was hard not to see a direct connection between Germany's inability to recognize Turks, Yugoslavs and other former guest workers as potential German citizens and the attacks of Turks as `foreigners.' Germany, of course, has since 2000 changed the laws of citizenship recognizing the right of second-generation immigrants to citizenship (Hansen and Weil 2001: 12-13).

Indeed except for Austria, Greece and Luxemburg, the other twelve EU countries now give second-generation immigrants the right to become citizens. Children of immigrant parents, born in the country, can apply to be citizens when they become adults. Of course, there are conditions. Residency in the country is always a condition and sometimes the residency requirement can be as long as 10 years. In some cases there are also conditions such as double *jus soli*, i.e. apart from the applicant, a parent too has to be born in the country. Of course, for first generation immigrants the access to citizenship through naturalization in EU countries is extremely restricted. But my point is not to defend European citizenship laws that are still remarkably exclusionary, but to draw attention to the fact that, unlike the homeland discourse, it is hard within the discourse of citizenship not to recognize the right to citizenship of second-generation immigrants. In that sense the citizenship discourse is qualitatively different from the homeland discourse of northeast India that makes denizens and perpetual foreigners out of ethnically defined outsiders and their descendants.

The obvious advantages of the framework of dual citizenship, it seems to me, is that it can define political communities in civic terms; introduce a dynamic element of incorporating new members and thereby make a decisive break from the notion of ethnic homelands that is part of the legacy of colonial subject-hood. Dual citizenship would imply that elected state governments and legislatures could make rules by which an internal immigrant becomes a citizen of the state and a member of the political community embodied in that state.

Furthermore, under a strong dual citizenship regime, even national citizenship could become a concurrent subject requiring for instance, that international treaties affecting the flow of people from outside the country into India – for instance the treaties affecting the rights of ethnic Nepalis or East Bengalis in India – would need the concurrence of state governments. Making such treaty making a part of state level political debates could give such treaties the popular legitimacy that they appear to lack in northeast India. Giving state legislatures a formal say in controlling the flow of people into the region – restrictions that exist today, but primarily through non-transparent colonial-era bureaucratic practices like the Inner Line or as an indirect effect of the protections given to STs -- will give legitimacy to the internal immigration into the region that is only likely to increase in coming years.

Indian public opinion, however, is unlikely to be friendly to the idea of dual citizenship. Indeed in the debate in 1999 that followed the autonomy resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, commentators specifically pointed at the dangers of the dual citizenship idea. Arvind Lavakare, for instance, argued that if a state had such power, it would "discriminate in favour of its citizens in

matters such as the right to hold public office, to vote, to obtain employment or to secure licenses for practicing law or medicine." He gave the example of Jammu and Kashmir where the right to acquire immovable property is restricted to the state's permanent residents to illustrate how "politically explosive" the idea of dual citizenship can be. "With that solitary exception (sic)", he noted with satisfaction, an exception that could be removed by abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution, "the Indian federation has largely achieved, and seeks to maintain, uniformity in basic civil and criminal laws" (Lavakare 1999). Like many Indian commentators, Lavakare is, of course, oblivious of the northeast and of Article 371 that gives some of the northeastern states their special forms of autonomy, the article that immediately follows the article on Jammu and Kashmir that offends so many Indians.

The choice in northeast India today is not between a new set of restrictions that dual citizenship would introduce for the first time and a uniform national citizenship where all Indian citizens have unrestricted rights to movement, residency and property ownership. What exists on the ground is a set of rules that distinguishes between citizens and denizens, rules that have fueled an increasingly exclusionary politics of homelands and have been prone to generating ethnic violence and recurrent episodes of displacement. Dual citizenship in such a situation would be able to introduce for the first time a regime of civic citizenship that will be in line with the actually existing political economy of the region.

Such a citizenship regime will also be consistent with the traditional liberal incorporative ethos of region. In the controversy over the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Bill with which I began this essay, the matrilineal system of succession that Khasi activists would like to "modernize," has a remarkably liberal and progressive conception of group membership. While descent is traced along the female line, that does not stop children of non-Khasi women married to Khasi man from being absorbed into Khasi society. Children of such marriages typically adopt the non-Khasi mother's given name or occupation as a clan name and over time such names became recognized as Khasi clan names. Indeed there are many Khasi clans today that trace their ancestry to non-Khasi women. They were wives or concubines of Khasi men abducted from the plains in the course of trading expeditions and wars. This also does not discriminate against children married out of wedlock. As Khasi sociologist Tiplut Nongbri points out, while the Khasi rules of descent may render "the ethnic boundary of the Khasi highly porous, it makes the addition of new members into the society relatively easy and adds to the vibrancy of the system" (Nongbri 1998). Dual citizenship will only return the northeast to the spirit of such progressive traditions of incorporating new members – so dramatically different from the caste sensibilities of mainstream India -- and make a clean break from the

colonial constructions of ethnic subject-hood that have generated today's lethal politics of homelands. ■

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Endnotes and References

1. The category 'tribal' and its definition would be considered problematical in scholarly circles. In India, however, it is part of a policy discourse because of an elaborate system of protective discrimination that exists in favor of groups of people listed as tribals. Article 342 of Indian Constitution provides for the president of India by public notification to specify the "tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall for the purposes of the Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Tribes." In my use, by tribal, I simply mean a group included in that list – hence scheduled tribe (ST). According to one scholar who has examined how the Indian government has arrived at the list, the tribes were "defined partly by habitat and geographic isolation, but even more on the basis of social, religious, linguistic and cultural distinctiveness – their 'tribal characteristics.' Just where the line between 'tribals' and 'non-tribals' should be drawn has not always been free from doubt" (Galanter 1984: 150.)

2. 'Denizen, ' of course, is not a contemporary legal category. The term goes back to the power of denization that British monarchs once had to grant some aliens some of the privileges of natural born subjects. Denizens, for instance, could buy land but could not inherit it. At a later stage, the parliament sought to control the royal power of denization by passing laws that disallowed denizens from being members of the privy council and the houses of parliament and from occupying civil or military offices of trust, or from obtaining grants of land from the crown. While the restrictions on the rights of the non-tribal population have a very different history and rationale, the particular limits, e.g. on rights of property ownership, access to public employment and elected office are not dissimilar to those applicable to denizens.

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Migration to Assam: 1951 - 1991

[A Study conducted by Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD), K. K. Bhatta Road, Chenikuthi, Guwahati – 781003]

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Although there is a general agreement that migrants, interstate as well as international, continue to constitute an important component of Assam's population even during 1951 to 1991*, no firm estimates based on sound demographic tools are available. This has led to wild guesses of immigrants ranging from 2 lakh to 77 lakh at various points of time made by different interest groups to suit their convenience[i]. More particularly, wildly divergent estimates of migrants have been made for the period 1971-91 as the 1981 census could not be conducted in Assam. It is therefore desirable to put at rest the speculation on the issue.

Objective

The primary objective of the study is to provide a scientific explanation of the growth of population in Assam during 1951 to 1991 in terms of various components of population growth viz. fertility, mortality and migration, with focus on migration. More specifically, the aim of the study is to make an objective estimate of the net volume of migration into Assam since 1951.

Data Base

The study is based on census population data[ii] and S.R.S. (Sample Registration System) estimates of fertility and mortality rates[iii].

Methodology

There are two main methods for estimating migration (in or out)

(1) Direct Method
(2) Indirect Method

Direct Method

The census birth place statistics provide the only direct method of estimating migration to a State. But the accuracy of the estimates is dependent on the respondents' answer relating to the 'place of birth' question, which has to be recorded by the enumerator as reported. If respondents wilfully give wrong 'birth place' information, which is usually the practice of many of the illegal

migrants, then the net volume of migration based on such information is bound to be incorrect. This phenomenon is emphatically recorded in Indian Censuses. To quote Pakyntein, who was the Superintendent of Census Operations in Assam, 1961, "Birth place statistics appeared to be completely unreliable in 1961. Our experience during enumeration as well as tabulation is that people did not correctly give their place of birth and so the interpretation of data is very limited. True migration is often artificially deflated and remigration to the place of birth is masked."[iv] In the same vein, Dey expresses his doubts about the number of immigrants into Assam as recorded in 1971 Census. He states, "This figure is also not reliable and cannot be used to make any valid estimate of growth of either immigrants themselves or the total population of the State excluding immigrants"[v].

Taking into account the inaccuracies of census place of birth statistics, one is left with no alternative but to use indirect methods for arriving at estimates of migration consistent with fertility and mortality rates.

Indirect Method

The indirect methods of estimating the volume of in and out migration, used in the study are as follows –

(1) Residual Method or Vital Statistics Method

The simplest equation to estimate net migration by this method is expressed as –

$$M = (P_1 - P_0) - (B - D) \quad \ldots\ldots(1)$$

or

$$P_1 = P_0 + (B - D) \pm M$$

where M stands for net migration (in or out) between two consecutive censuses, P_1 and P_0 stand respectively for population of succeeding and preceding censuses, B stands for total number of births and D for the total number of deaths between these two consecutive censuses.

According to the above formula, migration in the second census is equal to the difference of the differences between (a) the two consecutive census populations and (b) total births and deaths during the intercensal period. Alternatively, population of the second census is equal to the sum of the first census population and the difference of births and deaths and migration, if any, between the two censuses.

(2) Survival Rate Method

The survival rate method is widely used in underdeveloped countries usually deficient in accurate statistical data, because it does not demand the use of accurate vital statistics. It is also used in developed countries, partly because it yields net migration by age and sex without nearly as much as labour as it is involved in the use of death by age[vi]. There are two survival rate methods to estimate migration. These are as follows:

a) Forward Survival Method

$$M_1 = P_1^a - S\,P_0^{a-t} \quad \ldots\ldots(2)$$

b) Reverse Survival Method

$$M_2 = P_1^a/S - P_0^{a-t} \quad \ldots\ldots(3)$$

The average of estimate M_1 and M_2 gives M_3

$$M_3 = (M_1 + M_2)/2 \quad \ldots\ldots(4)$$

where S is survival rate, P_1^a and P_0^{a-t} are populations of age group 'a' and 'a-t' of two consecutive censuses. The population of age groups 'a-t' and 'a' are known as 'cohorts' and 'survivors' respectively. A cohort of a particular age or age group becomes the survivor in the next census in the age or age group, advanced by 10 years. If survival ratios of the ages or age groups are available, then the number of survivors in the ages or age groups advanced by 10 years (i.e. in the next census) can be easily estimated. A difference between the census populations in the ages or age groups will then constitute net migration (in or out). For instance, the cohorts of 0-4 age group in 1951 will become the survivors of 10-14 age group in 1961 census. If the cohort of 0-4 age group in 1951 is 1000, survival rate 0.986 and the census population of 1961 in the age group 10-14 age group 999, then net migration in the age group 10-14 in 1961 will be as follows –

(a) Forward Survival Method

$$M_1 = 999 - 0.986 \times 1000 = 13$$

(b) Reverse Survival Method

$$M_2 = 999/0.986 - 1000 = 13.18$$

(c) Average estimate

$$M_3 = (13 + 13.18)/2 = 13.09$$

For our purpose, survival method requires the following information –

1. Smoothened quinquennial age group population by sex of the census years 1951, 1961, 1971, 1981 and 1991 (estimates of age specific population for 1981 census were not available);

2. Life tables by sex of the decades 1951-61, 1961-71, 1971-81, 1981-91 and period 1971-91 to estimate age and sex specific survival ratios;.
3. 5 year age and sex specific mortality rates of the decades 1951-61 to 1981-91 in order to construct the life tables;
4. Birth rates of the decades 1951-61 to 1981-91 in order to estimate survivors in the age groups 0-4 and 5-9, as the survival ratios give projected population from age group 10-14 onward in general; and
5. Sex specific infant mortality rates for the decades 1951-61 to 1981-91.

Data Available

1. Age and sex specific quinquennial age group population for the census years 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1991;
2. Life table for the decade 1951-61 as constructed by Kohli[vii];
3. SRS age and sex specific mortality rates by quinquennial age groups for constructing life tables for the decades 1961-71, 1971-81, 1981-91 and the period 1971-91[**];
4. The census birth rates for the decades 1951-61 and 1961-71 and SRS birth rates since 1968.

For establishing their accuracy, the age specific census data are to be tested and smoothened.

There is yet another method for estimating migration, namely, "*Natural Growth Rate Method*". Although it is a commonly used method for estimating the rate of internal migration, it requires the fulfilment of a condition that the "rates of natural increase and of net immigration from abroad are the same for all parts of the country"[viii]. Hence no estimates on the basis of this method have been made.

By applying the methods mentioned above estimates of decade-wise migration to Assam have been made, which have been presented by Tables 1 to 3.

Table 1
Interstate and International Migration to Assam: 1951 – 1991
Estimate Based on Place of Birth Data
(Estimate 1)

Year	Interstate			International			Total		
	Migrants	Decadal Change	% of Change	Migrants	Decadal Change	% of Change	Migrants	Decadal Change	% of Change
1951	449646			866268			1315954		
1961	468062	18416	4.09	813346	-52922	-6.11	1281408	-34546	-2.63
1971	505425	40363	7.98	959826	146480	18.01	1465251	183843	14.35
1991	535679	31154	6.16	339555	-620271	-64.62	876134	-89117	-40.21

Source: *Census of India 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1991, Assam, Migration Tables*
Note: The figures of migrants in this table are cumulative

Table 2 (A)
Decade-wise Birth and Death Rates: Assam: 1951-61 to 1981-91

Decade	Birth Rate	Death Rate	Natural Growth Rate
1951 – 61	49.00	26.90	22.70
1961 – 71	44.10	19.60	24.50
1971 – 81	33.05	14.89	18.16
1981 – 91	33.15	13.47	19.68

Source: *(i) Census of India 1961, 1971*
(ii) Compendium of India's Fertility and Mortality Indicators, SRS Registrar General India, 1997

Table 2 (B)
Total Births, Deaths and their Difference: Assam: 1951 – 61 to 1981 – 91

Decade	Mid Year Population	Total Births	Total Deaths	Difference
1951 – 61	9433043	4622191	2537489	2084702
1961 – 71	12731191	5614460	2495313	3119147
1971 – 81	16333200	5398123	2432013	2966109
1981 – 91	20227785	6705511	2966109	3980828

Table 2 (C)
Decade-wise Migration to Assam: 1951 – 61 to 1981 – 91
(Estimates by Vital Statistics Method)
(Estimate 2)

Decade	P_0	P_t	B – D	M
1951 – 61	8028856	10837329	2084702	723671
1961 – 71	10837329	14625152	3119147	668776
1971 – 81	14625152	18041248	2966109	449987
1981 – 91	18041248	22414322	3980828	392246
Total				2234680

Table 3
Estimates of Migrants to Assam: 1951 – 61 to 1971 – 91
(Survival Rate Method)
(Estimate 3)

Decade/Period	Forward Survival Method			Backward Survival Method			Average		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1951 – 61	654659	460044	1114703	616699	381055	997325	635679	420549	1056228
1961 –71	416914	357312	774226	557940	471963	1029903	487427	414638	902065
1971 – 91	384198	326413	710611	600880	522907	1123787	492539	424660	917199
Total									2875492

Both the indirect methods used give almost similar estimates of migrants in Assam during 1951 – 61, 1961 – 71, 1971 – 91. However, estimates of migration based on vital statistics method are more likely to be erroneous as under this method "relatively moderate errors in population counts or in statistics of births and deaths produce much larger percentage errors in the migration estimates"[ix]. The estimates of migration based on average of reverse and forward survival rates method are free from such possibilities as the survival rates of population are taken in each age group, instead of births and deaths figures for the entire population.

Moreover, estimate of immigrants coming from various countries to the USA during 1950 – 60, by using the survival method, were found to be very close to the actual figures found in the visa and other official statistics[x].

Thus, net migration in Assam during 1951 – 61, 1961 – 71, 1971 – 91 stood at 1056228, 902065 and 917199 respectively, by following the Survival Rate Method.

Composition of Migrants: Interstate and International

The place of birth data of the persons reporting not born in Assam but enumerated in the state are available in the Census Reports. Persons who were born elsewhere in India usually reported their place of birth correctly, because every citizen of India has the right to move anywhere within the country. But those foreign migrants who have entered Assam illegally would never disclose their actual place of birth to avoid possible punitive actions. Therefore, while the census data on internal migration can safely be taken as accurate, those of international migration are far from being so. Keeping in mind the above, a rough estimate of inter-state and international migrants is made by deducting from the total migrants of each period the number of inter-state migrants as found in the corresponding census reports (Table 4)

Table 4
Composition of Migrants: Interstate and International

Decade/ Period	Interstate (Birth place data)	Total estimated migration	International migration
	A	B	C = B – A
1951 – 61	260636	1056228	795592
1961 – 71	340476	902065	561589
1971 – 91	290625	917199	626574
Total	891737	2815492	1983755

Composition of Migrants: Legal and Illegal

Out of these foreign migrants estimated for each period, those who have reported their place of birth outside India are only 314183 (39.49 percent), 330015 (41.24 percent) and 40803 (6.5 percent) for the decades 1951 – 61, 1961 – 71 and 1971 – 91 respectively. Even if we assume that these foreign migrants who have reported their place of birth are legal foreign migrants in Assam in the respective periods, then the total number of illegal foreign migrants entering into Assam during 1951 – 61, 1961 – 71 and 1971 – 91 are 481409, 231574 and 585771 respectively.

Table 5
Composition of Foreign Migrants: Legal and Illegal

Decade/ Period	Total foreign migrants (estimated)	Legal foreign migrants (reporting place of birth)*	Illegal foreign migrants
1951 – 61	795592	314183	481409
1961 – 71	561589	330015	231574
1971 – 91	626574	40803	585771
Total	1983755	685001	1298754

* 0 –9 year duration international migration for the decades 1951 – 61 and 1961 – 71
0 – 19 year duration international migration for the period 1971 – 91

Migrants and their Offspring

It is evident from Table 3 that Assam's population during the period covered by the study (from 1951 – 1991) had increased by 28.46 lakh through the process of migration. But in order to ascertain the total effect of the migrants on the growth of Assam's population during the period, one has to take into account the offspring of the migrants (who became by birth the citizens of India till 1986). This exercise is done by applying Assam's natural growth rate to the migrant population. (Tables 6 and 7). Column 2 of Table 7 shows that Assam's

population increases by 49,15,058 during the period when both migrants and their offspring are taken into account.

Table 6

Decade-wise Migrants and Vital Rates: Assam: 1951 – 1991

Decade	Migrant	Birth rate	Death Rate	Natural growth rate
1951 – 61	1067846	45.40	26.90	20.50
1961 – 71	801880	44.10	19.60	24.50
1971 – 81	488485	33.05	14.89	18.60
1981 – 91	488484	33.15	13.47	19.68

Note: 1) Column 2 figures are derived from Table 3
2) Migrants in the decades 1971 –81 and 1981 – 91 are obtained by dividing the 1971 – 91 migrants by 2
3) Column 3, 4 and 5 are taken from the Table 2 (A)

Table 7

Migrants and their Offspring: Assam: 1951 –1991

Decade	Migrants and their offspring (cumulative)	Births	Deaths	No. of migrants
1951 – 61	1067846	484802	287251	197551
1961 – 71	2067277	911669	405186	506483
1971 – 81	3062245	1012072	455968	556104
1981 – 91	4106833	1361415	553190	808225
Total	*4915058	3769958	1701595	202068363

Note: Figures in column 2 from 1961 –71 decade onwards include (i) the offspring of migrants of the preceding decade (ii) migrants of the preceding decade and (iii) migrants of the decade concerned.
* Total of column 2 includes number of migrants of column 5 of the decade 1981 – 91 and the migrants and their offspring (cumulative) of column 2 of the same decade.

Notes and References

* The first stream of migrants consisted of tea-garden labourers from other parts of India. Started in 1853, migration of tea-garden labourers on a large scale took place since 1860. It continued till 1937. The second stream of migrants consisted of Muslim peasants from the East Bengal districts of Mymensingh, Pabna, Bogra and Rongpur. Driven apparently by the pressure on the soil at home, and lured by the cheap and plentiful supply of both virgin and exceptionally fertile lands in Assam with freedom of settlement of the ryotwary system, land hungry peasants from the then East Bengal began to pour into

Assam from the beginning of the 20th century till partition. The third stream of migrants consisted of Bengali Hindu refugees mostly from the then Sylhet district to the adjoining areas of present Assam and Tripura as a result of partition.

** As many as 16 life tables were constructed by applying T. N. E. Grevelle's method

[i] For details see: M Hussain, *The Assam Movement,* Monak Publication Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 1993, p 133-135

[ii] *Census of India, Assam* 1951, 1961, 1971 and 1991

[iii] *S.R.S Analytical Series No. 2, Measures of Fertility and Mortality in India* 1968-1969, Registrar General India, SRS 1971-97, Registrar General India, 1999.

[iv] Quoted in *Census of India* 1971, Assam, General Report, Series – 3, Part I – A, p 10.

[v] K. S. Dey, *Census of India* 1971, *ibid,* p 10

[vi] *ibid,* p 397

[vii] K. LKohli, *Mortality in India,* Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1977, p 228 – 231

[viii] H. S. Shyrock, *et.al, Methods and Materials of Demography,* Academic Press, New York, 1976, p 378

[ix] H. S. Shyrock, *et.al, Methods and Materials of Demography, op. cit,* p 379

[x] *ibid,* p 361 – 362

Trade Unionism or Collective Efficiency: Well Being at the Unorganised Plantation Labour Market in Assam

Kalyan Das

This paper tries to provide a representation from the concept of collective efficiency and supportive state regulations for wellbeing of the workers in the unorganised sector of tea plantations in Assam, where the trade union is reluctant to enter. The first section provides a brief outline on the challenges posed by the unions in the current phase of liberalisation and globalisation. The second section shows how the trade union activism still ensures labour rights in the organised sector of tea plantation in Assam. The third section looks at the labour market that has emerged in the recent past and examines the state of well being of the workers in this new form. Fourth section assesses a few possible roles of trade unionism in the situation resultant from the globalisation and the feasibility of such forms for the wellbeing of workers in the study context. The last section sums up all possibilities in a synergetic environment.

Introduction

The World Labour Report of 1997-98 of ILO provided a revealing overview of the state of industrial relations in the world. The system of regulating employment within the nations is threatened by global competition, technology, new industrial organisations and changes in workforce. All these have resulted in a decline in trade union membership, reduced coverage of collective bargaining and a weakening of the legal protection of workers. The new areas of growing employment are in the private sector and in smaller workplace, where unions find it far harder to enter. The labour market changes in the globalisation process are linked to growth of an informal economy and a submerged labour force.

Now the question is, can the workers in the informal sector expect a better living without any need of institutional and collective support in the present phase of globalisation? The evidence across the countries does not provide a positive picture (IILS, 1998). So there is the need for some institutional support, labour or some other form of institutions. It is also interesting to know how the workers at the present phase view the institutions for their own interest.

It is important in this context is to know how strong the union is to respond to the changing environment. Is it possible to develop policies (wage policies) fitted with the fluctuating fortunes of business? How the trade union now responds to the flexible labour market? Or it is becoming redundant in the new system? Have there emerged any new forms of organisations, collective bargaining, cooperatives, welfare associations and their implications on the well being of the workers? The changing environment requires new approaches and strategies on the part of the unions if they are to remain major social actors contributing to dynamic and equitable growth. Liberalisation and globalisation, which pose formidable challenges to the unions, also provide them with opportunities to play a far more effective and politically important role in the society (Jose, 2000).

This paper tries to look for an alternative. It intends to address the wellbeing of the workers in the unorganised labour market in the tea plantation sector of Assam. This sector has emerged in the recent times where the trade union has kept its role at minimal level. The labour market in the tea plantation sectors of Assam otherwise till the last decade was entirely organised and trade union dominated. In the last decade there has been mushrooming of growth of small scale plantations creating a parallel labour market not covered by any stringent regulations. The growth of the small sector though is due to the entrepreneurial effort of the local growers, at present the large organised sector exploits the new sector as a source of outsourcing. The rules in the small scale plantations are so arbitrary that they have compressed the scope of application of the provisions of Plantation Labour Act (PLA). The government is yet to come up with some definite regulations. At the same time the small tea growers expressing their inability to provide all provisions to the workers at par with the organised sector on the ground of their inability to play command over the market prices. On the other hand, Assam Chah Majdoor Sangha (ACMS), the most dominant trade union in the tea sector in Assam, is playing an indifferent role for the workers in this sector. If one looks at the level of dominance of ACMS in the tea sector of Assam (the second section provides an overview), it is not that ACMS is incapable to intervene in the unorganised labour market rather it seems that they lack interest to get involved. The concern is how to protect the interest of the workers in this newly emerged sector. Some issues have arisen on the role of trade unions in this present form of labour market. Is it binding on the trade union to get involved in this unorganised labour market? Is there any need to reorient the trade union leaders to the changes that are happening in the labour market? Question also arises if the trade union is not capable or not interested as to who will look after the interest of the workers and ensure their well being? Like the organised sector in the tea plantation can something be done through government regulations? It is anticipated that the free market will not serve any purpose and some forms of safeguarding mechanisms need to be evolved. The

study looks at the possibility through a conceptual model (collective efficiency and supportive government regulations) and also tries to look at its feasibility.

The next section provides a brief overview on the trade union activism in the organised sector of the tea plantation labour market, how far workers' well being is ensured in the present economic environment?

Trade Unionism in the Tea Plantation Sector in Assam

What a labour institution is expected to do for the well being of the workers as well as for the employers? The economic role of a trade union is to facilitate production and ensure an equitable distribution of the value added (Jose, 2000). The primary goal is to prop up cooperation between capital and labour to secure and promote employment, working and living conditions. In the context of trade unionism in an industry some questions come about the nature and activities of the trade union. What is the nature of collective bargaining and negotiations at the industry level? How does the union maintain a wage structure? To what extent unions give voice to workers views on economic and social policies? Does it play any social role nurturing social cohesion by involving themselves in the design of the institutions, which guarantee a secure income and decent living? Or how together with the employer have labour policies developed (Jose, 2000)? So, the role of the Trade Unions not just to do the bargaining but also to play some specialised role. The trade unions need to establish themselves as creditable partner in the production process and provide variety of services to members- mutual aid, credit insurance etc. through cooperatives linked to union memberships.

It is a well documented fact that the workers in the tea plantations of Assam are an oppressed class receiving low wages and having poor living conditions. However, the position is much better than the colonial period and now workers are receiving fair wages and many non-pecuniary benefits, all are fixed by the bilateral agreements between the ACMS, the apex organization of the labourers in tea plantations and the employer organisations (Tables 5, 7 & 9). Here the state government is equally playing a supportive role.

Industrial relation in the tea industry of Assam is quite harmonious despite some differences between trade unions and garden owners over issues such as living conditions and productivity. The tradition of solving problems through dialogue has persisted in this sector. Since the labour force in the tea estates is organised, industry wide problems are solved through the tripartite agreements (trade union, management and the government), which are mostly signed every three years (Business Line, 2001). However, recently there was uproar leading to killing of plantation workers in the organised sector of plantations mainly for

pecuniary benefits. The issue, however, is perennial and comes to the limelight every year at the eve of *Durga Puja*. During 2003 workers' demand for 20 percent bonus was not accepted by the management of the tea estates and the workers blamed the state government and the ACMS for their insensitiveness. The management took the excuse in the form of decline in tea trade in the liberalised environment. In many tea estates workers had to content with 15 percent bonus. This is a reflection of the fact that there are violations of the agreements between the trade unions and the employer. This also may perhaps be actually due to the fact that there is glut in the industry. We will come to this a little later.

Over the years ACMS, the largest trade union in the tea plantation sector of Assam, has been playing the most dominant role in protecting the interest of the workers in the organised sector. Till 1945 there was no plantation workers' trade union in Assam and so was no evidence of organised labour movement against low wages and harsh condition of living (Behal, 1985). The strikes in the plantation in the initial stage were due to influence of economic causes like high cost of living. After the World War II, the Indian Tea Association laid down conditions for the recognition trade unions. The trade union movement entered the plantations only after the election for the four labour seats won by the Congress in 1946 (Guha, 1988:295). INTUC popularised the demand of old age pensions, ration to children, supply of cheap cloths and a minimum daily wage for children. The Congress victory in the labour constituencies in the 1946 brought home the need for regular political and welfare work among the workers, particularly in the plantations. By November 1947, trade unions were formed by the INTUC in about 200 tea gardens and the spade work was extended to many more. The delegates from the tea garden primary units met in a provincial labour conference in December 1947 and there the ACMS was formed. In due course it emerged as the largest trade union in the region.

After independence with the introduction of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 (PLA, 1951) plantation workers' interests were began to be protected. The provision of PLA, 1951 was made enforceable with the framing of Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956 (APLR, 1956). As a result of APLR, 1956, in many plantations the thatched quarters of labouers were replaced, hospital and dispensaries were established, water was supplied to the labour lines, and primary schools were established in many gardens. Wage and other provisions of the plantation workers are being assured by the bilateral agreements between the ACMS and the employers associations. The bilateral agreements increase the wage rate on the basis of the All India CPI. The wages are being revised in every three years and the ACMS always is prompt to take up the matter.

There is not much to say about the role of ACMS in this form of labour market in the plantation sector. Everything is assured for the workers in the organised sector. Our empirical evidence is based on interaction with 350 workers in some selected estates managed by different managements (see note in the tables), expected to reflect the overall situation of workers in the organised sector. The ACMS is facilitating production by maintaining good industrial relations and the wage structure. The ACMS has an adequate base in state politics and is always prompt to take up the matters relating to the plantation workers. The support from the law and government is adequate for the interest of the workers in this sector. However, it can not be said that the ACMS listen to workers' views on economic and social policies. In our sample of workers it was found that the ACMS has a very weak membership base (Table 10). Neither it has significant social role nor has developed labour policies. Everything for the wellbeing of the workers is ensured by the provisions of the APLR, 1956. Evidence shows that majority of workers are still illiterate, there is no social accumulation and the worker's class is still unprivileged. The AITUC says the living conditions of tea garden workers are unhygienic, marked by perennial acute shortage of drinking water (Business Line, 2001). Moreover, there has been mushrooming of small tea gardens without appropriate clearance from the state government. The gardens have no processing units and leaves are mostly sold off. The condition of labour, which is temporary in nature, is pathetic. A parallel labour market is growing in this sector and the ACMS is still keeping a safe distance from this labour market. There is need to talk about the workers in this sector and the role of trade unions.

The New Form of Labour market in the Tea Industry and The State of Well Being

In India in recent years the decline in the share of the organised sector in industrial employment is attributed to the economic reform process. The similar situation can be observed in the tea plantation sector of Assam. Since the last decade, the labour market in the organised sector of tea plantation has been showing some kind of stagnancy (Table 1).

Table 1: Area and Employment Growth in the Organised Sector of Tea Plantations of Assam

Year	Area under organised tea plantations	Growth	Workers			
			Total workers	Annual Growth	Total casual workers	Annual Growth
1971	182,325	-	397,000	-	-	-
1981	203,038	1.08	462,754	1.54	N.A	-
1991	233,284	1.39	585,044	1.70	97,366	-
1992	233,658	0.16	581,638	-0.58	96,524	- 0.36
1993	231,942	- 0.73	574,088	-1.29	88,645	- 8.16
1994	227,120	- 2.08	565,809	-1.44	84,226	- 4.98
1995	226,280	- 0.36	575,175	1.65	89,030	5.70
1996	228,205	0.85	587,382	2.12	92,237	3.60
1997	229,598	0.61	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A
1998	230,978	0.60	N.A	N.A	N.A	N.A

* Source: Tea Board, 1997-98; Statistical Hand Books of Assam, Various years

Against this stagnancy a significant employment growth is observed in the newly emerged unorganised sector of small scale tea plantations of Assam. These plantations now cover more than one lakh acres and employ about 1.85 lakh workers. However, for many reasons this section of worker is not covered by any welfare measures. There is absence of appropriate regulatory mechanisms from the part of the government and some kind of reluctance from the ACMS. A look at the genesis of the situation may help us to understand the issue better.

Till the beginning of 1980s Assam tea plantation was solely represented by the large scale plantations. However, in some states of India and in some countries of the world small tea plantations were gaining importance. It is also seen that productivity is more in smaller sized gardens (Table 2). The country of Kenya, based on small scale plantation with an average holding of less than one acre also has emerged as the third major producer of tea in the world producing about 10 percent of total production of the world. The small tea growers of Kenya getting appropriate institutional support form the Kenyan Tea Development Authority. In 1978 the then agriculture minister of the Assam stated in the state assembly that there was no hindrance from the government if the peasants would like to start small scale plantation in upto three acres of land. However, this was not an approved regulation. It was just an appeal to the peasantry of Assam to adopt this profitable venture for their own well being. This had initiated the small tea garden movement in the state.

Table 2: Size area and productivity of tea plantations in India

States	Number of gardens	Area in acres	Average size in acres	Productivity per acres in kgs.
Assam	1196	558912	467.3	751
West Bengal	343	249939	728.7	660
Tamil Nadu	26811	120926	4.51	942
Kerela	6131	90834	14.8	683
Others	3838	34239	8.92	409

* Source: Cha-Tsing, 2000

At present there are 19,494 small tea growers in the state covering 105,652 acres of land. These gardens employ 186,440 persons in total. The number of small tea gardens was just less than 700 in the beginning of the decade (Cha-Tsing, 2000). This shows that small tea cultivation is providing employment opportunities for 17 persons in every 10 acres of cultivation as against 10 persons in the large estates (calculated from Tea Board data, 1995). The positive aspect of small scale plantations is that it is providing employment to the local surplus labour force.

The reasons behind such growth of small plantations in Assam can be attributed to (i) a convenient market for sell of tea leaves (ii) skilled labourers and (iii) availability of tea saplings. Demonstration and entrepreneurial effort have also played a vital role in the growth of small tea gardens. However, despite such growth the growers are yet to reap the benefits. The tea produced by the small growers is sold to the large estates which do the processing and marketing. Selling of green leaves is the only source of income of the small growers and they do not get the benefit of the value added.

In due course, particularly since the 1990s, the large estates started using the small growers as their resort of outsourcing of production. This helps in restricting employment in the organised sector and the burden of unionism and many pecuniary and non pecuniary benefits. On the other hand as the small growers have no factories of their own (it is also not economically viable to have) they survive on selling their raw products to the large estates. This largely affects on the well being of the workers in this small scale plantation sector (Tables 4, 6 & 8). During our interaction with the small growers we are told that unless they do not get the right price of raw leaves it is not possible for them to provide benefits to their workers at par with the organised sector. The small tea growers had gone through a severe crisis in the recent past. There was a sharp fall in the price of green leaves. The prices were fallen to even Rs. 4-5 in the year 2000 from Rs. 12-17 in the previous year. This price was much below the cost of production of per kg. of green leaves which was around Rs. 7/. The Small Tea Growers Association (STGA) blamed the state government and the tea lobbies for hatching conspiracy and engineering the fall in prices. The estates stopped offering the acceptable price to the small growers or stopped buying from them. All these had put jobs of more than a lakh worker at a stake. The cost of production in gardens of Assam is high as compared to countries like Kenya and Sri Lanka. Productivity in these countries is also high and they mainly produce for the international market. Though India is the largest producer of tea, it also has a large internal market. In the WTO regime import of tea from other countries has increased by double from 8932 thousand kgs in 1998-99 to 15226 kgs in 2000-01. Competition from these countries has said to lower the price and the profit margin. This fact however can not be taken into

consideration in explaining the glut in the tea sector of the country. It is true that there is a huge inflow of tea into the country. At the same time internal demand for tea is also increasing. India also exports to the world market which fetches higher prices and the tea market is now tends towards equilibrium (Table 3). Apart from this the quantity auctioned through the Guwahati auctions indicates the production and movement of tea produced in Assam. Though there was decline in auction in the mid nineties, the Guwahati centre is today maintaining its relative importance in the country (Table 4) and the price fetched by Assam tea is also increasing. So, the glut faced by the small tea growers of Assam due to the huge inflow of tea can not be justified.

Table 3: Production, Consumption and Surplus of Tea in Indian Market

Year	Production	Import	Demand	Export	Surplus
1998-99	874.1	8.9	615	210.3	57.7
1999-2000	824.4	10.36	633	191.7	10.06
2000-01	486.4	15.22	653	206.1	2.52

*Source: Tea Digest, 2000; figures in million kgs.

Table 4: Sale of Tea in Guwahati Auction

Year	Quantity in kg.	Growth	Price in Rs. per kg.
1985	120251 (30.89)	-	22.85
1990	140931 (31.33)	3.22	43.10
1995	129867 (31.28)	-1.62	49.61
2000	159427 (31.44)	4.19	68.80

*Source: Tea Digest, 2000; figures in brackets are percentage to all India auction

Apart from these aspects absence of defined regulatory mechanisms from the part of the government has affected the workers in this sector. The demarcation line for small tea cultivation was fixed at 10 acres in 1989 by the state government. The cultivators having less than 10 acres are spared from sales tax and agriculture tax. However, the Tea Board of India defines small tea gardens as those which have an area of less than 25 acres. However, the STGA considers the demarcation limit to be at 80 acres. In practice this is the limit the growers of this unorganised sector follow when the question of application of the PLA comes. Our evidence shows that workers only from this category of plantations receive some kind of employment benefits (Tables 6,8&10). There is pressure on the department of labour of the state to adopt separate labour laws for small tea plantations.

There are supports neither from the government nor from the labour institutions for the workers in small plantations. Now a worker in the organised sector of the tea industry gets Rs. 48.50 a day. In contrast to this a worker in the

unorganised sector gets about Rs. 30-35 a day. Moreover, he or she does not receive any other pecuniary benefits (Table 6). Like the organised sector there is no incentive for additional plucking in the unorganised sector.

So at present outsourcing has changed the mode of production in the plantation sector and there is direct or indirect promotion of labour flexibility (low road). Our evidence shows that such a situation has impinged on many of the accepted basic labour rights. Though it was not quite intentional, the employers in the small scale plantation sector now seek low paid wage employees and utilisation of a flexible labour pool for their own survival.

Table 5: Employment benefits: workers in the organised sector

Tea Estate	Sample Size	Bonus	Provident fund	ESI/ maternity	Gratuity	Housing	Electricity	Paid holidays
Moran T.E.								
Male	51	51	51	51	51	51	-	51
Female	49	49	49	49	49	49	-	49
Khoomtai T.E								
Male	50	50	50	50	50	45	41	50
Female	50	50	50	50	50	48	40	50
Hingrijan T.E.								
Male	50	50	50	50	50	50	44	50
Female	50	50	50	50	50	50	42	50
Banamali T.E.								
Male	25	25	25	25	25	25	-	25
Female	25	25	25	22	25	25		25
Total	350	350	350	350	350	350	167	350

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

Note: Moran Tea Estates is managed by MNC, Khoomtai by Assam Tea Corporation, Hingrijan by Indian Tea Association and Banamali by native owner.

Table 6: Employment benefits: workers in the unorganised small scale plantations

	Sample Size	Bonus	Provident fund	ESI/ maternity	Gratuity	Housing	Electricity	Paid holidays
mall tea gardens >25 acres								
Male	25	25	3	-	-	10	-	20
emale	25	25	4	-	-	8	-	18
mall tea gardens 10-25 acres								
Male	25	25	-	-	-	3	-	-
emale	25	25	-	-	-	1	-	-
mall tea gardens <10 acres								
Male	25	25	-	-	-	2	-	-
emale	25	25	-	-	-	1	-	-
otal	150	150	7	-	-	25	-	38

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

Note: Unorganised plantation is classified into three categories. The lower one is demarcated by the state government, the middle one by the Tea Board and the upper one is self demarcated by the growers.

We found in our sample that workers in the organised sector receive subsided or free foodgrains, dry tea and firewood. In the case of small tea garden workers only the workers in the larger sized tea garden report that they receive subsidised food grains. Other benefits of dry tea and firewood are not available to them.

Table 7: Working conditions: workers in organised sector

Tea Estate	Sample Size	Fixed working hours	Rest hours	Canteen	Drinking water	Recreation	First aid	Toilet
Moran T.E.								
Male	51	51	51	22	51	-	22	22
Female	49	49	49	-	49	-	-	-
Khoomtai T.E								
Male	50	50	50	-	50	8	8	8
Female	50	50	50	-	50	-	-	-
Hingrijan T.E								
Male	50	50	50	-	50	-	-	-
Female	50	50	50	-	50	-	-	-
Banamali T.E.								
Male	25	25	25	-	25	-	7	7
Female	25	25	25		25	-	-	-
Total	350	350	350	22	350	8	37	37

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

Table 8: Working conditions: workers in unorganised small scale plantations

	Sample Size	Fixed working hours	Rest hours	Canteen	Drinking water	Recreation	First aid	Toilet
Small tea garden >25 acres								
Male	25	25	25	-	25	-	-	-
Female	25	25	25	-	25	-	-	-
Small tea garden 10-25 acres								
Male	25	25	25	-	25	-	-	-
Female	25	25	25	-	25	-	-	-
Small tea garden <10 acres								
Male	25	25	25	-	-	-	-	-
Female	25	25	25	-	-	-	-	-

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

Table 9: Non- pecuniary benefits: workers in the organised sector

	Sample Size	uniform	umbrella	shoes	aprons	mosquito net	blankets
Moran T.E.							
Male	51	9	51	51	51	-	51
Female	49	-	49	49	49	-	49
Khoomtai T.E							
Male	50	2	50	50	50	-	50
Female	50	-	50	50	50	-	50
Hingrijan T.E							
Male	50	50	50	50	50	-	50
Female	50	50	50	50	50	-	50
Banamali T.E.							
Male	25	3	25	25	25	25	25
Female	25	-	25	25	25	25	25

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

Table 10: Non-pecuniary benefits: workers in unorganised small scale plantations

	Sample Size	uniforms	umbrellas	shoes	aprons	mosquitoes net	blankets
Small tea garden >25 acres							
Male	25	-	20	25	25	-	19
Female	25	-	18	25	25	-	13
Small tea garden 10-25 acres							
Male	25	-	9	12	25	25	9
Female	25	-	5	12	25	25	5
Small tea garden <10 acres							
Male	25	-	5	6	15	-	-
Female	25	-	3	8	16	-	-
Total	150	-	60	88	131	50	46

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

From the tables it can be ascertained though the working conditions and some non-pecuniary benefits in both sectors are more or less same, in case of employment benefits the interest of the workers in the unorganised sector is not ensured.

New Role for Trade Unions or No Role

Certain general queries arise in the present context; what is the response of trade union organisations across the world? How the trade unions have adapted themselves to the new situations? What other means can be used to ensure basic employment rights and minimum standard of wages? Unions have historically achieved a publicly organised status as representative of workers' collective

interest. Do in the present context trade unions enjoy such exclusive rights? Evidence surfacing during our study shows that the ACMS enjoys such exclusive rights only in the organised sector of tea plantations.

In the present phase of globalisation the employers have restructured and relocated production. In the new form legislations and executive action are preferred to collective bargaining. Official guidelines restrain the movement of wages, while others are deemed to lie outside the scope of collective bargaining (Jose: 2000: 101). So the unions have to (if they want to remain in the scene) adapt their structures and organising strategies in order to ensure representation of workers in decentralised and smaller sized units of production (IILS, 1998). The decentralised units can have separate regulations and can yield satisfactory results with some support from the government. However, Biagi, Tiraboshi and Shemberg (quoted from Sisson, 2001) argue that in traditional labour law the presence of a third party (government) in the employment relationship has been considered as being dangerous for the workers and for the precision of the labour market. Moreover, the legal rules, work contracts and principles formulated over the course of the past century are inadequate for governing and representing the new types of labour of the 21st century. Indeed, they constitute one of the main obstacles to creating more jobs. This is true in our case of plantation labour market in the old organised sector. In the new form of labour market, however, supportive regulations are required. We shall come to this point a little later. Biagi, Tiraboshi and Shemberg further show how a pioneering local pact (*micro regulations*) in the city of Modena has helped to ensure social security and training opportunities. There is some evidence that organised decentralisation (Traxler, 1995) encourages collective bargaining at lower levels (Birindelli, D'Aloia and Broglia, referred in Sisson, 2001). There are cases of multi-employer bargaining in most EU systems.

But organised decentralisation at the lower level may require a supportive and regulatory role on the part of the government. In EU countries interesting and potentially innovative attempts of reorganisation and renewal of union strategies are evolving alongside the political initiatives to recast employment protection in order to meet the changing needs of a more diversified workforce and conflicting demands for manpower flexibility and employment security. Overall, however, there is little evidence that the shift in employment structure has caused major changes in basic functions and pattern of governance, power-relations and priorities within union movements (Dolvik referred in Sisson, 2001). Still without any supportive role from the government benefits can be assured but the employment security may not be there. Oliveria (referred in Sisson, 2001) draws on European Foundation studies of working conditions in micro firms in France, Greece, UK and Sweden to suggest a mixed picture. Compared to the workers in the larger organisations, those in the micro firms

show greater job autonomy, suffer lower level of discrimination and experience no significance differences in physical and psychological comfort. Yet job security is significantly lower in micro firms, workers have significant variability in working hours but get no extra pay for shift or overtime; and provision of training is far lower as is participation and consultation. To sum up we may treat the small scale plantation units as decentralised units but with supportive role from the government for employment security.

Will strengthening the membership base in such a situation help? Is it possible to build the membership base in the flexible labour market? Our evidence shows that even in the old organised sector it has not been possible to build a loyal base (Tables 11 &12). How to create a niche for trade union activism in the unorganised sector? Is there still demand for traditional union services such as pay and protection or the unions need to adapt their provisions to meet new demand? In our case it is found during the field work that workers in the unorganised sector prefer to work in the organised sector for better opportunities and security. The ACMS has established itself as a major role player in the organised part of the tea sector in Assam. This is not so in the unorganised plantation sector. An important reason for union non-representation is not that employees have decided not to get involved, but rather unions have been unable to establish themselves in new workplaces. There is an expressed willingness to join trade unions among the manual workers in non-union workplace, there is no such attitude among the non-manual workers (CEP, 2002). On the other hand how far can employers create effective and legitimate non-union procedures and channels of representation that will suppress any demand for unionism? This is not possible in our case as the small growers are yet to explore the market niche. The membership base in our sample estates shows that the union has failed to attract workers. It is in prominence just because of the existence of some set rules. It shows that there is a gap in knowledge concerning response of the unions in the changing economic environment.

Table 11: Efficacy of trade union: perception of workers in organised sector

	Sample Size	Yes	No
Moran T.E.			
Male	51	-	51
Female	49	4	45
Khoomtai T.E.			
Male	50	1	49
Female	50	2	48
Hingrijan T.E.			
Male	50	6	44
Female	50	4	46
Banamali T.E.			
Male	25	-	25
Female	25	1	24
Total	350	18	332

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

Table12: Participation in union activities: membership among workers in organised sector

	Sample Size	Yes	No
Moran T.E.			
Male	51	2	49
Female	49	-	49
Khoomtai T.E.			
Male	50	1	49
Female	50	-	50
Hingrijan T.E.			
Male	50	1	49
Female	50	-	50
Banamali T.E.			
Male	25	1	24
Female	25	1	24
Total	350	6	344

* Source: Field work, 2001-02

Now what can be done? Micro regulations based on smaller workforce in the micro units that ensure minimum well being of the workers (organised decentralisation)? Appropriate regulations from the state to support the unorganised micro units? Or creation of a membership base to pressurise the management?

To what extent these are feasible? There are constraints in these three approaches. There may be the willingness of the people concerned to get involved, however at present the minimum well being in small scale plantations is affected by the global market. There is need to develop a complementary approach where the entrepreneur, trade union and the government play a synergetic role.

In our case of the organised sector it is seen that there is neither breakdown in the pact between the state and the ACMS nor any pressure by employers on the government to withdraw the legislations. However, such support is not there in the unorganised part which bears the brunt of globalisation. It is true that

international competition and increasing mobility of capital pose major challenges to the traditional regime of industrial relations and social protection arrangements. Still such protections are there in the trade union dominated organised sector of tea plantations. Our data show that there is support from neither the ACMS nor the government in safeguarding the social security of workers in the unorganised plantation sector employing a major chunk of workers since a decade back. Even if there is support at the present phase of globalisation the entrepreneur class of small plantation sector shall find the going tough. When the question of legislations comes, it also brings in the question of economic liability. At present the crisis ridden small scale plantations will find it hard to bear the burden. How to counter it and ensure the economic viability in the small plantation sector?

The next section looks at an alternative approach.

Well Being Sans Trade Union! Collective Efficiency, State Regulation and Reflexive Governance

At present the concern is how to ensure employment, income and social security of the workers in the unorganised plantation sector? Here the union is not interested and there are no supportive regulations from the state government. It is also difficult for the employers at the current phase of globalisation to earn enough and provide all benefits to the workers. Now it requires an altogether new system for ensuring well being.

Even aggressive activism by the trade union or new legistlations on the part of government will not do anything good in the unorganised sector. It will simply discourage the small tea growers in their effort and hamper creation of employment opportunities. However, we can not say that neither government regulations nor unionism is required. There is the need to create an environment where the small tea growers can thrive. A look at the concept of collective efficiency (Schmitz, 1989) may provide the answer. Collective efficiency sees individual enterprises as part of an interrelated production system. It is based on interdependency and mutual adaptation among entrepreneurs focusing both within and outside the cluster. So, a collective efficiency is achieved through clustering and the distribution of the benefits depends on the structure of the cluster.

Do the small tea growers need to make profit at par with the large estate to provide more facilities to the workers? It is not only that the cost of production of these small tea gardens is high as compared to the countries like Kenya and Sri Lanka, the income of the small tea growers entirely depend on the sale of tea leaves to the large estates. The large estates have their own processing factory and get the huge margin of the value added. The individual small tea gardens

are incapable of establishing tea factories and it is not economically viable also. So, the small tea gardens of Assam are hit by the twin problems of high cost of production and incapability to add value to their green leaves.

A local co-operative environment or collective efficiency may have the answer in this context. It is possible for the small growers to go for dry tea production by establishing factories on a co-operative basis. The quality control and market exploration and other managerial aspects they need acquire for the survival of the small tea growers, at the same time ensuring employment of many. Simply by selling green tea to the large tea estates the small tea gardens can not ensure the welfare of the workers involved in it. At the present free market economy the small tea gardens of Assam may not have other alternatives to survive.

Like the organised sector here the role of the government is to come out with specific labour laws and regulatory mechanisms for the small plantations. Evolution and development of an economic space would be largely aided by the provision of an appropriate policy environment, by a supportive government. The capacity to start a new effort may be inhibited towards collecting information about accessibility, market and finance. Such real services may be provided by the government at least in the initial period.

At last in our case we need to look at the role of the trade unions from two angles. Their services may or may not be required in ensuring well being of the workers. If required it may take new forms - ensuring the wellbeing of workers as a facilitator in developing wage policies, cooperatives and welfare associations of workers etc. and also takes steps that help to sustain the production regime. The trade union needs to build confidence among the workers in the small scale plantation sector as their representative for dialogue. On the other hand, if the union (ACMS) is reluctant, the two approaches - collective effort of the entrepreneur and the supportive government regulations - will ensure the wellbeing. However, the union role has to be replaced by reflexive governance (Fleming and Soborg, 2001). Reflexive governance describes tendency to mutual communication, networking and sharing of information and responsibility in management labour relations. There is need to set up participatory policies by emphasising and identifying commitment to the firm. Here the traditional labour management relations need to be avoided (subordinations etc.). There is need to create *us* that is motivated and committed to change, flexibility and competence development like the corporate sector (Fleming and Soborg, 2001). ■

[Note: The tables based on primary data in this paper are from a larger study entitled - Contractual Arrangement in the Labour Market: Case of Plantation Sector in Assam conducted by OKDISCD and sponsored by VVGNLI.]

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Transaction Cost and Asymmetry of Information -The Twin Odds of Indian Commercial Banks in Rural Credit Market: Theoretical Fragility

Saswati Choudhury

This paper delves into the issues of transaction cost and asymmetry of information in the rural credit market. The first two sections deal with theoretical postulation of bank intermediation. The third section discusses the policy and administrative interventions in the rural credit market in India. The fourth section discusses the problem of asymmetry of information and high transaction cost the faced by the commercial banks in the rural credit market in India. The fifth section analyses the interrelation between the role of trust and transaction cost and examines the role of SHGs in bridging information asymmetry, fostering trust between bankers and the rural borrowers and thereby reduce the transaction cost.

Introduction

The role of financial intermediation in the process of economic development has long been recognised by distinguished economists like Schumpeter, Kalecki and Keynes. Evidence indicates that having a robust banking and capital market is correlated with economic development. As economic growth of service oriented sectors gains in importance it is believed that capital markets serve as more effective intermediaries vis-à-vis the banks. Nevertheless, the banks remain the best option for small and medium sized firms which are less able to tap capital market for funding. Relationship between financial intermediation and economic growth has been further articulated in the subsequent works of Goldsmith, Gurley and Shaw and Fry. Two discernible traits emerge from the studies on the relationship between financial development and economic growth: one, economic growth depends on the functional dynamics and efficiency of financial sector and secondly, neither economic nor financial developments are exclusive entities but influence each other in a reinforcing manner leading to a higher impetus for mutual development.

Given the increasing role of financial markets in developed and emerging economies including India, the role of banks in economic development still remains an actively debated issue. In fact renowned economist and Noble Laureate W. A. Lewis (1969), defined economic development as "the process

by which a community which was previously saving and investing 4 or 5 percent of its national income or less, converts itself into an economy where voluntary saving is running at about 12 to 15 percent of national income or more". It is true that with the development of the capital market Indian economy has been able to find an exigency to raise financial resources for large corporate investment. However, a major section of the economy comprising agriculture, small scale industry, trade and commerce etc. which assumes great significance in terms of employment generation and income diffusion is yet to graduate to tap investible resources from the capital market. Here comes the role of commercial banks. The task of intermediation in financial services sector provides a range of services which hitherto would have been both time as well as cost intensive.

Bank Intermediation

Individuals have differing needs in different points of time with differing amounts of financial inputs. Intermediation helps in the process by mitigating the time difference. This is done by either saving some amount of money to be spent at a future date or by spending the amount at the current period from sources other than own to replace it back at a future point of time which is usually referred to as loan or credit. At any given point of time there are always two groups of people - those who want to put away some money to be spent at a future time and those who are in need to spend at current time either from past savings or from external sources through borrowing. Hence, there is a demand supply situation where one can get/pay a price for the differences in needs with respect to time. This creates the opportunity for economic transactions and paves the way for financial intermediation.

Unlike the neo-classical theory, which assumed economic exchanges to be frictionless and instantaneous, Coase (1937:1960) challenges the idea with the concept of transaction cost. He argues that the classical assumption is wrong and all market transactions entail some costs. However, the transaction cost approach failed to generate much debate in the initial phase and after decades of dormancy the transaction cost approach took the entire study of business economics to a new height when a surfeit of literature with academic rigour emerged in the writings of Alchian and Demsetz (1972), Williamson (1975), Klein *et al* (1978), Cheung (1983). Two types of transaction costs have captured the attention of the scholars - opportunism and asymmetric information. But opportunism can impede the Pareto-improving exchanges because one partner may find it to his interest to expropriate the other *ex-post* because of bounded rationality, asymmetry of power domain and asset/ capital specificity. Asymmetric information, on the other hand, leads to such problems as moral hazard and adverse selection. The real challenge is, therefore, to design institutions where transactions do not lead to either opportunism or adverse

selection problem. Apart from the opportunity cost and asymmetric information, substantial energy is also spent in designing and framing the transaction deals which involves the twin costs of manpower and time. Hence, the real challenge of intermediation is to develop arrangements - either formal institutional or informal non-institutional - which can bridge the asymmetry of information and reduce the adverse selection problem and also mitigate the problem of opportunism.

Banks are the dominant financial intermediaries in a developing economy like India. From the economic point of view, the major tasks of banks are to act as intermediaries channeling savings to investment and consumption: through them the investment requirements of savers are reconciled with the credit needs of the investors and consumers. Banks accept deposits from the public- secured or unsecured (Demetrigades and Lunintel 1996). These deposits generate the necessary funds with the bankers to reconcile to the credit needs of the borrowers. Bank deposits are the most widely used savings option next to post office savings. However, as deposits in the banks also make the way for a payment system unlike in the case of post office savings which is only of depository nature without any facilitating provision for any payment system, therefore they also form the core of the payment system in a monetised economy.

The basic function of bank intermediation as noted by Jadhav and Ajit (1996-97) can be grouped as:

- Liability-asset transformation; i.e. accepting deposits from the public as liability and converting the same into assets such as loans.Size transformation; i.e. providing large loans on the basis of numerous small deposits.
- Maturity transformation; i.e. provision of alternate forms of deposits to the savers according to their liquidity preference while at the same time offering the borrowers with loans of desired maturities.
- Risk transformation; i.e. distribution of risks through diversification which substantially reduces risk for savers (depositors), which would prevail while lending directly in the absence of financial transformation.

In functioning as intermediaries the banks have the operational advantage that they can reduce (a) search costs, (b) transaction costs, (c) monitoring costs, (d) verification costs (Fry: 1980). In the absence of intermediation savers seek for investors and this involves search costs. In the process that banks offer standardised products and services to depositors and borrowers, they also reduce the transaction costs and by accepting deposits and extending loans,

banks acquire informational advantage over other financial intermediaries, and thus reduce their monitoring and verification costs. In this way intermediation helps in bridging the asymmetry of information and the institutions so involved get a fee for managing this asymmetry and the risk involved in the process - this fee is the transaction fee which is the differential between the interest paid to the depositors and the interest charged from the borrowers.

Policy and Administrative Interventions in the Rural Credit Market

In the edifice of balanced and equitable economic growth the central leadership of an underdeveloped country like India has to ensure adequate and appropriate stimuli to the agricultural and allied agro based activities. This is so because rural economy is agrarian and typified by high incidence of poverty, landless households, small fragmented agricultural holdings, higher levels of illiteracy and small fragmented cash needs for personal and social obligations which often leave the rural households in perpetual debts as these small cash requirements are met by the indigenous local money lenders at usurious rates. Hence the needs for an institution building in the rural areas require a system which serves the twin purpose of accelerated growth and creation and redistribution of assets for the asset poor and in the process ameliorates poverty.

It is significant to note that the importance of the rural credit institutions and the process of institution building in the area were realized even in the pre-independence era when the *taccavi* loans for providing low interest rate loans were started in 1793. However, the Land Improvement Loans Act of 1883 which was based on the sound spirit of providing agricultural loans was the first consolidated enforceable law in the realm of rural credit but its applicability was marred by the stringent procedures. Besides, the regressive land revenue system together with seasonal fluctuations of agricultural production and other vagaries of nature led to high incidence of landlessness among the rural households. These developments paved the way for theorizing the rural development in terms of mutual cooperation with emphasis on thrift which culminated in the enactment of Cooperative Credit Societies Act, 1904. This represents the first attempt at building an institutional arrangement for meeting the small credit requirements of poor peasants and other marginalized sections of the rural population in India. It aimed to prevent the peasants from the usurious money lenders. The subsequent attempts [The Royal Commission on Agriculture (1928) and The Central Banking Enquiry Committee (1931)] toed in the same line of argument where the emphasis was on strengthening and developing cooperative credit institutions for the rural areas owing to the small size and seasonal demand of credit and retrieving the rural poor from the clutches of the usurious money lenders. These attempts did not emphasize capital formation in agriculture. It was Sir Malcom Darling Report in 1934 which first raised the question of financial efficiency and efficacy of

cooperatives in addressing the agricultural credit needs and investigating the possibility of coordinating the activities of commercial banks towards meeting the credit requirements of agricultural farmers. In 1935, the Agricultural Credit Department in the Reserve Bank of India was created for supervising the agricultural credit operations.

These attempts in the pre-independence era were followed by a series of successive attempts in the post independence era. It started with the Rural Bankers Enquiry Committee in 1949, popularly known as Sir Purushottamdas Thakurdas Committee, which found that the cooperatives had been instrumental in providing agricultural and rural credit while the commercial banks preferred to stay away from the rural agricultural lending and concentrate on more remunerative trade and business activities. The subsequent Committees and Enquiry Commissions made recommendations and suggestions which are repetitive in restating the identified problems of rural credit delivery and suggesting measures which lack in theoretical soundness and practical efficacy. The overenthusiastic and highly ambitious plans of poverty eradication of the government make it a mere game of numbers where the entire approach of IRDP financing in the country has a target oriented approach of numbers. The high sounding rhetoric of the programme lacks sound theoretical framework in the context of ground realities of rural poverty in the country. The approach of targeted lending under poverty alleviation programmes and priority sector credit to the rural poor is a list of numbers which in essence tries to make a dent on the rural credit market through rural poverty alleviation programme based on highly unsustainable subsidized policies. The end result has been the engineered development of a fragile rural credit delivery system plagued with low operational efficiency e.g. poor loan appraisal, poor monitoring and supervision with concomitant result of high over dues and non performing loans leading to erosion of profitability and eventual threat to sustainability of the system.

The various enquiries/studies in the realm of rural credit in India has shown that it is timely and adequate credit which is the necessity of rural credit market and this has a close resemblance with the evidence from Germany, Japan and Spain. While quantitative dimensions of credit cannot be done away with, it is but also important to ensure provision of qualitative services and need based end products in the approach.

With the introduction of New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1990 reforms and liberalisation have been brought about in the real sectors of the Indian economy. Simultaneously, under the impact of NEP, there has been continuing deregulation and liberalisation of the banking system as well. The impetus to reforms in the financial sector received a major thrust with the submission of the Report of the Narasimhan Committee in 1992. The Committee

recommended wide-ranging reforms that included among others the reduction in pre-emption of bank resources (in the form of reserve requirements) and the directed credit programmes. It also recommended deregulation of interest rates so as to reflect market conditions and complete abolition of branch licensing policy that regulated entry into banking. In so far as the recommendations with respect to directed credit programmes are concerned, the government policies have continued with the existing norms for the Indian commercial banks and have also made it mandatory for the Foreign banks operating in India to ensure that at least 32% of their net bank credit is directed to priority sector, inclusive of small scale industries and exports. Within the priority sector lending also agriculture has to account for at least 18% of net bank credit. However, the newly set up private sector banks have been permitted to substitute agricultural lending requirements by contributions to deposits with Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)/National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) for a period of three years from the date of inception. Social banking need not conflict with canons of sound banking but when banks are required by directives to meet specific quantitative target there is the danger of erosion of the quality of the loan portfolio. The committee is of the view that the interest subsidy component should be eliminated in respect of priority sector credit and what is important is the 'timely and adequate availability of credit rather than its cost which is immaterial for the intended beneficiaries'. However, the reforms in the financial sector following the recommendations of the Narasimhan Committee Report is not aimed at reforming the rural credit market, rather it aims to reset the entire financial structure of the country. In evaluating the financial sector reforms Shetty (1997) tries to show how the present reform policies have failed to take into account the structural differences in the Indian economy. As pointed by Shetty, the present policies aim for the "most premature and operationally infeasible goal ..... of globalization" for the financial sector in India, which had not been pursued even by industrialized countries. This has resulted in the costly and "forced application of capital adequacy and other supervisory norms." Further, a monetarist approach guides the new policy which implies "primacy to the control of money supply" and monetary targeting at the cost of "size and distribution of bank credit". Besides, the "uncritical acceptance of the free-market philosophy has blinded the government to the needs of a genuine reform of the financial system".

Rural Credit Market: Transaction Cost and Asymmetry of information

The rural credit market is highly un-oraganised, imperfect and credit needs are more guided by seasonal agricultural operations. Even non farm or off farm incomes are at times dependent on the farm based agricultural activities. Although barter transactions have reduced over the years and formal institutional sources have gained access to the rural credit market, it remains a

fact that the services required in the rural credit market have not yet been addressed in a pragmatic manner. There are two cases in point: one, the savings product of the commercial banks has an urban orientation which has been designed taking into consideration the regular flow of income throughout the year and facilitating cash withdrawals as and when required. This does not incorporate the element of seasonality of income which is the main feature in the rural areas; also it does not have any product which could collect tiny amount of savings on a daily basis. Second, the supply of credit products in the rural areas from the commercial banks has been target oriented, dovetailed with the government's rural development programmes. These programmes have a uniform code of rules which do not take into cognizance the differences in rural livelihood along the tribal areas and the non tribal areas. The customary laws of the tribal and the common property right over forest and other land resources are some other contentious issues in the realm of bank finance. In the process the felt needs for credit products have been ignored.

Several considerations guided the development of highly subsidized intervention in the rural credit market- one the rural poor are not bankable and hence banks need a safety net and therefore the rural credit products are dovetailed with government programmes and second, rural poor need cheap money to meet their requirements. But little does the approach reflect on the fact that the rural poor are cost indifferent, rather they are more conscious of time and simple procedures of access. The schematic and targeted credit in the rural areas is administered by commercial bank branches with low and asymmetric information on economic strength of the borrower class, their requirements and repayment capacity. There is also asymmetry of information on the part of the borrower - type of credit schemes, requirements of transaction deed and more importantly the market linkages for the type of activities he or she is approaching to take up, whether agricultural activities or non-farm activities.

This asymmetry of information at the field level offices as well as from the borrowers delays the process resulting in time and cost overrun which in the process increases the transaction cost. Loan transaction costs are associated with operations such as loan appraisal, supervision of the end use, recovery cost, technical advisory services and qualitative services and a portion of servicing deposits. The transaction costs in rural credit market are higher because of the large number of small size accounts whose processing, supervision and monitoring as well as recovery costs are high. The information gap on the economic and financial credibility and viability of the borrowers on one hand and large geographical coverage of bank branches with poor transport and communication links at the field on the other increase the transaction costs for the rural branches.

Though Service Area Approach had been adopted to map out in details the economic and other resourcefulness of the area of operation covered by the particular bank branch, it is needles to say, such approaches have failed to deliver on account of managerial problems of branch staffing and tenure ship of the personnel at the bank branch. Also, the weak liaising between the bank branches and the block development and rural development offices has been another major instance of information asymmetry on the part of bank branches and the consequent adverse selection process. The yardstick of success for programmes like IRDP, the largest ever rural poverty eradication programme of India, is scaled in terms of physical and financial targets. As noted by Karmakar (1999), 'Physical and financial targets had been exceeded and programmes had probably grown too fast for its own good resulting in several deficiencies, including over-concern with targets which were determined on a uniform basis per block; identification of 15 percent to 20 percent of beneficiaries; leakages through corruption and malpractices, absence of backward and forward linkages in project identification; inadequacies in the delivery and monitoring of credit; and, problem in the absorptive capacity of many beneficiaries. The programme has been reduced to meeting targets with constant pressure from government agencies.'

The norms of social banking and business ethics do not contradict each other, rather it is the agencies at the implementation level which create conflicts representing a case of moral hazard in the case of Indian banking in the rural areas. Asymmetric information is an important assumption in the principal-agent model. In agency relationships, uncertainty and asymmetric information are the resultant effects. While the initial theorization of the moral hazard model was built on two person relationship - principal and the agent - the economists have of late developed more realistic models where the multitask and multi principle concepts have been incorporated. The multi task agent is a common problem in daily life. Similarly, one agent faces multiple principles. The evaluation studies on the rural credit programmes in the Indian context have all along argued for simplifying the organizational involvement in the programmes. But the real problem before the government in designing the credit programmes for the rural areas is that, these rural people are mostly asset poor, credit requirements are more for consumption requirements which have led to credit leakage for production purposes to consumption needs, poor marketing and communication linkages in the rural areas and more importantly the rural lending is not so remunerative for banking business. Hence, the rural credit programmes are designed by dovetailing them with subsidized government rural development programmes. The Central Government, which is the principal here, involves multi agencies in implementing the tasks and the interest of the agents are at conflict. The grass root level bodies like the block offices and rural development agencies involved in identifying the beneficiaries with respect to

the laid criteria enjoy the benefit of extra information about the potential beneficiaries due to their better information and communication access. The commercial bank branch, the other agent, which has a larger spatial and population coverage is constrained by manpower shortage and other organizational deficiencies which leads to asymmetry in its information system. The multi agency problem greatly exacerbated the control problem for the principal in charge (senior controlling authorities in the government) with low measurability. In addition, there is the problem of both the agents - the grass root level government bodies and the bank branches playing principals against each other since their interests are at conflict. The lack of functional specialization for the principal (senior controlling authorities in the government) leads to poor monitoring and control of agents (the grass root level bodies) and this in turn leads to faulty selection of beneficiaries and corruption in the process.

Apart from the multi agency task problem for the government, there arose the problem of opportunism, meaning the incomplete or faulty disclosure of information in order to hide the real facts (Williamson, 1998) for the commercial banks in the rural areas. Decision making in such circumstances is presented by the agency relationship in which two parties embark on a mutually beneficial hierarchical organizational relationship, one being better informed than the other. Each unit/ branch office in such a hierarchical structure, except at the ultimate level, is simultaneously a principal and an agent when rights are transferred down the organizational ladder (Eggerston 1990). The actions of an individual borrower are not easily observable e.g. a bank branch lends money to a borrower but can not perfectly monitor his investments and initiative. In a typical development finance approach credit officers (agents) possess more detailed and accurate information about the local environment and the clients than does central management (principal) and this entails high transaction and monitoring costs, and therefore the managers strive to align the objectives of the institution (which usually include a mix of outreach and profitability indicators) with those of the agents (credit officers) who actually decide on the loan sanctions. The subsidized credit in the rural areas and the low awareness and information gap on the part of the borrower led to rent seeking channels in the bank branches at the grass root level, taking advantage of the opportunistic information access. The heavy dependence on subsidy and cheap concessional rate of interest led to poor asset creation, often unsustainable for long run income generation.

The asymmetry of information also led to a vicious system of inefficient functioning in the rural credit delivery- there was lack of any accountability on the part of the grass root level government bodies and the commercial bank branches. This lack of accountability led to weak financial discipline and poor

recovery, poor productivity, justification of financial losses with social objectives and gradually the collapse of the entire system.

Role of Trust and Transaction Cost

Trust has a significant bearing on business transactions. Lower the information asymmetry, higher the trust and lower is the transaction cost. Several attempts have been made in the past to understand the various levels and scope of trust in affecting economic transaction and its impact (Humphrey and Schmitz, 1996). In fact, lesser the trust greater is the transaction costs. Fukuyama (1995) addressed this issue in great depth. According to him "communities do not require extensive contract and legal regulation of their relations because prior moral consensus gives members of the group a basis for mutual trust". He argues that in the absence of trust between two transacting parties, legal safeguards are the substitute measures and this is referred to as the transaction cost by the economists. It is because of the information asymmetry *about* the transacting parties *among* the transacting parties themselves which makes the parties trust each other with caution and legal safeguards; this entails a kind of payment to bridge the gap through intermediation. In the context of the Indian rural credit market, the state sponsored programmes of government in the rural areas of the country represented a signal of trust on the bankable capacity of the rural poor. But this 'make believe' trust was wrought with information asymmetry and hence a substantial amount of subsidy was involved in the entire game plan. The cheap credit not only led to the poor asset creation for borrowers but also eroded the quality of performance and affected the trust in banking institutions. Further, even when there was no information asymmetry, the available information was not used in the best interest for sustainability of the system and once the subsidies were removed and the transaction costs became real the system collapsed. The erosion, both in the quality of services and of trust, in the system deepened further when came the write-offs and loan waivers for the bad debtors particularly under the Agricultural and Rural Debt Relief (ARDR) Scheme, 1990 - the few good borrowers who repaid the loans thus suffered a net loss in comparison to the bad debtors who not only failed to repay but whose loan amount was wavered too.

Unlike the commercial banks the problem of transaction costs is either absent or minimal in respect of informal agencies like the village moneylenders. The village moneylender and his borrower usually belong to the same village or nearby villages and both have close information about each other. This information helps the borrower to choose his supplier. The supplier also either has or gathers adequate information on the borrower who comes to him and this facilitates transaction. The process is usually without any legal safeguards and the mutual trust to honour the deal makes transaction possible. The transaction involves no documentation or any other management and operational costs, and

therefore the transaction costs in informal lending like those of the moneylenders are absent. There are social aspects to it: the village moneylenders who are economically well-off also enjoy social trust and privilege and the fear of losing this social trust prevents them from making a breach of trust with the borrowers. Similarly, for the borrowers the money lenders are almost the modern day 'ATMs' and the fear of losing future access makes them honour the transaction without default.

The high rate of interest charged by the moneylenders is one contentious issue in the literature of rural credit and the edifice of concessional credit to poor centres round this. But the time and cost overrun due to procedural formalities in respect of the formal agencies like the commercial banks together with information gap on the part of the borrower provides a level playing ground for the moneylenders. The other point is the purpose and size requirement of loans in the rural areas. The essential purpose for loans in the rural areas is consumption requirement in small sizes. The commercial banks have no credit products designed to cater to these requirements. Secondly, collateral is yet another aspect of the commercial bank's loan. In the informal set up, the personal contact between the borrower and the lender takes care of the collateral security and the easy accessibility in terms of time and amount is the other aspect where the village money lenders have the advantageous situation. As the trust is higher with higher levels of information about each other, the transaction costs (both for the borrower and the lender) are very low due to lack of detailed documentation, immediate decision on sanction and disbursement of loan amount and lack of information costs.

As Hoff and Stiglitz (2001) pointed out, the structure and the volume of TCs depend on the institution and the institutional environment respectively e.g. recent research in Thailand has revealed that the type of lending agencies significantly influences the level of TCs incurred by borrowers (Erhardt 2000). The borrowers and the lenders include all explicit and implicit expenses that occur in the process of disbursing and obtaining a loan. The costs that are associated with in case of the borrowers are e.g. transportation, paperwork, logistics and opportunity cost of time and, in the case of the lender, the TCs include manpower costs, office rental costs and other statutory requirements. The remoter the area, the more marginalized a group of people is, the higher are the TCs.

In the post liberalization era, when information - access is the key word, the commercial banks in the rural areas need to gear themselves up to reduce their information gap. One approach in this has been the growth of self-help group (SHG) movement. The findings from the research studies conducted by NABARD showed that the most important and immediate needs of the rural poor are to keep safe their occasional surpluses in the form of thrift and

consumption loans to meet emergent lifecycle needs. The credit products of commercial banks need to be free from cumbersome procedures. The priority of the rural households and the poor is for consumption credit, small savings and production credit disbursed in time. The division of consumption credit and production credit for the rural poor is non-existent. Consumption requirements are met by the non-institutional informal sources like the moneylenders at exploitative rate of interest, as the poor borrowers are unable to offer to the banks any security for the small consumption loans. For the banks, extending small consumption loans involves high transaction cost due to asymmetry of information.

Based on these findings, NABARD started the micro finance initiatives in 1992, financing 500 self help groups (SHGs) across the country and the process has been an ongoing experiment. The emphasis here is on improving the access of the poor to micro finance rather than just micro credit. Here the NGOs act as the catalysts of change and combined social and economic agenda with synergic effect. The sustainability is the core factor in the entire process. The banking system accepted the SHG-bank linkage as a cost effective means of reaching the un-served and the under-served in the rural areas and accepted peer pressure as collateral substitute for recovery of loans. The movement has gained momentum and the total cumulative loans up to March 2002, was more than ten thousand million of rupees across the country.

The SHGs and the self-help promoting institutions (SHPIs) which work in a localized way have the comparative advantage of access to higher volume of information about the clientele vis-à-vis the banks and it is here that the SHPIs or the SHGs can become the best catalysts in addressing the credit requirements of the rural population with their felt requirements and channeling the supply of micro finance from the banking institutions in a viable and sustainable manner. However, at the formal institutional level, what is required is to increase the choice of credit products that can be availed of by the borrowers and simplify the procedures of borrowing. This can substantially reduce the element of asymmetry in information and the concurrent skepticism of lending institutions on the possible default by the borrowers can be minimized. This will in turn help to relieve the rural households from the usurious money lenders.

A crucial aspect of fostering trust and reciprocity in information access between transacting parties is the degree of certainty that the business relation will be viable and sustainable over a long period of time and the pay-offs for both the parties will offset the costs involved. In case of SHGs and SHPIs it is possible initially to peg the transaction costs at a lower level owing to its smaller size and structure of operation. With the growth in size the scales of operation change and also the transaction costs rise. It is here that the formal institutional

agencies have the advantage over the informal non-institutional sources. As the size and scale of operation changes, informal trust graduates over to a trust on records and documentations. The SHGs which have emerged since the nineties have been trying to address this issue on the principle of mutual reciprocity-bridging the gaps in the local demand-supply through the locally available resources and seeking external sources for incremental needs.

Evaluation studies on the SHG-bank linkage programmes by NABARD states that 'the dimension and flexibility in SHG-banking now practiced in India is unmatched in world's banking system'. The findings from the Seibel and Dave study indicate that the 'SHG bank linkage programme is the largest non-directed micro saving and micro-credit programme in the developing world and its bank lending rates fluctuating at market rates around 7% in real terms-are among the lowest'. The study also revealed that non-performing loans (NPL) to SHGs were 0%, testifying to the effectiveness of group lending to the very poor. In contrast, NPL ratios of cash credit and agricultural term loans (ATL) were up to 55% and 62% respectively. Returns on average assets of SHG banking ranged from 1.4% to 7.5% by average and 4.6% to 11.8% by marginal cost analysis, compared to –1.7% to 2.35 consolidated. The operational self-sufficiency of SHG banking ranged from 110% to 165% by average and 142% to 286% by marginal cost analysis, compared to 86% to 145% consolidated. In contrast, return on assets (ROA) of cash credit varied from –10.2% to –0.5% and of ATL from-6.3% to 0.2%; operational self sufficiency (OSS) ratios from 54% to 102%. SHG banking has been found to be a robust financial product performing well in healthy and distressed financial institutions. The impact assessment study by V. Puhazendhi and K.C. Badatya, indicates that there has been significant increase in the asset structure, mean annual savings, average loan per member, average annual income and overall repayment percentage.

However, the euphoria generated by SHG-Bank linkage has to be viewed with caution. There are reasons for this-

- Micro credit as the panacea for poverty eradication is again an ill understood concept; not all poor want to be self employed- rather, the general approach to employment in the middle class and lower strata of the Indian society is a steady income from job/wage employment either on or off -farm.
- Attempts to push micro credit for poverty eradication can lead to a situation even worse than the pre micro credit phase for the people below the poverty line. As Hume and Moseley (1996) have revealed, the increase in income of the micro credit borrowers is directly proportional to their initial level of income- lower the income level to start with, lower is the impact. But, for those

below the poverty line who have been pushed with micro credit ended up with less incremental income than a controlled group who are not pushed with micro credit.

- Credit is not the only financial service required by the poor. The example of SEWA bank in India shows that women, at least value a safe place to keep their savings. Another important necessity of the poor is the safety insurance – where insurance of crops and livestock is of paramount importance, more important than life insurance. However, in respect of occupations like fishing, mining etc. which are unorganized in the informal sector, life insurance is a necessity in the absence of which the families involved have a wholly unsecured future.
- The experience with cheap credit has shown that rural enterprises do not turn out successful by pumping in credit. Credit is a necessary input but not a sufficient condition for success of a micro enterprise. A comprehensive and realistic perspective has to be incorporated into the whole scheme of things which takes into account the culture, environment, resource endowment, marketing and other forward linking activities.
- The problem of principal –agent game is another aspect which cannot be totally removed from the SHG-Bank linkage programme. The SHGs who have the dual agent role (for the bankers and the borrowers) enjoy the information advantage and the element of opportunism cannot be wiped out.

Conclusion

The existing rural credit delivery system in India has evolved over the years prior to independence as an agent of carrying forth the government's rural development programmes. The efforts lacked a clear theoretical framework without incorporation of policy changes required for the identified structural and operational impediments in the delivery system. The changes effected were in respect of thrust approach and these served the purpose of fulfilling the government's target achievement in respect of rural credit. This resulted in faulty identification of beneficiaries and opened the scope for rent seeking which led to erosion of trust and qualitative banking services in the rural areas. Credit gaps continue to exist and the target orientation of priority credit in the rural areas failed to achieve the expected results. The quantitative targets had been achieved but the target oriented approach had left its adverse impact on the rural credit system- with high transaction costs due to asymmetry of information and also opportunistic behaviour at the bottom level of the banking system leading to conflict in the cannons of social banking and business policies. The poor monitoring and recovery led to erosion of profitability of the bank branches.

The loan melas and the debt write offs came as a benefit to the willful defaulters while they acted as penalty for those who honoured the transaction deals with the banks. The bank branches in the rural areas suffered from high transaction costs due to:

- Interventions with targeted credit rather than felt need credit
- Poor loan appraisal and monitoring due to information asymmetry
- High default rate due to conflict of interests between multi agencies in the principal- agent model with each agent acting as principal to the other.
- Marketing problems-one, internal to the commercial banks which failed to develop and market credit products suited to the needs of the rural borrowers and second, the external marketing problem, that of the borrowers with their end products; both arising out of information asymmetry.

The physical proximity and information advantage of the informal sources like the village money lenders with regard to the rural borrowers make them more efficient in assessing loan risks. The rural credit delivery is only an intermediating agent and cannot bring about development by itself. Also cheap and concessional credit as evidence has shown cannot deliver results. Besides, the easy money policy opens scope for nepotism and favouritism and this spells doom for any development policies. The low interest margins in the rural credit results in low or negative profits and the bank branches have been burdened with non performing assets (NPAs). Besides, a significant point that missed the attention of the policy planners was inculcating thrift in the rural poor. It was wrongly perceived that cheap credit delivery would assist the rural poor to acquire assets and help him in sustainable income generation activities. Rather, the poor need financial services which can address their small requirements of consumption credit to be met out of their own small savings product. The entire approach to the rural banking was designed on a theoretical perspective of easy money policy sans economic rationality and commercial viability. In the pursuit of social banking the ethos of business in the banking was overlooked and this led to contradiction between business of rural banks and their social obligatory roles. But the cannons of banking business do not contradict with social responsibilities if some elements of market forces are introduced. However, in a system wrought with information asymmetry or induced information asymmetry, the whole approach to rural banking was built up on a fragile theoretical framework which failed to deliver qualitative services and bail out the rural poor from indebtedness. The motto of good growth of the rural development policies ended up with pockets of what Mahbub-ul-haq calls; jobless growth resulting in a higher volume of unemployment, voiceless growth where the people for whom it had been designed did not have any say, ruthless

growth where marginalization of the poor had increased which eventually had led to growth of urban poverty, rootless growth where communities had been marginalized on ethic lines and displaced from their surroundings and above all a futureless growth where questions were raised about the sustainability of the efforts.

As emphasized by renowned historian Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, the well known social reformist and educationist, it is not the amount of goods and services produced in the country in a year which is important, rather more important is the fact how these services have catered well to the needs and services of the citizens. The emergence of SHGs is significant in this respect where the SHG bank linkage has led to reduction in the quantum of loan and number of borrowers from the moneylenders with high rate of interest. Further, the asymmetric information between the bankers and the borrowers has been substantially reduced. The borrowers have a higher volume of information on the range of credit products and accessibility to the same through the SHGs. At the same time these SHGs, who have full information about the borrowers also reduce the risk hazard of default and non-repayment for the bankers through their monitoring and supervision. However, institutional linkage of SHG and bank cannot totally ignore the problem of opportunism which still remains implicit in the process. This cannot be questioned on any moral rhetoric as SHGs are also business entities in a space where the present trend of market forces ensures the survival of the fittest. Efforts are rather needed to make strategies where neither the SHGs nor the rural branches of the commercial banks nor the borrowers become at least worse off than their previous Pareto optimal situation. ■

Notes:

1. Transaction Cost: Costs of implementing an investment strategy including commissions, fees, execution costs and opportunity costs. Commissions are fees paid to brokers to trade any financial service. Other fees include custodial and transfer fees. Execution costs reflect the difference between the execution price of a security and the price that would have existed in the absence of the trade, e.g., the result of the bid-ask spread and a price concession. Opportunity cost of not transacting, such as when a trade fails to be executed. (Cited from Encyclopedia of banking & Finance-Tenth Edition; Charles J. Woelfel: S.Chand & Company Ltd., New Delhi-110055. page 1140).

2. As per the estimate of NSS 48th Round, the share of institutional agencies in the total debt of rural households is 64 percent, and share of commercial banks is 33.7 percent. The share of institutional agencies in the rural debt of cultivator households is 66.3 percent and non cultivator households are 55.3 percent. The corresponding share of commercial banks for cultivator households groups is 35.2 percent and cooperative agencies are 23.6 percent. The figures for non cultivator households are; commercial banks 27.9 percent and cooperatives 14.2 percent

3. 1954: All India Rural credit Survey, 1960: Committee on Cooperative Credit, 1963: Agriculture Refinance Corporation set up which was then changed to Agricultural Refinance Development Corporation in 1975 and subsequently to NABARD in 1982, 1968: National credit Council which indicated three sectors- agriculture, small-scale industries and exports - as deserving priority treatment in the matter of bank credit, 1969: Rural credit Review Committee and nationalization of 14 major commercial banks, 1972: Banking Commission made the recommendation for the creation of Rural Banks, 1975: Regional Rural Banks set up following the recommendation of the Working Group on Rural Banks under the chairmanship of M. Narasimhan, 1978: the Government of India set before the public sector banks the target of providing one third of their credit outstanding to all priority sectors including exports and in March 1980, this target was revised upward to 40% to be attained by 1985, 1980: Nationalisation of six more commercial banks, 1985: Chakravarty Committee advocating the necessity of moving away from quantitative controls, 1989:Service Area Approach under which 20-25 villages assigned to bank branch for meeting credit needs, in the designated area, 1992: Financial Sector Reform following Narasimhan Committee Report 1991.

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Some Highlights of Economic History of Northeast India: 1826 – 1947

J B Ganguly

For many reasons, writing an economic history of the India's northeast region is very important. The Institute assigned the task to eminent scholar Professor J B Ganguly and the project is nearing completion. The following communication is based on his findings. The final output will soon come out in the form of a book.

The feudal land system of both the Ahom rulers of Assam (known as the *paik* system) and that of the Meitei Kings of Manipur (called *Lallup*) were based on the conception that the king was the owner of all lands and the services of able-bodied adult males. In these Kingdoms the traditional land system of community and clan ownership of land and other natural resources in the tribal hill villages normally did not come under either the *Paik* or *Lallup* system. After the British annexation of Assam in 1826 and the placing of Manipur under the overall control of the Political Agent appointed by the British in 1892, the traditional feudal land systems in the plains were replaced, in stages, by the ryotwari system which ushered in the rise of free peasant farmers in the plains of Assam and Manipur.

In Tripura even before the spread of British domination over the north eastern territories, the system of permanently settled land ownership under the zamindars along with land holdings by tenants under zamindars and also under the King directly by tenants and landholdings by sub-tenants prevailed. Sub-infeudation of land holdings and farming under crop-sharing basis also existed. The Kings, of course, imposed the condition of rendering free services to him and his nobles by the tenants and sub-tenants in some cases. In the hill areas there were the systems of extracting free services of the hillmen by the King and his officials when they went on tour into the hill areas.

The system of slavery also obtained in all these three Kingdoms. The system was legally abolished on the initiative of the colonial rulers.

Such feudal land and labour-extraction systems depended incentives to production and capital accumulation at the household levels in villages.

The women of this region traditionally took part in all kinds of productive activities, such as, agricultural operations and production of handloom textiles and various handicrafts. Many of them wee enterprising traders in both primary and manufactured commodities. Moreover, they performed all necessary household chores like cooking, washing, fetching water, collecting firewood and edible products from forests and tending poultry, piggery etc.

The colonial rule directly or indirectly brought about some basic changes in the socio-economic, political and administrative structures in all the three states. Since agriculture and allied activities were the mainstay of the region's economy the reorganization of the land system was the most important change that affected the life, living and productive activities, or in short, economic conditions of the people. The *Paiks* became peasants but their sufferings were not much eased as the revenue assessments were periodically enhanced even at times beyond the paying capacity of the *ryots*. In Goalpara district the ongoing zamindary system was retained. Restructuring of the land system ultimately created the classes of peasant proprietors, sub-tenants, crop-sharers, rentiers and even some agricultural labourers. But the most powerful class was the tea planters who were capitalist farmers and enjoyed several privileges and support of the government to corner the substantial portion of the state domestic product.

Capitalist farming for production of tea entailed employment of wage labour, appropriation of 'surplus labour' in various ways and inflicting extreme forms of deprivation of the workers, most of whom were recruited from outside Assam and were treated like indentured labour.

Development of tea industry was, however, the laying of foundation for industrial development of Assam mostly through the investment of foreign capital and involvement of foreign entrepreneurs. Besides tea, industries like mineral oil, coal, plywood, etc. were started. Capital was also invested by Indian entrepreneurs for starting tea estates, edible oil mills, rice mills, etc. Indigenous manufacturing activities in cottage and small-scale units, such as, cotton and silk-weaving, brass, copper, bell metal utensils were affected because of competition with imported manufactures. Yet the process of "de-industrialization" was not much in evidence. Some of the traditional cottage industries survived such competition as demand for these products was associated with Assamese culture and consumption of some of them was of conspicuous character.

With the growth of the industrial sector modern systems of transport by road, river and rail were developed. Trade and commerce – both internal and external

– consequently flourished. Financial institutions like banks, cooperative societies, insurance companies gradually came up.

Such developments of economic infrastructure, besides growth of literacy and education, set in motion the processes of modernization and specialization in productive activities, occupational diversification, accumulation of some capital for investment in various enterprises. Therefore volume of state domestic product and income grew. This development process, however, suffered from important structural weaknesses. Growth of tea industry was mainly export-oriented and it failed to boost sustained and widely dispersed growth of industrial production. It was an 'enclaves' industry without causing development of 'downstream' manufacturing activities. Most of the income generated leaked out of the province.

Investment in human resource development programmes, that is, on education, training, medical education and health services, etc. were inadequate. The tea industry had no stake in making investments in these respects even for their own labour force and their families. The production system was not significantly diversified so that economic base was narrow, rate of economic growth very low and distribution of income and wealth highly unequal.

In the colonial period there was no steady trend from one decade to another in the relative shares of the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors in providing livelihood for the people. In 1901 these three sectors respectively absorbed 87%, 5.4% and 7.6% of population while in 1931 these proportions shifted to 81.82%, 10.47% and 7.71%. According to the 1951 Census Report 71.5% of population was occupied in agriculture and allied activities, 16.4% in productive activities other than cultivation, 4.2% in commerce, only 1.4% in transport services and 6.4% in other services and miscellaneous activities. These census findings confirm that even at the end of 121 years of colonial rule people of Assam depended heavily on agriculture for their subsistence.

Assam's and Tripura's demographic profiles markedly changed as the proportions of immigrant population groups continued to increase in the colonial period. The immigrant groups consisted of landless peasants from Bengal, tribal tea garden workers from different tribal areas of the country, the Nepali graziers and different professional personnel.

After vacation of the Burmese occupation of Manipur in 1826, eight years of peace and stability prevailed. It was the period of reconstruction of Manipur's economy. In 1833 British-Manipur Trade and Defence Agreement was signed which eased restrictions on the flow of trade and movement of goods and people into Manipur from outside. The big setback suffered by Manipur in this

period was the handing over of the fertile Kabaw Valley (area : 1200 sq. miles) to the Burmese under British pressure. In 1835 the Governor General of India, appointed a political agent for Manipur for safeguarding British interests in Manipur and to mediate between Burma & Manipur to avoid any border dispute. But this step opened the avenue for British intervention in initiating the process of change in political and economic affairs of the state. In 1891, after suppressing the revolt of Tikendrajit Sing, the British took over the administration of Manipur on 27-4-1891 without annexing it to the British empire. But the British intervention in the internal and external affairs became more direct and overpowering.

The course of economic growth of the region was retarded by the Great Depression of 1929 that continued upto 1934-35. The tea industry in both Assam and Tripura, being mainly export-oriented, slumped and the jute-growers and the jute industry also suffered as the price of jute and jute-goods fell on account of the fall in world demand for tea and jute. Other economic activities linked with these industries also faced declining demand, fall in prices, underutilization of capacity and accumulation of stock. Moreover the depression caused severe problems of unemployment particularly of the educated youths.

The Second World War had its short and long term impacts on the economic and social life of the people as also on the political future of the region. Evacuees pouring into and passing through these areas from Burma and other South Asian countries occupied by Japan, scarcity of food and other essential consumer goods, inflation, rationing, etc. caused inconveniences and sufferings of the people. Construction of roads, improvements in railway transport system, building of air-field etc. expanded the infrastructure. Demand for agricultural and manufactured goods increased. All this boosted economic growth. The peasantry gained from increased prices of their products, much of outstanding debt liabilities of cooperative credit societies were cleared. Many consumer cooperative societies were started to deal in rationed and other consumer goods in urban areas. There was also a mushroom growth of commercial banks, some of which crashed in the post-war period.

The ill-famous Bengal Famine of 1943 resulted in a spurt of immigration of destitute landless rural agricultural workers from Bengal into the neighbouring districts of Assam. Of course, for the War itself there was a tremendous rise in the total population of the region though not on a permanent basis. There was also an exodus of some settlers in Assam who came from outside Assam. ■

Emergence of Entrepreneurship in Assam: A Note in History

Gorky Chakraborty

Entrepreneurship developmet has been a rather late ingrediant in the development theory where human capital replaces the earlier emphasis on physical capital. The present paper delves into the historical context of the subject. In the second section paper looks into the origine of entrepreneurship in Assam. It can be streesed that any development policy must contain a strong entrepreneurial character.

Adam Smith's publication of 'An Enquiry into the Wealth of Nations' (1776) heralded the birth of modern economics. But this treatise had little to say about the concept and role of the entrepreneur. Smith equated capitalist with entrepreneur and failed to differentiate between profits of entrepreneur and the interest of the capitalist. Actually during the time of Smith, the industrial revolution had scarcely began[1] and secondly, his observations were largely based in Glasgow, a place which in spite of its industrial advances was commercial rather than industrial in character[2]. These circumstances did not allow Smith to evolve a clear conception about entrepreneurship. It was J.B. Say who was 'the first to give us a definite idea of entrepreneurs'. When Say visited England towards the end of the 18th century, machine production was already in full swing which in case of France was just emerging. Therefore Say was able to compare the emerging realities of England and France and could conceptualize the role of an individual whom Smith had not even defined, and who henceforth would remain an important personage in the economic world, namely the entrepreneur.[3] Capitalism during the time of Say was undoubtedly maturing faster (than the days of Smith) which helped him to differentiate between the role of the capitalist and the entrepreneur and understand the latter's role in economic development.

The role of the entrepreneur on the threshold of the 19th century has been elaborated upon by Walras and Francis Walker. Walras states that 'the entrepreneur buys the productive services, pays them the price fixed by the laws of exchange.[4] Walker attributes the entrepreneur as the true leader of economic progress – it is his duty to furnish technical skill, commercial knowledge, power of administration, to provide responsibilities and provide against contingencies,

to shape and direct production, and to organize and control the industrial machinery.[5] Among the neo-classical economists Marshall attributed a position for the entrepreneur. But the Marshallian concept of entrepreneur, although popular, dealt with it from the management point of view.

The economist who single handedly contributed maximum to the growth and conceptualization of entrepreneurship is undoubtedly Schumpeter. Advance stage of capitalism during the days of Schumpeter helped him to understand various facets and functions of entrepreneurship which had been missed by his predecessors. The Schumpeterian model of economic development is based primarily on innovation which is brought about by the entrepreneur. The entrepreneur here is neither a financier nor a technician, he is merely an innovator who carries out discontinuous technological changes which result in development. But entrepreneurs do not form a social class, he is rather a rational person who dares to think, act and perform in a way which is different from his predecessors. Here the entrepreneurial analysis has deep rooted psychological implication. Schumpeter[6] identifies three elements regarding the psychology of an entrepreneur. Firstly, he should have a firm desire to set up a private business kingdom; secondly, he should have the will to conquer and prove his superiority and lastly, he should have the will of exercising his energy and ingenuity or in other words he should have the zeal to enjoy the pleasure of creation. Thus among all the contemporary economists who have dealt with the concept of the entrepreneur, Schumpeter's analysis is not only more elaborative but rich in content as well.

Various other scholars - for example, Brozen, Redlich and Hoseltiz – have dealt with the concept of entrepreneurship and added some other dimension to its analysis. Nevertheless there are certain common attributes in all the analyses namely (i) an entrepreneur is energetic, resourceful, alert to new opportunities, able to adjust to changing conditions and willing to assume the risk involved in change and expansion; (ii) an entrepreneur introduces technological changes and improves the quality of his product and (iii) an entrepreneur expands the scale of operations and undertakes allied pursuits and reinvests profits.[7] However if we deal with the Schumpeterian model of development in becomes clear that development occur mainly because of changes in non-material factors of production namely, technological changes and changes in the social organization. The activities of entrepreneurs are influenced by the social climate. In a depressing social climate the possibility of widespread innovation activities is limited and so the process of emergence of entrepreneurs is also limited. A conducive social environment for the emergence of entrepreneurs has been provided by the rise of capitalism in Europe. Capitalism helped in the growth of rationality and individual freedom which gave a new edge to the growth of entrepreneurship in two ways, 'it turned the monetary unit into a tool

of rational cost-profit calculations which in turn reacted upon rationality and propelled the logic of enterprise and secondly, apart from developing the modern scientific attitudes, the emerging capitalism also produced the eagerness to innovate'.[8] So the point worth mentioning here is that the social climate or the socio-economic structure plays a vital role in determining the role of entrepreneurs in an economy. The super-structure helps in the process of emergence of entrepreneurs that is then sustained by the economic structure.

In this paper an attempt is made to understand the concept of the entrepreneur, their emergence and the factors influencing or inhibiting them. These particular conditions are analyzed in the context of Assam regarding the process of or the lack of emergence of entrepreneurship within the framework of economic history.

Emergence of Entrepreneurial Activities in Assam

The presence of entrepreneurs can be traced back to the Middle Ages in Europe, particularly in commerce and finance, but it was only in the 18th century that the appearance and role of entrepreneurs became distinct with the maturing of capitalist relations of production. The rise of national states, breakdown of town control, decay of feudalism along with the emergence and consolidation of capitalism contributed substantially to the rise of entrepreneurship in Europe.[9] Hard work, ingenuity, pleasure for creation, innovation, personal freedom and rationality, all these attributes of emerging capitalism helped entrepreneurs to emerge, grow and sustain accordingly. However, entrepreneurs (either as individuals or as class) emerged from within the decaying feudal structure although they were nurtured by the emerging capitalism. So the functional classes of merchants, traders, artisans as well as the crystallized middle-class provided the base for the generation of entrepreneurship. But it is worth mentioning that different societies have responded differently in dealing with the transition from feudal to capitalist mode of production and accordingly the response to the emergence of entrepreneurs has been mixed. The European nations have thrown up a particular pattern whereas the developing countries portray a different picture. Among and within the developing nations which were under the colonial yoke, the process of transition has been divergent and so the evolution, emergence and efforts of entrepreneurs have been different. India's Northeast presents a unique picture in this regard which is interesting and sometimes intriguing in nature.

There are numerous example in India showing that the most basic requirement in most Indian cases of successful entrepreneurship has been membership of a particular caste.[10] The Marwaris, the Nattukottai Chettiars, the Seths, the Voras, the Komatis and the Gujrati *banias* – all were identified as belonging to particular communities. Even with a change of religion, such castes endured.

The Memons and Bohras, who were converted to Islam from Hindu trading communities, formed a distinct group and retained a firm grip on business. This distinct caste identity later on had a strong bearing on the rise of the entrepreneurial class which usually (but not without exceptions) emerged from within and retained the positive business traits of that particular community.

If not purely along the Hindu 'format', the caste content was prevalent in the Ahom society within its own unique feudal framework. In Ahom society one's position was largely determined by birth and the highest state officials had to be recruited exclusively from the seven families (*satghar*) constituting the Ahom nobility. The ruling feudal class was constituted of three distinct groups : (i) the traditional Ahom nobility (*Gohain*), (ii) the spiritual lords (*Prabhu*) and (ii) the hereditary vassal chiefs.[11] All of them, including the King, had farms cultivated by serfs and slaves. Within this overall framework the scope for trade and commerce or in other words for mercantile activities was not only restricted but constrained too. Firstly, due to the existence of subsistence economy the scope for surplus was limited. Secondly, lack of monetisation of the economy proved as a dampener for the emergence of mercantile activities, and thirdly lack of monetisation prolonged the system of barter trade. These related reasons didn't help in the growth of merchants or a mercantile class which might have blossomed into an entrepreneurial class. Although one can cite the examples of *Souds* and *Modois* of Barpeta district[12] as merchants / traders yet due to the lack of distinctive character and failure in terms of dealing with imported textiles they faded into oblivion.

There are instances in Bengal where the successful and prosperous merchants with their economic surplus have invested in land – most of the *banias* who made their money before 1800 had invested in land. Well-known examples are Gokul Ghosal and the senior (Pathurighata) branch of the Tagore family.[13] Now due to the absence of a flourishing mercantile class on one hand and the absence of land transaction during the Ahom rule on the other, this transformation didn't happen in Assam. At the time of the British take-over of Assam it was noted that hereditary private proprietary rights existed only in the case of homesteads and gardens, but not in the case of paddy lands unless backed by specific copper plate grants. In fact, the concept of community land embedded in the cultural tradition remained very much alive in relation to the paddy lands.[14] Every household customarily possessed three types of land : (i) a hereditary homestead plot held as private property, (ii) dry-crop lands reclaimed at private initiative and held as private property as long as cultivated, and (iii) a portion of community owned wet-rice land, subject to redistribution from time to time.[15] So the entire land scenario in rural Assam was setup within the precincts of traditional domain and communal ethos which didn't allow the growth of land

market and investment in land for development of agriculture and marketable surplus.

There was no system of land survey in Assam until the 16th century, although a loose form of census identified the number of male members and utilization of cultivable land by them. This system remained more or less similar when Gadadhar Singha (1681-96) introduced land survey in imitation of the Mughals.[16] Similarly, there was no land market in Assam till 1685. There was not a singly daily market center except for betel nuts and leaves at Gargaon, the Ahom capital, during 1662-63. Even in the 1790s not a single regular rice/paddy market was found by the Britishers in the Assam plains.[17] It can be inferred that neither there was a large scale marketable surplus in agriculture not land got transformed into a vendible commodity which could have otherwise helped the process of growth for economic regeneration in the future.

Another way out which helps in the process of growth of entrepreneurial activities is the transfer of artisans from traditional activity to the industrial activity of craft production. This sort of transformation which happened to be more common during industrial revolutions in England was rare in India. However, in the case of the Gujrati traditional bleaching and dyeing communities[18] there has been a noticeable transition to production of cotton cloths both in the Gujrat and Maharastra regions. It was similar in the case of the handloom industry in South India where there was more or less a transformation from traditional artisan skills to the emergence of entrepreneurial activities in the same trade. But in majority of the cases the artisans were ruined and pauperized by the emerging colonial production relations – Bengal artisans associated with traditional cloth production bear the saddest testimony to this proposition.

It seems that Assam missed this transformation altogether. Although Assam had a very good tradition of village and cottage industry yet it did not help in the growth of modern industrial entrepreneurs. The existence of silk, oil-cake, brass, bell metal production centers in places like Sualkuchi, Ram Dia, Hajo, Sarthebari[19] etc. were noteworthy, yet these products mainly had domestic use and only an insignificant quantity was produced for sale. Due to their restricted market, these artisans or industries could not generate enough capital for expansion, diversification and specialization. This hampered the process of their growth. On the other hand, the growth of occupational sub-castes was stunted in Assam. Though some people worked as blacksmiths, braziers, potters, mat makers and ivory workers hereditarily they could not emerge as a separate and independent entity away from land. They too had to remain largely dependent on land and pursue their non-agricultural activities on part-time basis during the agricultural off-season. Thus although ivory works, lac, pepper, *muga* etc. were

exported from Assam in limited quantity, yet due to lack of sufficient diversification, specialization and capital accumulation in these trades the artisans suffered the inevitable consequence of de-industrialization once the Britishers appeared in the scene.

Another important factor which affected the rise of entrepreneurial activities during the days of the Ahom rulers and even later was the role and character of the Ahom social structure and state apparatus. Habib[20] has painstakingly worked upon the possibility of the rise of indigenous capitalist class and capitalism in mainland India even without the advent of the British. The character of the Mughal empire gives support to his analysis. Improvement in agriculture, generation of marketable surplus, strong base of artisans, encouragement to trade and commerce, a small but powerful urban elite, the *manasabdari* system of feudal-administrative-military framework and an orientation beyond the geographical limits of the Mughal empire could have acted as positive elements for the rise of indigenous capitalism and entrepreneurship (although there were factors against it too). But if one juxtaposes the Mughal kingdom with the Ahom kingdom, one begins to see the striking differences. Whereas the *mansabdari* and *khel* systems were essentially feudal-administrative-military frameworks yet the very orientation of the systems differed substantially. In the former the element of land revenue, land market and monetization were quite developed whereas in the latter these elements were missing. Agriculture under the Ahoms was based on the *paik* system which may be understood as nothing but a form of slavery with minor modifications. Therefore the approach to marketable surplus differed widely between these two systems. Till the 17th century the dominant trend in the Assam economy tended to tie down the people to land, discourage the natural evolution of specialization among the peasants and artisans and restrict the process of commodity production.[21] Largely due to the above mentioned factors, the mercantile and the artisan groups could not emerge as a separate group nor could there be any regeneration in agriculture. This was not the case under the *monsabdari* system.

Similarly, whereas the individual merchants and traders played a dominant role in Mughal empire vis-à-vis the rulers the situation was quite different under the Ahom regime. Other than the barter trade whatever other form of transnational trade was allowed with Tibet and Bengal that too was monopolized by the monarchy and hence a prosporous mercantile community could not grow in Assam which was not the case in the Mughal empire. The Ahom rulers' restrictive trade policies and isolationist attitude hampered the growth of a mercantile class. During the 17th century, the Ahom rulers seemed to have adopted a policy of isolation and forbade people either to enter or leave their territories.[22] Whatever stunted growth in trade and commerce and of specialized

artisans was observed during the later part of Ahom rule, it was away from the center of power i.e. not in Upper Assam but in Lower Assam.

Scenario after the advent of the British

When the Company appeared in Assam plains it, in its own colonial interest, paved the way for increasing the scope of business, trade and commerce and therefore for widening the base of the mercantile class in the region. But as the growth of the local mercantile class was restricted and stunted therefore this opportunity was monopolized by the people from Rajasthan and, to a lesser degree, Bengal. So the opportunities in trade and commerce due to the advent of the British were availed of by mercantile groups from outside the state.[23]

Assam seemed to have saved itself form the initial thralldom of colonialism as it had no class worth its name which could challenge the might of colonial power. Had there been an established mercantile class it would have come into some sort of contradictions. Similar would have been the case of artisans. Nevertheless contradictions emerged when the newly emerging anglicized Assamese gentry tried to compete with their colonial counterparts. This clash of interest between the indigenous entrepreneur and metropolitan or colonial capital became evident in Assam's tea industry.

The Government established the first tea garden in Assam during 1833,[24] which thereafter encouraged both private companies and individual entrepreneurs to follow suit. But due to the requirement of a huge amount of capital, tea plantation remained in the hands of the British. In the next phase some Indian speculators stepped in. Among the indigenous entrepreneurs Maniram Dewan was the first Assamese tea planter. His martyrdom at the hands of the British surely had an element of contradiction between the emergent indigenous capital and the metropolitan capital among other things. By hanging Maniram Dewan the British served two purposes : quelling the nationalist spirit of the masses and warning other aspiring entrepreneurs who instead of collaboration chose confrontation with British capital. Thereafter although Rosheswar Barua, Dinanath Bezbarua, Hemadhar Barooah, Jaganath Barooah, Bisturam Baruah. Malbogh Baruah, Kaliprasad Chaliha[25] and a few others were involved in tea plantation and allied sectors yet their presence and clout seemed to be peripheral compared to non-Assamese tea planters in Assam. In 1893, as per the evidence given by J.B. Barooah to Royal Commission on Opium, there were only two to three dozens of native planters in the Assam valley towards the end of the century and more than 97 per cent of the total tea average were under British ownership. Even in 1845, only 16 per cent of the total area under tea were owned by Indian planters of whom only a very negligible number was of Assamese origin.[26]

Similar names can be cited of indigenous entrepreneurs who took to trade in timber, printing press and newspaper industry. Among them Bholanath Barua, Lakshminath Bezbaruah, Manik Chandra Barua and Radhanath Chankakati are noteworthy. These entrepreneurs were the product of the anglicized educational system set up by the British. Although they flourished in their respective trades due to their rational choice, managerial skill and business acumen yet the majority of the educated youth of their generation opted for white collar government jobs. English education was able to liberate their minds but could not liberate them from the prevailing social trait of hatred for physical labour. They looked down upon trade, commerce and industry leaving them to be monopolized by others while satisfying their ambition in safe and secured white collar jobs.[27]

One might question the non emergence of a mercantile or entrepreneurial class from the Ahom mobility after the fall of monarchy in Assam as seen in other places of such historical transformation. The root of this non-emergence lies perhaps in limited monetisaiton, absence of land market, lack of urban orientation, absence of any traditional skill in mercantile activities, inward looking rather than outward looking world-view of the Ahom elite and above all in the overwhelming dependence on slave labour. Once the British abolished slavery in 1843, the nobility and the gentry were robbed not only of their social status but their economic security as well. This happened to be another major factor behind the non-emergence of an entrepreneurial class among the Ahom nobility.

In lieu of conclusion

The rise of entrepreneurs both in terms of a concept and a group of people (if not class) can be scanned over a long period of economic history and for majority of the analysts the emergence of entrepreneurs is directly related with the prevalent relations of production. For Schumpeter the explanation of both development and the emergence of entrepreneurs must be sought outside the group of facts which are described by economic theory. The surrounding social structure plays an important role in the process of emergence of entrepreneurs. There were several individuals with entrepreneurial traits in pre-capitalist or early capitalist socio-economic set-ups yet entrepreneurs could only blossom under the capitalist mode of production. The will to prove superiority, the pleasure of creating something new and the belief in one's ingenuity were nascent under feudalism. Only an emerging capitalism with freedom of individual and capital could guarantee the emergence of entrepreneurs.

In the context of Europe, Marx noted that there is a three-fold transition from merchant capital or artisanal industry to industrial capital;

> 'first, the merchant becomes directly an industrial capitalist. This is true of crafts based on trade; second, the merchants turn the small masters into his middlemen, or buys directly from the independent producer, leaving him nominally independent and his mode of production unchanged; third, the industrialist becomes merchant and produces directly for the wholesale market'.[28]

Among these three modes observed by Marx, the last two were never observed in India or in the third world countries. Modern industrialists arose from the ranks of merchants in India, sometimes in collaboration with or in contradiction to colonialism. The other two modes were in direct contradiction with British colonialism. So independent artisans or merchants who had close links with production of craft industries rarely became entrepreneurs in India.[29]

In Assam, however, all the three modes mentioned above seemed to be absent which hampered the process of emergence of indigenous entrepreneurs during the early British rule. The region scarcely experienced the transformation of mercantile capital into industrial capital as there was a lack of indigenous mercantile community. Moreover, in Schumpeter's terms, the social surroundings were also not conducive to the growth of entrepreneurs in Assam. During the days of the Ahom monarchy the state apparatus was such that it never encouraged conditions for individual excellence either in trade and commerce or in agriculture. So the group of individuals called entrepreneurs never emerged. On the other hand, during the days of colonialism, this stunted process of growth was further hampered by the practice of coercion and encouraging migration and immigration of skilled people from outside the state to fulfil the requirements of economic consolidation. This also hampered the growth of indigenous entrepreneurs in the region, of course with few exceptions.

The apathy of the emerging elites to physical labour, trade, commerce and manufacturing proved as an obstacle for the growth of indigenous entrepreneurs in Assam. Their preference for white collar jobs or professions always blindfolded them and they lacked the foresight of entrepreneurs. It seems that this attitude has continued till date with minor modifications. But changes are on the horizon. The lowering of state expenditure on creation of white collar jobs and the withdrawal of the state will undoubtedly create a situation where there might be a paradigm shift. There are two distinct possibilities in the evolving future – either in the changed situation a strong, independent and rational group of individuals may emerge as successful indigenous entrepreneurs or a comprador class / group of people will emerge in collaboration with the rising tide of neo-liberal globalization. History here

seems to be a better judge to understand the emergence and role of indigenous entrepreneurs for future. ■

[Note: I am extremely grateful to Dr. P.S. Datta for his academic insight and brotherly persuasion, however faults in the paper are reserved for its author.]

Endnotes and References

1. When the *Wealth of Nations* appeared in 1776 the economic transformation known to history as Industrial Revolution has scarcely begun. Hargreaves produced the spinning jenny in 1765 and Arkwright perfected the water frame in 1767 while James Watt took out a patent for a steam engine in 1769. But these inventions were as yet quite novel, and required time before they could modify industrial system. The more important among them, Crompton's "mule" and Cartwright's weaving machine, where as yet of the future. For further details see Guide, Charles and Rist, Charles, *A History of Economic Doctrines* (London : George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd., 1961).
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6. Schumpeter, Joseph, A, *The Theory of Economic Development*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 1969)
7. The word 'entrepreneur' has been derived from French language, where it means 'an organizer of musical or other entertainments'. As a music conductor organizes all its musicians to produce a perfect blend of symphony, an entrepreneur in his/her field of activity tries to attain the goal of profit maximization. For further details see Chakraborty, Gorky, 'Entrepreneurial Analysis : Existential Reality and The Need For a Paradigm Shift', in *Journal of North East India Council for Social Science Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1, April 2003.
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16. (Guha : 1991)
17. Guha, Amalendu, *Baishnavbador Pora Moamaria Bidroholoi* (Guwahati : Student's Stores, 1993) in Assamese.
18. (Bagchi : 2002).
19. (Guha : 1993).
20. For further details, see 'Potentialities of Capitalist Development in the Economy of Mughal India', in Habib, Irfan, *Essays in Indian History : Towards a Marxist Perception* (New Delhi : Tulika, 2000).
21. (Guha : 1993)
22. Alam, K. in (Datta Ray : 1983).
23. Colonialism in its early stage creates opportunities for the emerging class/collaborators for establishing its firm grip over the economic structure. In the process some opportunities are created which when availed by the local elites creates in itself a class of its own. The entrepreneurs often emerged from within these sections. However in the ultimate analysis due to the contradictory nature of colonial relations of production the clash between the emerging or established indigenous capitalist class and the leading metropolitan capitalist class results in deprivation of the former at the hands of the later. This pattern continues until the yolk of colonial power is replaced by the nationalist state-either bourgeoise or proletariat in nature. For further details see Patnaik, Prabhat, *Whatever Happened to Imperialism* (New Delhi : Tulika, 1995).
24. Alam in (Datta Ray : 1983).
25. *ibid.*
26. *ibid.*
27. After British occupation of Assam, David Scott, the Agent of Governor-General noticed that education particularly in its written form was neglected by the Ahom monarchy. In fact it was considered derogatory to educate their off-springs unless their forefathers were *Kakotis* or scribes. The official aristocracy therefore proved themselves incapable of discharging their duties. Francis Jenkins sought to replace this system in 1834 and it led to the establishment of the first English School at Gauhati in 1835 and at Sibsagar in 1841. In these aforesaid

institutions, though there were two departments – English and Vernacular – emphasis was laid on the study of English. Soon it was found extremely difficult on the part of the beginners to learn English which resulted in rapid fall in enrolment in these institutions. Therefore in 1844, these schools in Gauhati and Sibsagar was converted into Anglo-Vernacular schools. These schools along with the 22 elementary schools set up by the American Baptist Missionaries gave instruction in Assamese rather than English. It also hampered the growth of educated elite which could have encouraged the cause of entrepreneurship. Only after 1860 the local intelligent section realized the importance of English education." For further details see Barpujari, H.K., 'The Emergence and Role of the Middle Class in Assam : Early Phase' in Datta Ray, B. (ed.), *The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North-East India* (New Delhi : Uppal Publishing House, 1983).

28. Marx, Karl, *Capital, Vol. III* (Moscow : Progress Publishers, 1966).
29. (Bagchi : 2002).

Perspectives on Family and Gender with Focus on India and Germany

Anuradha Dutta

Review of the book FAMILY AND GENDER : CHANGING VALUES IN GERMANY AND INDIA by Margrit Pernau, Imtiaz Ahmad, and Helmut Reifeld (eds.), Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2003) p. 360, Rs. 590.00.

The book under review is an edited volume of thirteen well-researched papers mainly based on a workshop organized by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Germany) during 1-4 March 2000. The universe of the chosen theme of family and gender is India and Germany, although European and brought to the mind in view of the globalization of knowledge.

The biography of the book, as it were, informs us that it concentrates on four major propositions, viz., *the concept of family does not follow naturally from the ties of blood but involves a cultural construction*; that it is no longer valid to regard the family as an anthropomorphic entity planning and acting *with one voice* : the family is a site or space not only of harmony but also of power relations; that the family has ceased to be a private refuge immune from the impact of political forces in that it is *decisively shaped by society and the state*; and that in the interest of heightening our understanding of the currents and cross-currents touching the family and social reality, it is necessary to focus on what has been called *the margins of the family*, the aberrations, *fault lines*, and violence against women in the family.

The book has been divided into four sections, the first covering the *Social History of the Family* (contributors being Imtiaz Ahmad, Gunilla-Friederike Budde and Vasanthi Raman), the second section covering *Images and Symbolic Practices* (contributors being Chaturvedi Bardinath, Margrit Pernau, Ute Frevert and Katharina Poggendorf – Kakar), the third section concentrating on *The Family and the State* (contributors being Nandini Azad, Helmut Reifeld and Shail Mayaram) and the last section highlighting the *Fault Lines* of the family (contributors being Nirlama Banerjee, Samita Sen, and U. Vidhya).

The book opens with a short Preface by Helmut Reifeld, representative of the Konard Adenauer Foundation in India, and Research Fellow at the German Historical Institute, London, and the Bayreuth University, Germany. He lays stress on the fact that the family as a social institution has been traditionally regarded as a core element for the development of the individual as well as for the society and the state. He points out the usefulness and necessity for a comparative perspective.

Margrit Pernau is a historian affiliated with the University of Brielefed, Germany. Apart from her entry in the second section of the book under review (article on *Motherhood and Female Identity : Religious Advice Literature for Women in German Catholicism and Indian Islam),* she has written a highly instructice Introduction entitled *Family : A Gendering and Gendered Space*, with subsections on Comparison, Comparative Approach of Dialogue ?; Social History of the Family in Germany; Studies on the Family in India; Opening the Black Box : Power Structures within the family; Joint, Nuclear and Beyond; Family and Social Position; Honour, Gender and the Creation of Group Identity; The Family Between the Private and the Public, and the State and the Family. Her introductory contribution could be regarded as a necessary and eminently thoughtful preface in depth adding value to the book as a whole. At the end of her Introduction, Dr. Pernau makes a significant point :

> Future studies will have to further investigate how far the state policy on the four different levels open up space for female agency and negotiations. The discussion on how to resolve the ambivalence between affirmative action and interference into the private sphere – on the necessity of private autonomy and on its limits, on the values which have to be guaranteed by the state, possibly even against the resistance of certain groups – however, is no longer a topic for academic research, but for the political debate.

Alike in Germany and India the traditional family continued to exercise social integrative power and, naturally enough, it has undergone changes through the processes of industrialization, urbanization and modernization. The many articles in the volume looked at the problems from different standpoints, and with merit, and the results of the studies produce a wholesome ambience for further academic pursuits, dialogue and discussion, and society-oriented activism through women-friendly movements for change.

In Germany systematic study on the family started as early as 1855 while in India it came to be studied in the pre-independence period. The *Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India, TOWARDS EQUALITY* (Government of India, 1974) is a very comprehensive study covering all aspects of the status of women in Indian society : chapters II and III of the Report

studied the demographic perspective and socio-cultural setting of women's status including the family organization.

In his essay in the book under review, Imtiaz Ahmad while discussing gender relations within the Indian joint family dealt with structured hierarchical relationships, gendering of roles, social history of the joint family, individualisaiton and inviduation, joint family and gender oppression, and with the dynamics of change and urban women. He elaborated how an Indian generally takes pride in being a member of the joint family. This is India's culturally idealized family based on an extended or joint family system. A joint household is a structure of various hierarchical relationship. The Indian family's value system calls for an ideal of solidarity, cooperation, affection and understanding observation of traditional norms and customs. A central theme of these complex hierarchical relationships is the special value accorded to male children. It has also been pointed out how the *traditional family* appeared to rest on shaky foundations of inequality and domination. In conclusion, Dr. Ahmad posed certain questions : to what extent will India's joint family be able to adjust to contemporary modernization while retaining the general commitment of family members to the well-being of the collective whole ? As middle class Indian women whose locus of esteem has been principally within the domestic realm move into the outside world, will India's family heritage produce somewhat different adaptations to forces of modernization ? He is of the opinion that while no ready answer is available, time alone would show whether *this is truly possible.*

In her essay on *The Persisting Image Vs Economic and Demographic Changes : The Three Generation Household in Europe* Gunilla Friederike Budde discussed several issues like forms of the European family in the 19th century, the birth of the modern European family, and innovations in the 20th century : on the way to the post-modern family, the latter section qith a question mark. She concludes that the model of *father-mother-child* continues to be regarded as the ideal way of life and that the concept of the family will not simply be washed away by the *vagaries of time.*

In her entry *on The Diverse Life-world of Indian Childhood*, Prof. Vasanthi Raman dealt with issues relating to western childhood, centuries of childhood, Indian childhoods, *two ideas of childhood,* colonialism and the new childhood, different Indian perceptions of childhood (based on an earlier published work), child socialization, adolescence; Globalization, the Indian middle class and the new childhood. Having touched upon the experience of childhood on both sides of the *great divide*, she points to the *impoverishing experience* of both children and families of the *have nots* side.

Chaturvedi Badrinath in his essay entitled *The Householder, Grhastha, in the Mahabharata* made an admirable text-based analysis to show how the *Mahabharata* is replete with ideas about the family ideal and duties of not only members of the family towards each other but also of the family in its entirety to the society.

Margrit Pernau's entry on *Motherhood and Female Identity; Religious Advice Literature for Women in German Catholicism and Indian Islam* is an excellent study on comparative religious literare and practices from a secular standpoint.

Prof. Ute Frevert's presentation on *Changing Masculinities in Central Europe : Duelling and its Aftermath* deals with aspects of research in gender history with special reference to historical origins dueling as a gendered and gendering behaviour, *from the New Man* to new masculinities : she concluded that even while consumerism changed gender images and practices, there could be no such thing as a hegemonic vision of masculinity existing in the dueling societies of the 19th century or, for that matter, *in the racist warrior societies of fascism.*

Dr. Katharina Poggendorf-Karkar's interesting essay on Virtuous *Mother, Virile Hero and Warrior Queen : The Conception of Gender and Family in Hindutva* discusses such concepts as *desh bhakti* and *Rama bhakti*, notions of manliness in Hindutva, *nation as Goddess; the importance of motherhood in Hindutva*, gender ideology in Hindutva with focus on women as powerful agents of the modern age, the question of the reinvention of female power in Hindutva; *shakti* and sexuality : women as icons of parity in Hindutva; the ideal of sacrifice, solidarity and unity. The Hindutva concept of women's identity is determined not by her interest as an individual but her assigned function in the family. It has also been noted that women are found to be used by the Hindutva movement to protect the private sphere of the family from what was characterized by an Indian authors as *Western and Muslim contamination.*

Dr. Nandini Azad's comprehensive article on *Gender and Family : State Intervention in India* is as it ought to be. Divided into documented sub-sections, she has analysed reform-led interventions, impact of the national movement and the work of the All India Women's Conference, codification of Hindu law, economic planning and policies, land legislation, health and family welfare policies, educational policies, with an appropriate concluding section. She is of the view that State intervention in gender and family has been marked by remarkable ambiguity and that under the sress of the long hand of pro-market and pro-capitalist forces, the exploited group continues to be in the grip of the appropriators of wealth and power.

Helmut Reifeld's studied article on *State Interest in the Family : Social Change and Social Policy in Germany* is a very useful contribution in the context of the thematic exercise covering Germany. The subsections in the essay are : the family in the Constitution and in Polity; changing patterns of German Society and Politics; family policy in the European context; and the concluding section. He is of the view that the liberal democratic state of the 21st century, apart from discharging its obligations to the traditional family, has to take care of the new generations also in the interest of a cohesive society.

Shail Myaram's article is based on relevant literature and field studies. The section on background traces developments since the 1980s, followed by other sub-sections, appropriately, on women in governance in rural India; families and the election of women Panchayat representatives; and then, women Panchayat representatives with profiles of performance of four typical women representatives in Panchayats. The author is of the view that in the interest of having genuine institutions of self-governance, panchayats must be endowed with real powers and fiscal resources. The wonder is that despite the constitutionalisation of PIRs and addition of Eleventh and Twelfth Schedules to the Constitution of India, listed power are yet to be transferred to PIRs, the third tier of India's parliamentary democracy.

Prof. Nirmala Banerjee's thoughtful article on *The Marginal Families* rightly deals with identifying women headed households (such households are also there in Germany, Cf. FRG Publication entitled *The Women In Family, Profession and Society,* 1969), character of such households, aging and widowhood, widowhood and mortality rates, migration, the problem of women migrating without the men, and the commuter worker women. Since migration has become a common strategy for the poor in the interest of their survival, she is of the view that this is another mater of national priority.

Academic and social activist Samita Sen has written on the marginalized women in Indian industries. As per 1991 Census, the total number of working women stood at 89.76 million out of which only 4.2 m were in the organised sector. The marginalized women workers' conditions defy description and hence, the value of Sen's entry. The sub-sections in the article are : from field to factory; women and migration; resistance and autonomy : women and working class politics; and the concluding section.

Prof. U. Vindhya's entry relates to *Private Crimes and Public Sanction : Violence Against Women in the Family.* No discussion on the family and gender would have been complete without a study on women subjected to crime and violence and hence, this is a very welcome entry. The highly documented entry has the following sub-sections : theoretical explanations of domestic violence,

reported cases of domestic violence, violence and the practice of dowry, violence and the law, method, incidence of dowry deaths, socio-demographic profile of victims and perpetrators, intervention, causes of violence, judicial outcome of cases. Conclusions are interspersed in various sections. The author's universe of study was Andhra Pradesh, and yet, the findings may have general applicability in other States as well given the similarity of traumatic experience women have to go through in India, that is Bharat.

The book should prove useful to all those connected with social science disciplines, women's studies and research thereon and the interested general readers. ■

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