

SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

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EDITORIAL

It has been a privilege for me to edit the sixth volume of *Social Change and Development*. Though the focus of this volume is primarily on the northeastern part of the country, yet several of the leading articles deal with the broader issues of Indian democracy, governance, growth and social justice,—issues which have a direct relevance to the present situation in India's Northeast. Javeed Alam, for instance, focuses on the distinctness of the nature of democracy in India and how democratic universals are being transcribed in their engagement with the Indian peculiarities, while S. Mahendra Dev stresses the role of the State as a facilitator of inclusive growth. Sameer Kumar Mahapatra highlights Ambedkar's ideas in the country's quest for social justice and Vibhuti Patel, while discussing the impact of the 73rd/74th amendments, underlines the need for women to empower themselves with first-hand experience of the operational reality. Samir Kumar Das deals with the intricate link between ethnic struggles and the nation's foreign policy and raises quite a few debatable issues. In her perceptive piece, Saswati Choudhury discusses the in-built difficulties on the path to an integrated economy of the region encompassing the Northeast and South/South East Asia and how prejudices and perceptions have stood in the way of greater sub-regional co-operation. The essays by Biswajit Choudhury and Anindita Adhikary *et al* attempt to explore some of the vital aspects relating to the prevailing economic situation in the northeastern region and Joydeep Baruah in his research note bases his findings on his field experience of Integrated District Planning and calls for a thorough discussion of the issue of fiscal federalism and its functioning in the country. Finally, there is the informative study by Moamenla Amer on the voting behaviour of women voters in Nagaland. I hope that all this will provide interesting and stimulating reading.

Guwahati; November, 2009

Udayon Misra

THE HISTORICAL UNFOLDING OF FREEDOM AND
EQUALITY IN INDIA

Javeed Alam*

Democracy and the values it entails have been studied in India in many different ways. Its evolution since the coming of colonial rule, as a legacy of the Freedom Movement, changes in its working under the impact of party competitiveness, its imperfections and infirmities, and so on have been the ways in which it has often been seen. While all these have been the source of important insights yet I believe, and strongly so, that the insights of these studies have missed out on something of vital importance to what democracy has *come to be* in India. Democracy is, whatever else, freedom and equality and dignity and self respect, in its essence. The point I want to raise, first, has to do with the shape these are acquiring in India, both in terms of form and content; that in other words mean the substantive content of democracy in India. Though radically different from where it came from to the Indian soil or USA or France and so on, why is it, as a general idea, it is as good a democracy, I deeply believe, as anywhere else in the West? This is important for comparative references in their normative sense. Equally important I want to try to identify, secondly, how these values entailed in democracy are taking roots in Indian society, in other words, becoming the needs internal to the requirements of our life; this, I assume, is the criterion by which we can say if X or Y are an authentic presence in that society. What follows in this essay revolves around these two axes and their intersection.

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Sixth Foundation Day Lecture delivered at OKD Institute of Social Change and Development on March 30, 2009.

What can, methodologically speaking, be the best way to study the consequences of the contact of democracy with the specificities of Indian communitarian consolidation?¹ I would like to suggest here that rather than look at the evolution of Indian democracy,² as has been the case, it would be more revealing if we were to look at the manner in which the *democratic universals* are getting transcribed in their engagement with the Indian *particularities*. Among many others, there are two types of types of democratic universals or values that are important in this regard. There are, one, those like liberty, equality, dignity, etc. which translate into policies in the course of being actualised. For instance, equality as a value requires, among other things, policies directed towards income distribution for becoming a feature of society. Or, freedom requires that inherited ritual practices that degrade people and make them unfree are eradicated through legislative and popular interventions. And, two, there are the other type of values, like those of universal franchise, representation, rule of law, etc. which get embodied as institutions when these are given a workable shape. For instance, rule of law requires legal institutions like courts to be effectual. The effective difference between these two types of values is in the way these take concrete shape.

¹ The course of the development of democracy in India in the last two decades has been deeply conditioned by the way communitarianism has taken shape in India. There are strong unitarian tendencies in the various communities of ritual and belief and a strong assertion by these politicised communities for equality and dignity and recognition. This has led to a pronounced expansion of democracy, seen as the enfranchisement of Dalits, the empowerment of oppressed castes, the assertion of women and the deepening of the popular commitments for the ideas and potentialities of democracy. Together with this, various infirmities have also crept into it like the denials of rights of individual person who disregard community injunctions, retaliatory politics in relation to those below you in ritual status, the humiliation of Dalits and women who defy community norms, lack of decorum and so on. These two developments have gone together and make up a package of contradictory features. We can say that the widespread and sweeping changes in Indian democracy are taking place in a pronouncedly untidy manner; this is so in the sense that there is a pronounced rule-deficit in the structuring of the political process. This contradictory nature is the crux that needs to be kept in mind.

² I do not want to understate the importance of looking at sequential changes in Indian democracy. One very useful study here is Yogender Yadav, "Electoral Politics in the Time of Change - India's Third Electoral System", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XXXIV, 1999.

Particularities which are specifically Indian like *jatis*, various ritualistic practices, structures of family sentiments which entails (something akin to) obligations, community codes both social and morals, regional cultural practices, forms of religious commitment, and so on impact on and interpenetrate the democratic universal as these go on to take roots in Indian society, this is what I imply by: getting transcribed.

This is a process quite dissimilar to the one in which democracy alters the articulation of the social structure. The structure may continue to exist, like caste for instance, but the entire mode of its expression in the political sphere may so change that it may look something entirely different than what it may have been 20 years ago.³ It is a rather interesting but different story what democracy has done to the Indian social structure or Indian society in general.⁴ What I am referring to here is rather how this social structure under alteration is shaping the actualisation of the values pointed to above. What does equality come to mean to certain communities in India. It can change its meaning as it crosses the different community boundaries.

Let us take the case of *equality*, something for which entire communities left behind in relation to others are clamouring insistently. Its prime focus may not, like in the West, be making all the individuals of comparable capabilities in using opportunities for well-being and, say, pursuit of individual worth. The way the backward communities are fighting for equality may seem curious to someone in Europe where individualism has become the feature of the society. Equality is being measured rather in terms of how many graduates or

³ See D.L. Sheth, "Secularisation of Caste and Making of New Middle Class", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21-28 August 1999; and M.N. Srinivas, "An Obituary on Caste as a System", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1-7 February 2003. See also Javed Alam, "Is Caste Appeal Casteism: Oppressed Castes in Politics", *EPW*, 27 March 1999; see also my "Caste, Class and Social Consciousness: ...", in K.L. Sharma, ed. *Caste and Class in India*, (Rawat, Jaipur, 1994); see also my recent article "Emerging Class Formation among the Oppressed Castes and its Political Implications", *Social Scientist*, No.426 - 427, November-December, 2008 which is a re-look at my argument on caste in *Is Caste Appeal Casteism: ...*

⁴ My understanding of these changes can be seen in my book *Who Wants Democracy?* (Tracts for the Time 15, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 2004. For a different account see Bhanu Pratap Mehta, *Burden of Democracy* (New Delhi, Penguin, 2004).

gainfully employed people are there, for instance, among the Yadavs or Thevars as against Kurmis or Vaaniyars, other spatially adjacent backward communities. It does matter very little if there is a large number of unemployed (and therefore lacking in well-being) persons within one's own community so long as the numbers of those on measures the community is interested in tallies with that of the other community one likes to compare with. So the struggle is to seek community based profiles of equality in comparison to other communities. Individuals per se do not count for much. Such also is the case with other forms of representations in politics and social life. The insistence today is for self-representation; every community and social group wants to be represented by leaders belonging to one's own community. Gone are the days when any enlightened person could represent any and every section of society. This is where the entire battle for "empowerment" or "social equity", two main self-identified areas of concern for backward communities, is focused on. One can go on and take other values like liberty and disentangle the exciting new connotations and nuance the word can come to have, unsurprising for us here but something that can baffle the uninitiated from the west where these words with their modern meaning first made the appearance.

The struggle for equality of the oppressed communities leads invariably to struggle for affirmative action and the main form this takes in India is the demand for reservations or the fixation of quotas in jobs and admissions. In a stagnant job market, the established middle classes largely belonging to the upper castes feel threatened and vehemently oppose this demand. The society is therefore also a warring camp of different caste formations and alliances. But the point here is that words like equality would mean something quite different to the established middle classes. It would mean something like individual right to equal opportunity and equal juristic standing, etc. something that the constitution already guarantees. Everybody must compete, they insist, on these conditions in terms of merit.

Coming from where it does, merit itself becomes a contentious word. The meaning of *merit* also like the other words changes as it crosses the community boundaries. It becomes the weapon of the strong in India. The weak avoid using it but are compelled to say something about it. They just about fumble and create a political din, a justifiable act in face of their verbal inadequacies. To the established middle classes or upper castes merit is not an inherent advantage like

belonging to upper caste itself but the worth that the individual by sheer hard work acquires, an accomplishment. Merit is something of an established fact, incontestably identifiable and measurable, as if it comes with the growth of our bodies. What never crosses their mind is that accomplishment requires a background and a long period of tending to the potential; merit is not like the faculty of speech which one picks up even in conditions of extreme deprivation.

What is suppressed is the fact that in a society of wide spread community centered deprivations, the insistence on merit abstracted from its context, is a route to the establishment of an *oligarchy of the privileged*. In a situation like ours, blind folded application of merit not only weeds out deeply dormant potential that is with everyone but more specifically also talent, which is struggling upwards through great effort among the deprived. Merit as abstraction is the means of keeping the door shut for those not being able to compete in favour of our progeny.

When words change meaning as they cross the community boundaries, it makes communication across the society that much more difficult. When meanings become properties of the communities, messages do not have an unhindered flow but are obstructed and gets altered as they reach the very differently placed communities in mortal combat. What we get is a *fragmented public sphere*, that is, a political context without the underlying social unification characteristic of civil society in a liberal democracy. That is how democracy came to be in the western societies with background features facilitative for a certain mode of articulation of emerging modern values. The point of reference was always the individual who was also always in incognito conversation with other individuals about values and claims and interests to further. Here with us some of the cultures of the communities are mutually incompatible and it is difficult to find a space within the public sphere where the upper caste middle class and the hitherto dominated *oppressed castes can share* equally in terms of symbols and values and idioms, in other words, the relations become one of non-communication. That is the sense in which the underlying social unification, mentioned above, is lacking thus making the civil society a constricted space.

This development of democracy in the West took place, furthermore, in the face of the dissolution of pre-modern communities; that is to say, the pre-capitalist past became archival. (Archival is not the loss of the past but the loss of something as a

presence with us.) In contrast to this, the pre-modern world is a living presence in India. In the case of Europe if I want to know how people worked, for example, in the guilds or how they spent their leisure, I have to go to some or other archive. That is why at some point in the first half of 19th Century words like kinship or guild quietly disappeared from the political vocabulary, to be replaced by class and industry; this loss and replacement of such key term can be, in fact, a substantiation of my claim above. Whereas in India, I do not have to travel even a hundred miles to get to know that these ways of working and living are not only alive but also vibrant. And this holds true for much else to do with ritual and kinship and status. To use Hannah Arendt⁵ in an altered way, the "past" with us here is not even a past. It presses for recognition. As she observes for another situation, we do not live in tenses as a continuum but simultaneously. All this deeply impinges in the way the *democratic universals* get embodied in democratic practices in India. The antagonism we live in is vastly different than any society "living with modernity"⁶ in the West ever experienced. The rapid dissolution of pre-modern communities of work and status with the rise of capitalism and the emergence of an individuated, autonomous person viewed as self determining is also the making of western modernity. Here in our societies the "past" is always pushing modernity. In this situation, in the spaces that democracy provides, what are entailed in modernity as universal values like rationality or secularism or rule of law do not any more remain "universals" but become claims which have to compete with other incommensurable claims from tradition for being accepted in society.⁷

The ordinary Indian therefore lives also absorbed in all kinds of traditional inheritances. In fact she is under constant pressure to uncritically affirm her allegiance to the social and moral codes of the community. The communities speak for the individual and attempt to

⁵ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, (London, Penguin Books, first published 1956, enlarged edition 1968.)

⁶ From the title of my book *India: Living With Modernity*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1999) where many of these things are discussed.

⁷ The alleged contradiction between Modernity and Democracy that I am contesting is best theoretically grounded in some of the writing of Partha Chatterjee collected in the volume *Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, (New Delhi, Permanent Black, 2004).

force them into silence in face of assertions contrary to the community's codes. These communities in a sense act like *collective personalities*, which do not allow the individuals any meaningful private space within their boundaries or like them to become different. They do not allow for the person the right to exit, to be *different* and *distant* from the community. What is lacking is the notion of the *integrity of self*, a value condition so essential for *freedom* to flourish or for the personal self-determination of one's own life; self-determination of the self is the correlate of freedom as autonomy.

What the person in pre-modern communities (more pronouncedly in India) lack is personal autonomy and therefore the important enlightened virtue of being able to, when required; distance oneself from inheritances so as to be able to take a *view from nowhere*. It is in this condition of being grounded in and surrounded by pre-modern inheritances that the individuals search for freedom and equality & recognition⁸ and agency. But this often gets pushed into the background by the community's struggles for equality and right to a way of life that gets precedence in face of individual demands. This goes against the grain of all western (liberal) understanding of modern democratic politics. Moreover the ordinary Indian person lives his life with inadequate education and means of livelihood surrounded by widespread poverty and illiteracy and the crippling of future due to the unmet daily needs for a respectful life. It is universally assumed, ever since J.S. Mills, that the poor and the illiterate cannot become part of the democratic deliberation or sustain democratic institutions. "Universal teaching", Mill averred in *Representative Government*, "must

⁸ Recognition is, as Hegel would tell us, an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects. A call for recognition is therefore also a call for equality, which ought not to negate my difference with the other. So being recognised and recognising the other constitute me as a subject and gives me a sense of self. It therefore follows that the denial of recognition is detrimental to subject hood. Hegel here is suggesting that the making of an Identity is a dialogical process in society.

I think, it is important to be clear about the distinction between making of Identity and identity politics; one is necessary for being an autonomous person whereas the other leads to reification of caste/ given collective identities. If Hegel is right, as I presume him to be, then the denial of recognition to the claims for equality of the lower castes in India by the upper castes goes a long way in perverting the values of democracy in India. See his "Lordship and Bondage" in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

precede universal enfranchisement". Democracy works and has gone on for long in spite of this widely held understanding bequeathed to us by Mills.

In view of these two features, absence of personal autonomy and universal teaching, democracy in India presents paradoxes in relation to received (western) theories of Democracy but I would like to argue not in relation to its own history.

Paradox one lies in the persistence of widespread poverty and mass illiteracy along with the *consistency of commitment* on the part of these people for democracy. This is contrary to Mill's understanding. Given how the poor and the illiterate live, democracy survives and lives without the adequate spread of the foundations of civil society. Rather enigmatically, the main lobbies for democracy are ascriptive communities, and herein lay paradox two, and not the civic bodies. Indian democracy manages, herein lays its distinctiveness, its paradoxes without drawing on earlier western democratic experience. In fact at the root of the expansion and legitimation of democracy in India, lies the differentiation and consolidation of *continuous* communities in India and their deep commitment for what they understand to be democracy and this gives a peculiar flavour to the democratic process in India. The vibrancy of democracy in India is in the processes (which have acquired certain autonomy from the institutional sphere) that sustain it and all its infirmities are in the mode of working within the institutional domain and in the disregard to the norms that inform their functioning. Yet the institutions perform the functions for which they are there.⁹ Both these features are the result of the interaction between the nature of Indian communitarian articulation noted above and the values and norms seen to be integral to democracy. Hence, the lamentation about the decline of democracy in India by the *privilegensia*.

I want to assert here that for a long time to come, how long nobody can say, Indian democracy is going to remain in a state of pronounced "*rule/norm*" deficit. Because what we are positing as the norm or the rule is the evolved practice of the West. And what evolved, as a practice in the West was itself based on what became the philosophical anthropology of those societies; that is, those attributes,

⁹See my "Institutional Infirmities and Democratic Resilience", North East Journal of Social Sciences (Forthcoming)

which came to define what it means to be a person. The person is presumed to be an individual, living with strong hedges from any communal pressure, capable of distancing himself from whatever surrounds him, and therefore with rational choices (such choices are always individually arrived at), and so on. "Inheritances" do not become a load on such a person. In sharp contrast to this, inheritances of a pre-modern kind embodied in communities of ritual and belief are constitutive of what makes, in varying degrees, people what they are in India. In such a situation to expect the "normative" scaffoldings of democracy of an individualised West from a communitarian India, as described above, is to ask for moon, which is what commentators on Indian democracy have been doing. Democracy to be understood for whatever it is worth in our societies has to be seen, first, in terms of the *functions it performs to keep alive an open political process and, secondly, for the continuing erosion of the power of the social structure which has been the source of collective unfreedom¹⁰ and hierarchic degrading of people.¹¹ If we look at the Indian democracy in terms of the criteria set forth above, then it's rating will surely go up. Moreover, in the process of doing so we will get out of the bad habit,*

¹⁰ I use the word collective unfreedom to indicate the collective subservience of the direct producers in India on upper castes. All the direct producers in India belonged to low castes because their work, being manual in nature, was looked down upon. This unfreedom was unlike those of the European serf who was individually under obligations to the lord. Therefore the struggle for freedom also takes on a collective form and that gives a peculiar flavour to Indian communitarianism.

¹¹ Democracy in India therefore has primarily become, over and above the many other definitions that set out its terrain, the sort of politics which the governed take recourse to; to gain a voice, a foothold into something valuable, a sign of status, a measure of effective power and so on. Apart from the modern proletariat, the governed in India has been largely made up of the Dalits and OBC's. The category of the governed more or less overlaps with those who have been direct producers in the traditional economy. It needs to be emphasized that among the producers women played a very important role both in the household production and agriculture. Their work was very valuable in the maintenance of family welfare. Moreover in the context of the level of development of the forces of production it was highly skilled and therefore comparable to those of the men in most respects. How the status of women's works changes and its implications for democracy, is an interesting area to explore.

epistemically speaking, of making judgement of the social and political process *only* in terms of the standards which arose in the West. In terms of such processes as noted above judgements can also be made in terms of democracy's relation with the history of its own society and what democracy is doing to that history. This, I presume, will give us deeper insight and be more enlightening.

The rupture or the divide between norm and the function in Indian democracy while palpable is not easily explicable. An explanation is therefore necessary. It has often been seen as being caused by the unreasonable and pig-headedness of the Indian political class and their propensity to drag people into politically and morally objectionable or undesirable form of behaviour, for reasons of power and gain. On a surface view this seems to be true in view of what has been called the "phebianisation" of politics, that is, the shift of power within representative institutions and political parties from the highly educated, western oriented political leadership towards those who are much less educated and come from lower caste and social orders. The causes of the rupture are much deeper and require a detailed analysis to gain a discerning perspective on the working of democracy in India.

Analytically, decoding the history and theory of liberal democracy as well as the history of this theory can best do this. Liberal democracy is a conjunction of two analytically separable historical processes. We have already noted, earlier in this essay, the dissolution of pre-modern communities with the development of capitalism in Europe. Capitalism did so by a simple yet effective process of, what Marx called, the "dissociation of the labourer from the means of labour", that is by depriving the peasant and the artisan from the instrument of production. Marx referred to this process also as primitive accumulation in the last chapter of *Capital*. The disposed working people were spatially also made to move from place to place in search of work facing strangers every time they moved. This is how we get a society of, to use a powerful descriptive term from Hobbes, "dissociated individuals." Today what we call a liberal society is made up of, at its rock bottom, the aggregation of such dissociated individuals. Social or society in liberal understanding is not an entity prior to, as for Greeks, the individuals but a willing congregation of individuated persons. An individualised person is not encumbered by social inheritances handed down by tradition as is a person living in pre-modern communities. This is how modernity, as a consequence of this process, defines a person as "disengaged", constantly making and

re-making himself solely by his reason. Such a person is, in the philosophical visions of modernity, an autonomous being -- self-determining -- and becomes a responsible agent because being endowed with reason does not allow his freedom to become a license. This morally responsible agent as a creature of capitalism at the same time is an interest maximising person but within the rules set by the market. This is what we know of as a modern man in liberal society -- an amalgam of contradictory attributes, a result of processes in 17th and 18th century with the beginning of mercantile capitalism.

What has come down to us as modern democracy, as mass participatory form, as distinct from its ancient forms in Greece and elsewhere, is a much later development beginning in 19th century through protracted struggles of ordinary and working people and later on joined by women's movements for enfranchisement. Earlier to the mid - 19th century, ordinary people with no property or education were barred from electoral and other decision-making spheres. So what the term liberal-democracy stands for today is a conjunction which firms up effectively only in later part of 19th century and the early part of 20th century. The liberal capitalist by creating a man theorised in philosophical visions of modernity propels the movements for democracy, for this new women can thrive and fulfil only in a democratic ethos, of becoming what one wants to be in terms actualising one's potential, that is, self-determining.

In countries like India, neither the liberal society emerged nor could the norms of what is called liberal could historically take root, this remains largely true even today. But under colonialism for a variety of reason, various forms of mass participatory political activities took shape, mainly as anti-feudal and anti-governmental struggles. All these developed into a national movement for freedom and emancipation. India saw unprecedented mass participation against colonial domination. It was not the individuated person (though the leadership came out of this stratum) who became the means of expression of participation but large communities of peasants and artisans and other toiling people. This mode of community based collectivised activity took root as democratised practice in India.

At the time of Independence and the making of Constitution, the universal adult franchise was not just an act of faith as is made out to be but much rather a recognition of what had already become a fact of democratic practice in India. So enfranchisement was not a slow

enlargement in India as in the West but recognition of what already existed in other participatory forms. And the mode of participation is still largely a function of pre-existing communities of ritual and belief whether as peasants or artisans or whatever else. Even in working classes, remnants of community consciousness still survive as a resilient power. This remains the case as individuation of persons (and of interests) is moving on, as we will soon look at it.

The entire history of the development of democracy in India in the conspicuous absence of a liberal society and its ethos is at the root of what I have referred to as the rupture between the norms and functions of democracy in India. This rupture is undoubtedly an unpleasant spectacle of democracy in India but not something only to lament about. How norms take root and in what form is a matter of patient expectation. The trend, in view of the developments of the last two decades, indicates that democracy is taking deeper roots in India without the tidiness of the processes, as determined by liberal norms, as seen in the European heartland of democracy. For the sake of flourishing of democracy we have to learn to live with this rupture, for how long I do not know but also go on struggling for a norm based society.

Situated as I am in the third world I would like to look now at the historical process and search for the features in terms of which democratic universals or values are both spreading and taking deeper roots in societies, their infirmities in process of actualisation, as discussed above, notwithstanding. Freedom or equality and many other such terms are no longer terms of western import. It is therefore important to find the routes and itineraries through which this is coming about. In other words, we move out of the world of ideas into that of history where larger processes are taking place. It is obvious that there are many new features taking shape in the societies here, which are rooted, in the historical sociology of our society. Out of many of these, I would take *Individuation*, a process immanent to our history, as the point of origination of the claims that go to make a person "modern". The process of individuation -- to form into *distinct* persons, individuals, and therefore also becoming somewhat *different* one from the other -- is the historical moment where the persons who are becoming individuals make multiple new claims. A feeling of being equal to others, a sense that one cannot be forced to submit to unsolicited monitoring as happens in our pre-modern communities etc. are what begins to emerge within us leading to continuous

alteration of the personal make-up. This *quest* to be is the beginning of the making of modern identity as distinct from traditional identities, which get defined entirely in terms of inheritances. Such a person, the individual (in the making), then seeks sanctuaries or refuges to protect oneself from invasions into his world and therefore also indemnities (these go to make up what are Rights) for the self, and hence new and different expectations from others as individuals or emerging modern groups of people. Once this process gains historical groundings, I do not think that we are far from witnessing the spread of claims for privacy, freedom to be, rights, self-respect, and so on in the society.

This is how, I believe, our modern life is being constituted. This is happening through a *process* that is a source of many new ideas but not by any *pre-conceived idea*, such as autonomy or rationality, the foundational ideas as the constitutive point of origin, as was the case in Europe. I am arguing for moving out of the ideational frame of references because these per force keep sending us to Europe for searching for the sense of the terms, the modern attribute we associate with persons or society.

It is in this, the historical sociology that something like the philosophical anthropology of modernity is taking shape amongst us. But the way the baggage called modernity is being filled is so very different that it marks a sharp distinction from the history we read from Europe. Only one difference I will like to highlight here. The "diremption" caused by the "exodus" of people from the communities, as Hegel had put it, is not happening here. While individuation as a process moves on, the communities of ritual and belief not only survive but re-discover themselves and challenge us with a new kind of resilience. What is happening here is an attempt at Exit without quitting the communities. The contestation or struggle for whatever we stand for out of the baggage of the modern therefore has, of necessity, to be context specific. This simply means that it has to be engaged and there cannot be any a prior demand to treat any of these as (abstract) universal entities as the West demands from, for instance, Iran or China or whoever else. What I am asking for is to knock the *foundational(ism)* out of theoretic consideration. What I am suggesting is not to shun theory but seek theoretical grounding in History, that is, not outside of time but in the *immanence of processes within history*. We ought to be seeking to democratise knowledge and

its dissemination. This is a dimension of freedom to which very little attention has been paid by those standing for democracy.¹²

Barring a few, the person as an individual is not allowed, in our societies to be fully an individual. She is under constant pressure from a variety of forces that are the sources of bonding and belonging in our society. He every now and then either gives in or is forced to succumb to the collective personality of the communities. This is a source also of enormous tensions for the individual person. As an aside, reversion into communal politics also has one of its sources in this. These psychic tensions are sought to be overcome or compensated by immersion into the artificial political community, the communal formation. Nevertheless individuation as a process goes on.

What I am trying to get at is, as I look at it, quite consequential. Given the whole range of transformation, in short, capitalist modernisation – bourgeois property, capital accumulation, economic differentiation, urban life, secular education, and what not – individuation is inevitable and unstoppable. But it moves with strong internal tensions. I earlier pointed out how the ordinary people are becoming distinct and therefore also different. They are no more completely absorbed within the communities, of which they remain a part, what we have is a kind of *exit without quitting* the community. This exiting without quitting is something that is happening on a regular basis in our part of the world. This is something that never happened in the west. There the exit was an exodus. The exit became an exodus, to borrow a term from Hegel, because as pointed out in the beginning, communities with the onset of capitalism dissolved rapidly. People want to make their choices, different from what the pressures of the community may be. But the pre-capitalist

¹² I have recently begun to do this exercise with modernity. I am referring to my unpublished note, "Beyond Enlightenment: Democratising Modernity". Akeel Bilgrami also in his unpublished "Divided Mind and Democratic Culture" speaks of the need of 'cognitive democratization'. These are out of papers presented at the recently held Alam Khundmiri Foundation seminar on Modernity and Democracy: Legacies and Future of Enlightenment. Long years ago Hegel in his section on Enlightenment in Phenomenology of Spirit had shown that in attempting to undermine Faith, the enlightenment project by putting Reason outside of time (or history) had by a processes of inversion had itself become a faith. We, the above group, are now trying with small beginning to correct this history of the theory.

communities, of whatever kind, demand un-critical absorption of the person within the moral and the social codes of the community. These communities try to stand over the individual person as a collective personality, an unsolicited monitor. This is a source of ineradicable tension for the person and deep-rooted consequences for the social process of change as hinted above.

These communities are pulling you back all the time in the sense that they are forcing you, compelling you, to be what you always have been. It is precisely here that the whole new dialectics of the process of becoming modern is working out in our society. The communities cannot stop or control the process of individuation or the capitalist modernisation of which individuation is the result. What they try in practice to do is to control the consequences of the process that of the individual persons try to move their own way in life.

It is here that the process of individuation establishes an immediate link with democracy. Democracy cannot wish away the plurality of particularities embodied within the communities, which compel the individual persons from what they want to become. It at this point the struggle is joined with the conservative forces in the society. The Left, the secular, the "modern" have to combine to defend the individual to be what she wants to be. And to defend the individual to be what he wants to be, it is also simultaneously a struggle both for the democratisation of the state power and the erosion of the hold of inherited social structure. And this makes for a different flavour for democratic universals in our society than it had in the west. And this is precisely because of democracy where it struggles to win its battles, modernity has to recognize and contest those claims of that plurality of particularities which is what Indian society is. In other words, modernity or its rationality is without the power to override the claims of particularities specific to our societies. Modernity has to win its claim to be legitimate and what it entails to be universal in the arena of democratic contestations and struggles. These contestations and struggles in the domain of popular are the equivalent what in the realm of ideas is the critique.

Hence the flavour, the specificities, the peculiarities in the modes of manifestation and of articulation of the democratic universals¹³ like

¹³ I have used the term democratic universals throughout this paper. Let me therefore clarify. Freedom is a democratic universal in the sense that democracy is inconceivable without freedom, in varying doses. That is to say

the freedom or equality as well as their imperfections and the consequent infirmities of democracy in the social ethos of India.¹⁴

that it is internal to democracy, that is, entailed in the word democracy. Freedom cannot be taken as universal in the philosophical sense, as having a necessity attached to it. Freedom, like much else, is a claim to be treated or become as such. Freedom is a universal not in the sense of having the attribute of necessity but is indispensable for democracy. Indispensable is not inevitable. For example, we can without epistemic hesitation say that the 'rule of law' is indispensable. But we can do without it and instead go into a jungle raj like the powerful in Bihar and Haryana so often do to keep the vulnerable under their thumb. Using the universal as indispensable simply suggests that we can dispense with it only by damaging that entity within which it is entailed. It is necessary as normative scaffolding. See Javeed Alam "Ethically Speaking, What Should be the Meaning of Separation for Secularism in India" *Social Scientist*, No. 406-407, March – April 2007, for the use of indispensable in relation to its sense for social phenomena.

¹⁴ AS far as I am aware there are no words for freedom or rights with their modern connotation in pre-modern Indian languages in India. Most Indian languages, though not all, now use the word Adhikar for rights. This word now in usage is derived from the Sanskrit word adhikara, which translates as "a just claim" but one that has been earned by the performance of some duty. Through the performance of the duty 'status' is gained. Rights, on the contrary, per se inhere in the person by the sheer fact of being human. I do not earn it. Even when I am full of moral lapses, I continue to enjoy rights. Now the shift in the meaning of the word both as sense and reference is unmistakable. It now attaches to everyone by the virtue of being human. It is neither earned nor lost for any reason. If we do not have a conception of rights then we cannot have a concept of freedom. Modern notion of freedom needs indemnities and rights are those indemnities. So the word mukti, for freedom, will not do because its connotations have a heaviness of spiritual presence to be able to stand for mundane personal self-determination.

INCLUSIVE GROWTH IN INDIA: ISSUES, POLICIES AND CHALLENGES

S. Mahendra Dev*

The concept of inclusive growth is not a new or novel idea for the world in general and India in particular. Inclusive approach is a broader concept covering economic, social and cultural aspects of development. The approach of growth with equity has been followed in India since independence. We treat here 'inclusive growth' as synonymous with 'equitable development'. In this framework, there is complementarity between growth and equity. Economic growth can create opportunities for wider participation of people. On the other hand, equity is important in itself as well as for raising economic growth by harnessing physical and human resources on a broader scale.

There has been a lot of debate on the development strategies to be followed in developing countries. One of the main criticisms of globalization and economic reforms has been that they do not have 'human face' and have not achieved inclusive growth. Although economic growth has improved, bottom 40 per cent have not benefited much and inequality has not declined. In general, the international experience shows that reforms have not succeeded in Latin America and Africa in achieving equitable development. It may be noted that economic reforms *per se* may not lead to inequalities if initial conditions are good (Rao, 2009). The experience of South East and East Asia which had better initial conditions, poverty reduction and equality has been much better with economic reforms.

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The present context of inclusive growth in India relates to economic reforms started in the early 1990s. In the post-reform period, India has done well in some indicators such as economic growth, exports, balance of payments, resilience to external shocks, service sector growth, significant accumulation of foreign exchange, Information technology (IT) and stock market, improvements in telecommunications etc. In the first few years of this decade, there was a feeling that 'India was shining'. It was, however, realized that the 'feel good factor' was only in these indicators. However, exclusion continued in terms of low agriculture growth, low quality employment growth, low human development, rural-urban divides, gender and social inequalities, and regional disparities etc. Thus, social exclusion is taking place in terms of regions, social and marginal groups, women, minorities and children¹. It may be noted, however, that economic reforms *per se* may not lead to insufficient inclusive growth. Initial endowments like infrastructure and social development are important.

The immediate context for inclusive growth in India is the 2004 general elections. It was argued that the verdict in the elections was against the urban-biased economic development policies pursued earlier. The UPA government included inclusive policies in their common minimum programme. The approach paper for 11th Five Year Plan acknowledges that the economic growth has failed to be sufficiently inclusive. 11th Plan (2007-12) advocates for faster and more inclusive growth. Of course now we have the problem of financial crisis impact on economy and employment. Growth came down to less than 7percent in 2008-09 and the same is expected in 2009-10. It would adversely affect the employment and incomes. In order to come out of financial crisis also we need inclusive growth policies.

Recent high growth path of 7-9percent also highlighted the rural-urban divide, rich-poor divide, regional and social divide. Some people object to the word 'growth' in the term 'inclusive growth'. They say we are still talking about growth and not development. Anyway, whether we use 'growth' or 'development' we mean 'equitable development' when we refer to 'inclusive growth'.

According to me, there are five inter-related elements of inclusive growth: (a) Agriculture (b) Employment generation and poverty

¹ More on this see Dev (2008).

reduction; (c) Social Sector Development; (d) Reduction in regional and other disparities; (e) Protecting the environment. In this lecture, I will be discussing issues, policies and challenges in these five elements and also offer suggestions for enhancing inclusive growth.

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture plays a pivotal role in Indian economy and this sector's better performance is vital for inclusive growth. The performance at all India level shows that GDP growth in agriculture recorded the highest growth rate in the 1980s but declined in the post-reform period. Within post reform period, agriculture growth declined continuously in the 9th and 10th Plan periods. Agriculture sector has many problems. Growth decelerated from 3.5percent during 1981-97 to 2percent during 1997-2005.

Yield growth has also declined. Farmers' suicides have continued/increased in some states. Farming is becoming a non-viable activity. There are also other problems. Further scope for increase in net sown area is limited. Land degradation in the form of depletion of soil fertility, erosion and, water logging has increased. There has been decline in the surface irrigation expansion rate and reduction in ground water table. Risk and vulnerability increased. Disparities in productivity across regions and crops persisted. Long term factors like steeper decline in per capita land availability and shrinking of farm size are also responsible for the agrarian crisis.

The Steering Committee report on agriculture for 11th Plan (GOI, 2007) has identified the possible reasons for deceleration in agriculture since mid-1990s. According to the report, the major sources of agricultural growth are: public and private investment in agriculture and rural infrastructure including irrigation, technological change, diversification of agriculture and fertilizers. It looks like that the progress on all these sources slowed down in the 1990s particularly since mid-1990s (Table 1). There has been expansion only in the case of agricultural credit.

According to the report, the causes of slow down are: increase in subsidies crowding out investment in infrastructure, degradation of natural resources, failure in conservation and improvement of rain-fed land, knowledge gap with existing technology, low market infrastructure and too much regulation, institutions not geared to help

women farmers, imperfections in land market and plight of small farmers.

TABLE 1
Trend growth rate in area, input use, credit and capital stock in agriculture during 1980-81 to 2005-06

	1980-81 to 1990-91	1990-91 to 1996-97	1996-97 to 2005-06
Technology	3.3	2.8	0.0
Public Invest.	3.9	1.9	1.4
Private Invest.	0.6	2.2	1.2
Irrigated Area	2.3	2.6	0.6
Area under Fruits and vegetables	5.6	5.6	2.7
NPK Use	8.2	2.5	2.3
Credit	3.7	7.5	14.4

Source: GOI, 2007

There has been some revival in agriculture in recent years. Agricultural growth was more than 4percent during 2003-04 to 2007-08. The total food grains production for the year 2008-09 is estimated at 233.88 million tonnes and stands out as record production ever achieved in India and the country has high buffer stocks of 55 million tonnes in May 2009. There were significant exports in cotton, rice and sugar. Cotton crop experienced a revolution due to adoption of BT cotton. Production of cotton increased from 99.97 lakh bales in 2000-01 to 258.84 lakh bales in 2007-08. There has been some increase in high value agriculture. Some of the lagging regions like Bihar showed relatively high growth in recent years. Similarly, Gujarat recorded high growth of 9percent per annum during 2001-02 to 2007-08 (see Gulati, 2009).

There has been demand problem in the economy due to financial crisis. However, rural demand was higher due to increase in purchasing power due to several factors: increase in minimum support prices, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS), loan waiver scheme and higher agricultural growth in recent years. In the year 2008-09, however, agricultural growth was

only 1.6percent. There is also a concern in 2009-10 due to drought conditions in several parts of the country.

How to Achieve Goals of Agricultural Development?

There are three goals of agricultural development. These are (a) achieve 4percent growth in agriculture and raise incomes by increasing productivity (land, labor), diversification to high value agri. and rural non-farm by maintaining food security; (b) sharing growth (equity) by focusing on small and marginal farmers, lagging regions, women etc. Share of women is increasing in agriculture. On lagging regions, focus on Eastern India and other rain fed areas; (c) third is to maintain sustainability of agriculture by focusing on environmental concerns.

What are the policies needed to achieve the above goals? The supply and demand side constraints have to be removed to raise overall growth in agriculture. It may be noted that more than 80percent of India's farmers belong to the categories of small and marginal farmers with an area share of more than 40percent. The support systems and policy changes have to be tuned in such a way that they improve the productivity and incomes of the small and marginal farmers. National Commission on Enterprises for Unorganized Sector (NCEUS, 2008) suggests for special programmes for small and marginal farmers. However, the Approach Paper for 11th Five Year Plan indicates that the entire agriculture sector is in crisis and not limited to small and marginal farmers. Also second 'green revolution' should focus more on dry land areas. Simultaneously, the domestic reforms have to be undertaken in certain areas to improve growth and compete in globalised world.

Investment in Agriculture

Rise in public and private investment is crucial for enhancing agricultural growth. Several studies have shown that public investment in rural infrastructure like roads, irrigation is more important than other factors. Fortunately, gross capital formation in agriculture has increased from 12percent of agricultural GDP in 2004-05 to 14.2percent of GDP in 2007-08 (Table 2). Public sector investment has increased significantly during this period. However, we need 16

percent of investment as per cent of agriculture GDP in order to get 4 percent growth in agriculture. In this context, the announcement of *Bharat Nirman* programme in 2005 by the Government of India in order to improve agriculture and rural infrastructure is in the right direction. However, the pace of this programme has to be improved.

TABLE 2
Gross Capital Formation in Agriculture

Year	Agriculture & Allied Activities (in Rs. Crores at 1999-2000 prices)		GCF/GDF in agri.& allied (percent)
	Gross capital formation (GCF)	Gross Domestic Product (GDP)	
2004-05	57849	482446	12.0
2005-06	66065	511013	12.9
2006-07	73285	531315	13.8
2007-08	79328	557122	14.2

Source: *Economic Survey, 2008-09*

Land Issues

Some argue that small size of farm is responsible for low profitability of agriculture. Chinese and the experience of other East Asian countries show that it is not a constraint. On land market, the Report of the Steering Committee recommended the following. "Small farmers should be assisted to buy land through the provision of institutional credit, on a long term basis, at a low rate of interest and by reducing stamp duty. At the same time, they should be enabled to enlarge their operational holdings by liberalizing the land lease market. The two major elements of such a reform are: security of tenure for tenants during the period of contract; and the right of the land owner to resume land after the period of contract is over" (GOI, 2007). Basically, we have to ensure land leasing, create conditions including credit, whereby the poor can access land from those who wish to leave agriculture.

In order to improve the incomes of marginal and small farmers, there is a talk that we should promote cooperative farming. Andhra Pradesh has some experiences in cooperative farming particularly in the case of women. There are some emerging land issues such as

increase in demand for land for non-agricultural purposes including special economic zones, displacement of farmers, tribals and others due to development projects. There is a need for careful land acquisition. Land alienation is a serious problem in tribal areas.

Research and Extension

The yield growth for many crops has declined in the 1990s. Technology plays an important role in improving the yields. The National Commission on Farmers also indicates that there is a large knowledge gap between the yields in research stations and actual yields in farmers' fields. There seems to be a technology fatigue in Indian agriculture. The yield gaps given by the Planning Commission (GOI, 2007a) are the following.

The 2003-05 data show very large yield gaps: Wheat: 6percent (Punjab) to 84percent (M.P.); Rice: Over 100percent in Assam, Bihar, Chattisgarh and UP; Maize: 7percent (Gujarat) to 300percent (Assam); Jowar: 13percent (M.P.) to 200percent (Karnataka); Mustard: 5percent (Haryana) to 150percent (Chattisgarh); Soybean: 7percent (Rajasthan) to 185percent (Karnataka); Sugarcane: 16percent (A.P.) to 167percent (M.P.).

A fresh look at the priorities of Indian agricultural research system is necessary in light of emerging prospects. There is only marginal increase in the funds for research in the recent budgets. Of course states have to take a lead in research and extension. It is known that India spends only 0.5 per cent of GDP on agricultural research as compared to more than 1 per cent by other developing countries. There is considerable potential for raising the effectiveness of these outlays by reordering the priorities in agricultural research and redefining the relative roles of public and private sectors in research and extension.

There is a need to shift away from individual crop-oriented research focused essentially on irrigated areas towards research on crops and cropping systems in the dry lands, hills, tribal and other marginal areas (see Swaminathan, 2007). Dry land technology has to be improved. In view of high variability in agro-climatic conditions in such unfavourable areas, research has to become increasingly location-specific with greater participation or interaction with farmers. Horticulture crops that are land-saving and water-saving should be encouraged in dry land areas. Research has to be improved on

horticulture crops. Progress in post-harvest technology is essential to promote value addition through the growth of agro-processing industry. Private sector participation in agricultural research, extension and marketing is becoming increasingly important especially with the advent of biotechnology and protection being given to intellectual property. However, private sector participation tends to be limited to profitable crops and enterprises undertaken by resource rich farmers in well endowed regions. Moreover, private sector is not interested in research for better techniques of soil and water management, rain fed agriculture, cropping systems, environmental impact and long term sustainability. Therefore, the public sector research has to increasingly address the problems facing the resource-poor farmers in the less endowed regions. The new agricultural technologies in the horizon are largely biotechnologies. Effective research is needed to have biotechnologies suitable to different locations in India. Similarly, there is a need to strengthen extension. The returns to investment on research and extension will be much higher on agricultural growth as compared to other investments.

Land and Water Management

The decline in productivity growth is attributed, *inter alia*, to deterioration in soil quality and water shortages. Therefore, land and water management should be given *number one priority*. Water is the leading input in agriculture. Development of irrigation and water management are crucial for raising levels of living in rural areas². Both investment and efficiency in use of water are needed. Investment in irrigation, watershed development and, water conservation by the community are needed under water management.

Credit

According to the expert group on Financial Inclusion (GOI, 2008) only 27percent of farmers have access to institutional credit. It is true that there have been some improvements in flow of farm credit in recent years. However, the Government has to be sensitive to the *four distributional aspects of agricultural credit*. These are: (a) not much

² On land and water management, see Vaidyanathan (2006)

improvement in the share of small and marginal farmers; (b) decline in credit-deposit (CD) ratios of rural and semi-urban branches; (c) increase in the share of indirect credit in total agricultural credit and; (d) significant regional inequalities in credit.

Diversification to Hi-value Agriculture by Maintaining Food Security

There has been diversification of Indian diets away from food grains to high value products like milk and meat products and vegetables and fruits. The increasing middle-class due to rapid urbanization, increasing per-capita income, increased participation of women in urban jobs and impact of globalization has been largely responsible for the diet diversification in India (Pingali, 2006). Hi-value products have caught the fancy of the expanding middle class and the result is visible in the growing demand for hi-value processed products. There is growing demand for non-food grain items in India. The expenditure elasticity for non-cereal food items is still quite high in India. It is thrice as high when compared to cereals in the rural areas and over ten times as high in urban areas. Per capita consumption of fruits and vegetables showed the highest growth followed by edible oils. Diversification to high value crops and allied activities is one of the important sources for raising agricultural growth. Since risk is high for diversification, necessary support in infrastructure and marketing are needed. Price policy should also encourage diversification. However, diversification should not be at the cost of food grains and other food crops. Efforts should be continued to improve the yields of food crops.

The Government wants to have second 'green revolution' by diversifying agriculture in crop sector and allied activities. Diversification is unlikely to be a feasible strategy all over the country if it is restricted only to agriculture related activities like shift from cereals to horticulture crops. The true benefit of diversification will come if more emphasis is given on allied activities like animal husbandry and fisheries. The livestock sector contributes to 5.4percent to GDP and 22.7percent to total output from agriculture sector. Value of milk group (Rs. 103804 crore) is more compared to paddy (Rs.73965 crore) and wheat (Rs.43816 crore). Rural women play a significant role in animal husbandry and are directly involved in major operations like feeding, breeding, management and health care. As the ownership of livestock is more evenly distributed with landless

labourers, and marginal farmers, the progress in this sector will result in a more balanced development of the rural economy, particularly in the reduction of poverty ratio.

Marketing

For small and marginal farmers, marketing of their products is main problem apart from credit and extension. The contract farming arrangements are particularly useful in developing countries where small-scale agriculture is widespread. The small and marginal farmers have problems in getting inputs, credit, extension and marketing. The services provided by the contract farming companies would thus be useful for small-scale agriculture. In recent years, there has been some form of contract arrangements in several agricultural crops such as tomatoes, potatoes, chillies, gherkin, baby corn, rose, onions, cotton, wheat, basmati rice, groundnut, flowers, and medicinal plants. The contract farming arrangements have to be strengthened in order to help the small farmers. There is a silent revolution in institutions regarding non-cereal foods. New production-market linkages in the food supply chain are: spot or open market transactions, agricultural co-operatives and contract farming (Joshi and Gulati, 2003).

The contract farming is spreading throughout India for several crops in states like Andhra Pradesh (Dev and Rao, 2005), Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Punjab and Maharashtra. The contract farming arrangements are particularly useful in developing countries where small-scale agriculture is widespread. From the farmers' perspective, there are risks of market failure and production problems while growing new crops. The sponsoring companies may be unreliable, may exploit a monopoly position, and/or have inefficient management and marketing problems that could result in manipulation of quota and non-fulfillment of commitments. Contract farming in India is neither backed up by law nor by an efficient legal system. This is the single most constraint to widespread use of contract farming in India. The legal system can be improved with legislative measures like the model contract and code of practice, registration of contracts with marketing committees and tribunals for dispute resolutions.

Most important problem for the farmers is output price fluctuations. There is a big gap between producer prices and consumer prices. For example, some times farmers get 50 paise per

Kg. of tomatoes while the consumers pay Rs.15 in urban areas. In order to protect farmers from national and international price volatility, price stabilization fund is needed. There are different models for marketing collectively by the small and marginal farmers. These are: self help group model, co-operative model, small producer co-operatives and contract farming. *Apni Mandi* in Punjab, *Rythu Bazars* in Andhra Pradesh, dairy co-operatives are some of the successful cases in marketing. The real challenge lies in organising the small and marginal farmers for marketing and linking them to high value agriculture.

Regional Disparities in agriculture

Growth rates in agriculture SDP were high for many states during the period 1984/85 to 1995/96. However, growth rates decelerated in all the states except in Bihar during the period 1995/96 to 2004/05 (GOI, 2007)³. The deceleration is the highest in the states with greater proportion of rain-fed areas (Gujarat, Rajasthan, M.P., Karnataka and Maharashtra). Agriculture growth in these states was less than one per cent per annum in the decade 1995/96 to 2004/05. *Recent experience, however, shows that Gujarat recorded the highest growth of around 9 per cent during 2000/01 to 2007/08* (Gulati, 2009). During this period, six states viz., Gujarat, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Bihar recoded more than 4percent growth per annum. Public investment in infrastructure like irrigation, power, roads, watersheds, check dams, technology like BT cotton and diversification in agriculture played crucial roles in raising agricultural growth in Gujarat. Other states can learn from the experience of Gujarat. *There is a need to shift rice cultivation to Eastern region from Punjab and Haryana for growth, equity and environment regions.*

De-risking agriculture

One of the differences between 'green revolution' benefits in the 1960s and 1970s and the present 'second green revolution' plan is that the risk is higher in the latter approach as it has to concentrate more

³ Also see Bhalla (2006)

on dry land areas apart from the problems in irrigated areas. Crop failures and distress sales are increasing.

Agriculture has two types of risks: Yield risk and price risk. Crop insurance is important for taking care of yield risk. Since major cultivated area is dependent on rainfall, crop insurance is important for farmers. In place of the Comprehensive Crop Insurance Scheme (CCIS), Government introduced a new scheme entitled 'National Agricultural Insurance Scheme' (NAIS) from Rabi 1999-2000 season. Field surveys also show that the insurance schemes are largely ineffective although some farmers got the benefits (Vyas and Singh, 2005).

There are some proposals that insurance based on rainfall should be considered instead of yields. Area based rainfall index insurance has some attractive features such as less adverse selection, less administrative costs, potential for a secondary market, can be sold non-farmers, can be linked to microfinance and can clear the way for innovation in mutual insurance (Hazell and Skees, 2006).

For taking care of price risks, futures markets are advocated. It is not; however, clear whether farmers are benefiting from futures markets. It looks like that there is a disconnect between future's markets and the farmers. The argument in favour of futures markets is that farmers in all other countries are benefiting from these markets. Indian farmers should not be denied this facility of futures markets.

It may be noted that de-risking agriculture through investments in infrastructure, land and water management and technology are important than relying on curative approaches through crop insurance.

To conclude, there are six deficits in Indian agriculture. These are: (a) investment, credit and Infrastructure deficit; (b) research and extension (technology) deficit; (c) market deficit; (d) diversification deficit; (e) institutions deficit and; (f) education/skill deficit

There are many domestic and external trade liberalization challenges and small farmers can respond and benefit from the challenges. Apart from high growth, efficiency (cost reduction) is also needed in globalized world. India can benefit from international trade if developed countries reduce their subsidies.

Ultimately appropriate domestic and external policies depend on political will at both central and state levels⁴. Deficiency in agriculture and rural infrastructure is biggest problem for agricultural development. There is a need for massive increase in outlays for agriculture and rural infrastructure by simultaneously improving the delivery systems. Trilemma of keeping input prices low, farm level prices high and consumer prices low has always been a challenge for policy makers. 'Business as usual approach' may not help revival of agriculture. Declining profitability in Indian agriculture has to be reversed. The government is thinking of big push to education in 11th Five Year Plan. Such a big push is needed for agriculture. Given the short run and structural long term problems in agriculture, the government should give large push to core issues like public investment in infrastructure, land and water management including rain water conservation and watershed development, research and extension, price stabilization etc. to make cultivation viable and profitable. There is a need to concentrate on delivery systems also. India's large numbers of farmers and poor can benefit if there are right policies and effective implementation.

POVERTY, RIGHT TO FOOD AND EMPLOYMENT

Poverty also includes inter related areas of food security and employment. Therefore, we examine in this section issues and challenges in these inter-related topics.

Poverty and Inequality

The official estimates show that income poverty declined from 55percent in the early 1970s to 28percent in 2004-05. Although there has been progress in decline still more than 300 million below poverty line. Apart from other factors, increase in inequality seems to have slowed down the rate of reduction in the post-reform period. However, changes in two sub-periods of post-reform period are interesting. The extent of decline in the second period (1999-05) seems to be higher than the first period (1993-00) of the post-reform period. This result is surprising given that the second period witnessed the lowest growth in agriculture. Factors such as low relative food prices,

⁴ Alagh (2006)

higher growth in employment particularly in non-farm sector might have been responsible for higher reduction in poverty during 1999-05 period. This needs to be further investigated. However, there are three unambiguous conclusions. These are: (a) There is no evidence of higher rate of decline in poverty in the post-reform compared to pre-reform inspite of higher overall growth; (b) Inequality increased significantly in the post-reform compared to pre-reform; (c) Poverty is getting concentrated among some regions, some groups (SCs, STs). Higher inclusive growth that increases agriculture and rural non-farm sector growth, reduction in regional, rural-urban and social disparities is important for faster reduction in poverty. Low relative food prices seem to be an important variable that reduces income poverty. In this context, recent increase in food prices is a concern for the poor and very poor. There is also a need for focused intervention on the 115 million hard core poor.

There is a need to revise the poverty line by including expenditures on education and health. One of the criticisms of the official poverty line is that it does not capture the cost of basic necessities, particularly non-food components such as health and education. This issue gains importance due to an increase in household private expenditure on education and health services in recent years. Dev and Ravi (2008) estimate poverty ratios at the all India level and for the states in 2004-05 by including the minimum private expenditure on health and education. The estimated poverty ratios are substantially higher than the official poverty ratios. Total poverty rose from 27.5 to 35.8 per cent – an increase of 8.3 percentage points due to the inclusion of the minimum level of private expenditure on health and education. Expert Group appointed by the Planning Commission is expected to come out with new numbers on poverty shortly.

Right to Food

It is being increasingly recognized that rights approach would be useful to achieve food and nutritional security in the country. Rights approach puts pressures on public action and would lead to effective implementation of the policies and programmes⁵. Due to its enormous importance, we deal here with right to food and nutrition. Right to

⁵ Right to food is part of right to development. See Sengupta (2000).

food can be analyzed in terms of availability, accessibility and adequacy (Dev, 2003)⁶. The progress on food and nutrition security indicates that there are serious concerns regarding food access and malnutrition. It is extremely serious among women and children. Dev (2008) examined two programmes viz., PDS and child nutrition schemes to illustrate how rights approach can improve the effectiveness of these schemes. Basically we have to go beyond supply side and focus on demand side. Social pressures are needed for public action. Better monitoring systems have to be developed at Central, state, district and village levels to realize right to food. Justiciability is one aspect of right to food. In this context, recent Supreme Court Orders and the Right to Food to campaign are in the right direction. However, one (particularly the poor) can not go to court every time right to food is violated. It is the responsibility of citizens and NGOs to organize campaigns for better functioning of the programmes. Public accountability is crucial for the success of right to food.

Nutrition Security

The Presidential address to Parliament and the budget 2009 indicate that the Government would enact a law that will provide a statutory basis for a framework which assures food security for all. According to this proposed law, every family below the poverty line in rural as well as urban areas will be entitled by law, to 25 kilograms of rice or wheat per month at Rs. 3 per kilogram. It is felt that the statutory guarantee to food with fixed entitlements to the poor would be an important step in the direction of ensuring food and nutritional security of the country. It is argued here that right to food in terms of providing food and nutritional security to all is a much broader concept than the proposed national food security Act of providing 25 kgs of food grains at Rs.3. Many things have to be included in order to have genuine 'right to food. India is signatory to many international treaties and Indian Constitution also indirectly refers to right to food.

At the national and international levels it is recognized that the ultimate objective of the right to food is the achievement of nutritional well being of adults and children. Thus, the right to food needs to be understood in a much broader sense as the right to adequate food and

⁶ Also see Gaiha (2003) and Dreze (2004).

nutrition. In India it is known that child malnutrition (weight for age) has declined only marginally from 47percent in 1998-99 to 46percent in 2005-06. On 15th August, 2008, The Prime Minister of India called malnutrition situation in India as 'national shame'. It is known that calorie intake is only one of the determinants of malnutrition. Therefore, giving food grains at subsidized prices would lead to only partial fulfillment of food and nutritional security⁷.

Malnutrition in India in particular and South Asia in general is much higher than that of Sub-Saharan Africa. This 'South Asian Enigma' can be partly explained with women's agency. Women in South Asia tend to have lower status and less decision-making power than women in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, women have less ability to take care of their own and their children's health and nutrition including low birth weight and poor child feeding behaviors in the first twelve months of life. As shown by NFHS III data, there is a strong association between child nutrition and women's health/well being. Women's and child specific interventions can reduce malnutrition. Measures like rise in child and maternal immunization, antenatal care coverage, nutritional supplementation (including breast feeding) and home based neo-natal services bring about significant reduction in both infant mortality and child malnutrition. In other words, *basic health services* for women and children have to be improved. Malnutrition can be reduced by enhancing women's health, promoting gender equality and, empowerment of women including female education.

The under nutrition in India across states varies from 21percent in Mizoram to 60percent in Madhya Pradesh in 2005-06. Under nutrition is relatively low in Kerala, Goa and North Eastern States. Women's health, education, empowerment played important role for the lower malnutrition in these States. In general, gender equality and the well-being of children go hand in hand. The rights of women and children are mutually reinforcing. Apart from these factors, hygiene, sanitation and clean drinking water play important part since sick children are not able to absorb essential nutrients.

India has government programmes such as TPDS including AAY, nutrition programmes like mid-day meals, ICDS to improve food and nutrition security. Similarly, there is a need for improvement in health

⁷ On nutritional security, see Radhakrishna (2002)

services, empowerment programmes for women, programmes on sanitation, drinking water and hygiene. The effectiveness of these programs has to be increased in order to realize right to food. One of the major problems of TPDS is corruption and lack of public accountability. There are large scale exclusion and inclusion errors in TPDS. It may be noted that accountability is one of the important components of the principles involved in rights perspective. On large exclusion errors, the report of the Commissioner appointed by the Supreme Court says that who are poor and at risk of exclusion given the extent of misidentification, should get universal coverage under AAY/BPL. Regarding ICDS, in spite of its expansion in the last three decades, the impact on child nutrition and protecting the rights of the children is quite limited. Findings of FOCUS (Focus on children under Six) survey conducted in May-June 2004 in six states brings out some of the problems and regional disparities in the working of ICDS. Tamil Nadu scores over Northern states in infrastructure, quality of pre-school education, immunization rates, mother's perceptions and, quality of anganwadi workers. These things have to be improved in other states along with focus on 0-3 age children.

International experience also shows that effective implementation of direct programmes have improved food and nutrition security. Thailand is considered as one of the most outstanding success stories of reducing child malnutrition in the post-1970s. The country launched large focused programmes on nutrition in 1977. The child malnutrition declined from 51percent in 1979-82 to 17percent in 1991. The success is attributable more to the direct nutritional programs by the govt. than only to rapid economic growth.

The practical implications of rights approach is that wherever possible legal sanctity can be achieved for realizing right to food. Demand based approach like social mobilization, public action is important here. Women's economic and social empowerment not only improves intra-household food distribution and health related matters but also improves the working of food and nutrition programmes.

Social Safety Nets

In order to alleviate poverty, India has adopted a holistic approach of combining pro-poor growth policies with directly targeted anti-poverty programmes. The latter is also termed as safety nets in the literature on poverty. The safety nets are basically non-contributory

targeted transfer programmes to the poor and vulnerable groups. If we leave everything to market and growth, we cannot take care of risk and inequality. Certain redistributive policies can be good for growth. Presence of safety nets can maintain acceptable minimum floor for social cohesion and can prevent irreversible losses of human capital in hard times. The state has a role in helping the poor in times of insecurity and in ensuring minimum levels of provision to those unable to gain from the growth process. The poor in India suffer on account of several risks induced by the weather, technology, life cycle events and market forces. In order to reduce risks and achieve other benefits, India has introduced several safety net or anti-poverty programmes.

Major social safety net programmes in India are: self employment programmes, wage employment programmes, targeted public distribution system, nutrition programmes for children, old age pensions and maternity benefits.

The group approach to self employment has worked as compared to individual approach. So far (upto March 2009), 34 lakh self help groups have been formed in the country. There are two important models in the country. One is Kerala's *Kudumbasree Programme* which improved empowerment and reduced poverty. Second one is Andhra Pradesh model. The government of Andhra Pradesh is implementing a statewide rural poverty eradication programme based on social mobilization and empowerment of rural poor women. This programme is popularly known as 'Indira Kranti Pathakam'. It is relatively successful in Andhra Pradesh. Social and economic empowerment of women improved.

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)

The NREGA was notified in September, 2005. The objective is to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of *guaranteed wage employment* in a financial year to every household. The primary objective is employment creation. The auxiliary objective is regenerating natural resource base and creating productive assets. Third one which is process objective is to strengthen grass root democracy by infusing transparency and accountability in governance. First time, a rights based approach for employment throughout India is introduced. *This is the largest ever public employment programme visualised in human history.* One of the important things in the programme is to have transparency and accountability. Gram Sabhas conduct social audits of

all works taken up within Gram Panchayat. Social audit includes scrutinizing and verifying the authenticity of all records and procedures of the programme and expenditure. Social audit of all works in gram panchayat area is conducted by the Gram Sabha. The performance of NREGS is uneven. The problems and challenges where it is not working are the following: (a) awareness problems among workers; (b) implementation and administration problems; (c) monitoring and evaluation problems; (d) Lack of professionals and capacity building at various levels particularly at panchayat level.

However, most evaluations-official and non-official show that implementation has been more effective than any of its predecessor schemes. In particular, the leakages have been reduced significantly in many places. Significant rise in agricultural wage shows its success. In some places, migration has reduced. It created much needed relief during financial crisis even for the urban poor returning to rural areas. The 11th Five Year Plan indicates that NREGS is going to be one of the important programs for poverty reduction in India. NREGS can transform livelihoods of the poor but can also lead to revolution in *rural governance*.

Despite inefficiencies, the contribution of safety nets to the observed reduction in rural poverty has been significant although potential is much more. One can learn several lessons on safety nets based on Indian experience. These lessons are useful for effective implementation of these programmes.

A village level study in three states viz., Orissa, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh provide some interesting findings on the working of safety nets (Dev et al, 2006). The study shows that in-kind transfer programmes like PDS, ICDS, mid-day meals, free text book, free uniform are doing well in terms of awareness and participation. However, these programmes have not done well in terms of targeting effectiveness. On the other hand, cash transfers like IAY, NOAP, widow pensions show low awareness and participation rates, but the participating households are disproportionately from among the poor and, to this extent, their targeting performance is much better than for other programmes. Thus, there is inverse relationship between participation and targeting.

Regarding policy recommendations based on village studies, health risk is the most important individual risk. Currently we do not have good safety net programme to take care of this risk. There is a

need to have good health programmes. Analysis of household data showed that factors like social capital and women's empowerment play important roles in promoting participation in safety net programmes.

Employment

Expanding productive employment is central for sustained poverty reduction and food security in low income countries, as labour is the main asset for majority of the poor. India faces many challenges on employment such as quality, working poor, structure of employment, new employment mainly in informal sector, low education and skills of workers etc.

Trends in employment and unemployment based on NSS data show the following patterns.

(a) The employment trends show that after drastic decline during 1993-94 to 1999-00, work participation rates and employment growth picked up during the period 1999-00 to 2004-05. However, overall post-reform employment growth (2percent per annum during 1983 to 1993-94) was lower than the pre-reform period (1.84percent per annum during 1993-94 to 2004-05).

(b) Employment growth in registered manufacturing sector declined while the share of informal sector in total employment increased.

(c) Unemployment rate (current daily) has increased from 6.03percent in 1993-94 to 8.2percent in 2004-05

(d) There has been an increase in the share of self employed workers while the share of casual workers declined. The share of self employed in agriculture increased from 58percent in 1999-00 to 64percent in 2004-05 while increase in non-agriculture increased from 45 to 46percent only.

(e) In India, working poor is the major problem rather than unemployment per se. Poverty among workers was around 20percent in 2004-05. Casual workers have the highest incidence of poverty with 32 per cent followed by self employed with 11 per cent.

(f) There are conflicting trends regarding wages. Some studies showed increase in the growth of real wages while some others indicated lower growth in the post-reform period. Recent data,

however, show low growth in real wages for casual and regular employees particularly for females.

(g) Labour productivity growth in most of the sectors including agriculture was high in the post-reform period.

(h) Increase in the share of rural non-farm employment was higher for males as compared to females.

Mismatch between shares in GDP and Employment

There is a mismatch between growth and employment. Growth is occurring in services and industry but they are not able to absorb employment. Agriculture with 18percent absorbs 55percent of employment while services sector has share of only 25percent of employment with 54percent in GDP.

Need for rise in rural non-farm employment

Poverty can not be removed with 55percent of workers in agriculture. There is a need to promote rural non-farm sector⁸. India currently produces about 50 million tonnes of fruits and 90 million tonnes of vegetables. Only 2percent of these fruits and vegetables are processed as against 23percent in China, 78percent in Philippines, 83percent in Malaysia.

TABLE 3
Distribution of Workers by General Education Category (percent)
(above 5)

Category	Rural Males		Rural Females	
	1977-78	2004-05	1977-78	2004-05
Illiterate	55.0	33.8	88.1	66.4
Literate & primary	30.8	29.4	9.1	18.4
Middle	8.5	18.1	1.6	8.7
Secondary & higher education.	4.7	13.9	1.0	5.0
Graduate & above	1.0	3.8	0.2	0.9
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

⁸ On rural non-farm sector, see Chadha (2003)

Source: NSS data on employment and unemployment

Half of those engaged in agriculture are still illiterate and just 5 percent have completed higher secondary education. Even in 2004-05, around 60 percent of rural male workers and 85 percent of rural female workers are either illiterate or have been educated up to primary level (Table 3). In other words, education and skills are constraints for diversification. If India wants to benefit from demographic dividend, education and skills of workers has to be improved.

India can learn from China which experienced a structural transformation in the last three decades. In China, the state's role has been decisive in building up the physical and social infrastructure (including land reforms). India should learn from China on reforms in agricultural growth, rural non-farm employment, public investment and human development. The impact of growth on poverty reduction is quite significant (Rao, 2005). China started with agricultural reforms. Agricultural growth was quite high. The economic and institutional reforms in the whole economy created space for rural non-farm sector (TVEs and others). India leap forged from agriculture to services without focusing on manufacturing sector. The share of employment in manufacturing in Malaysia is 50 percent, in Korea 62 percent, in China 31 percent. On the other hand, the share of employment in manufacturing in India is only 12 percent. Diversification towards rural non-form sector in China is one of the important factors responsible for rural poverty reduction (poverty 3 percent in China). This was partly due to agricultural productivity.

There has been a lot of debate on the impact of labour market reforms on employment in the economy. The Indian experience in the post-reform period shows that the Indian industry has been adjusting its work force more after liberalization. India can also go for labour flexibility by simultaneously providing social security to its vast number of workers.

Social Security for Unorganized Sector

There is a dualism in Indian economy divided into formal and informal sectors. India has about 456 million workers in 2004-05⁹.

⁹ On informal sector from inclusive development perspective, see Kannan (2008)

Around 92 percent of those employed are informal workers. They suffer from two sets of problems: (a) capability deprivation in terms of lack of basic facilities like food, education, health and housing; (b) the second one is adversity, no fallback mechanism to meet contingencies such as ill health, accident, death and old age.

The UPA government constituted National Commission on Enterprises for Unorganized Sector (NCEUS) to examine the problems faced by unorganized sector enterprises and workers and suggest solutions to address them. For decent employment and as a national floor, the Commission advocated three pronged strategy: (a) Minimum level of social security (b) Conditions of work (c) promotion of livelihood.

The minimum level of social security has three major components: (a) accident or death of the registered worker; (b) health cover to take care of sickness of the workers and their family members, maternity benefits to the spouse or self; (c) old age pension for those belonging to the poor households and provident fund to those outside this segment. Parliament has accepted a diluted version of social security proposals of NCEUS.

The second Bill which, deals with conditions of work and livelihood promotion addresses the issues relating to providing a basic minimum standard on hours of work, payment of minimum wages, bonded labour and child labour. The Bill also recognizes some minimum entitlements of the workers such as the right to organize, non discrimination in the payment of wages and conditions of work, safety at work place and absence of sexual harassment.

NCEUS also advocates programmes and policies for skill formation for the informal workers, strengthening NREGS and extending to urban areas, special programmes for marginal and small farmers, development of micro enterprises with a focus on credit, technology and development of clusters and growth poles.

Several social security programmes, introduced by Central and State Governments and NGOs cover only a small proportion of the unorganised workers. National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme is one of the important components of social security

The experience of India in protective programmes in the last few decades shows that there have been initiatives at three levels: Central Government, State Governments and NGOs. However, there has been unevenness in terms of coverage of states as well as workers. Kerala

tops the list with a lot of welfare funds followed by Tamil Nadu. Many NGOs are also involved in providing a measure of protective social security to workers and their families in the unorganised sector. Although their coverage is low, NGOs have a variety of best practices through people's participation. Yasaswini Health Insurance Scheme in Karnataka is an example of successful case of such partnership.

The report of the NCEUS containing the bill on social security raised several issues regarding finance, benefits and implementation of the scheme. Health insurance is one of the major controversial subjects. These challenges have to be sorted out before implementing the scheme. The major challenge is to extend social security to around 400 million workers covering all states and all groups of workers.

SOCIAL SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

This Section looks at the performance, issues and policies relating to social sector or human development. It also examines whether India can achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In spite of significant achievements, the levels of human development are much lower than China and other East Asian countries and countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam. India's rank in human development index is 127¹⁰.

The performance of social sector development indicates that there are basically six problems with the sector. These are: (a) low levels of human development indicators; (b) slow progress in these indicators; (c) significant regional, social and gender disparities; (d) slow growth in public expenditures in social sector particularly in the post-reform period; (e) poor quality delivery systems in both health and education; (f) privatization of health and education services.

In the 1990s, the achievements in literacy and primary education were significant. On the other hand, the achievements in health sector were not satisfactory. Illiteracy and low health status are high in rural areas and among socially disadvantaged sections like SCs and STs. There are also significant inter-state disparities in education and health indicators.

¹⁰ On economic growth and social development, see Rangarajan (2009)

Social sector expenditure in India in the 1990s is low, as compared to other developing countries, and certainly as compared to East Asian countries, and it is low as compared to the UNDP recommended ratios. It is not always low as compared to what India spent in the 1980s; that depends on the particular indicator chosen to assess social expenditure trends. But what is clear is that the pace of growth in social sector expenditure has slowed down in the post-reform period – and that this is true with regard to all three indicators. The States have done much worse than the Centre. Since 2004-05, there has been some increase in social sector expenditures.

Education

There have been significant achievements in education. In spite of the achievements, India has the largest number of illiterates and low levels of schooling to large number of population. Recently right to education bill was introduced in Parliament to guarantee universal education to the children in 6-14 age group. However, there are a number of challenges in attaining the objective of universal primary and secondary education. Quality of schooling is a major concern, especially in government schools in the rural areas. While several interventions as part of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Education for All) are in place, their successes are contingent upon various factors like capacities, and institutions. There are significant disparities in educational development in terms of regional, socio-economic groups and gender that need attention. Public and private participation in education and resultant 'dualism' is a major challenge. Gross enrolment ratio for higher education is 11percent in India as compared to world average of 25percent. The government policy for all levels of education is to fulfill the objectives of quantity, quality and access.

Health

In the 10th and 11th Five Year Plans, several policies have been introduced to raise the levels of health. The Common Minimum Programme of UPA government also gives emphasis to social sector. In the case of health, National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) is supposed to improve health services in rural areas. As Kumar (2005) says, the success of NRHM depends on three factors: adequate finances, dedicated and well trained health workers and improving

the accountability and efficiency of health services. Community health services and public-private partnerships in health should be encouraged to expand health services.

There are five problems in health. These are: (1) India's health record absolutely and relatively is poor compared to China, Bangladesh; (2) Equity and quality considerations are neglected; regional, rural-urban, social groups; (3) Progress and improvement in health has been slow ; (4) There have been glaring failures in the management and delivery of quality health care; most of the government operated rural health sub-centres and primary health care centres are on the verge of total collapse; growth in large private sector; Amartya Sen says that there is 'Quackery and crookery' in health sector; (5) India's health sector is grossly underfunded. There are only four countries of the world Nigeria, Sudan, Indonesia and Myanmar which spend less than India

The progress on millennium development goals (MDGs) shows that if India follows the current rate of progress (business as usual scenario), it can not achieve millennium development goals in crucial indicators of human development like health and education and sanitation. It may achieve MDG in case of poverty. But, in key indicators like infant mortality, maternal mortality and malnutrition India can not achieve MDGs at current rate of progress.

In order to improve human development indicators and attain MDGs, more efforts are needed than now. There is a need to concentrate on backward regions, social disadvantaged groups and women. Sector specific interventions and institutions are needed for better delivery systems particularly in rural areas. To achieve this, rights based approach is useful. Education and health are important for their own sake and for improving rural economic growth. Apart from the supply side factors like infrastructure for education and health, there is a need to focus on demand side for better accountability. Social pressures are needed for public action. Better monitoring systems have to be developed at Central, state, district and village levels for better performance. It is the responsibility of citizens and NGOs to organize campaigns for better functioning of the programmes on education and health. Involvement of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) will improve the participation of people.

India can learn lessons from the experience of Bangladesh in raising the levels of human development. Bangladesh is looking

beyond MDGs while India is struggling to achieve some of the MDGs. Large NGO's presence is responsible for 'creative tensions' and upward and downward accountability. Institutional delivery systems are better because of this accountability. Female secondary education due to stipends to girls in secondary education also improved human development in Bangladesh.

REGIONAL AND OTHER DISPARITIES

Divides in the economy and society in India are significant. These divides are in terms of regional, social, rural-urban and gender. In some areas there are signs of improvement while in some other areas the divides are widening. Bridging these divides should be one of the priority areas for Indian Government.

Rural-urban divides

In the post-reform period, rural-urban disparities have increased. Of course inter-regional disparities are related to these divides. Development and the quality of life are improving more rapidly in urban areas than in rural areas. This is partly due to the relatively lower growth in agriculture. On the one hand, the growth of GDP is between 7-9 per cent per annum. On the other hand, the share of agriculture in GSDP has dropped below 20 per cent without any appreciable shift in the proportion of population still dependent on agriculture for livelihood. This has resulted in a large disparity in output per worker between rural and urban areas and the relative impoverishment of rural areas. The government has to take necessary steps to bridge the rural-urban divide. Basically, agriculture and the rural non-farm sector have to be developed further. The former President of India Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam has advocated implementation of the scheme 'PURA' -Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas. 'PURA' is a scheme to enhance physical, economic, knowledge, societal and electronic connectivity in rural areas. Generally, the performance of many basic services like drinking water, health, education, sanitation, electricity, transport are weak in rural areas.

Gender Divide

There are significant disparities in socio-economic development between men and women in the country. Although we have constitutional commitment to equality and rise in the emphasis on equality of women, it had only a limited impact in reducing disparity and discrimination of women. There is a need to focus on reducing the divides between males and females.

Social Inequalities

Another divide is the disparities in socio-economic development between marginalized sections (SCs & STs) and other groups. There have been various programmes and legal provisions for improving accessibility of these groups to cultivable land, education, health care and basic amenities in the context of 'inclusive development strategies'. Though there has been progress in many development indicators across the SC and ST communities in the state, they still lag behind the 'other' social groups. The gaps between social groups are becoming narrower in education. Health conditions among these communities have been improving at a very slow pace. The situation is alarming with respect to economic well-being of STs as the poverty level among the STs has, in fact, increased during the last decade or so. Moreover, landlessness is increasing among these communities, especially STs. It may be noted that without effective steps to enhance access to productive assets including land and, most importantly, employment opportunities through 'affirmative policy action', their lot can not be improved in a sustainable manner. Apart from general approach for the disadvantaged, specific measures have to be taken for the upliftment of SCs and STs.

Regional Disparities

The existence of wide inter-regional variations in a vast country like India is well recognized. All the Five Year Plans stressed the importance of balanced regional development. Plans and policies were designed to provide more investments to the relatively backward areas. In spite of these policies, regional disparities is a serious problem in India. In the post-reform period, the degree of control of Central Government declined in many areas due to deregulation in many sectors of the economy. State governments can

take more initiatives for economic development now than before. Also, the role of private sector is becoming more important as compared to the public sector. In this context, apart from central government interventions, state level policies are crucial for attracting both domestic and foreign direct investment. The role of public policy is also vital for reducing regional disparities.

The growth rate in SDP across states seems to be more uneven in the post-reform period as compared to pre-reform period. Poorer states like Bihar, Orissa, M.P. and U.P. suffer from high population growth and low economic growth. As a result, variations in per capita SDP growth are much higher than those for SDP growth. The per capita income of Bihar as ratio of Punjab was 30percent in 1993-94 but the ratio declined to 22percent in 2004-05. Female infant mortality varies from 12 in Kerala to 88 in Madhya Pradesh. Female literacy varies from 33.6percent in Bihar to 88percent in Kerala. Regional disparities increased in respect of poverty, inequality, underweight children and infant mortality. The poorer states seem to be catching up with other states in social development, particularly in education, compared to economic growth and poverty. Human development and nutritional levels are better in North Eastern States. Poverty among STs is lower in NE region as compared to STs in other regions.

Poverty is getting concentrated in a few states in India. The poor among SCs in rural areas are concentrated in Uttar Pradesh (58 per cent), Bihar and West Bengal while the poor among SCs in urban areas are concentrated in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (41 per cent). Regarding poor among STs, Bihar, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra together accounted for 75.5 per cent of the poor among STs in 2004-05.

Millennium Development Goals for many states may achieve the goal of halving poverty by 2015. On the other hand, many states may not achieve MDG in the case of malnutrition at the current rate of progress. Therefore, reduction in malnutrition is a bigger challenge than reducing poverty. Even if poverty is removed malnutrition may remain. Apart from inter-state disparities, intra-state disparities seem to be widening in poverty. This is a cause for concern because of social unrest due to disparities within states. What are the policies needed for reduction in regional disparities in economic and social development?

Important issue is that some states benefited from reforms while some others lagged behind. The answer for this issue lies partly in the initial or pre-reform level of social and economic infrastructure conducive to growth and partly in the rate of capital formation, physical as well as human, in the post-reform period. Historical factors and initial endowments explain only part of the reasons for regional disparities. The experience of different states shows that the group of some western and southern states has done better than some eastern and northern states. For example, Tamil Nadu and Southern states could do better than poorer states because of better infrastructure, fiscal management, investment in social sector and institutions including governance.

However, central government role is equally important in reducing regional disparities. The shares of the per capita plan outlay for the poorer states have declined in the post-reform period. The Central Government including the Planning Commission should help poorer states in getting investments for infrastructure and social sector. Mid-term Appraisal of Tenth Plan indicated some measures like Backward Regions Grant Fund to help the poorer states. It also hints at the need for revision of Gadgil formula to suit the present requirements.

For North East Region, two pronged growth strategy of creation of critical infrastructure and creation of employment opportunities is needed. Similarly, security, law and order and governance have to be improved. In farm-based economic activities, horticulture, animal husbandry, fisheries, poultry etc. are important. The region should be made attractive destination for private investment and also follow look East policy.

Finally, to improve accountability and development, there is a need to devolve more finances, functions and powers for panchayats in order to make these institutions self sustaining. Overtime decentralization would increase accountability. Governance has to be improved in less developed regions.

ENVIRONMENT

Protection of environment is an important component of sustainable inclusive growth strategy. Population growth, urbanization, development with energy intensive technologies etc. have resulted in large quantities of pollutants in the environment.

Natural resources such as water and land are limited and their per capita availability is actually diminishing because of rising population and irrational exploitation of common pool resources (GOI, 2009). The degradation of natural resources reduces the well being of people, and the poor and women suffer more, as they depend much more on natural common property resources for fuel and water, and also have fewer resources to take defensive actions. There are also new challenges for environment in the form of climate change.

Environmental concerns are among the policy priorities in Indian agriculture. Particularly degradation of land and water is alarming. Watershed development under the new guidelines, in general, has an overall positive impact on environment. However, groundwater tables are depleting at an alarming rate. The *de facto* privatization of groundwater and subsidized power supply are the main culprits. There has been a neglect of minor irrigation sources like tanks. Shortage of drinking water has accentuated and quality of water has declined over time.

An integrated approach is needed for water resources management in the country. An appropriate strategy should integrate institutional approaches with market principles. Since institutional innovation (water user associations) is already in place for canal irrigation, it is time now to implement volumetric pricing. There is a need to de-link water rights from land rights in order to ensure equity and sustainability.

Institutions like the water user associations (WUAs) and watershed committees are important for water management. In the case of land and forestry, watershed approach and Joint Forest Management are crucial for protecting the environment. The critical issue is sustainability of these programmes. Although watersheds have shown positive economic impact, the social issues are missing. More participatory approach and involvement of women would lead to sustainability of watershed development approach. In the case of JFM, the focus is more on high income areas like timber. Low value products constituting sources of livelihoods for the poor have low priority. Customary rights of the tribals on *podu* (shifting cultivation) have to be recognised.

Awareness and involvement of the civil society is a precondition for checking environmental degradation. Environmental movements would have a discerning impact in this regard.

Another concern is the land degradation due to excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides. Government has programmes such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM) and Integrated Nutrient Management (INM). Keeping in view the ill effects of pesticides and also National Policy on Agriculture, Integrated Pest Management Approach (IPM) approach has been adopted as a cardinal principle and main plank of plant protection in the country in the overall crop production programme. Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) advocates the integrated use of all sources of plant nutrients like chemical fertilizer, bio-fertilizer and locally organic manures like farm yard manure, compost, vermi-compost, green manures, edible and non-edible oil cakes to maintain soil health and its productivity. Focusing on improving soil quality should be one of the priority areas in raising agricultural growth. Organic farming is also being encouraged in the country due to demand for these products all over the world.

Climate Change, Food Security and Livelihoods

Climate change is a reality. It has impact on food security and livelihoods of the people. It is known that the greenhouse gas emissions are not reversible in the foreseeable future. The greenhouse gases we send in today may last more than 100 years. This peculiarity makes climate change problem more difficult than other policy challenges.

There are some indications that world temperatures are increased by 0.7 degree C since the advent of industrial era and the rate of increase is quickening. Many of the world's poorest people and most fragile ecological systems are already being forced to adapt to dangerous climatic change. However, beyond a threshold of 2°C the risk of large scale livelihood set backs and irreversible ecological catastrophes will increase sharply.

It is the production and consumption of developed countries that are responsible for the deterioration of the earth's ecological conditions. Since the start of industrial era few rich countries like the US and U.K. account for 7 out of 10 tonnes of CO₂. Cumulative per capita emissions are 1100 per capita for US and Britain as compared to 66 tonnes per capita per China and 23 tonnes per capita for India (UNDP, 2008).

It does not mean that developing countries should not reduce CO₂. Recently, G8 countries told developing countries to take more mitigating actions. Indian Prime Minister assured the rich countries that India will restrict its per capita emissions to the average per capita emissions of the developed world. Another thing is that the rich countries worry more about energy security (oil etc.) whereas developing countries like India worry more about food security and livelihoods.

Agriculture is part of the problem and part of the solution. Food security and livelihoods depends on sustainable agriculture in many developing countries. Climate change will worsen the living conditions of farmers, fisheries and forest-dependent people who are already vulnerable and food insecure. Hunger and malnutrition will increase. Rural communities, particularly those living in already fragile environments, face an immediate and ever-growing risk of increased crop failure, loss of livestock, and reduced availability of marine, aquaculture and forest products. More frequent and more intense extreme weather events will have adverse impacts on food availability, accessibility, stability and utilization, as well as on livelihood assets and opportunities in both rural and urban areas. Poor people will be at risk of food insecurity due to loss of assets and lack of adequate insurance coverage. Rural people's ability to cope with climate change impacts depends on the existing cultural and policy context, as well as on socio-economic factors like gender, household composition, age, and the distribution of household assets.

Mitigation in Agriculture Sector

Agricultural mitigation in developing countries can make farming more resilient to the vagaries of climate change and can also reduce hunger and poverty. But this requires massive investments and information – to change unsustainable farming methods and to train farmers in mitigation practices.

Current global funding arrangements such as the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism are not reaching farmers in poor countries, New and more flexible financing mechanisms are needed that offer incentives to farmers, including smallholders, so that they may participate in greenhouse gas emission reductions and removals. The scope of the Clean Development Mechanism, for example, could be expanded in order to include reduction of emissions from

deforestation and forest degradation, wetlands, croplands and grasslands, in order to realize the high potential for sequestering carbon in soils and above ground biomass.

Impact on India and Strategies for adaptation and mitigation

India has reasons to be concerned about climate change. Vast majority of population depends on climatic sensitive sectors like agriculture, forestry and fishery for livelihood in the country. The adverse impact of climate change in the form of declining rainfall and rising temperatures and thus the increased severity of drought and flooding, would threaten food security and livelihood in the economy.

India has prepared a document namely the National Action Plan on Climate Change. It provides a direction for changes at the national level in policy, planning and public-private partnerships but also because it lays out a global vision for modifying longer time trends for sustainable development.

The action plan deals with ideas like increasing solar energy, renewed thrust on energy efficiency, an effort to promote integrated water resource management, and a focus on restoring degraded forest lands, joint forest management committees, reduction in electricity and fertilizer subsidies etc.

11th Five Year Plan document also provides India's approach to climate change. The government's effort will be towards creating energy and carbon efficiency in public and private sectors and towards internalizing climate change concerns in development planning.

The serious consequences of climate change, including especially the consequences for India, lead naturally to the question of what should be our response. Two types of responses need to be considered. The first relates to adaptation, i.e., measures that have to be taken given the very high likelihood that climate change will occur and will have adverse effects. The second relates to mitigation, i.e., steps to be taken that might reduce the extent of climate change.

Recognizing the importance of climate change issues, the Prime Minister established a Council on Climate Change under his chairmanship in June 2007 to co-ordinate national action for assessment, adaptation, and mitigation of climate change.

An action plan for adaptation to climate change would require (i) action in the area of agricultural research to evolve varieties that can cope with likely climate changes, (ii) action to cope with likely increases in water stress, (iii) action to be able to cope with a greater frequency in natural disasters. The institutional network created at the time of preparation of India's initial National Communication to United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) exists and is currently engaged in the preparation of information on India's second National Communication.

With a share of just 4 percent of global emissions, any amount of mitigation by India will not affect climate change. A substantial commitment to reduce emissions by the major industrialized countries will be required. Nevertheless, as contribution to the global emissions reduction effort, the Eleventh Plan would focus on efforts to ensure that the emissions intensity of India's GHG continues to decline.

To conclude, climate change is a reality and would affect the poor and vulnerable and future generations. Successful adaptation coupled with mitigation holds the key to food security and livelihoods for the 21st century and beyond. International cooperation is important. Environmental objectives can only be achieved if environmental concerns are internalized in policymaking in a large number of sectors. This would require sharing of responsibility at all levels of government and across sectors with respect to monitoring of pollution, enforcement of regulations, and development of programmes for mitigation and abatement. Sustainable use of natural resources also requires community participation with a responsible role assigned to the communities for conservation.

HOW TO IMPROVE INCLUSIVE GROWTH

There is some sort of consensus now that growth should be shared by all sections of the society rather than limiting to few categories of population. This is important to reduce poverty and various types of inequalities in the economy and society. The following policies have to be followed in order to improve economic growth.

First, equity matters for development. Equity is important for its own sake and for higher growth. If we reduce personal, rural-urban and regional disparities, growth will increase. Growth and equity are

complements rather than trade-offs. The policies for growth and equity should be followed simultaneously rather than 'growth first and equity next' approach. Economic growth is important. It improves tax/GDP ratio and one can spend on agriculture and social sector. Of course, growth is necessary but not sufficient for inclusiveness.

Second, agriculture development should be given priority for more inclusive growth. As mentioned above, there are six deficits in agriculture. These are: There are six deficits in Indian agriculture. These are: (a) investment, credit and infrastructure deficit; (b) research and extension (technology) deficit; (c) market deficit; (d) diversification deficit; (e) institutions deficit including land and water management and; (f) education/skill deficit. There have been some improvements in agricultural investments in the last few years. Agricultural growth has been more than 4 per cent per annum during 2003-04 to 2007-08. This has to be sustained over time. Technology has to be given more focus than before. Land and water management should be given top priority.

Third, it should be recognized women as agents of sustained socio-economic growth and change. Gender is a cross-cutting theme and should not be confined to one department. The policies regarding women should cover all sectors of the economy and society. Agriculture is one area where women's role is very important. Similarly, the participation of women in labour market is increasing. There are significant gender disparities in indicators like education, malnutrition and infant and child mortality rates. Reduction in gender disparity in these indicators itself will achieve the relevant Millennium Development Goals. Thus, there is a need to focus on reducing the divides between males and females.

Fourth, one of the important areas for priority is enhancement of physical and social infrastructure. Greater public investment in infrastructure in rural and urban areas to create more employment is needed. Development of physical infrastructure and its quality have not been commensurate with the recent growth in aggregate output (Reddy, 2009). In other words, GDP growth is not sustainable if physical infrastructure is not improved. Government has to play major role in providing education and health care facilities. A sustained emphasis on education and health are needed in the next decade in many states for equitable development.

Fifth, macro pro-poor policies are more important than having only safety nets for poverty reduction. The macro policies such as fiscal, trade, financial, monetary policies have to be more pro-poor. The experience in several countries during the reform period shows that, public expenditure as percentage of GDP is low and declining. As a result, public investment in rural development has declined sharply in most of the Asian countries. Consequently agricultural growth slowed down in most countries in the 1990s. Average annual rate of growth of gross capital formation also slowed down in many countries. Trade liberalization has been associated with increased ratio of trade to GDP, improved export performance, and diversification towards manufactured exports. However, linkages to employment are not so well established (Palanivel, 2009). Financial sector has historically had an urban bias¹¹. On balance, the macro policies have not been pro-employment and pro-poor in the post-reform period in many developing countries including India. Therefore, there is a need to have pro-poor macro policies.

Sixth one is that structural change in economy should follow agriculture-industry-service sequence. In GDP shares, India jumped from agriculture to services without concentrating on manufacturing. Also in many South East Asian countries, there has been a shift of employment from agriculture to manufacturing. The share of employment in manufacturing in Malaysia is 50percent, in Korea 62percent, in China 31percent. On the other hand, the share of employment in manufacturing in India is only 11percent while the share of agriculture is more than 55percent. Therefore, there is a need to develop industry in order to improve employment. Jumping to services is not the solution. High agriculture growth of 4percent and industry growth of more than 10percent are needed for better structural change. In India, growth acceleration has been significant in service sectors. These include, trade, hotels, transport, communication services, financing, insurance, real estate and business services. Importance should have been given first to agriculture, manufacturing, rural infrastructure etc. in the reforms for better employment, incomes and equity. Employment (both quantity and quality) should be the focus of inclusive approach. Skill improvement and youth employment need to be the focus areas. Otherwise you can not shift people from agriculture to non-farm sector.

¹¹ On financial sector reforms see Nachne (2009)

Seventh, equality of opportunities is important. Even if we do not follow equitable distribution of assets, every one should get equal opportunity for better education and health. The Indian economy is on a high growth track. While the Indian government has implemented policies that unleashed the country's growth potential, it should also embark on a process of social transformation that ends discrimination on the basis of caste, class and gender. We also need to pay more attention to provide clean water, access to health care and high quality education to all. At national level, public action should see that states such as Bihar, M.P., Chattisghad, Jharkhand, U.P. and Orissa and the poor in other states enhance opportunities for improving education, health and incomes. A comparison of Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan in education shows that Rajasthan has done exceedingly well in the 1990s. According to a study, Andhra Pradesh may join the rank of BIMARU states in education if you go by the current progress. A sustained emphasis on education and health are needed in the next decade in many states for inclusive growth.

Eighth, South East Asian and East Asian experience shows that globalization with better initial conditions have increased employment and incomes for workers and led to equitable development. Developing countries should learn from China on agricultural growth, rural non-farm employment, public investment and human development. The impact of growth on poverty reduction is quite significant. Elements of Chinese experience such as high and labor-releasing agricultural growth, favourable income distribution through broad-based agricultural growth, availability of infrastructure, higher levels of literacy and skills, inducements for the location of enterprises in rural areas, and easy access to credit and inputs are extremely relevant for developing countries. Those who support liberalization say that China's high economic growth and impact on poverty is due to economic reforms since 1978. However, initial conditions before introduction of reforms are important. China's success is due to these better initial conditions. China introduced land reforms and invested in infrastructure, health and education before reforms. This led to high agriculture growth, better human development. In other words, reforms work better in a more egalitarian (equality) society. It may be noted that Investment rate in China is 35 to 44 percent compared to 30 percent in India. Infrastructure investment is 19 percent of GDP in China as compared to 2 percent in India in the 1990s. The foreign direct investment also

plays an important role in improving investment in China. One important debate in India relates to the impact of FDI particularly on retail chains on employment.

Ninth, development of technology is important for inclusive growth. For example, the spread of green revolution to the poorer states in India shows its potential for reducing regional disparities in development. Also, small farmers benefited from technology. This is because gains from technology are widely distributed. Therefore, stepping up agricultural growth through the use of biotechnology holds considerable prospects for reducing regional and interpersonal disparities. Similarly, the experience with information technology is equally encouraging and holds the prospect for raising productivity in agriculture and industry. There is a need to exploit the potential from these emerging technologies for equity across households and regions. There is lot of knowledge gap in agriculture. Even with existing technology, productivity can be improved.

Tenth, inclusive governance is important. The focus of reforms can now be shifted to more efficient delivery systems of public services. It has been recognized that better governance is very important for inclusive development. This is important for better implementation of sectoral policies and poverty alleviation programmes. Social mobilization, community participation and decentralized approach are needed. It may, however, be noted that governance has to be contextualized in relation to socio-economic environment. Appropriate institutions are needed for better implementation of policies and programmes. For example, rural institutions in areas like land, water, marketing of agricultural and non-agricultural products, credit, technology and infrastructure are needed for better governance. Similarly, people's centric programmes and institutions are needed for poverty alleviation. Collective approach is gaining importance in the country. Self help group approach for livelihoods is relatively successful. For example, small and marginal farmers can get better services if they are organized through collectives like self help groups or cooperatives.

Eleventh, all over the world it is recognized that decentralization in terms of transferring power to local councils is important for development. For many state governments in India, decentralization means devolution of power from Centre to states. The experience of decentralization in terms of greater devolution of functions, finances and powers to PRIs and urban local bodies in many states has not

been satisfactory. The PRIs have to be strengthened for achieving growth with equity.

Twelfth is the need to have economic reforms in relation to socio-economic environment. Calibrated approach is needed (Reddy, 2009). The rationale for the ongoing economic reforms in India, their consequences and prospects has generally been discussed in the parlance of economics. However, these 'economic' phenomena represent largely a superstructure, which is profoundly influenced by the underlying socio-political factors. The economic reforms may not be sustainable if the burden falls disproportionately on the poorer sections of the population. Therefore, there may be a need for meaningful economic reforms that is in line with socio-political factors. Also, we have to tackle structural inequalities rooted in caste, religion and gender.

Lastly, rights approach plays an important role in improving implementation for development programmes. Right to food, right to health and right to education, right to employment and right to information etc. puts pressures on governments to deliver the services to citizens. . Basically we have to go beyond supply side and focus on demand side. Social pressures are needed for public action. Better monitoring systems have to be developed at Central, state, district and village levels to realize rights. Justiciability is one aspect of rights. However, one (particularly the poor) can not go to court every time right is violated. It is the responsibility of citizens and NGOs to organize campaigns for better functioning of the programmes. Public accountability is crucial for the success of right to food. Also you can not have legal aspect for every right. For example, rights of a girl child to have a food within a household can not have legal aspect. It is the responsibility of the parents to treat boys and girls equally.

CONCLUSION

There is a need for inclusive growth in India for reduction in deprivation and disparities and for sustainable equitable development. Bridging the divides in Indian economy and society should be one of the priority areas for Indian Government. It is more challenging to achieve inclusive growth than getting 9percent growth in GDP. Public policy should give priority to 'inclusive sectors' rather concentrating on policies to improve lop-sided growth benefiting few sections of the population. The role of state as facilitator and provider

is much more important for attaining inclusive growth. Basically, we have to achieve freedom from food and nutrition insecurity, illiteracy, ill-health, low quality employment, regional, gender and social disparities remain one of the biggest challenges in a democratically free India. As Sen (2009) says that injustice in the society should be reduced as far as possible. The road map should consist of improving physical infrastructure, social sector/human development and improving inclusive governance. *It is often mentioned that when things were not working, democracy was responsible for lack of governance. There is a need to strengthen democracy by decentralizing and inclusive governance.* In a democracy we debate more before implementing policies. There are strong social, economic and political reasons for achieving broader and inclusive growth. India will be a running tiger if inclusive growth is achieved.

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GETTING FOOHOLD IN POLITICS WOMEN IN POLITICAL DECISION MAKING PROCESS

Vibhuti Patel*

*...Let us enter politics,
Continue our struggle
And take leadership.
Can't put up with patriarchal power any more,
O, Venubai, why do you remain repressed?
Come out and join our rally.*

This is how the song sung for the first time by "Toiling Women's Liberation Movement" members in the late seventies ended. It represented the gusto of a newly formed mass organization of tribal women of Dhulia district (Vibhuti Patel, 1987). It became popular among the women's groups not only in Maharashtra but also all over India. This song represented the new understanding of 'politics'. Politics as not only electoral politics or membership of political parties, but as collective action of women against oppressive patriarchal power with a long term goal of social transformation that ensured women's liberation from exploitation, degradation, injustice, subjugation and superstition, casteism and communalism.

The 73rd and 74th Amendments in the Constitution of India made one million Indian women "elected representatives" in the rural and urban local self government bodies by granting 33 percent reserved seats in Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1992. During last 16 years, many grass root activists of the women's movement have plunged in electoral politics for empowerment of women in their constituency.

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But when it comes to women's reservation in legislature and parliament of India, we witness tremendous resistance from the patriarchs. For the first time, the Bill providing 33 percent reservation to women was introduced on 4th September 1996 known as 81st Constitution Amendment Bill and after massive political debates was referred to Joint Parliamentary committee chaired by M.P. Late Geeta Mukherjee who presented the report to Lok Sabha on 9-12-96. Two years later, on 26-6-98, the Bill was reintroduced in the 12th Lok Sabha as the 84th Constitution Amendment Bill. Controversy racked by the opponents of the bill around 'reservation (for S.C., S.T., DTNT, Disabled and minority women) within Reservation for women' so that women from upper class and caste from majority religious group do not exclusively take away the advantages of women's reservation once again scuttled the bill. National Democratic Alliance brought the Bill to the Lok Sabha twice more in 2002 and 2003 but never managed to get it passed. United Popular Alliance elected in May 2004 promised to pass the bill. Current controversy and high drama in Rajya Sabha over the 108th Constitution Amendment Bill providing 33 percent reservation to women introduced in the Rajya Sabha on 6th May, 2008 betrays persistence of patriarchal power in the mainstream politics. On the one hand are M.P.s from Congress, BJP and Left parties advocating for converting the bill into an Act. While on the other hand, members of Janata Dal (U) and Samajvadi Party are persistently creating ruckus against introduction of the bill. For past 11 years, such discouraging scenario has been going on.

It is interesting to note that our neighbouring countries Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh have provided reservation of seats for women in their respective parliaments. As per article 114 of 1991 of the Constitution of Nepal, 5percent parliamentary seats in the lower house and 3 seats in the upper house are reserved for Nepalese women. Pakistan made provision for 33percent reservation of seats for women in the National assembly and 36 out of 342 seats (i.e. 17percent) in the Senate as per election Law Quota in 2002. Bangladesh has ensured 15percent reserved seats for women in its parliament as per 14th Constitutional amendment introduced in 2004. (Website: CENWOR, UNDP, HDR, 2004).

Women's Liberation Movement and Electoral Politics

The slogan 'Personal is Political' is popularized by the western women's liberation movement appealed to many city-based women's

groups who realized how individual cases of violence against women were not merely 'personal problems, but an outcome of socio-cultural, historical, political and economic realities in which Indian women had to survive. As a result, the issues which affected women and treated as personal problems such as rape, family violence, dowry-murders, harassment at the workplace were put on the 'public-political agenda' of the women's movement (Vibhuti Patel, 1988). The pressure from the new women's groups forced the mainstream political parties also to show greater concern for women's issues at least in their public speeches, press statements and election manifestos. After the nationwide anti-rape movement in 1980, cases of violence against women became issues for parties to score points against contenders in electoral battles as well as in the local power struggles (Vibhuti Patel, 1994).

In an interview conducted by The Times of India on 31-5-2004, the women Members of Parliament (MPs) have identified issues to which they would give top priority, are as follows:

- Stringent punishment for the rapists and Special Courts to deal with rape cases and in-camera trials to avoid harassment to victims (Sumitra Mahajan, M.P.- B.J.P.)
- Crimes Against Women to be dealt with at local level (Nivedita Mane, Nationalist Congress Party M.P., Kolhapur)
- Help to widows to become financially independent (Sumitra Mahajan, M.P., B. J. P.)

Women's Movement and the Fourteenth Lok Sabha Election, 2004

Horrifying experiences of communal carnage in Gujarat, attempt to change the name and scope of 'UGC sponsored 34 'women's studies center' to 'family welfare center' by the right-wing decision makers and killing of the women's reservation bill that would guarantee one third of seats to women in the legislative assemblies of the state and in the Parliament of India made women's rights activists to campaign actively against the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). (Kiran Moghe, 2004).

The election results made Mrs. Sonia Gandhi a super-star for the secular humanists and progressive forces that were touched by her

dignified conduct and a target of crude and cheap attack from the Hindutva lobby.

Recent election results once again brought the issue of 'personal & political' to surface. In a debate "Should Sonia Gandhi have declined the top job?" published by *The Economic Times*, in May, 2004; a veteran feminist publisher and writer, Ritu Menon has succinctly represented the position of women's rights movement in these words, "Feminists have been saying for ever so long, for all women-the personal is political and the political is personal. In her (Sonia Gandhi's) case, especially, it is pointless trying to separate the two. But equally, in her case, she embodies a conundrum, combines in herself every politically problematic and thorny issue we have had to deal with: womanhood, widowhood, religious identity, national identity, ethnicity, citizenship, minorityism, majoritarianism. Who is legitimate, who is not."

It is encouraging to note that many first time contestants' women candidates of BJP refused to resort to character assassination of Mrs. Sonia Gandhi in their election speeches on the ground that "I am a mother and she is also a mother. I believe in dignity of mother."

Mobilisation of Women by the Political Parties

The parliamentary parties started viewing and wooing women as a constituency in the eighties. This changing attitude of the parliamentary parties towards women is reflected in their election manifestoes, their attitude towards women candidates and their overall electoral strategies. Mrs. Indira Gandhi started making references to "Stree Shakti" in the early eighties and Bharatiya Janata Party began advocating the revival of ancient Indian culture, eulogizing mythological women characters. BJP also demanded a uniform civil code but from an anti-Muslim angle rather than women's rights perspective. During the mid-nineties, in Andhra Pradesh, at the time of the State assembly election, the popular regional party of that time, Telugu Desam made a legal provision for land rights for women.

In the electoral process, we find two contradictory processes. On the one hand we have powerful, articulate women leaders who are mainly elite and on the other we have women who are mere rubber stamps. However, the elite women's political presence derives from their relations with male politicians- husbands, brothers, fathers, uncle and father-in-laws. Between 1962 and 1984, the total number of

women who contested the Lok Sabha (Lower House of Parliament) has increased from 65 to 157 and the number of women who were elected was increased from 33 to 42. After 1985, meetings of women members of parliament (M.P.) to discuss important issues of women became more or less a regular feature. This was achieved at the initiative of the Minister for Women's Development and Social Welfare.

Implications of Increased Political Participation of Women: Women's visibility in the political scenario can be understood in the following ways:

- Increase in the number of women in the electoral process and their meaningful contribution in highlighting women specific issues.
- Qualitative change in political goals and processes as a result of accommodation of women's perspectives and priorities.

We have seen increasing number of meetings, camps, welfare programmes, weekly meetings, national conventions organized by different political parties of their women cadres. Mahila Congress, BJP Women's front, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Republic Party of India, Janata Front and Shetkari Sangathana have all organized conventions to discuss/ highlight women's problems. In terms of rhetoric on women, all of them are competing with each other to establish their credibility in the eyes of women. If the Congress Government brought National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000), the Janata regime came up with the National Commission for Women. But in this image building exercise, both of them shared the same ideology. A good illustration is their response to the Muslim Women's Protection of Rights (on Divorce) Act that took away the right to maintenance from a divorced Muslim woman. Likewise neither regime did anything to bring the culprits of Deorala Sati episode to book. NDA government went one step further-It freed the culprits of Deorala Sati episode!!

Hurdles faced by Women Candidates

Most of the women face tremendous opposition from family, community and the male political leaders if they decide to enter electoral politics or public life. The present political leadership, in spite

of its populist rhetoric, wants to keep women out of the political arena. Indian women's lower educational level, inferior social status and lack of autonomy are reflected in their lower participation in politics.

TABLE I
Men and Women in the Parliament of India

Sr. No of Lok Sabha Elections	Year	No. of seats	Total no. of contestants	Male			Female		
				Contested	Elected	percent winning	Contested	Elected	Percent winning
1	1952	489	1874	--	--	--	--	--	--
2	1957	494	1518	1473	467	31.7	45	27	60.0
3	1962	494	1985	1915	459	24.0	70	35	50.0
4	1967	520	2369	2302	490	21.3	67	30	44.8
5	1971	520	2784	2698	499	18.5	86	21	24.4
6	1977	542	2439	2369	523	22.1	70	19	27.1
7	1980	542	4620	4478	514	11.5	142	28	19.7
8	1984	542	5574	5406	500	9.2	164	42	25.6
9	1989	529	6160	5962	502	8.5	198	27	13.6
10	1991	521	8699	8374	492	5.9	325	39	12.0
11	1996	543	13952	13353	504	3.8	599	39	6.7
12	1998	543	4750	4476	500	11.2	274	43	15.7
13	2002	543	N.A.	N.A.	494	N.A.	446	49	9.1
14	2004	543	N.A.	N.A.	498	N.A.	432	45	9.6

Note: Gender-wise data for 1952 not available.

Source: Statistical Profile of Women in India, Government of India, 2006.

Increasing criminalisation, corruption and compromises required to sustain one's political career also deter women from entering mainstream politics (Usha Thakkar and Rohini Gawankar, 2004). Even among the majority of women's rights groups, 'politics' is equated with 'politicking', 'dirty' maneuvering and manipulations and therefore power and politics remain an anathema to them. But at the same time, women activists involved in direct action for past two and a half decades have also realized the limitations of micro level activities.

Electoral Politics and New Social Movement

Though the social movements have thrown up new band of educated, sincere and hardworking women as leaders, their participation in the electoral politics is quite limited.

In the recently held 14th Lok Sabha election, 2004; the number of women parliamentarians has gone down from 49 in the 13th Lok Sabha Elections to 45 in the 14th Lok Sabha Elections in 2004 out of total number of 543 parliamentarians. Women's representation in Lok Sabha is less than 10 percent of the total.

TABLE 2
Educational Qualification of the Members of the 12th Lok Sabha (1998)

Educational Qualification	Male	Female	Total
Doctorate	26	4	30
Post Graduates	127	16	143
Graduates	227	19	246
Sr. Cambridge	1	0	1
Under Graduate	8	1	9
Matriculate	43	1	44
Under Metric	11	2	13
Intermediate	44	1	45
Diploma	1	0	1
Illiterate	0	0	0

Source: The Times of India, 1-10-99

Credibility of new social movements has been commodified by the electoral market. Women social activists who are ready to give thumb-impressions are promoted by the mainstream politicians. Women who stick out their necks have to create their own safety nets-financial security, gainful employment, credit-worthiness and self-sustaining life-style. Women in public life need to have special skills to scrutinise budgetary provision in favour of empowerment of women. English educated articulate and aggressive women are tolerated by the mainstream, only, if they remain silent about budget. International Association of Feminist Economics (IAFE) has 550 members working in 31 countries. Women leaders with mandated power should interact with the women economists of IAFE as they can provide "insights into the relationship between gender and power relations in the economy" (Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay, 24-6-2000, p. 2280). It is

important for women who have gained success through ballet also handle balance sheet and budget for developmental activities with equal dexterities.

The following table reveals that around 44 elected women had to represent 50 crore Indian women's interests in the 12th Lok Sabha election.

Elected Women Representatives and Area Development

Elected women representatives can be successful in promoting women's development agenda only when their trusted soldiers and family members share their vision and don't force them to make unprincipled compromises. Each (Member of Parliament) M.P gets Rs. 2 crore of government funding known as Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS). Moreover, personal charisma of the M.P. and M.L.A. (Member of Legislative Assembly) brings investments for area development. MPs use these funds according to their political and personal priorities. Limited personal demands of the women politicians ensure maximum resources for the area development. Female-headed households have been most successful in all social movements' right from the pre-independence days. Elected-woman representative whose decisions are taken by others is not respected by her constituency. It is very important for her to be aware of legal provisions, developmental schemes, help lines for emergency situations, tax structure, revenues and expenditure in her/his department and constituency, women component plan-schemes and programmes targeted for women and marginalized sections of society, special needs of the constituency, labour relations and labour processes in her constituency.

Women in the Electoral Bodies

With amendments of Constitution in 1993 to decentralize political power as per 73rd and 74th Amendments, a provision has to be made for devolution of power and decision-making in favour of women. One third of all seats in the local self- government bodies have to be reserved for women. Rural India has already elected village panchayats with one third elective seats reserved for women i.e. India has 'one million elected representatives. Women elected representatives are taking active interest in using budgetary allocations for promotion of women's education, safe drinking water and sanitation. But,

"Neither the people's representatives at the center nor at the state level, wish to give up their powers over their constituencies and to share their power at the local level. Similarly the bureaucrats are not geared to play the role of facilitators. Giving up powers to representatives of the Panchayati Raj system is difficult for them. Voluntary organisations can play a major role in developing training programmes for all three groups- the politicians at the center and in the states as well as the bureaucrats in order to help develop new perspectives on their roles." ¹

Elected representatives are facing innumerable problems. Shetkari Sangathana Mahila Aghadi managed to win election for their all women panels in the last Gram Panchayat elections in spite of stiff opposition from the local vested interests. In spite of threats of rape and witch-hunting by rival political parties, several women in Dhulia district contested elections in Gram Panchayat. In South Gujarat, when a woman activist working for women's rights contested election, the local vested interests tried to divide votes by putting up a 'rubberstamp' woman candidate. When Vijayatai Chowk, a courageous woman's rights activist of Dhule district applied for a Lok Sabha seat, she was refused the seat by the party bosses on the ground that while she would win votes from the bride's side, she will not from the bridegroom's side because she had taken up so many cases of dowry-murders in the past 15 years. The political compromises of principles and programmes in the policy resolutions, the increasing importance of 'mafia' politics and exorbitant money power required by the electoral politics act as deterrent for women's participation in the mainstream politics. Yet Indian women have come on the political agenda of the country through various techniques - collective actions, programmes of consciousness raising, petitioning and lobbying. In addition they have produced well-researched documents and obtained, after great effort, some media visibility for women's issues. This contradictory process must be kept in mind to evolve a proper political understanding of women's political participation in India.

¹ Armitry S. Desai "Challenges for the Voluntary Sector in India at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century", *Perspectives in Social Work*, Vol. XVI, No. 3, Sept.-Dec., 2001, p. 11.

Women as Voters

Indian women have become more aware of their rights but the level of political information of women voters is low. Many women's groups in Ahmedabad, Pune and Bangalore have prepared women's manifesto. They conduct educational campaigns, organise *know thy candidate* programmes and issue leaflets concerning women's issues. They expose those candidates who had a criminal or unsavoury background such as involvement in murder of wives or daughter-in-law, or sexual molestation of women. Vimochana in Bangalore campaigned against several candidates who had a record of violence against women by organising street-corner meeting, writing in newspapers, and issuing leaflets in Kannada and English. As a result of this campaign, all the candidates lost their seats.

In response to the complaints of sexual violence by Mr. Narvekar, Speaker of Legislative Assembly of Goa and CPI (M) cadres in Kerala and Bengal, the feminists' organisations demanded 'a code of conduct' for the party cadres. In Maharashtra, Stree Mukti Andolan Sampark Samiti (Women's Liberation Coordination Committee), a state level United Front of the progressive and the leftist women's organisations issued a leaflet before the Lok Sabha Election in February, 1990 that expounded the perspective of women's organisations on elections and suggested to voters the principles and programmes around which the choice of candidate should be made. The manifesto considered the issues such as fundamentalism, family laws as well as development. Development alternatives with women and ecological perspective should address fuel-fodder-water issues, implications of electrification, and dams and education, health, employment etc. Political education of the masses on violence against women, sexist media, rural and tribal women's survival struggles need to be carried out and the candidates should be answerable to constituencies on these issues.

Reservation of Seats for Women in the Electoral Bodies

In the thirties, the women leaders of India involved in the nationalist struggles were pressing for universal adult franchise and now, sixty years later, the women leaders of the same political parties have agreed to support 33percent seats for women. Is this one step forward or two steps backward? Those who regard it as one step forward is empowering women to do so because they think "It will broaden the base of women's political participation and will help to

strengthen women's faith in the political process which is otherwise dominated by men". (Women and Media Committee, Bombay). Those who are opposed to this move have consistently held this approach undesirable, right from pre-independence days. Moreover reservation as such is unlikely to solve the main causes of limited political participation of women in furthering women's cause, because given socio-political context where mass illiteracy prevails along with the style of politics that encourages growing violence, mafia politics, character assassination of candidates, prohibitive election expenses and opportunistic/debased politicking pursued to achieve very narrow and short term political goals. Where such influences are operative in the Indian politics in an overwhelming way, more reservation of seats has a limited value.

It is interesting, that same national level male politicians who support 33 percent reserved seats for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions have expressed their outrage against the reservation of 33percent seats for women in the Legislative Assembly and in the Parliament (LAWS, 2002). They are using the same arguments as our colonial masters used against the native then, i.e. women will not be able to govern, as they are inexperienced. Many corporators of Bombay and Chennai Municipal Corporation have openly expressed their discontentment over this decision of the present government (Archana Ghosh, 2002).

During 1990s sharp polarisation of political opinions took place around Women's Reservation Bill. It was first tabled in parliament in 1996, "and was mired in the conflict over the demand for special quotas for women of the other backward classes and minorities" (Mary John, 2000).

The autonomous women's organisations' doubts about 33percent reservations have different reasons. They fear that by participating in the corrupt electoral process women's rights activists will not be able to further the broader interests of women (Vibhuti Patel, 1993). They feel that women activists will have to make compromises in their principles, programmes and practices. Moreover, the talented women will be co-opted by the system. The 33percent reservation has other dangers. It prepares the ground for opponents of the women's rights movement (the mothers-in-law) to get elected in most of the places. These women will be from the elite sections, mainly the kith and the kin of male politicians. Women politicians in South Asia are not different from their male counterparts (Jahan, 1987).

Some scholars and women's organisations do think that the entry of women in the electoral process will help the curbing of violence and corruption, in other words, female presence will moralise the system. Experiences of Karnataka and Kerala have proved the same (Prachar, 2001). This is the argument that women have often advanced as for example in the U.S.A.

The decade of 90s has witnessed several roundtables on Women in Decision-Making. Round tables in the Eastern parts of India highlighted the need for networking. In the Western India they focused on the achievements of women's movement and need for women's policy. In the Southern states the round tables were concerned about initiatives in women and development. In the Northern states, they were concerned about formation of state sponsored National Commission of women. In the national round table, the need for mainstreaming of the women's agenda was emphasized.

Herstory of Decision Making in India

The first generation of women decision-makers in India was the product of the independence movement. In the post-independence period, they made important contributions in the fields of education, institutions for women's welfare, diplomatic relations, and administration of the state and central government and in politics. They were perceived as super women and enjoyed honorary male status in the society.

Collective Decision-making Processes of the New Social Movements in India

1970 onwards, development of social movements highlighting the problems of the rural and urban poor, industrial working class, tribal masses and minorities threw up a new kind of women decision makers who had strength of street-fighting, formal education and strategic thinking. They had to work under tremendous adversity, as they were a part of politics of protest. In the nineties, other sectors of the society also gave space to competent and highly qualified women to be in the decision-making bodies. At present, gender sensitisation of state and central government, management and trade unions, mass organisations, educational institutions is one of the topmost priorities among the development-oriented organisations. In the last two decades, women who have held important positions have had positive

experience whenever they have done thorough homework and have played a role of problem shooters diligently and fearlessly. At the same time, in several places they have faced tremendous male hostility and physical violence. Competent women in the public life who have promoted the ethos of distributive justice have managed to get popular support.

National Commission for Women

At present, the National Commission for women has generated a lot of debate among the women's groups. The Committee for the Status of Women (1974) had recommended the formation of such a commission to take up women's problems. The Congress (I) government did not pay any attention to this demand. The report of the National Commission on Self-Employed Women ('Shramshakti') gave a comprehensive picture of women's status and recommended many concrete steps for women in the informal sector. This too was not officially discussed in the parliament. In this climate of official apathy to do anything concretely for women, when the bill on the National Commission for Women was tabled in Lok Sabha on May 22, 1990 many welcomed it as a forward step but these early hopes were soon belied. The content was found less than satisfactory and invited a lot of criticism from women's group as it lacks an autonomous status and has an inbuilt structure that provides far too much governmental interference. The Women's Organisations have proposed to the government that it explicitly define the clauses to protect the autonomy and independence of the commission. Moreover, the reports of the commission should go straight to parliament via the president. It should be empowered to conduct enquiries concerning women even when the government officials or agencies themselves are involved in perpetuating violation of women's rights. Alas, in spite of detailed recommendations given by the women's groups, the present government has not included all of them in the Act. Now, State level women's commissions are active in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Kerala. They are executing state policies for women, promoting advocacy work on women's problems, strengthening elected women representatives in the Panchayati Raj institutions and selectively taking up cases of violence against women. They are effective in the social sector of the economy as they take up women's problems in the areas of education, employment, welfare and health-public health and reproductive rights (Vibhuti Patel, 2002).

The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution in 1990 had opened avenues for women's empowerment. For example, in Kerala the state government had given Panchayat bodies power, authority and finance. Out of the state budget, 40 percent was devolved to the Panchayat and of this 10 percent was mandated to be utilised for women's programmes. Other states could emulate this pattern. The Maharashtra Policy for Women, 2001 has also targeted 10 percent of development oriented budget to women. This would enable women to develop their capabilities, to take control of the programmes in such a way that through interaction, criticism and continuous learning, they would develop self-confidence and greater self-esteem.

The Round Table on Women Empowerment Policy, 2001

In the recently held Round Table discussion on Women Empowerment Policy, the sub-group on 'Women in Governance' stated that Women should be represented in important committees formed by the government like standing committee, resource and budget allocation committee etc. so that they can strengthen the hands of women elected representatives executing women's development agenda.

Any funds either of MP/MLA or any organisation, when remain unutilised should be diverted for the development of weaker sections only. A monitoring mechanism to keep vigil on such instances must be put into action.

Corruption in and criminalisation of politics had kept women away from politics. Women with commitment to the ideology of good governance should be brought into politics. How to do it was a big question, thought the group.

In response to demand of 'reservation within reservation' (Rekha Thakur, 2004)², the group had no objection to 25 percent of reservation going to OBC women candidates for the Lok Sabha and assembly seats. The initiative to debate this issue with women's groups should be taken by the Maharashtra State Women's Commission. This would

² Rekha Thakur, General Secretary of Bharatiya Republican Party-Bahujan Mahasahgh led by Prakash Ambedkar states, "We want reservation for Other Backward Classes according to the strength of the OBC in the population, i.e. 52 % within 33 %. Our stand is clear: No tabling of the bill, till changes are made."

hasten the process of passing the Bill seeking Reservation of 33 percent for women in Parliament.

Womanist Party of India

Womanist Party of India headed by Ms. Varsha Kale (Bhartiya Streevadi Paksha) got registered on 27-11-2003. It has published its document that demands 50 percent reservation of seats in all electoral bodies for women. It aims to strive for a constructive approach in politics that executes development agenda such as women's rights over natural resources-land, water, fuel-wood, opening of district level women's banks, sustainable development to get rid of drought, identification of hawkers' zones and 50 percent allocation of space and infrastructural facilities to be targeted to self-employed women. WPI will field its candidates in the forthcoming Assembly elections (WPI, 2004). Many spokespersons (who have been community workers, trade-unionists, NGO activists, researchers and field-investigators) of WPI have been foot soldiers and street fighters of the varied social movements for over a decade. At present, WPI does not have any godfather or godmother. Culture of summer-camps, training programmes, small group discussions, demonstrations, rallies in the social movements and formal education and computer literacy have given its members great deal of confidence to deal with complex and violent political scenario at local and state level politics.

Renowned social activist, Medha Patkar has also launched a political party with the backing of National Alliance of People's Movement.

Women Political Empowerment Day, 24-4-1994

On 24-4-2004, more than 1500 women elected representatives from the urban and rural local self-government bodies celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Women Political Empowerment Day in New Delhi. The gathering concluded with a charter of 20 demands. (Peoples Reporter, May, 2004). For the first time such charter has been prepared to empower women. The demands raised reflect the needs and aspirations of the women's rights movement and they are as follows:

1. Raise the percentage of reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj institutions from 33.3 percent to 50 percent and ensure reservation of seats for women in the state legislative bodies and in the parliament.

2. For capacity building of and continuous skill up-gradation women elected representatives within a year, set up training centre, minimum one in each division in every state. Refresher Courses that enhance competency must become an annual feature and they should include computer literacy and an internet access for enhancing efficiency.
3. Start regular orientation programmes for gender sensitisation for MLAs, MPs and administrators about budget, funds, functions and implementing machinery of the panchayats.
4. Self-help groups of women must be guaranteed contracts for village level construction work.
5. Ensure that due consideration is given by authorities at all levels to the proposals of gram sabhas, especially those concerning women and children.
6. Facilitate women's association at different levels to act as watchdogs and pressure groups.
7. Provide reservations for women for the posts of Up-Pradhan and Up-Sarpanch of gram panchayats.
8. Ensure adequate number of women panchayat secretaries and entrust not more than two gram panchayats to one panchayat secretary/village development officer.
9. Ensure that every state government opens a toll-free help-line for panchayat women at the state and district levels to attend urgent needs (adverse or favourable) of elected women of PRIs in terms of police assistance, information dissemination, legal assistance, counselling, so on and so forth. Set up national centre in Delhi to coordinate all state level help-lines and act as a resource centre.
10. Provide for sub-quorum for women in the gram sabha.
11. Give representation to women on all committees of the panchayats at all levels and see to it that parallel committees are not formed.
12. Implement Women Component Plan (to assure at least 30percent of funds/benefits from all development sectors flow to women) through panchayats.
13. Provide for stringent laws to deal with violence against women during and after elections.
14. Strap the two-child norm as applicable at present in respect of the representatives of panchayats.

15. Provide right to land and housing in joint names of spouses and for single, deserted, Dalit, tribal, devdasi, widowed and battered women, and for those rendered homeless in caste/communal riots and due to displacement.
16. Enforce Equal Remuneration Act, 1976.
17. Provide literacy training under special crash programmes for illiterate women panchayat members.
18. Facilitate exchange programmes for panchayat women representatives inside and outside the country.
19. Give awards for outstanding performance by women representatives inside and outside the country.
20. Ensure that the government provides funds for celebrating women empowerment day at district, state and national levels.

This charter has received due coverage in the national as well as the social movements journals and newsletters (Panchayati Raj Update, 2004).

CONCLUSION

At present, most of the women's organisations are demanding 33 percent reservation of seats in the legislative assemblies and in the parliament. But if they don't acquire sufficient skills and abilities to handle unfolding reality with efficiency and harmony, they will be the objects of jest. To empower aspiring women candidates, the S.P. Jain Institute of Management and Research and The Times Foundation has started a six-month certificate course on Women in Governance. In Maharashtra, Mahila Rajsatta Andolan, a network of women elected representatives in the local self-government bodies in the state, is mentoring them for contesting election for legislature and parliament along with executing constituency-area development programmes.

Without popular mandate if women are selected for the top positions, they will have to face non-cooperation from the administration and the law and order machinery. Women in the public life need a protective shield of popular support and tremendous good will so that they can execute a development agenda more meaningfully. If we don't want to be puppets in the hands of different power-blocks, we will have to empower ourselves with the first hand experience of the operational reality. We should consolidate

our experience gained during Training of the Trainers (TOT) workshops of different types of the decision-making bodies to evolve our day-to-day tactics and long-term strategies (Devaki Jain, 2000). There is no short cut to fieldwork and efficient handling of the crisis situation. We also need to see ourselves as change-agents and not as beneficiaries of the welfare departments of the government structures and private foundations. Women in the public life need to create their own support- structures for safe night-halts, safe transport and clean toilets. Constant up-gradation of skills and knowledge base is a must for each and every woman decision-maker to survive in a public life for a long term. Ability to handle more than one portfolio is a key to success in this rapidly changing socio- economic and political environment. Women in public life must give up phobia for modern equipments for better communication such as computers (internet), cell phones and advanced technologies, which reduce human drudgery. Majority of Indian women are seeking protection of the benevolent patriarchs and only 11percent women (widows, separated, divorced, deserted and single) are actual/ nominal heads of the households. Hence it is unrealistic to seek women's liberation without active support of sympathetic men. The 21st century is going to unfold an era of partnership between men and women dedicated to the cause of liberation of humankind, which will ensure social justice, safe environment, communal harmony and world peace in an era of terrorism in the name of religion that has upset the power relations in the world.

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DEFINING AMBEDKARISM

Samir Kumar Mohapatra*

A little inquisitive effort reveals that in the contemporary period, Ambedkarism has emerged as a new paradigm in the academic lexicon. It has triggered an academic interest in it in recent times, apart from continuing to guide the subalterns in their struggles for self-dignity and self-respect. Ambedkar was a great and charismatic leader from the dalit community. Like all great and charismatic leaders, Ambedkar too had an enduring impact on his community members. While great leaders emerge and disappear with the passage of time, their enunciated ideas and views keep them alive. They live in the heart, soul and mind of the people who appreciate and admire their ideas and, in fact, get inspired by them. In due course of time, their ideas and philosophy are transformed into a strong and firm ideology, an ism. As we know, ideology can have a very potent influence on those to whom it appeals. We have seen this in the case of ideologies, like Buddhism, Maoism, Gandhism and Marxism and so on, which came into being and influenced people in their own ways, but in a very strong way. Ambedkarism is the new ism. It has emerged as a new ideology. As Clifford Geertz¹ has argued, ideology is a system of interacting symbols. It interprets the environment and projects self-images. It codifies and organises beliefs, myths, outlook and values, defines aspirations and interests and directs responses to specific social situations. Thus it is not only a 'framework of consciousnesses but also a source of legitimising action. Ambedkarism as an ideology can be understood in such a way. It is an embodiment of Ambedkar's innovative ideas and worldview, his thoughts and philosophy. It is an ideology, which has a mesmerising effect on its followers. As an

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¹ Rao, M.S.A. 2000. "Conceptual Problems in the Study of Social Movements" in M.S.A.Rao (ed.). *Social Movements in India* (pp.6-7), New Delhi: Manohar

ideology, it has been created from the existential reality of Hindu society just like Marxism from the existential reality of capitalist society. The Untouchables² can well relate to it, and they get overwhelmingly inspired and guided by it in their struggles for assertion and rights. The vociferous criticism of Hinduism and the caste system constitutes the core of Ambedkarism. It is primarily and profoundly an ideology of protest and criticism against the iniquitous Hindu social system that perpetuates graded inequality and reinforces inhuman treatment of a particular section of society through untouchability. It leads to a very radical albeit critical way of making sense of Hinduism and Indian society. It diagnoses and opens wide the inbuilt caste-discrimination in Hinduism. It not only finds flaws with Hinduism and the Hindu social order and attacks it but also enunciates ways and means as to how to wage struggle against it and fights it. At the same time, it also outlines the framework of an ideal society.

Ambedkar has emerged as one of the central figures in the post-Independence Indian polity and society. His ideas and philosophy have come to influence the every day political and social life of a large section of Indian population, particularly Dalits. Specifically, in Indian context, the Untouchables have no ideologies to inspire them propounded by one of them except that of Ambedkarism. Take for example, Gandhism, Nehruvian Socialism or the nationalism perspective- all of them, as it has often been argued by dalit activists or ideologues- have come from above and have been defined, shaped and professed in terms of upper caste values. Even the perspectives propounded by Phule, Periyar or the sub-altern historiography, though talked about the upliftment and emancipation of Dalits and have certainly been helpful in providing ideological and motivational inputs to Dalits to fight for a better place in an iniquitous Hindu society, none of these ideologues came from a dalit background. So their influence and impact was not like that of the perspective of Ambedkar who himself was a Dalit, though Dalits continue to be influenced by them even today. Ambedkar ideology or Ambedkarism emerged from his own experience, understanding and knowledge of being a Dalit. Along with this, his intellectual expertise, acquired

through illustrious and varied educational career, also provided him with the intellectual and emancipatory ideas to not only attack the Hindu society but also delineate and envision a society where the Untouchables will live with self-respect and dignity. Being a visionary, Ambedkar ingeniously devised and articulated the goals, means, strategies and safeguards needed for a necessary dalit struggle. He emerged in a situation when nationalism was gradually engulfing everybody's consciousness. He took up the cudgel against Hinduism and the Hindu social order in this very crucial period of volatility and vehement anti-imperial struggle and thereby attempted to create and sustain a separate and distinct consciousness and identity of the Untouchables. Nobody, like Ambedkar, worked with so much passion, rigour and vision for them. So, no other perspectives, no other ideologies inspire the Untouchables as much as Ambedkarism does. This should not, however, be understood to mean, as mentioned earlier, that the Untouchables do not get influenced by other perspectives or ideologies. It is only that Ambedkarism, in contemporary period, has left other perspectives behind in terms of its strength to influence, inspire and guide the Untouchables in their legitimate, persistent and protracted struggles.

Before one analyses the salient features of Ambedkarism, one would like to briefly sketch Ambedkar's bitter experiences in life since his childhood, which helped him adopt a not-taken-for-granted understanding of society. As we know, Ambedkar was born to Mahar (untouchable) parents. His father being educated, a British servant, Ambedkar was fortunate to get an opportunity to go to school, as school education was rarely available to the untouchable pupils. As a Mahar, he had to undergo the painful experiences of untouchability in the school. He was made to sit separately, not allowed to touch the school tap for water, refused by washer men for cleaning his clothes, refused by barbers for haircut and so on. He was, like all his fellow caste-men, a victim of imposed oppression. It was not only during the childhood that Ambedkar borne the full brunt of the demeaning practices of untouchability but also when he returned from abroad, he faced such bestial treatment. A foreign returned Ambedkar went to Baroda on getting a job, but did not get any accommodation there. He persuaded a Parsi inn-keeper and stayed there for some days only to be forced to vacate later because local Parsees came to know about the defiling nature of his caste. Even two of his friends (one a Hindu Brahmin and the other a Christian) showed their helplessness in providing him a shelter. The peons in the office also used to fling files

² In this article, terms, such as Untouchables, Dalits, Depressed Classes, etc., have been interchangeably used denoting the same meaning.

and office papers at him since a touch with him could defile them. Thus, Ambedkar understood existentially what it meant to be an untouchable in India. He, thus, took upon himself the duty to expose and attack such a system of forced inequality and inhumanity. What helped him in this was his vast knowledge base. In fact, he tried to acquire as much knowledge and expertise as possible in varied field of knowledge, such as commerce, philosophy and religion or theology, political science, anthropology, sociology and law.

Hinduism and the Caste System

Ambedkar's varied educational qualifications provided him with enough intellectual might to attack Hinduism and the caste system. He virulently critiqued the caste system. However, he made it clear that Manu did not create caste. Manu's work was only concerned with 'the codification of existing caste rules and preaching of caste Dharma.'³ Similarly, he absolved the Brahmins of the blame of imposing the caste system on the non-Brahmin population. However, he stated that they might have helped the process by their glib philosophy. They were the ones who created certain customs, like sati, enforced widowhood and girl marriage. And because of the prevalence of such customs, the class (Brahmins) had become the originator of the institution of caste. He argued that 'a caste is an enclosed class.' He further said that 'caste exists only in the plural number. There is no such thing as a caste. There are always castes. While making themselves into a caste, the Brahmins, by virtue of this, created non-Brahmin caste; by closing themselves in, they closed others out.'⁴

For Ambedkar, the caste system is not merely a division of labour but also a division of labourers into watertight compartments. It is also a hierarchy in which the division of labourers is graded one above the other without having any scope for individual sentiment, choice and preference. In fact, according to him, it is based on the dogma of predestination.

In Ambedkar's opinion, the Hindu social order is not a free social order, as it lacks the two essential pre-requisites of a free social order.

³ Ambedkar, B.R.1979. Volume-1, p.16, Bombay: Department of Education Government of Maharashtra.

⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

viz., recognizing the individual as the centre of social purpose, and liberty, equality and fraternity as cardinal values of associated mode of life. According to him, in the Hindu society, there is no Hindu consciousness of kind, and in every Hindu, the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste. 'If the individual has a privilege, it is not because it is due to him personally. The privilege goes with the class... Contrary wise, if an individual is suffering from a wrong, it is not because he by his conduct deserves it... it is because he belongs to that class.'⁵ The Hindu society is rather, in his opinion, based on three principles, such as graded inequality, fixity of occupations for each class and continuance thereof by heredity and fixation of people within their respective classes. Regarding the first principle, Ambedkar said that 'This order of precedence among classes is not merely conventional. It is spiritual, moral and legal. There is no sphere of life which is not regulated by this principle of graded inequality.'⁶ The second, in his opinion, is an inexorable law from which an individual could not escape, and the third leads to isolation and exclusiveness, which is inimical to a free social order. Unlike a free social order, according to him, the Hindu society bans inter-course, inter-dining and inter-marriage between different classes.

Based on these three essential principles, according to Ambedkar, there are three essential or unique features of the Hindu social order. These are: (1) worship of the Superman (Brahmin), the representative of God irrespective of his worth, (2) the maintenance and preservation of social order from dissents or rebellions and (3) the Divine social order created by God himself and as such not subject to abrogation, amendment or criticism. The Brahmin is bestowed with all worldly and other-worldly privileges, including marrying or entering into wedlock with a woman of any varna, punishing any 'wrong' doer, taking away anybody's hidden treasures and issuing commands even to the king. By denying opportunities to rise, the Hindu social order, in Ambedkar's opinion, has fixed the socio-economic status of the lower varnas or castes forever through the mystic scheme of *Karma* (deeds), *Bhagyan* (fate) and *Punarjanma* (rebirth). In other words, it has doctrinated the people of lower varnas that they are lower and hence deprived because the God has created them so, and also because of their bad karma, fate and birth in the past. Since God himself has

⁵ Ambedkar, B.R. 1987 (a). Volume-3, pp. 99-100.

⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

created them so and the Hindu social order, only he could change it. So, human beings could do nothing about it. According to Ambedkar, through such a mystic notion, the dissent or rebellion is discarded and the order remains intact.⁷

Speaking on Hinduism that has given birth to such an iniquitous social order as the Hindu social order, Ambedkar said, 'To argue that all religions are good is a false notion. Everything depends upon what social ideas a given religion holds out as a divine scheme of governance.' He further said, 'Hinduism is a religion of rules and not a religion of principles.' Distinguishing between rules and principles, he clarified that while 'principles connote responsibility, rules do not. Religion based on rules ceases to be religion as it kills responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act and hence Hinduism is not a religion at all.'⁸

Ambedkar, however, not only diagnosed the ills of Hinduism and as such its caste system, he was also much more concerned about how to bring about the reform of the Hindu social order, how to abolish caste. Like a social doctor, he has given certain suggestions to cure the ailments plaguing the Hindu society. To abolish caste, one needs to get rid of sub-castes- this was a suggestion prevalent in the society. Ambedkar believed that this suggestion would never serve the purpose. According to him,

what guarantee is there that the abolition of sub-castes will necessarily lead to the abolition of castes. On the contrary, it may happen that the process may stop with the abolition of sub-castes. In that case, the abolition of sub-castes will only help to strengthen the castes and make them more powerful and therefore more mischievous.⁹

Inter-caste dining can also help abolish caste- another prevalent suggestion. This, in Ambedkar's view, would also not serve the purpose since there were many castes, which allowed inter-caste dining, but 'the spirit of caste' and 'the consciousness of caste' did not disappear. For Ambedkar, the real remedy for breaking caste is,

⁷ Nandu Ram. 1995. *Beyond Ambedkar: Essays on Dalits in India*. New Delhi: Har-Anand Publication, pp.52-53.

⁸ Ambedkar, B.R. 1979. Volume-1, p.75.

⁹ Ibid., p. 67.

therefore, inter-marriage. 'Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste.'¹⁰ According to him, 'Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling - the feelings of being aliens created by caste will not vanish.'¹¹

Further striking at the root of the problem, Ambedkar made it clear that it was not possible to break caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the caste system, was founded. The enemy, in his view, is not the people who observe caste, but the sacred books like the Shastras, the Vedas, which teach them this religion of caste. According to him, 'criticising and ridiculing people for not inter-dining or inter-marrying or occasionally holding inter-caste dinners and celebrating inter-caste marriages, is a futile method of achieving the desired end. The real method is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras.'¹² 'To agitate for and to organise inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages is,' for Ambedkar, 'like forced feeding brought about by artificial means.' He said, 'Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine or inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so.'¹³ Since Hindus like others are basically religious, Ambedkar recommended for the abolition of hereditary priesthood and for state appointment of qualified and efficient priests holding *sanads* (certificates). Being thus appointed, these priests would be governed by the normal rules of the land, he said.

Ambedkar was, thus, in favour of obliterating the religious sanction behind the caste system, responsible for all evils in the Hindu society. And with the elimination of the religious sanction, the caste system, in his opinion, would eventually fall and with it, its pernicious off-shoot-untouchability- would also crumble. According to him, 'The two stand together and will fall together.'¹⁴

Ambedkar was also critical of the doctrine of chaturvarna preached by the Arya Samajists. He said that they were though critical

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., pp. 68-69.

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ambedkar, 1989 (a), Volume-5, p. 101.

of caste, talked about varnas, which, though different in letter, are similar in spirit. The doctrine of chaturvarna, in his view, divides the society into four classes, viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra instead of the four thousand castes found in our society. He said, 'As a system of social organisation, chaturvarnya is impracticable, harmful and has turned out to be a miserable failure.'¹⁵ He further argued that 'There can not be a more degrading system of social organisation than the chaturvarnya. It is the system which deadens, paralyses and cripples the people from helpful activity.'¹⁶

Thus, Ambedkar, being a torrential critic of the caste system, did not want a society characterised by it or by the chaturvarna, rather he visualised an ideal society, the edifice of which would be founded on the solid pedestal of liberty, equality and fraternity. According to him, 'An ideal society should be mobile...'¹⁷ There should be liberty of members in the society in the sense of a right to property, tools, and materials necessary for earning one's livelihood, but the liberty of one individual should not hinder another's liberty. It should promote fraternity. Ambedkar also knew that all persons could not be made equal in each and every aspects of their life. Therefore, he said, 'it may be desirable to give as much incentive as possible to the full development of everyone's powers.'¹⁸ 'Society should treat all men alike irrespective of whether they are alike.'

Thus, what is evident is that Ambedkar's trenchant analysis of Hinduism and the caste system reflects his commitment to expose their iniquitous and exploitative nature in order to argue for the case of a democratic society, based on liberty, equality and fraternity to all.

Religion as emancipation

B.R. Ambedkar is regarded as the greatest emancipator of the Depressed Classes because he showed an unwavering commitment and tenacious zeal to emancipate them. As has already been discussed, Ambedkar has, from the very childhood, experienced the indignities inflicted on the Untouchables. They are born as Hindus, yet they are not recognized and treated as Hindus. They are

¹⁵ Ambedkar, 1979, Volume-1, p. 59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

considered to be defiling and polluting and, hence, relegated and kept outside the four-fold division of the Hindu society. It is the religion, according to him, that provides the life force to such a despicable social system. His vitriolic attack on Hinduism should, thus, be seen in such a context. For him, Hinduism is a majoritarian religion, which is simply a Brahminic tool for exploitation of the Untouchables. Religion should be, in his opinion, emancipatory and should have a social philosophy. He was for true religion (religion of principles) whose basis should be in consonance with liberty, equality and fraternity, in short, with democracy. Not being treated with dignity, Ambedkar, on behalf of the Untouchables, was desirous of leaving the fold of Hinduism. However, he understood that the Untouchables, like other Hindus, being religious, once they left Hinduism, they had to have a belief system to hold on to and which, at the same time, would provide relief from social and mental agony of caste discrimination and untouchability as well as would enable them to lead a life of dignity and self-respect. It is worth mentioning that, as early as 1935, Ambedkar made it clear that though he was born a Hindu, but he would certainly not die a Hindu. In the conversion speech of 1935, he said, '... I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power.'¹⁹ In his 'Annihilation of Caste' also, Ambedkar made his intention clear for a change of religion. He said, '... you must make your efforts to uproot caste, if not in my way, then in your way. I am sorry, I will not be with you. I have decided to change.'²⁰ Ambedkar, however, did not specify which religion he would adopt. So there was much speculation in the air.

Ambedkar never considered Islam and Christianity very seriously at any stage because of their foreign origin. The other important factor was that the Indian caste system did not even spare them from its encompassing and demeaning influence. Sikhism was influenced too. According to Ambedkar, 'caste is no doubt primarily the breath of the Hindus. But the Hindus have fouled the air all over and every body is infected, Sikh, Muslim and Christian.'²¹ The religion, Ambedkar seemed to lean toward for a while, was Sikhism, but soon he dropped

¹⁹ E. Zelliot, 1992, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*. New Delhi: Manohar Publications, p. 206.

²⁰ Ambedkar, 1979, Volume-1, p. 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*

the whole idea when it became clear that after conversion, the Untouchables could not carry their new political privileges into a new religion. Thus, the only religion left was Buddhism, which was also free from caste infection. For Ambedkar, the interest in Buddhism was aroused long back since his school days when a Bombay teacher, K.A. Keluskar, gave him a copy of the life of Buddha in 1908, on the occasion of his passing his matriculation examination. He even propounded a new theory²² of the origin of untouchability. He published his own book *The Untouchables* with this theory that *Brokemen* were Buddhists, and they were reduced to the level of untouchables or made untouchable in India. It was, in fact, in his opinion, born out of the struggle for the supremacy between Buddhism and Brahminism. He, however, did not opt right away in favour of Buddhism after declaring his intention of leaving Hinduism. It was probably, as Gore puts it, on 29th September 1950, in a speech at the Buddhist temple in Worli that Ambedkar made the first open plea to his people to embrace Buddhism as a way out of their sufferings, and declared that he would devote the rest of his life to the revival and spread of Buddhism.²³ In one of his most important articles written on Buddhism - *The Buddha and The Future of His Religion*, published in the *MahaBodhi* (Calcutta) in 1950, he wrote, 'Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has, it is not an integral part of it... The religion of the Buddha is morality. It is embedded in religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if not morality...' ²⁴ He also said that Hinduism would lapse and cease to be a force governing life. This would have the effect of disintegrating the Hindu society, which could be saved only by turning to Buddhism and adopting a more positive attitude.

The actual conversion ceremony to Buddhism took place in 1956, 20 years later, when he first expressed the desire to come out of Hinduism. The ceremony brought over three million Indians, most of them being the Mahars, to the Buddhist fold in the next few years. Ambedkar decided and finally embraced Buddhism because, in his opinion, it was a religion of emancipation, a religion ingrained in

²² K.N.Kadam, 1993, *Dr. B.R.Ambedkar: The Emancipator of the Oppressed* (Edited). Bombay: Popular Prakashan, p. 123.

²³ M.S.Gore, 1993, *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 250.

²⁴ K.N.Kadam, op. cit.

which the most egalitarian principle, equal treatment to all human beings, a religion, which was based on the tenets of equality, liberty and fraternity. According to him, 'The Buddha never claimed that he was a prophet or a messenger of God (unlike Mohammed and Jesus). A more important point than this is that his religion is a discovery (it was discovered by man for man). As such, it must be sharply distinguished from a religion which is called Revelation.'²⁵ Further he said, 'All prophets have promised salvation. Buddha is one teacher who did not make any such promise... He was only a *marga data* (way finder). Salvation must be sought by each for himself by his own effort.'²⁶ Further, Ambedkar said, 'He (Buddha) never claimed infallibility for his message... He said that it was open to anyone to question it, test it and find what truth it contained.'²⁷ Unlike the Hindu scriptures like Vedas, Shastras, etc., which were not open to abrogation, amendment and even criticism, Buddha's example of opening his preaching for anybody to question and test was something quite enlightening for a rationalist like Ambedkar. According to him, for Buddha, worth and not birth was the measure of man unlike the theory of chaturvarna, based on birth. This was quite liberating for the Untouchables who were subjected to untold sufferings and humiliations as a result of their low birth. Buddha's indomitable faith in the capacity of man to shape his own destiny, whereas the lack of recognition of individual's capacity in Hinduism revealed to Ambedkar the superiority of Buddhism over Hinduism as a better religion. Though Buddha believed in rebirth and the doctrine of karma, he discarded the belief in transmigration of soul. According to him, 'The Buddha's Law of Karma applied only to karma and its effect on present life. He was the first to say: Reap as you sow.'²⁸ Regarding rebirth, Buddha said 'when elements of a body (Prithvi-earth, Apa-water, Tej-fire and Vayu-wind) join the mass of similar elements floating in (Akash) space, a new birth takes place.' Thus, it is not the soul, which takes rebirth; it is the elements of a body, which take a new birth. According to Ambedkar, Buddha's 'Dhamma (religion) is social.' 'It is righteousness, which means right relation

²⁵ Ambedkar, 1992, Volume-11, p. 217. The bracket is added.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 338.

between man and man in all spheres of life. As such, society cannot do without Dhamma.²⁹

Further in Ambedkar's opinion, 'Buddhism makes learning open to all (males and females of all castes),' 'It breaks down barriers between man and man (in terms of caste division)' and 'It promotes equality between man and man.'³⁰ Buddhism also underlines that 'maitri or fellowship towards all must never be abandoned, one owes it even to one's enemy.'³¹ As such, in Ambedkar's opinion, in Buddhism, doors are open to all, irrespective of caste or class. Anybody could join the Buddhist Sangh.

It is, thus, amply clear that Ambedkar's attraction to Buddhism was because of its message of equality and fraternity, its universal morality, in short, its libertarian philosophy. He believed that it was a true religion in the sense of having a social mission.

Marxism vis-à-vis Buddhism

It may be unambiguously stated here that as a proof of the rejection of Hinduism as well as due to the emancipatory nature of Buddhism, Ambedkar, along with his followers, adopted Buddhism. However, another development, the spread of communism in Buddhist countries, was also no less important in this shift. The relatively prosperous living under communism in Russia and the growth of dictatorship in Germany and Italy made people get attracted towards communism. It really pained Ambedkar. So, he wanted to establish a religion (read here the revival of Buddhism), which, in his opinion, would serve as a bulwark against communism. He did not like many of the postulates of Marxism. In fact, he presented Buddhism as a substitute of Marxism. However, he did accept some of the basic assumptions of Marxism, which can be seen in his final writings on *Buddha and Karl Marx* because these are also a part of Buddhism, such as

1. The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world,
2. That there is a conflict of interest between class and class,

²⁹ Ibid., p. 316.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 271. The brackets are added.

³¹ Ambedkar, 1987(a), Volume-3, p. 442.

3. That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation,
4. That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property.³²

In Ambedkar's opinion, Buddha too had similar ideas as the above with the only difference that Marx used the term exploitation, while Buddha used the terms like misery and sorrow. 'If for misery one reads exploitation Buddha is not away from Marx.'³³

However, Ambedkar did not accept the Marxist claim of the inevitability of Socialism; the economic interpretation of history as the only explanation of history; the claim of progressive pauperisation of the proletariat; the claim of the state withering away; and many of his other premises. According to Ambedkar, the communists believed that there were only two means with the help of which communism could be established: violence and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Buddha, however, demonstrated that communism could be established without dictatorship in the form of Sangh. Even though it was a communism on a very small scale but the abolition of private property without bloodshed or dictatorship was certainly a significant example. In fact, the means adopted by the Buddha (to ensure communism) were to convert a man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily³⁴ so that each man might himself become a sentinel for the kingdom of righteousness.³⁵

Thus, Ambedkar said, '(while) the differences are about the means, the end is common to both.'³⁶ Buddha as such was against violence. 'But he was also in favour of justice and where justice required he permitted the use of force.'³⁷ According to Buddha, Ambedkar maintained, 'An offender must be punished and an innocent man must be freed,'³⁸ but punishment or the use of force

³² Ibid., p. 444.

³³ Ibid., p. 446.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 450.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 459.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 450.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 451.

'must not be for selfish ends.'³⁹ Regarding dictatorship, he held, 'Buddha was a thorough equalitarian' and his 'Bhikhu Sangh had the most democratic constitution.'⁴⁰ Buddha, in his view, was never a dictator nor he appointed anybody as his heir by saying that 'The Dhamma is the Supreme Commander of the Sangh.' As such Buddha was, according to him, for Parliamentary Government because 'in Parliamentary Government you have a duty, and a right; the duty to obey the law and right to criticise it' but 'in Dictatorship you have only duty to obey but no right to criticise it.'⁴¹ Ambedkar further held that 'The Communists themselves admit that their theory of the State as a permanent dictatorship is a weakness in their political philosophy. They take shelter under the plea that the State will ultimately wither away.'⁴² But, as Ambedkar argued, they themselves were not sure as to when the State would wither away and what would take its place. If the Communist State could not be sustained except by force, then, as Ambedkar believed, religion, in this case Buddhism, could help sustain it. This is why, in Ambedkar's opinion, Buddhism was superior to communism and could be a better alternative to it.

Thus, Ambedkar's alternative philosophy to communism is based on universal values, like equality, liberty and fraternity, which are deeply ingrained in Buddhism - an emancipatory religion, as he found it to be.

Gandhi and Gandhism

Ideological differences do not always culminate in so much of bitterness as existed between Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. They had an antagonistic familiarity between them in terms of always having diagonally opposite viewpoints. It might be because of difference in their caste background, Ambedkar - an out-caste Mahar, Gandhiji - a caste Bania, and it might also be because these two prodigies were egoists, not tolerating and withstanding each other's erudition and popularity. Whatever may be the cause of their incompatibility, it is certain that these two titans did not have a cordial

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 452.

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 452-453.

⁴² Ibid., p. 459.

and affable relationship. They had differing opinions regarding untouchability and the caste system. They were also at loggerheads with each other on many other issues. As we further move on the discussion, it will be amply clear about the conflict-ridden relationship between these two prolific geniuses.

Ambedkar first met Gandhiji in Bombay before going to the First Session of the Round Table Conference when Gandhiji had told Ambedkar that he was not in favour of regarding the Untouchables as a separate entity for political purposes.⁴³ Beginning with this meeting, the viewpoints of Ambedkar and Gandhiji never coalesced on any issue. The Congress boycotted the first session and, hence, Ambedkar and other non-Congress leaders put forward their views in the First Session. Ambedkar reiterated his demands for the Untouchables to be recognised as a separate political entity, which he made to the *Simon Commission*. The verbal duel between him and Gandhiji regarding political safeguards to the Untouchables got heightened when Gandhiji joined the Second Round Table Conference as a representative of the Congress. Gandhiji said that, except the special treatment of the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, he would most strongly resist any further special representation. According to Ambedkar, 'This was nothing but a declaration of war by Mr. Gandhi and the Congress against the Untouchables.'⁴⁴ Speaking on Gandhiji's claim of the Congress representing the Depressed Classes, he said, '...To that claim I can only say that it is one of the many false claims which irresponsible people keep on making...'⁴⁵ When the *Minorities Pact* was agreed upon among the minorities and presented, Gandhiji, as Ambedkar put it, attacked everybody who had taken part in producing the pact. He was particularly furious for the recognition given to the Untouchables as a separate political entity. According to Ambedkar, Gandhiji expressed his dissatisfaction by saying

... I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf...It (separate political entity) will create a division in Hinduism which I can not possibly look forward to with any

⁴³ Ambedkar, 1991, Volume-9, p. 56.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 57.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 65.

satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I can not possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are divisions set forth in the villages...if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life.⁴⁶

For Gandhiji's such kind of rigidity, as Ambedkar put it, everybody felt that Mr. Gandhi was the most determined enemy of the Untouchables. When the pact was accepted by the British Government, Gandhiji took to fast unto death for its revoke, and, according to Ambedkar, responding to the call of humanity, he had to sacrifice his demand and agree to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Gandhiji in order to save his life. The Poona Pact, which resulted from such agreement, in his opinion, though increased the fixed quota of seats for the Untouchables, took away the right to the double vote, thereby hammering on their interests.

According to Ambedkar, there was a Temple Entry Movement in 1933 to allow the Untouchables to enter the temples, which was only a publicity-oriented activity, since the temples, which were opened, were no longer temples, being in a dilapidated condition and inhabited by dogs and other animals. When Ambedkar was asked by Gandhiji to lend his support to this movement, he declined to do so because Gandhiji refused to carry this social reform beyond removing untouchability. Also, according to Ambedkar, 'He (Gandhiji) said that though he was against untouchability he was not against caste.'⁴⁷

The differences in viewpoints between Ambedkar and Gandhiji also surfaced after Ambedkar published his undelivered speech 'Annihilation of Caste,' prepared for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. Gandhiji, in his *Harijan*, said that Ambedkar made the mistake in his address by picking out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value to substantiate his argument. In his opinion, Shastras should be interpreted by Saints and not by learned men. He further said that judged by the standard applied by Ambedkar, every known living faith would probably fail. He also said that a religion should be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. There was no calling too low and none too high. Everybody

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 68-69. The bracket is added.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 113. The bracket is added.

should follow the ancestral calling, he said. To these, Ambedkar replied one by one. He held that the texts used by him were not at all of doubtful authenticity. He said, 'I should like to state that the texts cited by me are all taken from the writings of the late Mr. Tilak who was a recognised authority on the Sanskrit language and on the Hindu Shastras.'⁴⁸ Further, Ambedkar argued that the Shastras could also be interpreted differently by the Saints and the interpolations could gradually become parts of the Shastras. Though Ambedkar agreed that the best specimens should be taken to judge a religion rather than the worst specimens, but, according to him, '... why the worst number so many and the best so few?'⁴⁹ Criticising Gandhiji's emphasis on sticking to ancestral calling, Ambedkar wanted to know how far Gandhiji practised what he preached. He said that Gandhiji preferred law to trading, his ancestral calling, and later he became 'half-saint and half-politician.' Similarly, Gandhiji never condemned his youngest son, who married a Brahmin girl and served a newspaper magnate, for not following the ancestral calling, he said. He argued, 'It may be that his failure to practise (what he preached) is due to the ideal being too high to be attainable; It may be that his failure to practise is due to the innate hypocrisy of the man.'⁵⁰ Though he admitted that the standards used by him to judge Hinduism would disqualify it or for that matter any religion, but any religion, in his opinion, should be judged by social standards based on social ethics, and by this standard, Hinduism failed to be a religion.

Thus, it is evident that the two had different understanding relating to, and diametrically opposing views regarding, society, caste system and religion. The antagonism between the two became glaringly evident when Ambedkar spoke his mind on Gandhism as a whole in a very dissecting and critical way. According to him, 'Quite recently a new 'ism' has come on the Indian horizon. It is called Gandhism... Some have so much faith in it that they do not hesitate to offer it as an alternative to Marxism.'⁵¹ Ambedkar has, however, underlined two features of Gandhism.

The first special feature of Gandhism is that its philosophy helps those who have, to keep what they have and to prevent those who

⁴⁸ Ambedkar, 1979, Volume-1, p. 87.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 88.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 90. The bracket is added.

⁵¹ Ambedkar, 1991, Volume-9, p. 274.

have not from getting what they have a right to get. No one who examines the Gandhian attitude to strikes, the Gandhian reverence for caste and the Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship by the rich for the benefit of the poor can deny that this is upshot of Gandhism. Whether this is the calculated result of a deliberate design or whether it is a matter of accident may be open to argument. But the fact remains that Gandhism is the philosophy of the well-to-do and the leisure class.⁵²

Similarly, the second special feature of Gandhism is to delude people into accepting their misfortunes by presenting them as best of good fortunes.⁵³ Ambedkar has given two illustrations to clarify this. According to him, the Hindu sacred law penalised the Shudras (Hindus of the fourth class) from acquiring wealth. It is a law of enforced poverty unknown in any other part of the world. What does Gandhism do? It does not lift the ban. It blesses the Shudra for his moral courage to give up property!⁵⁴

Similarly, Gandhism, in his opinion, without condemning scavenging, sought to perpetuate this system by praising scavenging as the noblest service to society. Ambedkar held that,

... this is the technique of Gandhism, to make wrongs done appear to the very victim as though they were his privileges. If there is an "ism" which has made full use of religion as opium to lull the people into false beliefs and false security, it is Gandhism....⁵⁵

Gandhism, in Ambedkar's view, professed to abolish untouchability and this was hailed as the greatest virtue of Gandhism, but it was opposed to the idea of inter-dining or inter-marriage to abolish untouchability. He said that what Mr. Gandhi's anti-untouchability meant was to class together the Shudras and Ati-Shudras making the Untouchables as Shudras in the process. But it was clearly evident that such assimilation was not possible from the new name, *Harijan*, given to the Untouchables by Gandhiji. According to Ambedkar, 'He (Gandhiji) has also by his new name counteracted

⁵² Ibid., p. 291.

⁵³ Ibid

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 293.

assimilation and made it impossible.⁵⁶ Similarly, he revealed that though Gandhism allowed access to any kind of education by the Untouchables, it however, clearly specified that such educational achievement should not be used to further one's living. No other than the hereditary calling should be followed as occupation or profession. So, according to Ambedkar, 'Under Gandhism the Untouchables are to be eternal scavengers.... The virtue of anti-untouchability plank in Gandhism is quite illusory. There is no substance in it.'⁵⁷

Ambedkar, however, said that Gandhism and Hinduism were one and the same with the only difference that Gandhism provided a philosophic justification for Hinduism and its dogmas and thereby making it appear decent, respectable and even attractive from the surface. The philosophy provided by Gandhism was that 'All that is in Hinduism is well, all that is in Hinduism is necessary for public good.'⁵⁸ A later Gandhiji, however, spoke against caste and said that it was an anachronism, but Ambedkar said that much should not be read into it since he did not say it was an evil or anathema. Continuing his encapsulation of Gandhism, Ambedkar said, in the context of machinery and civilization,

Machinery and modern civilization are indispensable for emancipating man from leading the life of a brute, and for providing him with leisure and making a life of culture possible... Under Gandhism the common man must keep on toiling ceaselessly for a pittance and remain a brute. In short, Gandhism with its call of back to nature, means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast mass of the people.⁵⁹

Thus, Ambedkar's elaborate criticism of Gandhiji and Gandhism clearly demonstrates that the two had perceptible differences towards most issues of society.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 295. The bracket is added.

⁵⁷ Ibid

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 296.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 284.

Mainstream Nationalism

Ambedkar's role in mainstream nationalism is an important component of Ambedkarism, as it brings forth Ambedkarism's link to the larger issue of freedom and dignity. Ambedkar was criticised by many as not being a nationalist, a patriot and, more harshly and rudely, considered to be a British tool. These kinds of charges were the most damaging stains in his meaningful career. These charges were the product of Ambedkar's actions, which, to some extent, gave them apparent plausibility. He was a nationalist at heart in the true sense of the term, but he did nothing overtly to prove his nationalist bent of mind. He was certainly against the continuation of British rule in India. This was clearly evident from his speech delivered to the convention of students union of London University in 1924. It was also known from his thesis submitted for his Ph.D. degree. But, at that time, Ambedkar was not actively involved in politics, and, when he entered politics and became a leader to reckon with, his attitude and action towards the national struggle for Independence was quite bothersome for mainstream nationalists. According to him, the Untouchables as a community never took part in what was called Fight for Freedom and this was particularly noticeable in the last campaign of the Fight for Freedom, which followed Quit India resolution passed by the Congress in August 1942. Even, as he pointed out, it is only once that the Musalmans took part in it and that was during the *Khilafat* agitation. They soon got out of it. The Fight for Freedom, as Ambedkar stated, was carried on mostly by the Hindus.

The Congress, however, gave the reason for the indifference of the Untouchables to the freedom struggle. It said that the Untouchables were the tools of the British Imperialism and that's why they did not join the fight for freedom. Ambedkar was, however, of the opinion that such explanation given by the Congress was an absurd explanation to which circumstances lent an apparent plausibility. He said that the Untouchables did not join the struggle not because they were the tools of the British Imperialism but because 'they fear that freedom of India will establish Hindu domination which is sure to close to them and forever all prospect of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and that they will be made the hewers of wood and drawers of water.'⁶⁰ He further said, '... They (the Untouchables) do not wish to be placed under *Hindu Raj* in which the governing class

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 168.

would be the *Bania* and the Brahmin with low class Hindus as their policemen, all of whom have been the hereditary enemies of the Untouchables.'⁶¹ The Untouchables as such were not opposed to freedom from the British Imperialism, but they refused to be content, as Ambedkar put it, with mere freedom from the British Imperialism. What they wanted was that free India should be made safe for democracy in which they would have safeguards in the constitution to prevent the tyranny of a Hindu communal majority from coming into being. And unless, this was guaranteed, they found no exhilarating impetus to join the struggle. The Congress, on the other hand, regarded the freedom of India from the British Imperialism to be 'the be-all and end-all' of Indian nationalism. Ambedkar said, 'Nothing more, it thinks, is necessary for the welfare of the Indian people in a free India.'⁶² The Congress, when asked about the constitution of a free India said that it would be democracy based on adult franchise and ruled out any other safeguards for preventing the tyranny of a Hindu Communal Majority as it would lead to the vivisection of the nation. Ambedkar said that this argument of the Congress had its origin in the genius of Mr. Gandhi to whom the high class Hindus, who stood to lose by these safeguards, felt so grateful. Thus, according to Ambedkar,

What the Congress wants is a free India with full, unrestricted freedom to the Hindus in a free India to dispose of the Untouchables in anyway they liked. No wonder the Untouchables have refused to take part in such a dishonest agitation, elevated though it may be by such high sounding name as "Fight for Freedom"⁶³

Even in the Second Round Table Conference, Ambedkar made it clear that the Untouchables were not for transfer of power from the British to the Indian people. He said that the Depressed Classes were not anxious for the transfer of power, but if the British Government was unable to resist the forces that were clamouring for transference of political power then the Government should make the necessary arrangement so that the power be shared by all communities in their

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Ibid., p. 169.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 78.

respective proportions and should not fall into the hands of an oligarchy whether Muhammedans or Hindus.

Thus, as Ambedkar has made it clear, the Untouchables were not opposed to the freedom *per se*, but certainly they were not outright supporters of the struggle for Independence for which they were branded as not-nationalist, not-patriot. They wanted freedom from the Hindu domination first, then from the British domination.

Hence, it may be said that Ambedkar's non-involvement in the mainstream nationalism, which invited scorn, was, not because he was a British stooge, but because he was too preoccupied with the issues of social justice and social democracy. He was always striving for the cause of dalit justice, which was very close to his heart and which was dearer than even the Independence of the country, as it was his understanding that Independence without social democracy was meaningless for Dalits.

Education and Politics

Ambedkar, coming from an untouchable caste and himself experiencing the traumas of dehumanising practices generally meted out to the Untouchables, also grasped the emancipatory potential of modern education in their life. If Ambedkar could question the unscrupulous and unjust domination of the upper castes and the Brahmins in particular, it is because he himself was educated and visionary. He knew that the strength and power of his diatribe of Brahminism and injustices in the society came from his learned knowledge. He believed that education would not only provide knowledge but also trigger a consciousness to emerge - a consciousness of their material conditions, dehumanising existence and multiple (social, cultural, economic, religious and so on) exploitation, and this consciousness of deprivation and marginalisation would force them to yearn for liberation.

During his period and before that, education was mainly the preserve of the upper classes. So, Ambedkar was clamouring for the access of the Untouchables to education and encouraging their increased participation. He himself established educational institutions for this purpose. Highlighting the importance and reason for education and spread of knowledge, Ambedkar said,

- The power of the privileged classes rests upon lies which are sedulously propagated among the masses. No resistance to power is possible while the sanctioning lies,

which justify that power are accepted as valid. While the line which is the first and the chief line of defence remains unbroken, there can be no revolt. Before any injustice, any abuse or oppression can be resisted, the lie upon which it is founded must be unmasked, must be clearly recognized for what it is. This can happen only with education.⁶⁴

Similarly, speaking at Dhobi Talao High School in 1948, he said, we can not rise in life without education and knowledge. The upper castes at present hold the reigns of political power. The education needed to win high positions is still only with the upper castes. You cannot wrest this power from them without education.⁶⁵

Thus, Ambedkar gave a very special importance to education.

Apart from education, being western educated, Ambedkar was, however, aware of the fact that political means would be more effective in raising the status of the Untouchables and effecting improvements in their lives than religious means. He said that 'Power is needed to destroy power.' In his opinion, power is either economic or political but he urged the Untouchables to acquire political power as much as possible.⁶⁶

So, according to Ambedkar, education and political power are the two most important things, the Untouchables should try to achieve. He even demanded separate political protection for them. He also established two political parties- the Independent Labour Party (1936) and the Scheduled Caste Federation (1942) - to give the political movement of the Untouchables a definite shape. Though in electoral politics, the two political parties achieved nothing substantial, they were, however, able to achieve great success in highlighting, promoting and protecting the interests of the Depressed Classes. Ambedkar's own example - being educated and politically empowered- stands as a testimony to the fact that one, with education and political power (and of course with genuineness of interests and determination), can make a difference in one's own life as well as in others'.

⁶⁴ Ambedkar, 1989(a), Volume-5, p. 399.

⁶⁵ M.S.Gore, op. cit., p. 209.

⁶⁶ Ambedkar, 1989(a), Volume-5, p.399.

Conclusion

After the perusal of the whole discussion, the meaning of Ambedkarism becomes crystal clear. It is a new 'ism,' an ideology of protest and criticism against the iniquitous and exploitative Hindu social system. It envisions the emergence of a new society devoid of untouchability, slavery and exploitation, and based on equality, fraternity, liberty and justice. Ambedkarism underlines the importance of religion in life and proves how an emancipatory religion like Buddhism establishes communism without any bloodshed and violence.

Ambedkarism makes a critical analysis not only of Marxism but also of Gandhism. Gandhiji is hailed as the champion and saviour of the Untouchables, but Ambedkarism portrays him as the most determined enemy of the Untouchables. Gandhism, with its rejection of machinery and modern civilization, will make people lead the life of a brute. Ambedkarism is, on the other hand, for more machinery and more civilisation. Besides this, Ambedkarism suggests that educational achievement and political participation will, in due course, bring about a discernible change in the subhuman existential conditions. While education will help know their plight in the society, at the same time, they can take advantage of government jobs to improve their lives. They can also formulate ideas and opinions. Similarly, political participation will empower them to build pressure on the government to ensure social democracy and social justice. Thus, Ambedkarism, features centrally the famous cliché 'to educate, agitate and organize.'

To comprehend, Ambedkarism is a subaltern diatribe against majoritarian Hinduism, which is same as Brahminism that glorifies perpetual slavery and inhuman treatment of the Untouchables. It is a radical paradigm that leads to iconoclastic analysis of the Hindu society, and its caste system, based on deep religious sanction that originates and sustains graded inequality and socio-religious disabilities. It is an ideology, associated with liberalism, rationalism, humanism, egalitarianism and justice. It brings to the fore the principles of social justice, social democracy and emancipation (of the Depressed Classes). It is a conflict theory that throws light on the inherent and age-old contradictions and antagonisms of and within the system (Hindu social system). It is a perspective that, *inter alia*, talks about change: change towards humanity and fraternity. It is also about criticising Marxism and Gandhism and presenting Buddhism as

an emancipatory religion and as an alternative to Marxism. And finally, it is also about educational and political empowerment of the Untouchables to elevate their social position and help them lead lives with dignity and self-respect, based on the tenets of equality, liberty and fraternity.

Today, as we know, Ambedkarism, apart from inspiring Dalits in their struggle for self-respect and social justice, has also emerged as an important ideology in the arena of sociological ideas and has succeeded in redefining our sociological concerns and categories. Thus, Ambedkarism as an important subaltern ideology, would continue to influence and inspire Dalits and impact upon the academic discourse in times to come. No wonder, in contemporary Indian context, it has emerged as an important ideology for social change and development.

CONTESTING THE NATION: BORDERS, ETHNICITIES AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST

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As ethnicity and sub-nationalism¹ have acquired a new stridency in India's northeast particularly since the beginning of the 1980s, their linkages with foreign policy has naturally received some attention, though this has been rather sketchy. This paper proposes to review their interrelations and seeks to argue that while ethnicity and sub-nationalism are viewed by nation-states primarily in instrumentalist terms - more as foreign policy tools mobilized and deployed by them in order to pursue their respective national interests albeit with varying degree of success- it is also important to focus our attention on some of the everyday modes of ethnic articulation and practices in the region, which by all evidences refuse to be absorbed by any of the given grids of foreign policies of the concerned nation-states. This, one must understand, in no way undermines or even underestimates, the otherwise powerful role that nation-states, driven by their respective national interests, are seen to play in absorbing and appropriating such forces, framing the foreign policies and conducting their relations with others. It only draws our attention to a slowly widening space of ethnicity and sub-nationalism that the foreign policies of nation-states find difficult to occupy or colonize, come to terms with, absorb let alone appropriate, in their abiding pursuit of national interests. Ethnicity, as we argue in this paper, exists more as an *excess* of foreign policy and international relations constantly invoking and making use of the country's foreign policy and relations while bending them in

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¹ We use these terms without any value load that is usually associated with them. Thus, the term - 'ethnicity' is not used in any pejorative sense and 'sub-nationalism' does not necessarily refer to any social unit that dissolves or has the potential of dissolving into the wider Indian nation or its nationalism.

'ethnic' or 'sub-national' interests more than providing any direct opposition and challenge to them.² The contest between national interest on one hand and ethnic or sub-national interest on the other in our view plays itself out through the production of an excess or a surplus that cannot be accounted for by any of the available categories (such as 'internal security' or 'domestic factors of Indian foreign policy' etc) of foreign policy analysis.

Contest as excess

Ethnicity or sub-nationalism is usually viewed in foreign policy circles in binary terms - either as part of a game that *nation-states* play in a world that continues to be dominated by nation-states or as a challenge that threatens to turn the game upside down, albeit with varying degree of success. Contemporary writings on the collapse of the former Soviet Union bear ample testimony to how ethnicity provides a successful challenge to the so-called 'established' nation-states. Rules of the new game are yet to be crystallized and the final contours of the emerging world, according to the second stream of theorists, will arguably be decided upon by the tug and pull between these two sets of forces.

The early literature on Indian foreign policy is marked by the robust expectation that her foreign policy ought to be informed by her 'national interest'. Yet, in any discussion on foreign policy, India's national interest is made to stand on a distant pedestal above all scrutiny and is usually much too taken for granted to require any further proof and demonstration. Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya's pioneering work on the *making* of Indian foreign policy describes the dynamics in the following terms:

In a democratic form of politics and government, theoretically speaking, the foreign policy decisions of the government, like other decisions, are tested in the light of public opinion, influenced by pressure groups, examined and criticized by the political parties and the press, filtered through parliament, moulded and shaped by the Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister, and finally approved by the Cabinet. It is, therefore, expected that the ultimate determination of the national interest by the government is

² The analogy is that if they are bent often enough, there comes a point when they might break.

based on a broad consensus generated by the democratic processes of decision-making, and therefore, on the whole rational (Bandyopadhyaya 1980/1970:6).

Bandyopadhyaya's book apparently rules out any possible role that ethnic groups and communities might play in shaping and influencing India's foreign policy. Viewed in this light, he merely reiterates the dominant sentiment of the foreign policy elite of his time that the foreign policy of a state pertains to the nation fictively defined as a collective and an indivisible whole and the interest of the nation is not only given and self-evident but most obviously prevails over ethnicities and sub-nationalities contained within it. The agencies that are supposed to play any such role named by him are predominantly the modern *civil* institutions like the pressure groups, political parties, the press and the official functionaries of the formal governmental setup. Elsewhere in the same book, he however makes a plea for basing foreign policy on 'national consensus' so that it has a 'cementing and stabilizing influence on the centrifugal forces' and 'our status abroad is not dwarfed' (Bandyopadhyaya 1980/1970:86).³ The foreign policy of a nation, according to him, should not be driven by any ethnic, sub-national and similarly particularistic considerations but is believed to have a sobering impact on these forces. Centrifugal forces, in this body of literature, are seen primarily - if not exclusively - as an embarrassment to the 'we' - whose status abroad will have to be projected in better light by founding the country's foreign policy on a democratic basis. The idea is that we need to 'democratically order' these forces.

The ordering in a country like India, according to Kanti Bajpai, is done not simply through the application and deployment of force and coercion but through democratic accommodation. In theoretical terms, he describes India's security policy as one of 'modified structuralism' (Bajpai in Muthiah ed. 1998:157-197). While democratic ordering of the centrifugal forces helps a state in the process articulate its national identity, foreign policy most importantly requires such an identity for its projection. It is not the nation that makes its foreign policy; it is rather the foreign policy that makes its own nation. At a more

³ While early foreign policy analysts' discomfiture with ethnicity is understandable, few amongst them would have explicitly acknowledged it as embarrassment and shame. Most of them preferred to avoid the embarrassment by not mentioning it and taking it into cognizance at all.

theoretical level, while summing up the findings of a reasonably large collective of researchers, Jepperson et al for example maintains: "Appropriation of this idiom (of national identity, SKD) for the study of international relations may seem forced, since states obviously do not have immediately apparent equivalents to "selves". But nations do construct and project collective identities, and states operate as actors" (Jepperson et al in Katzenstein ed. 1996: 59).

With the beginning of the 1980s, ethnicity in the bordering states of India particularly in the northeast has become a formidable force and almost as a matter of coincidence started figuring in the writings on India's foreign policy. Yet there is reason to believe that these writings continued to be dominated by the governing paradigm of nation-states. Ethnicity is viewed as an instrument, a tool or a ploy that nation-states fall back on, use, utilize, mobilize and deploy in order to pursue their national interests. Bhaumik's study on *Insurgent Crossfire* (1984) shows how ethnic insurgencies in the region are caught in the 'crossfire' of conflicting foreign policy interests of such concerned nation-states as, Myanmar, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan and India. Rajat Ganguly's work on 'kin states' points out how ethnic continuities provide the nation-states with a convenient handle for intervention in the neighbouring countries of South Asia (Ganguly 1998). In all these writings, nation-states are recognized as prime actors and ethnicity - merely a pawn in the grand chess-game that nation-states play in order to outmaneuver and checkmate others.

On the other hand, there are studies focusing on how ethnicity's challenge to international relations results in a certain destabilization of not just a few individual nation-states but the existing order of nation-states. Olivier Roy's study for example points out how the challenge that the Taliban all over the world poses today, aims not so much at replacing one nation-state by another and thereby subscribing to the same nation-state paradigm that has been articulated since 1648 but very much at undermining the settled order of nation-states (Roy 2001). It may be worthwhile to review the connection between the Taliban and the rise of fundamentalist forces in the neighbouring countries. In the writings of such commentators as Kotwal (2001), Das (2002), Bhaumik (in Limaye et al 2004: 219-244) and Lintner (in Limaye et al 2004:413-436), one traces how the rise of ethnic and fundamentalist forces in the northeast or in neighbouring Bangladesh has been mediated by the national interests of the relevant state actors. Bhaumik and Lintner in particular prefer to view Bangladesh as 'the

second front of Islamic terror' - second only to Pakistan, and in both cases, such 'terror' is primarily masterminded and perpetrated by the unfriendly neighbours while covertly pursuing their national and foreign policy interests.

We on the other hand propose to focus on ethnicity that exists as an excess to India's foreign policy and therefore remains unappropriated if not, inappropriable, but does not seem to challenge the given structure from without, by way of completely shaking and undermining it or as we will see, by even having threatened to do so. We describe it as everyday articulation of ethnicity and define it as a peculiar and oft-neglected site of resistance - an excess, which such mega identity-defining structures as foreign policy and national interest, find difficult to fully contain, absorb and appropriate. We call it 'excess' insofar as it exceeds the limits set forth by these structures almost on an everyday basis without of course becoming overtly visible or destroying them. Every contest is not an opposition. While opposition is defined in zero-sum terms, contest defined as excess is not. For, ethnicity's gain should not be regarded as the nation's loss or vice versa. Resistance implicit in contest requires the very structures to express, organize and articulate itself. It is within the given structures of foreign policy and international relations that such contest takes its roots.

What we describe as 'everyday contest' needs to be distinguished from its more publicized and widely known, episodic and dramatic forms occupying much of the attention of foreign policy scholars and analysts. It is always difficult to identify the nature of demands underlying the episodic and dramatic forms of contest in the sense that the insurgent leaders more often than not settle for far less than what they publicly demand. Although the Bodo Liberation Tigers began with the demand for separate statehood, it as we all know finally settled for a territorial council within the state of Assam. We may for our convenience restrict ourselves to an analysis of only two of its underlying demands: On the one hand, a good deal of contest revolves around the demand for complete secession from the Union of India. The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) by its own admission struggles for establishing what it describes as 'Sovereign and Independent Asom' and the proposed territory of 'Sovereign and Independent Asom' corresponds to the Indian state of Assam as it was on April 7, 1979 when the outfit was born and its political boundaries are sought to be carved out of India. On the other hand, the Zu nationalism upheld and represented at one time by the Mizo National

Front (MNF) was predicated on the irredentist demand for carving out a separate and 'sovereign' land for the Zu nation from out of the presently existing States of India, Bangladesh and Myanmar. In either case, the demand seeks only to alter the existing configuration of nation-states in the region and certainly not the paradigm of nation-states as it has been laid down by the Peace of Westphalia (1648).

It is important to note that the concerned foreign powers do not necessarily find it possible to utilize ethnicity to their advantage. In a book published as early as in 1980, Nibedan for instance suggests: "... though all the insurgents were dependent on Peking (sic) as well as CIA, and through the patrons, the Maoists struck a deal between them, uniting them on a common objective, the insurgents had not been indoctrinated enough to merge their respective separate identity into a common organization" (Nibedan 1980:52). The case of ULFA's controversial Pakistani connection during the initial years may be discussed at this point. On being asked by Pakistani authorities to 'disrupt communications and economic targets such as oil, pipeline and gas fields, create chaos and pave the way for a general uprising against the government', two of ULFA's top leaders expressed their opposition to major strikes on civilian targets as advocated by the Pakistanis. As Nath explained: "Major attack on government property will alienate us from the people and they will turn against us" (quoted in Hazarika 1994:174).

Borders as crooked lines

The transition to postcolonial India also coincided with the transformation of vast, largely uncharted and loosely administered frontiers into neatly demarcated and precisely drawn borders with the neighbouring states. The colonial policy of administering the northeast as a frontier rather than as a province or for that matter a conglomerate of provinces in British India is usually viewed as an extension of the Ahom policy of keeping the tribal communities of the hills free from any direct administration from outside. The Ahoms were particularly keen on extending their administration towards the plains than towards the hills. Contemporary researches on tribal raids particularly in the foothills of upper Assam during the Ahom rule suggest that these raids were 'primarily targeted at regulating labour' and the plainsmen apparently held hostage by them played a great role in supplying the 'corvee labour' (*posa*) to the evidently labour-scarce and low-yield hilly regions. It is only with the colonial

annexation since the Treaty of Yandabo (1826) that the so-called natural barrier between the plains and the hills turned into a rigid and ossified political boundary (Barbora in Kikon & Das 2005 eds.: 51-2; Barbora in Samaddar ed. 2006:196-215).

The colonial policy was inspired not only by the desire of keeping the insiders separate from the outsiders by way of making such special provisions as Inner Line and Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas etc. but also more fundamentally by the self-imposed obligation of protecting the subjects from the marauding raids of the 'primitive' and 'savage' tribals. The question was not simply of keeping the raiders at bay but of organizing regular punitive expeditions while protecting the subjects - "who have submitted to our authority". As Allen observes: "It was not creditable ... to our Government that such atrocities should recur annually with unvarying certainty, and that we should be powerless alike to protect our subjects or to punish the aggressors" (Allen 1905/2002:16). It seems that the colonial rule was committed to what it always regarded as the well-being of its subjects.

The frontiers were constructed by the colonial ethnographers-cum-administrators, as the means of keeping the tribal raiders at bay. As Dunbar puts it:

... Assam has hill tribes on the border, and although these people cannot be called warlike or particularly enterprising, the border tracts have always needed protection from what might otherwise be frequent petty raids (Dunbar 1932/1984:76).

The Assam Rifles - formerly known as the Military Police of Assam - was raised precisely with the purpose of 'border defence among strange wild tribes' (Shakespeare 1929/1980:1). A frontier, according to the colonial perception, is a vast tract of land that is situated between the territory inhabited by their 'subjects' and 'the new country' (like Tibet/China) on the other. The insiders and the 'new country' are therefore not separated by any thin line; indeed there is a gradual slope of frontiers that gradually merge into the 'new country'. The threat from without is always perceived to be associated with that from within the frontier. As Dunbar writes:

... there have been times during the past twenty years when the Chinese troops, invading Tibet, and pressing down upon the tribes beyond the North-East Frontier, have given cause for anxiety (Dunbar 1932/1984: II).

The frontier administrators almost unequivocally felt that punitive expeditions as the only means left open to them for tackling the problem of tribal raids, were not enough to put a complete stop to the raids and that such raids were almost inevitable - given the nature of the terrain, the absence of any settled administration and most importantly, the 'habits' of the tribal groups conducting such raids. The British administrators seem to be constantly experimenting with newer technologies of governing the frontiers. Dunbar for example felt the necessity of raising a mobile column of border police trained in 'transborder warfare at a few hours' notice'. In 1911, the frontiers of Balipara and Sadiya were put for the first time under separate political officers. Yet, given the 'habits' of these tribes, the raids were considered as excusable and attracted surprisingly less force and coercion. As Misra points out: "Primitive crimes ... took place outside civilization and were therefore seen as natural and not barbaric. This would partially explain the ideas which justified the relatively low reliance on the use of coercive force in the Naga Hills with prolonged and direct personal influence rather than subjugation being advocated as the dominant policy" (Misra 1998:3276). The colonial policy in other words was one of non-interference in the frontier areas and concern for the well-being of their subjects. The British authorities enforced the Inner Line regulation in 1873 by which they sought to keep the administrative districts of Assam on the northern valley of the Brahmaputra out of the administrative limits. The Inner Line was a limit up to which the district officer's regular jurisdiction ran and up to which they were supposed to maintain law and order.

It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century and more precisely in 1911 that the British started following the 'forward policy' of exercising 'loose control' over the tribesmen so that they did not have the impression of being left in the lurch in their hours of need and distress and were sought to be used as a means of repulsing growing Chinese attacks. The tribals were seen as the trump card to be played against Chinese expansionism in and across Tibet. This has been described as 'the policy of controlling the tribes from within' (Majumdar 1963:1036). This was done in most cases by way of appointing British superintending officers in those areas. In March 1936, the King in Council passed necessary order to declare North-East Frontier (Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur) together with Naga, Lushai and North Cachar Hills as Excluded Areas of Assam. In 1937 the affairs of the tribal areas were transferred to a newly created establishment called the Governor's Secretariat, and the Chief

Secretary of Assam was relieved of the Tribal Affairs Department. The Political Officers of the Eastern Frontier were thus placed under the immediate authority and direction of the Governor of Assam as a delegate of the Governor-General of India. During the Second World War the necessity of bringing the Frontier Areas under more direct control was felt and a new post of Advisor to the Governor of Assam was created. The Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880 as amended in 1884 and 1888 was revised again in 1945 to accommodate the changes that took place in the twentieth century.

It is important to note that the task of reorganization of territories at the time of Partition was always thought in terms of 'drawing a line' - as Sir Cyril Radcliffe - responsible for demarcating the borders in the east has put it. The report dated 13 August 1947 is full of references to how the line could (and not should⁴) be drawn notwithstanding many problems and impossibilities associated with the process. We have to keep in mind that there were sharp differences of opinion concerning not just the precise location of the line on ground but the very terms of reference that invested the Bengal Boundary Commission that Radcliffe headed, with the authority of making recommendations. The difference of opinion was so sharp that 'other members' unable to arrive at any decision acceptable to all, relinquished their power and agreed to go by the award given by Radcliffe:

... in the absence of any reconciliation on all main questions affecting the drawing of the boundary itself, my colleagues assented to the view at the close of discussions that I had no alternative but to proceed to give my own decision (Government of India 1947:3).

In other words, border-making in postcolonial India can hardly be called a democratic exercise in spite of the fact that the Indian state subsequently described itself as a 'democratic republic'. Borders everywhere escape the protocols of democracy.

Once the borders were delineated, it is interesting to see how our nationhood was contingent on the new territoriality that emerged in

⁴ Exceptions by Radcliffe's admission had to be made in many cases to the principle of drawing the line in accordance with the status of demographic majority.

the wake of our independence. Nehru's 'search for India' in his famous *Discovery* was also among other things a search for a determinate territorial space that one could unambiguously call India - an 'India' which was to be wider than our immediate ethnic and culturally bounded albeit particularistic imaginations and hence an indivisible space without any internal borders. This is one of Nehru's superbly effusive descriptions of *Bharat Mata*:

Sometimes as I reached a gathering, a great roar of welcome, would greet me: *Bharat Mata Ki Jai* - 'Victory to Mother India'. I would ask them unexpectedly what they meant by that cry, who was this *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, whose victory they wanted? My question would amuse them and surprise them, and then not knowing exactly what to answer, they would look at each other and at me. I persisted in my questioning. At last a vigorous Jat, wedded to the soil from immemorial generations, would say it was the dharti, the good earth of India, that they meant. What earth? Their particular village patch, or all the patches in the district or province, or in the whole of India? And so question and answer went on, till they would ask me impatiently to tell them all about it. I would endeavour to do so and to explain that India was all this that they had thought, but it was much more. The mountains and rivers of India, and the forests and broad fields, which give us food, were all dear to us, but what counted ultimately were the people of India, people like them and me, who were spread out all over this vast land (Nehru 1956:62).

We obtain here an image of India that is larger than any of the communities living in it or any of their combinations. The new geopolitical imagination was expected to cut across the geographies of our ethnic and communal imaginations.

Let us reflect on how the state borders were drawn in the wake of India's independence in the northeast. In the hills, it will be more apt to say, that the borders determined the nation and the nation did not determine its borders. The integration of Naga hills offers a significant case in point. Nehru never thought that the integration of Nagaland (the erstwhile Naga Hills district of Assam) was either contingent or provisional. Benjamin Zachariah - one of his contemporary biographers - informs us that even before independence, Nehru was aware of the uneven spread of nationalism to these areas. After

independence, he believed that these areas 'ought to be part of India and Assam' for which he was prepared to concede as much 'freedom and autonomy' as possible. Zachariah discovers a 'patronising attitude' in Nehru's 'understanding' of the situation. It was this belief that seemed to have goaded him to build the nation 'by force of arms with the Indian 'defence forces' in a culturally alien territory indulging in large-scale killing and rape'. In his words: "It was in the north-east of India that the Nehruvian vision took on its most brutal and violent forms" (Zachariah 2004:210-11). Never before in Indian history has the nation been so much shaped by the borders and enclosed by them.

Why was the transition from frontiers to borders considered necessary by the newly born Indian state? Nari Rustomji - one of the pioneering frontier service administrators responsible for crafting the borders in the northeast - attributes it to such 'purely fortuitous circumstances' as the growth of tea industry and the exploitation of minerals, including coal, oil and tea etc. that brought the tribal groups and communities under 'the embrace of civilization and administration'. Of course strategic factors are far too important to be wished away. Insofar as the international borders with China, Myanmar and East Pakistan/Bangladesh started being crystallized, it was impossible for India to administer these areas as frontiers. In the words of Rustomji:

In course of time as China proceeded to entrench herself in Tibet and gave indications that she had reservations regarding the MacMahon Line as the international frontier (read, border SKD) between China and India, it no longer remained possible for India to allow the vast belt of mountains stretching out northwards from the Brahmaputra valley to remain an unexplored, neglected and undefined void. Strategic considerations necessitated the construction of a network of communications for the movement of troops and provisioning of supplies in the event of an attack from the north. And it became no less essential to cultivate the goodwill of the frontier people so that they should lend their support to the administration and the armed forces in time of their need (Rustomji 1983:18).

This short yet extremely significant excerpt shows at one level that the early policy of administering the region as a vast, uncharted and

loosely administered frontier was considered as anachronistic for economic and strategic considerations and at another level, how the peoples inside the border were sought to be expressly drawn into the centre of the nation instead of letting them relatively free as per the colonial practice and thereby providing them with the relative freedom of administering themselves.⁵ Thus, Tripura for example was more open to the then East Pakistan than to India. In the words of V. P. Menon - widely regarded as one of the principal architects of the India state: "The first task was to build a road from Tripura to Assam, and another within Assam itself to provide a connecting link with the rest of India" (Menon 1956: 345). The concern here is to connect the far-off places with what is considered as India as fast as possible. The British concern on the other hand was to isolate them so that they could not pose a threat to the 'subjects' of British India.

Thus to cite another example, why was Manipur "taken over" by India? The phrase "taken over" - used by Menon - is highly significant as he offers the explanation:

Manipur is bounded on the north by the Naga district of Assam; on the east by Burma; on the south by Burma and the Lushai hills, and on the west by the district of Cachar ... In view of its position as a border state and its undeveloped character, it was decided to take over Manipur as a Chief Commissioner's province (Menon 1956:346).

⁵ Nari Rustomji feels that this new policy should be practised with great caution as it might backfire and prove to be counterproductive:

Much of the discord on the borders is a reaction to this patronizing condescension. It has been sought to be shown that heavy economic investment is of little avail in gaining the goodwill of the people of India's north-eastern borderlands and that a strong military presence often creates more problems than it solves. It is only if they can be convinced that their culture and way of life are not in jeopardy and will not be undermined by alien pressures that there is hope for a peaceful and secure manner (Rustomji 1983:3).

Rustomji's to my mind was the solitary voice that sought to draw our attention to the flip side of this policy of drawing them towards the so-called centre by whatever means including force and coercion.

It is significant to note that Manipur's interests were hardly of any concern here. The only concern was the security of India and defending her borders. Manipur's merger with India, as we know, continues to be a sore point of dispute between the Indian state and such insurgent organizations as the United National Liberation Front of Manipur and the People's Liberation Army and such overground organizations as United Committee, Manipur.

In the absence of a frontier that served in colonial India as a buffer between 'British India' and the 'new country', Indian state's attitude to borders per se and international borders in particular continues to be shaped by the 'cartographic anxiety' of protecting the people from the "invasion" of immigrants from outside.⁶ Yet it is interesting to see that even the demands for 'detection, disenfranchisement and deportation' of foreigners voiced first in a major way during the Assam movement (1979-1985) were regarded primarily as a 'domestic problem' and it was only in the 1990s and with the coming of Bharatiya Janata Party to power at the Centre that the foreigners' issue started being viewed as an bilateral issue to be settled bilaterally (Murayama 2006:1355). If we keep in mind the steps that the Centre and the states of the region have taken or promised to take say, during the last few years, one gets a fair idea of how attempts have persistently been made to evolve a more perfect and foolproof system that could completely stop the cross-border flow of population and protect the borders primarily through military and administrative means. Barbed wire fencing is being constructed along the 221 kilometer-long border between Tripura and Bangladesh and about 1500 families had to be displaced as a result. Such fencing made it difficult for many others to cultivate their land insofar as their land was located beyond the fence. A plea has already been made to set up live electric fence along the 272-kilometer stretch land border that separates Indian state of Assam from Bangladesh. A cabinet sub-committee of Meghalaya recommended issuance of three-tiered identity cards that would help the administration distinguish the permanent residents from both the semi-permanent and temporary settlers. The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) took the crucial decision of establishing floating police stations in order to stop 'infiltration' in the riverine areas. Even the Centre has decided to take the decision of involving the local civilians

⁶ Thus an ex-IPS officer turned activist during the Assam movement (1979-1985) - who subsequently fell out with the youth leadership - designates it as 'silent invasion' (Bhattacharyya 2001)

in identifying the immigrants. The Assam Government for example, adopted the resolution of setting up vigilance committees for this purpose. In simple terms, border is the first point through which the outsiders can make the contact with the body of population enclosed by it. It, as Mary Douglas argues, is the means through which the body can be saved from any contagion. Thus the formation of borders necessarily coincides with their securitization. Border discourse hardly enjoys any autonomy of its own; it is only part of a nation's discourse on security (Upadhyaya mimeo; Samaddar 2005 mimeo).

It is widely argued that illegal immigration implies a violation of the border control regime that accompanies the emergence of any modern state. The needle of the debate on illegal immigration in the region has focused not so much on whether the migrants have any right to enter and settle in India but on how India should evolve an effective border control regime that will not unduly harass and inconvenience the bona fide citizens facing the threat of being branded as 'foreigners'.⁷ Empirical studies conducted by us from time to time albeit on a much smaller scale tend to suggest that the border control regime also puts in place a border violation regime and there is reason to believe that the two are complementary to each other. For, a border violation regime cannot exist without a border control regime already in place and perhaps vice versa. Once the borders get drawn and the migration of 'unwanted' cheap and unskilled labour (like the rickshaw and handcart pullers, construction workers, domestic help and umbrella repairers etc.) grows apace in response to the rising demand for it in India, the immigrants - 'rejected' in their own countries - are in a desperate need for crossing the borders and a good deal of migration assumes a network character. The immigrants get in touch with the middlemen (popularly known as *dalals*) who have a network with the border guards and make them cross the borders. Once they cross the borders they go into hiding for a few weeks in the bordering villages where they stay against payment of rent and then melt into

⁷ The plea made by the Congress party to make suitable amendments in the Foreigners' Act and provide for the institution of tribunals for the purpose of detecting and deporting the foreigners settled in the country - in the wake of the Supreme Court verdict in favour of scrapping the Illegal Migrants (Detection by Tribunals) Act 1983 applicable only to Assam is a case in point. The tribunals may prolong the process but are likely to ensure, according to the Minister for External Affairs, the rights of the bona fide citizens against arbitrary harassment and deportation.

the crowd at an opportune moment and settle in those areas where the neighbours from their own villages already live in numbers. There are middlemen and party bosses for helping them obtain ration cards and requisite official papers by way of bribing the corrupt officials and thereby become citizens and voters. Everyone benefits from migration – the migrants who have to cross the borders to earn their livelihood, their employers who employ them at comparatively lower wages than what they have to pay to the natives and the locals, the politicians who thrive on the immigrant vote banks, the villagers of the neighbouring villages who serve as middlemen and rent their houses and thereby make money from them and the security forces who open the ‘line’ against easy money for the free passage of people and goods. Quite ironically, borders serve as the means of earning livelihood and everyone has a stake in having the borders drawn. The presence of a border control regime is necessary in order that immigration comes as a means of livelihood and easy money to everyone involved in the process. Border violation regime requires a border control regime for its operation; border’s paralegal career makes its legality a fiction but only a *necessary* fiction.

The intertwined character of these two regimes – borders and their violations – cannot be explained through Willem Van Schendel’s notion of ‘Bengal borderlands’ – defined as a culturally continuous space distinct from either of the territories of two contiguous nation-states encircling it. The borderlands have their own dynamics that according to him exist independently of the nation-states encircling them. The emphasis in Van Schendel’s work is laid on the distinctiveness of borderlands that cannot be explained through the borders separating the nation-states from each other. The notion does not seem to sensitize us to how border violations are predicated on the very entrenchment of borders and the control regime that accompanies them and how one feeds on the other. For him, borderlands are an anathema to borders. We see borders and border violations as being caught in a complex cobweb of mutuality. The violations as we have noted have assumed the character of a regime and the regime of border violations exceeds the border control regime, yet is enmeshed in it.

Secondly, it is interesting to see how the insurgents acquiesce to the border rules while bending them at the same time. Crossing the borders when they are on the run and taking refuge in a foreign country are usually interpreted by them more as a right than as a tactical move to escape arrest and avoid any imminent crackdown on

them. Most of the insurgent organizations look upon the northeast as part of a larger ‘Indo-Burma region’ where people share many ethnic and cultural affinities throughout history.⁸ The region was arbitrarily divided between several nation-states much against their will. The people of the region according to them were not given any role to play in the reorganization of borders. While borders contain many a democratic polity within them, they themselves escape the democratic logic. It is interesting to note that many of the insurgent organizations claiming to represent their respective communities and getting ‘Hinduized’ over the years, are now seen to be involved in rediscovering their ethnic and cultural roots and erase the recent past history. The United National Liberation Front of Manipur and the United Liberation Front of Asom are obviously cases in point (Das 2001: 48-69).

While it proves to be difficult for the Indian troops to enter the neighbouring countries in hot pursuit or organize joint operations against them except in a few cases (for example ‘operation bluebird’ with Myanmar) while flushing out and demobilizing the insurgents across the borders, the insurgents take full advantage of the borders that separate the nation-states. It is important to note that refuge is taken not simply with the immediate consideration of escaping the security forces but on the basis of a larger argument that their routes of escape have also been the great traditional passageways of people and tradable commodities and services since the ancient times. Viewed in that sense, the host countries according to them have the obligation of honouring their right to entry and settlement in it. Thus, immediately after the operations in Bhutan in December 2003 that led to the busting of its headquarters and killing of a number of its top-ranking cadres, an offer of peace was made by ULFA although the same issues of ‘sovereignty of Assam’ and ‘venue of third country’ were set as preconditions by Paresh Baruah – its “Commander-in-Chief”. ULFA cadres who escaped the operation and fled away made a ‘dramatic appeal’ to the Chairman of the People’s Republic of China:

⁸ I have discussed it in my keynote address on ‘The Extended Northeast: Contesting New Geopolitical Imaginaries’ to the UGC national seminar on ‘Dimensions of Myanmar-Bangladesh Connection with Conflict Situation in Northeast India’ organized by the Department of Political Science, Dibrugarh University on 15-16 September, 2008.

"At this moment, they (the cadre) have no option but to enter the territory of the People's Republic of China extra-legally to save their lives, negotiating subzero temperature and starvation ... We would like to request you and your people to permit them safe passage to your territory and temporary shelter necessary for their survival". Although the appeal is apparently based on humanitarian grounds, the letter interestingly emphasizes the 'consanguine histories' shared by these two countries and emphasizes the Chinese and the ULFA cadres as 'comrades-in-arms'. But for ULFA to declare escape and safe passage as legal would be embarrassing to the neighbouring nation-states who consider them as sovereigns by their own right. The letter of ULFA Chairman - Arabinda Rajkhowa aptly sums up this dilemma. The Government of India's response has been very cautious in the sense that it accuses ULFA of initiating peace talks with a view to regroup itself usually after an army operation. The Chinese envoy in New Delhi however instantly rejected the appeal, denied any connection of his country with ULFA and promptly turned down the request.

Surrogating the state

The British were primarily responsible for what Barrow in a different context calls the transformation of 'land' into 'territory'. Not all lands constitute a territory; land that is 'accessed, inhabited, possessed and controlled' is called in today's parlance, a territory (Barrow 2003:13). Since one's accession, possession or control can hardly be unlimited, this requires the land to be circumscribed on all sides by its borders. Borders therefore are meant for demarcating the area of one's accession, possession and control. Territoriality in simple terms is necessarily associated with the idea of exercising control over it and creating and defending the borders. Territory thus becomes the site of generation of wealth and sovereignty. The stronger the control, the greater becomes the exercise of sovereign power over it. Border control administration does not simply mean controlling the borders and preventing incursions from outside, but at the same time using and deploying them as a means of establishing social and political control over the body circumscribed by it. Borders have an inside role to play: they ensure the purity of the body and protect it against what in anthropological parlance called dirt and contagion. These play an important role in establishing the state's sovereign control over land and turning it into an object of accession, possession, occupation and

control. Akerman suggests that since the seventeenth century sovereignty changed its meaning from control over people to control over territory (Akerman 1995).

Land, as the theory of borders, tells us turns into space only by way of being enclosed on all sides by borders. Mapping borders also implies some sort of resource mapping whereby the physical and natural resources, of river waters of the frontier regions, their flora and fauna, climate, temperature and rainfall, specificities of agricultural activities and modes of livelihood, tea and timber resources and plantation potential etc. are thoroughly charted out and tapped. It is by way of mapping that these resources can be accessed, rendered as usable, mobilized and most importantly monopolized. For, it is within its borders that resources are held as the monopoly preserve of the state or its citizens and borders make this monopoly meaningful. The first provincial *Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India* (reproduced 1979) compiled by B. C. Allen, E. A. Gait, H. T. Howard and C. G. H. Allen in the early twentieth century serves as a case in point. Preparing the provincial Gazetteer was essentially a form of resource mapping - taking stock of all its physical, demographic and agricultural potentials and resources in the modern sense of the term and most importantly in order to make use of them. With the demarcation of frontiers and borders, nature and its elements are seen essentially as resources to be taken stock of, tapped and utilized exclusively in the interests of those who are in control of them. In an interesting paper written on the economic transformation in Assam particularly in the wake of the establishment of colonial rule, Baruah shows how control over land and forest resources started shifting away from the peasantry - whether settled or shifting, and hunter gatherers to the colonial state (Baruah 2005:96). Although Baruah's paper does not make any mention to it, border serves as the missing link in this transformation. Similarly, Kar points out how the inner line that separates the tribals from the non-tribals was never a given datum and constantly redefined in colonial times - depending on the availability of resources over which the colonial state thought it expedient to exercise its control (Kar 2005 mimeo). Borders were the means of exercising control over resources and thereby a means of asserting the state's sovereign power.

A community's claim to autonomy is usually expressed through some form of an exclusive control over the non-replenishable and critical life-bearing resources (like, timber, oil, coal, water and agricultural land etc.) that are located within a particular territorial

space that it considers as its 'homeland'. At one level, it is expressed through a community's desire of immediately ending the extraction of these resources by the 'outside' (often referred to in insurgent circles as 'colonial') forces. Even such students' organizations as All-Assam Students' Union (AASU) and Khasi Students' Union (KSU) vehemently opposed the flow of oil from Assam's oilfields and felling of trees in the rainforests of Meghalaya respectively. National Democratic Front of Bodoland's (NDFB) reported attacks on apparently poor woodcutters predominantly belonging to the Bengali-speaking Muslims in the Bodoland area aptly illustrate this point. The organization has been asserting people's right to the forest resources not because they are poor and forest provides the only means of their livelihood but because they have a right to the resources, which they think, belong to them.⁹ The examples of insurgents coming into conflict with the state over the control of resources located in what they consider as their homeland are by no means rare. Oil and Natural Gas Corporation's (ONGC) proposed explorations in Nagaland had to be stopped in the face of severe resistance from the Naga rebel groups. Again in March 2003, ULFA claimed responsibility for having organized the serial blasts that struck the Digboi oil refinery's main storage tank and the gas pipeline in Dibrugarh and justified it as an act of protest against "economic exploitation ... since the days of Raj."

At another level, one has to keep in mind that most of the insurgent groups operating in the region are opposed to extraction of their critical resources by the outside forces, not extraction per se. Many of them are accused of doing the same for raising funds and financing their activities. It is extraction in reverse, a form of counter-extraction that offers no solution to the phenomenon of extraction. A youth organization like the Jaintia Unemployed Youth Labourers' Union (JUYLU) in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya demanded preference of Jaintia youth in coal-extraction over others and bandhs were organized in collieries on such a demand. Similarly in October 2003,

⁹ It is important to note that these are examples of insurgent organizations voicing their claims over such resources more as *rights* than as shares in state allocations. Almost all the functionaries of DCs/ADCs present at the Fourth Civil Society Dialogue organized by Calcutta Research Group in 2005 asserted these claims as rights. Thus, Holiram Terang of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) observes: "We got the water but not water rights and the mining rights have not been given to the people as well" (quoted in Kikon & Das eds. 2005:18).

ULFA urged the tea industries set up in Assam to share the profits accrued from the region with its people. While insurgent groups of the region criticize extraction by the outside forces including the Indian state, which - to many of them - is 'an outside agency' (Das 1994), they are not opposed to the process of extraction and depletion per se.¹⁰ Viewed in this light, their critique of extraction is a patently anti-colonial critique that is seldom guided by any kind of pure and unalloyed ecological concerns. A community's right to resources in this context is only an adjunct to its right to self-determination. In another context, we defined ethno-ecologism as a syndrome that subordinates ecological concerns to community's abiding quest for self-determination (Das 1997: 21-35).

In October 2003, ULFA wanted the industrial houses operating in Assam to share the profits accrued from the state with 'the people of Assam'. Gokhale traces the trend to the early 1990s and on interviewing the top brass of some of the tea majors operating in the region he found that some of the points raised by the outfit were related to upgradation of Dibrugarh's Medical College Hospital, establishment of a referral hospital in Tinsukia, instituting scholarships for meritorious students in various subjects at Dibrugarh University in upper Assam etc. In a statement issued on 11 November 1990, Siddhartha Phukon - ULFA's the then publicity secretary for example pointed out: "We have not stopped anybody from doing business in Assam. What we want however is that the businessmen should share some of the profits that they make for the benefit of the people of Assam ... ULFA welcomes more businessmen to come and set up their enterprise" (quoted in Gokhale 1998:45). As Gokhale observes: "ULFA's reasoning was based on a simple premise: since the tea industry made so much profit out of Assam, it had to repay the state and its people at least something substantial" (Gokhale 1998:29).

The examples of insurgent organizations being involved in the same process of depleting precious life-bearing resources that they accuse others of doing are by no means rare in the region. Yet it is important to note that the insurgent organizations officiate as state in areas wherever the authority of the established state is weak or almost non-existent. Their activities range from protecting the environment

¹⁰ Prasenjit Biswas rightly designates it as 'counter-appropriation' and shows how the subjugated becomes a collaborator to the very process of subjugation (Biswas 2004 mimeo)

and maintenance of law and order to initiate development in extremely backward areas. ULFA's principled stand against poaching of rhinos and other forms of wildlife and illegal human settlement in such reserve forests as Manas and Kaziranga was for some time highly effective in containing the forest resources and preserving them. It deployed many of its cadres who organized close vigil on the poachers and illegal settlers in order to protect the environment particularly in the late-1980s. In as late as in March 1996, ULFA expressly asked ONGC to 'undo the environmental disaster' it had caused to 'Sibsagar and Jorhat districts' of Assam. In the same statement, it issued a warning to the game hunters in the Pabitora Reserve Forest against poaching the white winged wood ducks - a rare and near-extinct bird species in the world.

Secondly, state's role in the internal pacification of the body enclosed by the territorial borders through the establishment of its monopoly control over legitimate instruments of violence is regarded as an integral part of the formation of modern nation-state. The borders serve as the containers of sovereignty. In many examples, the administration seems to act in close collusion with the insurgents in maintaining law and order and stopping riots and other forms of large-scale violence from getting out of hands. The example of its intervention in containing violence at Hojai in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid (December 2002) serves as a case in point. At a time when the police forces and their equipment were ruefully inadequate to stop the irate mobs from clashing against each other and the police stations were reportedly functioning without the commands of the deputy commissioner who was otherwise very busy from the morning, 'ULFA assumed the role of defender of law' (Bhaumik 1992) and ULFA's armed vigil in the streets of Nagaon asking people to refrain from violence and observing curfew and prohibitory orders imposed ironically by the state over microphones was reportedly effective in restoring law and order and compensating for an inadequate administration. In the words of Bhaumik:

The condition of the junior officers was miserable. They too wanted heart and soul that since there were no sufficient troops, if anyone else takes up the responsibility, let that be (Bhaumik 1992).

Thirdly, the insurgents surrogate as state by way of initiating developments schemes and projects in areas where the state is non-existent and has not been able to make much headway. Contributions of Jatiya Unnayan Parishad (National Development Council) - reportedly an ULFA outfit - were important in building bridges and embankments, cleaning *namghars* and constructing village roads in areas where the state simply did not exist. More positively, it aimed at reducing people's reliance on the phenomenon of state itself. ULFA's development activities in general but more particularly in the late 1980s are already well-known. This is perhaps the most novel experiment that it had ever made. The government servants, bank employees, block development officers and even policemen and tea garden managerial personnel were forced to work on embankments, cleaning of community houses, maintenance of sanitation and public hygiene etc.: "All those were done under the banner of Jatiya Unnayan Parishad, which technically has no relation with ULFA. In practice, the link between the two is an open secret and Unnayan Parishad members freely admit it" (Gupta & Sengupta 1990:40)

Surrogating the state is not to be confused with the dramatic events of challenging the state from without and threatening its authority. It is to be defined as supplementing the authority of the state - thereby covertly weakening but not completely obliterating it. The state and the insurgents are not necessarily up in arms against each other.

Conclusion

It seems that India's much-touted Look East policy is unable to address these concerns. While Look East policy - as we know, continues to be guided by the three imperatives of strategically viewing the Indian ocean arc from the Persian Gulf to the Straits of Malacca as its 'legitimate area of interest'¹¹, expanding the flow of goods and services with some of the newly buoyant economies of Southeast Asia and finally introducing a liberal visa regime only as a corollary to the strengthening of India's economic ties with these countries.

¹¹ For an explication of this see, Rao (2006 mimeo).

A plea is made in recent times to retrace and reactivate the ancient passageways along India's northeast through which trade was conducted with such countries as Tibet/China, Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries (Ray 2003:126-135) and to make them operational while reviving our traditional connections with them. Such an approach to our mind looks utterly instrumentalist: On the one hand, it looks upon the cultural continuities as a resource to be tapped, exploited and made use of, while strengthening our trade and commercial ties with these countries. As Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has observed recently:

Full advantage may be taken of the Look East policy of the Government of India. ASEAN markets provide big opportunities for NER, particularly in areas such as promotion of horticulture, floriculture and medicinal herbs. Affinity in the cultural background will make our products acceptable and saleable once the connectivity is improved (quoted in Singh 2005:3-4)

The flow of population is only seen as a corollary to the basic objective of promoting trade and commerce between the countries. The autonomy of the historically existing social and cultural continuities is never recognized. While people to people contact became briefly possible in the wake of the earthquake that shook Pakistan-controlled part of Kashmir, the population movement that is envisaged in the available documents on India's Look East policy is of more limited nature - limited 'among others to parliamentarians, youth, artists, sports persons and representatives from business, industry, media, academic and think-tank institutions'.¹² The phrase 'among others' is not to be seriously taken for it either could be a diplomatic lingo ritually mouthed by the politicians and diplomats or a grudging concession - never standing on its own right. It does not seek to address any of the concerns underlined above. Thus Look East may benefit India but not the northeast. If northeast were to benefit from India's Look East policy, we probably need to recast the northeast in a way that will make her benefit from it and will not cost

¹² Joint declaration on ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity (30.11.2004), quoted in Gupta et al (2005:21).

India much either. But that takes us to a different subject altogether.¹³ The question is: how long will Indian foreign policy and relations try to contain ethnicity as an excess - instead of addressing and handling them upfront with great historical and cultural sensitivity? The signs are yet to become clear.

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¹³ I perfectly agree with Shibashis Chatterjee - one of the discussants of an earlier version of my paper - when he says that ethnicity as an excess does not go into the formulation of Indian foreign policy. That it does not, explains for its presence as an irreducible excess. I do not for once argue in favour of a policy of boxing the northeast within a 'territorial boundary' à la Egreteau (2005: 161), but instead plead for a soft border, double citizenship and work permit for migrant labour. See, Das (in Ray & Chakraborty eds. 2008:149-165).

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ASPIRATIONS AND ANXIETIES TOWARDS SUB-REGIONAL COOPERATION: NORTHEAST INDIA

Saswati Choudhury*

The South Asian countries have a shared past based on deep-rooted common cultural heritage and historical legacy. The region has demographic and geographical advantages- a young labour force and a contiguous border. It also has the highest population density in the world. The population living in its border areas is the second largest next to Europe. The experience of East Asia shows that growth that is supported by factor accumulation as well as productivity improvements can lead to higher growth. The demographic dividend of a cheap labour force in South Asia can be a major source of attraction for relocation of regional and global production centers in the region as firms move in response to wage differentials and this creates benefits for the low-income regions. High population density and integrated connectivity can ensure better access to markets and South Asian firms can take advantage of agglomeration economies (Ahmed and Ghani 2008). Notwithstanding these advantages it however remains a fact that the small size of the manufacturing sector has restricted generating employment opportunities and the benefits of growth have not brought about the redistributive gains of welfare across nations and even within the geographical perimeters of the nations. There are sub-regions of slow growth and growing marginalization of rural population in many countries of South Asia and their high incidence of poverty continues to be a major concern. Most of these lagging regions are either land-locked countries (Afghanistan & Nepal) or are border districts/states/provinces of Bangladesh and India. The market integration in South Asia is the lowest in the world as reflected by intra-

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regional trade among countries being less than 2 percent of GDP for South Asia compared to 40 percent for East Asia. While the border barriers to trade and services have almost been removed in the rest of the world the same has not taken place in South Asia. Divisions across countries in South Asia have increased dramatically over the last four decades (Ahmed and Ghani 2008). The region is also one of the ethnic strife ridden areas and that has its impact on regional integration. The cooperation among the South Asian countries has lagged behind in their mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's problems. The politics of blame game has often marred this cooperation.

The Northeast India: a landlocked paradox

Of the fourteen states of India that have borders with neighbours, as many as eight are from the Northeast region of the country. The other bordering states are West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Punjab and Gujarat.

TABLE 1
Growth rate of NSDP in Border States (constant price)

States	NSDP 1980-90	NSDP 1990-00	NSDP 1980-00	PCI 1980-90	PCI 1990-00
Bihar	5.20	3.46	3.85	2.97	1.86
Uttar Pradesh	5.88	4.33	5.15	3.46	1.98
Gujarat	5.71	8.28	6.80	3.62	6.38
Punjab	5.14	4.63	4.70	3.17	2.71
West Bengal	5.20	7.24	6.11	2.93	5.41
Assam	3.91	2.47	3.49	1.74	0.65
AI-India	5.60	6.03	5.66	3.36	4.07

Source: Working Paper: Regional Growth and disparity in India: A comparison of pre-and post reform decades by B.B. Bhattacharya and S.Sakthivel, Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi.

A careful look at the pattern of growth in the bordering states during the pre-reforms (1980-90) and post reforms (1990-2000) period reflects that Gujarat and West Bengal have done very well in the post reforms period in terms of per capita income growth and the overall economic growth of the States. Significantly, while Gujarat's growth stems from secondary sector growth, in case of West Bengal, it is the tertiary sector, which has accentuated the growth in the post reforms

period. On the other hand, Punjab's slowdown stems from the stagnation in its agricultural sector and lesser impact of the tertiary sector. Assam and the other states of Northeast India, failed to attract private investment in the post reforms era primarily for its poor infrastructure combined with poor governance and insurgency problems (Bhattacharya and Sakthivel: 2004). Even the memorandum of the Government of Assam submitted to the 12th Finance Commission puts forth a similar argument:

'States and regions with high level of infrastructures, proximity to the national market and with locations nearer to the sea ports have been able to attract much more investments than the peripheral States like Assam who are handicapped by geographical distance, transport bottleneck, insurgency and poor infrastructure.'

The RBI's region wise data on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) shows that the seven states of Northeast India received 0.08 percent of the total FDI during the period 2000-08. There were only four states viz. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal where FDI was less than the Northeast Region (0.02 percent) during the same period. The RBI data further shows that states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu which have better infrastructure attracted foreign investment. The states with inadequate infrastructure (the seven Northeast States, UP, Bihar, Jharkhand and Uttaranchal) are also investing less because historically they mobilised resources for public investment mainly through grants and assistance from the Centre, which are now declining due to fiscal constraints (Bhattacharya and Sakthivel).

The constraint of transport connectivity to the region is fallout of the partition of India. It was Bangladesh, which was a part of undivided India that provided the main connectivity to the Northeast India in the pre-partition days. The partition of 1947 totally disrupted the natural connectivity to the region. The present Sylhet, Sunamganj, Habiganj districts of Bangladesh were within Sylhet district in the pre-partition days and Sylhet was a part of Assam. The partition cut off the river and land access of the region through Bangladesh and this sharply increased the geographical distance to the mainland India and also raised the transport cost. The economic cost of this disruption can be inferred from the fact that in the pre partition days, ships carrying tea, coal and timber reached Kolkata from Dibrugarh (a town in Upper Assam belt) in 8

days whereas a ship from Calcutta to Guwahati takes more than 25 days at present due to lack of night navigation and customs formalities at various points. The distance between Kolkata and Agartala (capital of Tripura) which was little more than 300 kms in pre-partition, is 1700 kms in the post-partition period which obviously has its bearing on the transport cost. To elaborate further, a 9-ton truck from Guwahati to Calcutta, covering a distance of 1100 kms today costs around Rs. 20,000 while a truck going from Chennai to Calcutta, a distance of 1600 kms costs only Rs.16000. In fact, the cost of trading across borders is nearly double for India and Bangladesh compared to China. Ideally, raising the level of infrastructure and reducing regulatory trade mechanisms will help in integrating the lagging regions into national and international economies. The weaning away of state patronized investment together with transport bottlenecks has slowed down the region's growth in the liberalized regime.

Demography and the economy of Northeast States

The northeast region accounts for 3.8 percent of the total population of the country. But due to the predominance of hilly terrains in the region, 68 percent of its population lives in Assam, which is a valley state. Further, the region's population structure shows that except Assam, Tripura and Manipur the other states have overwhelmingly tribal population and are covered under the Sixth Schedule. Further, 84.49 percent of the populations in the region are settled in rural areas. The urbanization process in the region has been slow; the entire region has only 248 towns with an area that spreads over a little more than quarter million sq. km.

TABLE 2

Tribal population and rural population in Northeast States

No.	State	Tribal population (in percentage)	Rural population (in percentage)
1	Arunachal Pradesh	64.20	79.59
2	Assam	12.40	87.28
3	Manipur	34.20	76.12
4	Meghalaya	85.90	80.37
5	Mizoram	94.50	50.50
6	Nagaland	89.10	82.26
7	Tripura	31.10	84.49
8	Seven Northeast States	27.02	84.49

Source: Census of India, 2001

The remoteness of urban life is well captured by the mean distance between towns in Northeast India, which is an average of 49.23 km as compared to 33.51 km. in India. Further, a town in northeast India on an average serves an area of nearly 2000 sq. km. as compared to 1000 sq. km. in the rest of the country. This in a way indicates that urban services are far more distantly located for vast majority of the rural population in the region.

Apart from urbanization, work participation ratio is another key indicator of economic progress. A statistical reference is worth here. A comparative look at the figures of census 1991 and 2001 reveal that the proportion of main workers to the total workforce in the region has decreased during the last decade of 1991-2001. This indicates growing casualisation of workers in the region. Also there is a marked growth of agricultural labour-force during the past decade, which further reinforces the distressful situation in the region's labour market. The increasing trend towards marginalization and the growth of agricultural labour are important aspects of the emerging land relations and agricultural scenario in the region. These factors have a distinct bearing in the emerging policy framework for the region.

TABLE 3
Distribution of workforce in Northeast States

States	Main workers			Marginal workers			Non workers		
	1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001	1981	1991	2001
Arunachal Pradesh	49.6	45.2	37.8	3.0	1.0	6.2	47.4	53.8	56.0
Assam	N.A.	31.2	26.7	N.A.	4.9	9.1	N.A.	63.9	64.2
Manipur	40.3	38.6	30.4	2.1	3.6	13.2	56.8	57.8	56.4
Meghalaya	43.4	40.3	32.6	2.5	2.4	9.2	54.1	57.3	58.2
Mizoram	41.7	42.1	40.8	3.7	6.8	11.8	54.6	51.1	47.4
Nagaland	47.5	42.3	35.4	0.7	0.4	7.2	51.8	57.3	57.4
Tripura	29.6	29.1	28.5	2.6	2.7	7.0	67.7	68.9	63.8

Source: Census 2001

The sectoral income shares indicate two distinct trends over the years-a gradual decrease in agriculture and an increase in infrastructure. The question that obviously follows is: what has been the level of infrastructure development in the region in the light of this increased share of infrastructure?

TABLE: 4

Sectoral shares in the NSDP in Northeast States-2003-04 (at constant 1993-94 prices)

States	Agriculture		Primary		Manufacturing		Infrastructure		Services	
	1993 to 1994	2002 to 2003	1993 to 1994	2002 to 2003	1993 to 1994	2002 to 2003	1993 to 1994	2002 to 2003	1993 to 1994	2002 to 2003
Arunachal Pradesh	46.9	33.5	1.4	1.4	3.1	2.7	21.8	23.6	26.7	38.9
Assam	42.1	37.4	6.0	4.6	8.4	7.3	7.4	8.7	36.2	42.1
Manipur	37.9	29.1	0.0	0.0	7.4	8.6	11.8	17.4	43.0	44.9
Meghalaya	28.6	26.0	3.4	6.9	2.6	2.7	12.6	16.8	52.8	47.7
Mizoram	33.1	23.9	0.1	0.1	2.7	1.0	7.9	16.7	56.2	57.1
Nagaland	25.9	37.3	0.0	0.1	3.0	0.7	25.8	27.9	45.4	34.0
Tripura	37.4	25.0	0.6	0.6	3.3	2.5	9.5	23.9	49.3	48.1
Northeast Region	36.1	29.5	1.5	1.7	4.5	3.6	14.0	19.8	43.9	45.2

Source: Vision 2020-NER.

The answer to this may be found in a study conducted by the 12th Finance Commission of India on the level of infrastructure base in the country relating to three core sectors of communication, power and transport. With the different states having been classified into five categories viz. low, low-medium, medium-medium, high-medium and high, the figures show that all the seven states of Northeast India fall in the category of low index of infrastructure together with Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Rajasthan.

TABLE: 5

SSI units in Northeast India

S. No.	State	Percentage of SSI units in NE India	Percentage of SSI units in India	Percentage of exporting Units to total exporting SSI units in India
1	Arunachal Pradesh	0.4	0.01	0
2	Assam	61.54	1.85	2.88
3	Manipur	15.2	0.46	0.02
4	Meghalaya	7.13	0.21	0
5	Mizoram	3.52	0.11	0.38
6	Nagaland	4.39	0.13	0.9
7	Tripura	7.71	0.23	0.18
8	Northeast India	100.00	3.00	4.66

Source: Third Census SSI.

However, within the group itself, all the states of Northeast fare much lower than national average. While Assam is ranked top in respect of communication and second in respect of transport among the seven Northeast states, it however ranks lowest in respect of power index. The study revealed that during the two years 1995 and 2001 all the states of Northeast India have gone down in the development index of these sectors. The question necessarily arises that if the share of infrastructure in Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) has been increasing, why has the level of infrastructure registered a fall in the region? A plausible explanation can be found in Sanjib Baruah's argument that development that has shaped the course of change in the region is through allocation of funds to departments like Public Works, Rural Development and Industries and this has been bolstered by the patronage politics of an electoral democracy (Baruah 2005). The argument also explains why the industrial scenario in the region is dominated by concentration of Small Scale Units. Incidentally, the region has only three percent of the SSIs in India as per the Third SSI Census. Even within the SSIs, the share of services units dominates the industrial space. Consequently, the export base of the SSI units in the region is small and the total value of the exports of the SSI units in the region is only 0.23 percent of the total value of exports from SSI units in the country.

Therefore, given the prevailing economic space of the seven states of the region, economic rationale would demand policies for market agglomeration and economies of scale through regional integration for the region. But such policies still elude the region. Why is it that the economic priorities never get their due share in the policy framework of this region?

Understanding the Dynamics of Political Economy in development discourse of India

In forging sub-regional connectivity the countries need to share a certain commonality of (national) interests. These interests may incorporate issues of social, economic, political, cultural, historical, and other factors. The countries should be sufficiently enlightened so as to understand the significance of placing cooperation above conflict in the conduct of inter-state relations (Bhatta). Therefore, sub-regional connectivity between India and her neighbours needs to be understood from the other related phenomenon of political, social and economic priorities of India and other participating countries. It may be remarked

that in India politics of development dynamics is dependent on three factors: federal democracy, demography and the economy of each of the states (Panandiker 1998). The most important political development over the course of last sixty years in India has been the gradual transfer of political power from the Western educated urban middle class to a growing section of the regionally educated rural class from agricultural households. The priorities of this new political class are distinctively different as much as their perception of complex economic and strategic issues (Panandiker 1998). The ethnic diversity together with the caste factor therefore, plays an important role. Coming to the question of federal democracy, the Indian democratic structure is a complex system both in institutional terms and process terms (Panandiker 1998). The complex system of democratic decentralization is ensured through a process of participatory democracy comprising of three million elected Panchayat members, 4120 members of the State legislative assemblies and 788 members of both the houses of parliament elected by more than 60 crore voters. Given the fact that 72.21 percent of the Indian population is settled in rural India, the presence of political consciousness among the masses will obviously decide their choice of representatives who can best articulate their aspirations. The Mandalisation of the Indian polity and the emergence of political leaders from the backward classes and their participation in the governance have been shaping the priority issues for the government. Further, the emergence of the backward classes with strong regional roots based on local issues also has made the Indian political process a coalition game where the 'powerful' hold the shots.

While electoral democracy has been the demarcating factor in the devolution and share of power from Centre to the local bodies, demography also has been an equally strong force. The size of population and religious and ethnic groupings have their significant impact in public policy debates and issues. This is evident from the fact that eleven most populous states of the country, which account for 74.41 percent of the country's total population, have a dominating influence on the political economy. Especially, the three states of UP, Bihar and Maharashtra account for 33.66 percent of the country's total population. The states of UP and Bihar with large incidence of rural poor have a pro-poor policy orientation, while Maharashtra as an industrializing state is more prone to a market friendly liberal policy framework. However, given the fact that more populous states also have more rural folks in the political leadership, it is inevitable that the policy debates and issues tend to be more pro-rural. The policies like SGSRY, IAY, TSC,

NREGA etc. provide the political parties an opportunity to strengthen and expand their electoral space by extending coverage of these schemes to those sections of the population as may be decisive in winning elections.

Another major determinant of the economic policies in India happens to be the economic structure of the constituent states. The poorer states which are basically dependent on agriculture demand pro agricultural economic policies. Incidentally, the states of Bihar, UP, Madhya Pradesh figure significantly here. On the contrary, states like Gujarat and Maharashtra, which are industrial states, demand for more liberalized market friendly policies. States like Punjab, Haryana, Kerala which have lower incidence of poverty have different policy needs. As Varshney (1999) writes, the more direct the impact of an economic policy and greater the number of people affected by it, and more organized the section, higher is the chance that such economic issues enters the domain of mass politics. Hence ethnic issues, local problems based on caste lines, public distribution system of supplying subsidized rice, wheat etc. are major concerns of mass politics in India. Not all aspects of economic policy happen to concern all and this is more so in case of reforms on trade and investment, which distinctly concern urban and metro based big industrialists. These industrialists and business houses concentrated in a few states are also major patrons of election funding and, hence, decisions on trade liberalizations which have economic merits get safe passages as they pave the way for revenue generations in two ways- first for the country through its income from trade and second the patronage for political parties. Therefore, while on the one hand trade liberalization is vigorously pursued, on the other hand pushing through pro-poor development policies ensures rural votes. Economic development has been re-cast into jargons of 'social and redistributive justice' to the poor in a market friendly liberalized economy. It is not without reason why one finds that policies for rural development starting with the Integrated Rural Development Programme and the infamous Agricultural and Rural Debt Relief Scheme have been re-emphasized time and again. It is also not without reason that in each of the Five Year Plans, the size of allocations of the annual budgets for rural development schemes has been increasing.

The perusal of a market economy has led to rise in income disparity in India in the post liberalization period and, hence, keeping in view the objective of 'social justice' of the pro-rural political class, the quantum of pro-poor schemes and allocations too have increased. Although states with a pro-rural policy bias in the form of grants and aid to rural sectors

have gone down in respect of growth of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) and Per Capita Income (PCI), yet such issues continue and will continue in the sphere of public policy debates and priorities. The fractured electoral verdict over the years and growing regionalization of the political parties seem to have further reinforced the phenomenon. The regional parties are an off shoot of the 'felt deprivation' and 'perceived neglect' of 'New Delhi' over the years and hence an attempt at capture of a power share at the centre through coalition with major national political parties help keep alive the pro-rural and ethnic issues whose sum and substance are almost the same across all regional political parties. The demographic and regional influences are well illustrated by this example; the three states of UP, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh along with Rajasthan account for 37 percent of the seats in Lok Sabha. The size of these four states has a strong influence in the policy formulation; at the same time the strength of economic power of states like Maharashtra, Gujarat and Punjab influence major economic decisions as these three states also happen to be the largest resource generating states of the country. Hence, democratic decentralization of power, regional coalitions, demography and economic issues underline the political economy of development discourse in India. Therefore, electoral representation, regional 'development politics' and politics of resources are three important factors in India's policy debates. The announcement of waiving of loan for farmers in the Budget speech of the Finance Minister in 2008, adoption of a National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, (NREGA), fund flow through special schemes like BRGF while at the same time easing of interest and taxes for corporate sectors, indicate the complexity of developmental democracy in India.

A new variant in the development politics in India is the 'voice' of the minorities. The setting up of a Ministry of Minority Affairs in recent years indicates the growing importance of religion-based politics in India and a movement away from a caste based politics of the eighties and nineties. As many as 90 districts in the country have been identified as minority concentrated districts, majority of which are Muslim dominated and a special Multi-sector Development Plan Fund (MSDPF) has been earmarked for this. The Sachar Committee set up in 2006 specifically to address the socio-economic issues of the Muslims for formulation of policies addressing these issues is a significant development. The Committee noted that the politics of identifying a Muslim with suspicion has deprived the community of socio-economic progress and these have impacted the identity and security of the community. Hence policies need to be in place where such

discriminations are done away with (Sachar Committee Report 2006). Indian society is multicultural and all identities can become candidates for *political loyalty*¹ and not merely *nationalist one*². In the fast changing socio-economic scenario people can change their self-description submerged within the marker of Indian nationalism to something else quite suddenly, to attract better deals from the Indian State (Kaviraj: 2007).

Within this context of India's socio-political culture, the dynamics of sub-regional integration for a lagging region like Northeast India and the choosing of political and economic issues from the region and what they fore ground and what they deny require careful understanding and projection.

Politics of sub regional integration between Bangladesh and India: a perspective from the Northeast India

India shares the largest border with Bangladesh. The total length of the border is 4,095 kilometers running across four states of Northeast viz. Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal. Cyril Radcliffe, who headed the Boundary Commission to partition India in 1947, demarcated the line in the eastern part of India by drawing a straight line through villages and rivers, houses and market-places (Banerjee 2001). As a result, the border cuts through the middle of several villages and in some cases, while one section of a house is in one country, the other is in the neighbouring country. The small towns of Mankachar, South Salmara, Kedar, Binnachorra, and Balabhoot across the border in India's Northeast are corridors along which people from both sides of the border cross for their various requirements which from perspective of law is illegal immigration for either countries. The politics of Indian federalism as discussed in earlier sections, with its demographic, regional and economic factors, do not offer sufficient strength to the states of Northeast India to push the policy debate for integrated river connectivity through Bangladesh so as to gain easy access in the global market. The reason for this argument lies in the very political and economic factors influencing the democratic governance in the region.

^{1&2}This is borrowed from Sudipto Kaviraj, 'The Modern State in India' in *Politics and the State in India* (ed) by Zoya, Hasan, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2007.

TABLE: 6
Fiscal Indicators of Northeast States

S. No	State	State's own tax revenue/ Revenue expenditure	State's own non tax revenue/ Revenue expenditure	Gross transfer to aggregate disbursements
1	Arunachal Pradesh	5.7	10.4	70.5
2	Assam	23.8	9.1	54.1
3	Manipur	5.2	6.4	79.6
4	Meghalaya	12.7	8.2	73.9
5	Mizoram	3.3	8.0	76.0
6	Nagaland	5.4	4.2	80.2
7	Tripura	11.4	2.2	68.6
8	Special Category States	19.0	9.8	60.6

Source: RBI, State Finance, 2006-07

All the states of Northeast are Special Category states, which are protected under a policy of positive discrimination because of the fact that most of these states are economically not viable. The fiscal governance in the region is highly dependent on central transfer of resources and Central transfers continued to be more than 50% of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for the States of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram while the same for Manipur was more than 40% during the year 2002-06. During the same period (2002-06), the Central Transfer as proportion of GSDP was more than 30% for Nagaland and Tripura and around 21% for Assam. The own tax revenue (OTR) to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) is another indicator, which reflects the poor financial viability of the Northeast States. The OTR to GSDP was less than 2%, for Nagaland and Mizoram during the period 2002-05; the same ratio for Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh was 2%-6% and for Assam the ratio was 4%. The small size of jurisdictions of the states in the region and virtual absence of a production sector makes own revenue generation virtually impossible in these states. Except for Assam, the share of OTR to GSDP for the other six states of the region was less than the average share of OTR to GSDP for all the Special category states during 2002-05. The current

transfer and devolution from the Centre (shareable Central taxes and grants-in-aid) continued to be a dominant source of revenues for all the Special Category States especially for the six Northeast States other than Assam. Besides, the geophysical location of the region especially its hilly and inaccessible terrains, contributes to higher unit cost of providing public services vis-à-vis other states. It is, thus, not surprising to see why the states in Northeast India were declared Special Category states.

The proportion of gross transfer to aggregate disbursement from the Centre continued to be major source of revenue for the Special Category states. This form of financing often provides opportunities for the local politicians to engage in rent seeking and encourages fiscal irresponsibility (Baruah 2005).

TABLE: 7
Transfer and devolution from Centre to Northeast States

S. No.	State	Central Transfers/GSDP (2002-05)
1	Arunachal Pradesh	>50 percent
2	Assam	>15 percent but <20 percent
3	Manipur	<40 percent
4	Meghalaya	25 percent
5	Mizoram	50 percent
6	Nagaland	29 percent
7	Tripura	>25 percent but <29 percent
8	Special Category States	29 percent

Source: RBI, State Finance, 2006-07

While fiscal dependency remains high, the region's strength in terms of its elected representatives at the Centre stage of Indian parliament remains very marginal; the region's share in the total electorate of the country is only 3.33 percent and the share of elected representatives in the Lok Sabha is 5.89 percent only, these figures can fairly explain why Northeast states have failed in their bargaining power in economic fronts. Further, one cannot lose sight of the fact that as many as three states of the region (Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram) were once districts of Assam and four states of the region (Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram) have serious boundary disputes with Assam. Hence within itself, the region is fragmented and the identity of Northeast at best is a forced misnomer.

Assam, which is the largest state in terms of its economic base has the highest share in the parliamentary representation from the region—of the 24 Lok Sabha seats from the region as many as 14 seats belong to Assam and 69 percent of the electorate in the region is from Assam. The growing regionalization of issues and emergence of regional political parties is natural fallout in the process. These regional parties also provide a base for national parties to find a platform into the electoral polity while the regional parties need support of national parties (alliances decided on political convenience) and coalition ties have become the trend of events over the years. The elections fought in the states of the region with regional issues seldom find their articulation at the national level agenda.

Apart from the imbalance in the democratic representation of different Northeast states in the parliament, the tribal ethnic diversity of the region has led to a complex structure of governance with Sixth Schedule applicable in many States. Excluding Assam the proportion of other six states in the tribal population of the region is 60.42 percent. The protectionist policy towards the tribal population in the region can be understood from the fact that in the State Legislative Assemblies of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram all but one seat has been reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (ST) while in Meghalaya all but five out of sixty seats have been reserved for the ST. Placing the tribal population and their aspirations on a different scale is a legacy carried from the Colonial administration in the region. The genesis of this lies in the Colonial period when the British put in the protective policies as a rule of non interference in the tribal societies mainly because annexation and administration of the tribal areas was not found to be profitable by the Colonial Government (Misra:2000). But once in place these became irreversible over time especially against the political backdrop of insurgent rebellion in the region (Baruah2005). In the post independence era under Article 244(2) of the Indian Constitution, the provision of Sixth Schedule was made applicable to the administration of the tribal areas of the present states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. In addition, other civilian restrictions like the Inner Line Permit and Restricted Area Permit for Indian and Foreign Visitors respectively, visiting the states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh have been in operation for limiting the demographic transformation in the frontier tribal areas of the region. Given the micro level considerations like ethnic identity in politics of power, one can easily understand why issues of international importance, which can reap greater dividends, remain marginalized. The politics of affirmative action which many see

as appeasement, based on religion, caste and ethnicity has been a major determining factor in the public policy debates of the region. The identification of as many as twelve districts in Assam as minority (Muslim) concentrated districts arouses political passions which overshadows the economic exigencies for an integrated connectivity through Bangladesh for a cost effective access to the global world. Within the region itself, Assam that is the largest state in terms of its economic base and also in terms of its representative share in the parliament, therefore, has a decisive influence in shaping the sub-regional connectivity of the region. While immigration from Bangladesh is a major issue in the state with spill over effects in the region, yet at the same time retaining the Muslim vote banks is equally important in Assam's electoral democracy for both regional and national parties. Hence policies addressing issues for the poor and the ethnic and religious minorities find precedence in the region's policy discourse rather than an integrated sub-regional developmental policy centering on market and transport integration. The politics of ethnic identity and Muslim vote banks vis-à-vis protests against immigration from Bangladesh go hand in hand in the political economy discourse of Assam and in the emerging policy debates of the region at large.

While the democratic political process and economic space in the region represents one aspect, the role of the Central government towards the region represents the other aspect in the development discourse in the region. Northeast India has been known for its infamous ethnic unrest and insurgency problem. The Chinese aggression of 1962 exposed the fragile border security of India in this part of the country. The region is the only one in the country where it was gifted with a council (North East Council-NEC) to oversee its aggregate development. However, the skewed reflection of the Central government's perception of region's development is borne by the NEC than being under Finance Ministry or Ministry of Home affairs rather any other Ministry like Commerce. The very fact that a development agency should be under the control of a Ministry concerned with law and internal security of the country and which initially included only the Governors and not even the Chief Ministers of the region, speaks of the region's inability to resist such a development best with Centre's overriding concern with security threat to the region from the long standing insurgency problem in some parts of the Northeast India. The centre-periphery dichotomy is perhaps more pronounced in the region as the policies and strategies for the Northeast's (periphery) growth and

development are linked more to the national security concerns at New Delhi (centre) rather than the sub regional economic growth of the region. Apart from the presence of several secessionist forces from the various ethnic groups in the region the near capture of Assam by the Chinese in 1962 forms the basis for security paradigm. As Sanjib Baruah (2005) writes, in the political governance of the region 'Generals as Governors' have been more common for Northeast India, which has led to a de facto parallel political system autonomous of the formal elected democratic structure. The insurgency and ethnic issues remain active in the domain of mass politics in the region with the regional party leadership accusing Centre's neglect in development of the resource rich region. The over bearing presence of the Central government in shaping the development trajectory of the region can be gauged by the fact that since 2001 a separate Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region (DONER) has been set up, no other region in India has any such Ministry. However, the financing of development works through grant money from the Centre to the states provided little incentive for the states to utilize the resources for expanding their own tax base, and almost all the states of the region have a weak fiscal consolidation. Although liberalization leaves much scope for State governments to peruse their development strategies through public-private partnerships (PPP), the overriding political demarcations of issues on ethnic and tribal lines in most of the states of the region have left little space for emergence of a consensus for integrating the region to the natural connectivity frontiers in South Asia. Rather, there appears to be a cosmetic integration of the Northeast India to South East Asia through Myanmar under New Delhi's twin target of wooing the Myanmar's junta and pacifying the wounded sentiments of insurgent infested states of the region especially Manipur and Nagaland on New Delhi's neglect of economic development in the region.

Beyond landlocked ness: in search of integration

Apart from the internal dynamics of India and its constituent states in the Northeast, the bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh are of equal importance. While pointing to the geo-politics, it is true that the history of state formation in South Asia has produced almost permanent set of relations that pre-empt regional economic cooperation. The reasons behind this slow pace towards regionalization are well known and involve serious discord in which the countries of the region are entangled. The retreat of the British and the socio political

conditions of the country created bitterness between the ruling elites of the two major south Asian states that, in turn gravely disrupted the traditional complementarities and cohesion. The Indo-Bangladesh border has several enclaves and there are more than 100 such enclaves in India's possession, and a little more than 50 enclaves in possession of Bangladesh. The 1974 the agreement between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, agreed to hand over these enclaves to the respective sides. However, New Delhi has been delaying the issue and the feeling in Dhaka has been that India is reluctant to exchange the enclaves because it would lose around 10 lakh acres to Bangladesh (Banerjee: 2001). The political and economic interests of states in India and the dividing lines between India and Bangladesh along nationalistic, religious and ethnicity substantially complicate policy making that involve cross-border dialogue and cooperation. The more serious flaw in the process has been that both Bangladesh and India has approached the issue of sub-regional connectivity more as a bilateral issue camouflaged by internal political dynamics rather than a cross-boundary economic and commercial investment. The transit through Bangladesh has been a contested subject between both Bangladesh and India. The cost of trading across borders is high e.g. at the Petrapole-Benapole, one of the main borders between Bangladesh and India where trucks wait for more than 100 hours to cross the border. In fact quality of connectivity and productivity enhancing infrastructure have been the major constraints for the firms exporting to the regional markets in South Asia (Ghani and Ahmed 2008). The regional integration among the East Asian countries overcoming their political differences has shown how economic integration can induce growth that can address political issues as well. In fact, populist negative perceptions have dominated the regional political discourse and the lack of information and sound analysis in the public domain about benefits of regional cooperation has been one great shortfall in the Northeast region. The division of political and economic interests on ethnic and religious lines has made the possibility of a regional integration with Bangladesh a complex discourse in the region.

Although intellectuals and development experts from the Northeast India believe that its natural access to Asia is Southeast Asia through Myanmar, the Vision 2020 argues that the continental land route via NER-Myanmar-Thailand is not yet considered safe and cost-effective (NER Vision:2020). India's engagement with Myanmar is prompted by two reasons: a greater involvement with Myanmar helps India to ease its apprehensions about China and the relation may also be in favour of

Myanmar's interest, secondly, the border trade through Myanmar will be maintained by Indian government to undo the blame for economic negligence and backwardness of the region and pacify the region's demand for 'north east India as the gateway for (South East Asia) India's eastward ho' (Choudhury 2006). The border trade will thus, be more 'cosmetic and less for economic opportunities' as Indian leadership at New Delhi knows better that northeast economy needs more homework done before getting into direct international trade with a liberalized South East Asia through Myanmar. In fact, mutual engagement between Myanmar and India has other dimensions too. According to Huttington's Hypothesis a rapprochement between India and Myanmar would help in fighting growing Islamisation in the region (two million Muslims live in Myanmar of in Rakhine estate and of these one million are Rohingyas and they are living in Rakhine estate; there is also a small portion of Chinese Muslim traders). While the Saudi Arabia and Pakistan fund the Islamic radicals in Rakhine, Bangladesh's Jamaat Islami is said to be the funding source of the Arakanese Islamist movement and are opposed to Rakhaine Buddhists (Egretau 2003). Hence, Buddhist Myanmar and 'secular' India with Hindu majority would engage with each other for mutual political and security interest rather than economic interest of the Northeast region. Indian policy in respect of Myanmar is somewhat obscure and has twin goals: *on one hand*, it cannot ignore military junta in Myanmar given the junta's strategic partnership with China and India is still hesitant about its own foreign policy towards China; *secondly*, India knows that the military junta will not continue for ever in Myanmar and democratic forces will come back, but it cannot overtly and actively support the pro-democracy movement (as it had done in the initial phases) and antagonize the junta because this has serious implications for India: a possible escalation of the insurgency movements along the Northeastern states of India indirectly aided by both China and Myanmar. Also Myanmar is one of the major drug trafficking centres in the world and most of the political insurrections in Northeast India and Myanmar are involved in the trafficking network; the emergence of drug lord among the insurgent outfits is inevitable in India (Egretau 2003). According to the Annual Report, 2001, of the International Narcotics Control Bureau, the 1,643-km Indo-Myanmar border has been utilized as a transit point between the Golden Triangle and the Golden Crescent (Vision 2020). Hence the frontiers of India along the Myanmar border have remained sensitive zone.

In conclusion, it may be said that the spatial dimension of regional integration of Northeast India and Bangladesh can be inferred from the historical fact that economic growth of Northeast during the British rule flourished essentially on the strength of its integrated transport network through East Bengal. Inland-water trade between India and Bangladesh is important in linking not only Assam but also the region as a whole to Bangladesh. Cost effective trade routes through water ways is more important than land routes for India's Northeast through the corridors of Bangladesh. Notwithstanding the importance of waterways, the land routes continue to be the safe transit for informal trade between both the countries. One of Bangladesh's major concerns has been the large volume of informal imports (approximately 15-20%) from India, which are not covered by Bangladesh's import duties. Although the existing bilateral trade relation between the two countries is far less significant for India than it is for Bangladesh, nevertheless, closer economic integration with Bangladesh is seen as a very important way of reducing the economic and political isolation of the Northeast states from the rest of the country (Vision 2020). The dilemma with states in Northeast India is that they are not ready for an economic integration for the fear of being swamped up by immigration from Bangladesh, which is based on historical experience of post-independence immigration. Also the states are not ready to solve long standing political conflicts among themselves in order to maintain supremacy over one another e.g. the interstate boundary disputes. The integration of Southeast Asian countries have shown that for economic growth through market agglomeration it is necessary to think beyond the debate over territorial borders. In East Asia, Thailand is an important market for Laos and Cambodia. In Africa, economic growth in Kenya provided the linkages to those African countries, which are endowed with natural resources but are landlocked. Hence it is the seamless interaction of better connectivity, improved trade and converging institutions in the South Asian sub-region that can accelerate growth in the lagging regions, and benefit the slower growing and land locked regions like Northeast India, rather than depending on grants and transfers from the Central Government. However, this realization appears to be faint in the present political economy discourses of the states of northeast India.

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EXPORT FROM NORTH EAST INDIA: STATUS AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

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Exports are the major focus of India's trade policy. It is a core sector in economic growth of a country and is important for addressing macro economic issues. In India, as in many other nations, export expansion is widely regarded as a means to attain higher rate of economic growth. Since 1991, a number of measures have been undertaken to correct the 'anti-export biases' of policy regimes. Export performance improved during post 1991 years with the announcement of Export Import (EXIM) Policy 1992-97. The EXIM Policy announced on March 31, 1992, was the first ever EXIM Policy declared by the Government of India with validity period of five years. It came as a major thrust to accelerate India's exports through restructuring and revamping of various export promotion schemes and wide ranging measures for simplification of procedures with a view to make them more transparent and easy to administer. The trade policy has impact not only on volume and composition of foreign trade from India as a whole but also from North East India (NEI).

NEI comprising of the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura has an area of 2.62 lakh square kilometers (7.9% of the country's total area) and has a population of 39 million (3.8% of all India population, 2001 census). NEI shares 2% of the border with mainland of the country

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and more than 98% is linked with international border i.e. Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal. This region is bountifully endowed with bio-diversity, hydro-potential, oil and gas, coal, limestone and other mineral resources. It is also rich in forest resources which occupy nearly half of the total area in the region. Forest resources include rubber, cane and bamboo timber, hardwood, medical plants and herbs. Even then industrial development in the NEI does not seem to be significant. Only a negligible percentage of the country's total number of factories is in the region. Most of which are engaged in manufacturing of food products, wood and wood-based items and non-metallic mineral products. Tea and petroleum are the two important industries and both these industries are playing a vital role in NEI's economy. The other large and medium-scale industries include cement, paper, sugar, jute, fertilizers and spinning. In medium and small-scale sector plywood, handicraft and handlooms are occupying a significant share.

There has been a remarkable acceleration in the process of trade liberalization and globalization from the second half of 1990s. NEI economy along with Indian economy has become increasingly integrated to the world economy with the removal of quantitative restrictions. A number of researches were carried out to study trade liberalization programmes, the increase in volume of foreign trade due to its liberalization and the impact of globalization on Indian business environment. Kumar (2001) argues that so far India like other developing countries has been responding to implement her commitments with respect to liberalization of their trade and investment regimes passively. It has not geared itself up for the new emerging global business environment to expand her access to the world market. Banik (2001) has identified a set of factors that appears to be responsible for the decline in India's export growth rate during the post-reform era. The analysis brings out the nature of demand side factors as well as supply side bottlenecks that have constricted the growth of export. He focuses on achieving price competitiveness, creating potential demand and removing trade barriers including non-tariff barriers that stand as demand constraint. Bhattacharyya (2000), Paul, Ramanathan (2000) and George (2001) have analyzed the impact of EXIM policy on Indian economy and have shown the impediments to foreign trade and globalization process.

There are very few studies undertaken to find out the potentiality of trade in NEI. Baruah (2000) reported a large amount of unofficial

export of horticultural products, agro-products, mineral products, coal and lime from NEI to its neighbouring countries. He has gathered from informal discussions with the exporters and officials of enforcement agencies that the volume of unofficial exports will be 4 to 5 times higher than the volume of official exports. Dutta (2000) and Dass (2000) also argued the same fact. Das (2000) advocated through his study that the unofficial exports indicate that there is a hidden demand for export. Bhattacharyya (2000), in his paper identified that in order to boost NEI trade with neighboring countries and to remove illegal trade along the border, Government should provide necessary infrastructure facility at different trade route. Husain (2000) has viewed that a strong vigilance has to be maintained against illegal trade, unlawful activities and infiltration in the border without jeopardizing the interests of the border trade. Gogoi (2004) claims that if formal trade is developed, it can be said that on the basis of specialisation based on the thrust areas, NEI can emerge as an important exporter to Myanmar, China and other South East Asian countries. Baruah (2000) has articulated that in order to take advantage of new liberalized trade regime in the South East Asian region, all the border trading states of NEI must take adequate steps to improve the infrastructural facilities. Bezbaruah (2000) has emphasized that some economic and legal adjustments have to take place on both sides of the border for healthy and mutually beneficial export trade to grow. Choudhury (2004) has studied the need for infrastructure improvement for enhancement of foreign trade in NEI. He had suggested that NEI requires an up-gradation in all infrastructures if the objective of activating the export trade in the region is to be achieved. Bhuyan (2000), in his paper emphasized that to improve the regional economy and to sustain it, the infrastructure may improve the traditional sector of farming and manufacturing in NEI.

To further proceed with the study, the objectives of the same have been outlined below.

NEI is a very significant part of the country as far as trading is concerned. Owing to its richness in tea, coal, limestone and other mineral, agricultural and allied products and forest resources, the region has natural trading advantages. There is a wide scope of generating economic activities through the interaction of exports with its trading partners. In fact, its neighbouring nations had been the traditional markets for a variety of goods and services provided by

NEI before its traditional links were disrupted by partition of the country. However, there is a renewed focus on trade in view of the need to forge closer commercial and economic links with larger markets in the fast developing South East Asian economies. The challenge is in terms of utilizing the natural trading advantage of the region for export promotion through establishment of multi-dimensional relations in terms of trade, business and commercial activities. Hence, the present study makes an attempt (i) to study the present status of export trade from NEI and (ii) to find out the impediments to export trade from NEI

As a part of investigation in the present study, data have been accumulated from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources comprise of interviews and responses collected from exporters engaged in commercial ventures of the region. The official record of Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) at Guwahati, which the present researcher visited once in the month of April 2006 and again in January 2007, shows that the registered exporters were 4900. But it has been reported that many of them are negligently perusing business as a result of which many of them have withdrawn subsequently. From the DGFT authority it has gathered convincingly that around 500 exporters are actively participating in trading from NEI. Hence this forms the total universe. Against this universe the size of the sample chosen for the present research work is 150 registering around 30% of the total universe. The reason for selecting 150 registered exporters is to derive inferences from the faithful representation of the universe. The secondary sources follow official documents, rules and regulations provided by respective governments of the sister states. The methodology adopted here takes the study through a field survey, close observation as a participant in practice, interpretation of information gathered and an analysis of present state of affairs. Deduction from the inferences is done over the accumulated information. The study now prudently proceeds to study the present status of export trade from NEI.

PRESENT STATUS OF EXPORT TRADE FROM NEI

The researcher now prudently proceeds to study the present status of export trade from NEI and to analyze its changing pattern as stated in objective number 1. To have an elaborate study of the said

objective, this part is put forward in different sub-groups namely, country-wise share of export trade, growth performance, NEI's share in India's total export and international competitiveness thereof.

Country-wise share of Export Trade

The exports from NEI in terms of value during the period 1991-92 to 2005-06 are presented in tabular format in Table 1 below. A perusal of the Table 1 makes it clear that even though export has increased since liberalization in India in 1991, NEI has exhibited a fluctuating trend in the past fifteen years. In value terms, the total export has increased from Rs 85.78 crores in 1991-92 to Rs. 105.62 crores in 1992-1993 and then decreased to Rs. 104.13 crores in 1993-94. It gradually increased from Rs 141.78 crores in 1994-95 to Rs. 401.04 crores in 1997-98 and then dipped to Rs. 388.73 crores in 1998-99. The volume of export further increased to Rs. 404.07 crores in 2000-01 and then dived to Rs. 379.15 crores in 2001-02. It then increased to Rs. 435.03 crores in 2003-04 and then again dipped to Rs. 392.03 crores in 2004-05. The total export volume from NEI finally increased to Rs. 437.81 crores in 2005-06.

The export from NEI takes place both directly and indirectly. Direct trade flows through the LCSs /custom check posts along the international border between NEI and neighbouring countries of Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. Hence the items of trade, quantities and values are recorded at LCSs. However, in case of NEI's export to countries like Germany, Ireland, Japan, Kenya, Netherlands, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri-Lanka, UAE, U.K., etc are through ICD, Amingaon and Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International (LGBI) Airport. All these countries together have been categorized as 'other countries' for the study purpose since trading to those countries individually is very negligible and insignificant. NEI's exports through L.G.B.I. Airport started its operation in the year 2000-01. But, in case of indirect trade, it is very difficult to estimate the contribution of NEI as the goods produced in the region are exported from the place outside its geographical boundary, after value addition in the process of production of exportable items.

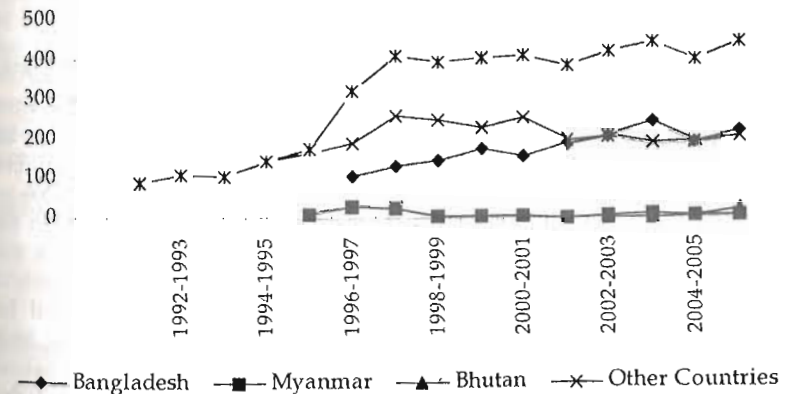
In order to identify the major trading partners in NEI's export trade, the country-wise shares in NEI's export are also presented in the same table 1 (shown in brackets in percentage). It can be

concluded from the table that NEI has major trade relationship with neighbouring countries like Bangladesh and Myanmar.

It has been found from the inception that NEI's exports to all the other countries together ranges from 42.66% to 100%. The volumes of export to those individual nations are not available for the study purpose. In regards to trade with neighbouring countries, export to Bangladesh though fluctuating, dominated NEI's export followed by export to Myanmar. Bangladesh's share in the region's total export ranges from 31.98% to 54.94%. Myanmar's share ranges from 0.32% to 9.72%. NEI's export to Bhutan has been very negligible and it ranges from 0.04% to 4.00%. Bangladesh is the single major destination for export from NEI and is determined by several factors such as geographical and political proximity, difference in comparative advantage and degree of trade barriers, among other factors.

Figure 1 shows the country-wise export from NEI. It reveals that there has been a year-to-year variation in volume of trade with its trading partners. However, the volume of trade with Bangladesh and other countries shows an upward trend and the volume of trade with Myanmar and Bhutan more or less remained the same.

FIGURE 1
Country-wise share in NEI's Export



The exports from NEI to Bangladesh mainly comprise of mineral and agricultural and allied products. There are two types of minerals – coal and limestone. Both are mined in southern belt of Meghalaya and directly exported to Bangladesh. They are also found in Sutarkandi and Karimganj (Assam) and are exported without any value addition. The bulk of other items exported from NEI include boulders, fruits, agricultural products and low-value manufacturing produces. Horticultural products like ginger, oranges, citrus fruits, garlic, pears etc have a contribution in the total NEI's export volume. These are cultivated mainly in Meghalaya and N.C. Hills of Assam. The complementarities between the resource base of hills of NEI and the plains of Bangladesh provide a firm basis of trade between them. It demands a special mention that the people residing on both sides will certainly find their lives much easier with border trade and commerce since marketability will be least costly as compared to respective main land alternatives in their own countries. The distance to nearest port of NEI is Kolkata which is about 1100 kms to 1700 kms from different capitals of North East states.

Meghalaya has become important amongst eight sister states with regard to volume of trade with Bangladesh. The cement plant at Chattak in Bangladesh, the only major public sector cement manufacturer, depends solely on the limestone brought from Shella and Nongtraï areas of Meghalaya. Lafarge, the international cement giant, has reiterated its commitment to implement its \$25 million dollar investment for mining limestone in the state. The French company has established a joint venture to feed its mammoth cement plant at Chattak in Bangladesh. Chairman of Japan Development Institute (JDI), Shoichi Kobayashi during his recent visit to Northeast observed that Bangladesh is deficient in cement production and requires not less than '8 million metric tones of cement' annually for its domestic consumption. Bangladesh is currently importing limestone from South East Asian nations. "Meghalaya which has abundant limestone can set up a cement plant and export it to Bangladesh," Kobayashi said. The government of Meghalaya needs its state to earn foreign revenue and has an ambitious plan to attract more foreign investment in the long run. Thus, it has a reason to assure complete support and security to Lafarge. Besides this cement company, the tea gardens, jute mills and brick manufacturing units in Bangladesh largely depend on Meghalaya coal. In fact, the demand for mineral products in Bangladesh is far more than that of supply from Meghalaya. As far as the export of coal and limestone is concerned, neither Tripura nor Mizoram has got any reserves of these two minerals so far. Although Assam has got reserves of the both, there is hardly any marketable surplus. As a result, NEI's exports are predominated by Meghalaya.

TABLE: 1

Year	Country-wise share in NEI's Export (in Rupees crores)				Total Export
	Bangladesh	Myanmar	Bhutan	Other Countries	
1991-1992	-	-	-	85.78 (100.00)	85.78
1992-1993	-	-	-	105.62 (100.00)	105.62
1993-1994	-	-	-	104.13 (100.00)	104.13
1994-1995	-	-	-	141.78 (100.00)	141.78
1995-1996	-	10.45 (6.09)	-	161.82 (93.91)	172.27
1996-1997	103.67 (32.65)	30.86 (9.72)	-	182.9 (57.62)	317.43
1997-1998	125.45 (31.28)	23.84 (5.94)	-	251.75 (62.77)	401.04
1998-1999	138.75 (35.69)	5.03 (1.29)	-	244.95 (63.01)	388.73
1999-2000	169.81 (42.89)	3.31 (0.84)	-	222.77 (56.27)	395.89
2000-2001	151.23 (37.43)	5.53 (1.37)	-	247.31 (61.21)	404.07
2001-2002	185.85 (49.03)	1.23 (0.32)	-	192.03 (50.65)	379.15
2002-2003	202.55 (49.41)	5 (1.22)	0.15 (0.04)	202.42 (49.34)	410.27
2003-2004	238.19 (54.75)	9.41 (2.16)	1.82 (0.42)	185.61 (42.66)	435.03
2004-2005	190.42 (48.57)	6.49 (1.66)	5.49 (1.4)	189.63 (48.37)	392.03
2005-2006	215.92 (49.32)	3.87 (0.88)	17.55 (4.0)	200.47 (45.79)	437.81

The above table is self compiled from the data collected from the office of the Commissioner of Customs, Shillong.

NEI ginger enjoys the edge in international market due to its characteristic, taste, flavour and texture and has captured a good market in neighbouring nations. Bangladesh is engaged in cultivation of ginger but do not produce enough to meet their requirements and hence import some quantity. It is an important spice crop and is used as taste-maker. Among all the states, Assam is one of the ginger producing states. The quality producing in the state is at par with the quality of best ginger produced in the country. Philippines is also engaged in cultivation of ginger but not in a position to meet the demand. So, NEI can easily capture the market.

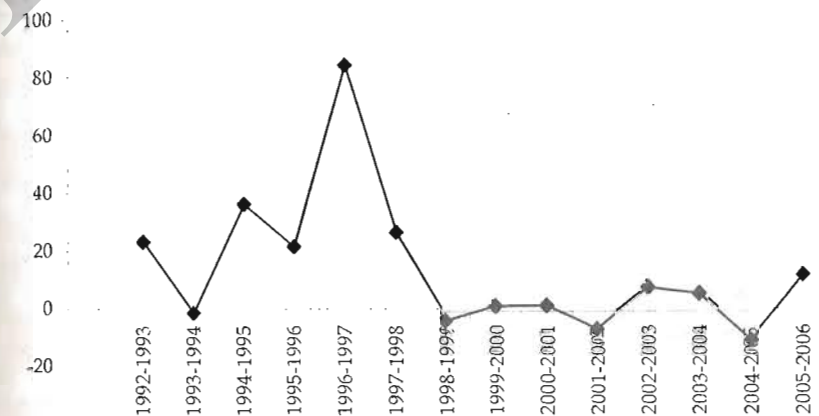
Export of plant portions, derivatives and extracts of cultivated varieties of the species are allowed only through the ports of Mumbai, Kolkata, Cochin, Delhi, Chennai, Tuticorin and Amritsar. Growth of export trade from NEI to Myanmar is adversely affected because of the restrictions on export of plant and plant materials by Ministry of Commerce. As a result, The NEI, which is rich in flora and fauna, is not able to tap the tremendous potential for trade in plant and plant materials. Moreover, DGFT has notified 22 agricultural items and minor forest products for trade with Myanmar. But due to the difference in pattern of demand of goods in both the countries, the limited number of items allowed to be traded has proved to be a major obstacle in the growth of trade. It is observed that manufactured goods of Indian origin has strong demand in Myanmar and should be included in the exchangeable items in order to hold the declining tend in export from Moreh.

Growth Performance

For the purpose of measuring the growth performance as mentioned earlier, the present researcher has tried to measure the growth in relation to volume of export over different period of time. The annual growth rates of exports seem to have fluctuated a great deal. The fluctuation in the growth rates of exports can be observed in the figure 2. NEI's export from the period 1992-93 to 1995-96 was basically tea to countries like Germany, Ireland, Kenya, Netherlands, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri-Lanka and U.K. It was exported through ICD, Amingaon. It is difficult to capture a trend in the growth of exports, however, it can be contended that exports suffered during the period 1993-94 with negative growth rate of 1.41% because of sluggish demand situation in NEI's major trading partners. In spite of down fall in growth rate during 1995-96, there was boost in the export from

NEI due to commencement of Indo-Myanmar border trade from 1995 after it's initiation in April 1995 and at the same time improvement in lethargic demand of NEI's major trading partners. Growth rate picked up to the highest in 1996-1997 over the entire study period. This has been manifested in figure 2 hereafter. It seems to be coinciding with NEI starting of export trade with Bangladesh after the issue of official notification by GOI. Moreover, it was contributed by a positive growth of export to Myanmar and other trading partners. The growth rate of export decreased drastically during 1997-98 and further demonstrated by a negative growth in 1998-99 can be explained on the basis of nature and composition of exports which is highly lopsided in favour of export trade to Myanmar. In next two subsequent years i.e. in 1999-2001, there was slight improvement in the growth rate of export. Positive growth of export was witnessed in case of export to Bangladesh but at the same time it was affected by the variations witnessed in export trade to Myanmar and also exports of tea to various other trading nations.

FIGURE: 2
Growth Rate of Export Trade



The year 2000-01 coincided with the commencement of international air traffic for export from LGBI Airport situated at Guwahati, but the export volume observed was quite negligible. In the year 2001-02, there was again a negative growth rate of export. Such a wide fluctuation in growth rates tends to suggest that it is mainly

affected due to decline in productivity of tea sector in NEI and export of tea from the region. Moreover, export to Myanmar also suffered a major set back. The year 2002-03 had a favorable growth of export which can be attributed because of factors like increase in demand of NEI's products in Bangladesh. NEI's export trade with Bhutan was initiated in the same year but had a very little contribution to the total export from it. In next two subsequent years i.e. in 2003-2005, down fall of growth can be observed with a negative growth in 2004-05. It can be observed that it is mainly influenced by the slow productivity in tea industry coupled with low volume of export to Bangladesh and Myanmar. However, the year 2005-06 had viewed a favorable growth in rate of export because of increase in export to different destinations.

NEI's Share in India's Total Export

A study of NEI's share in India's total exports shows the magnitude of NEI as a whole in the entire nation. NEI's share in India total export of mineral, agricultural & allied product and other product category from 1991-92 to 2004-05 is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2
NEI's share in India's Total Export (Values in percentage)

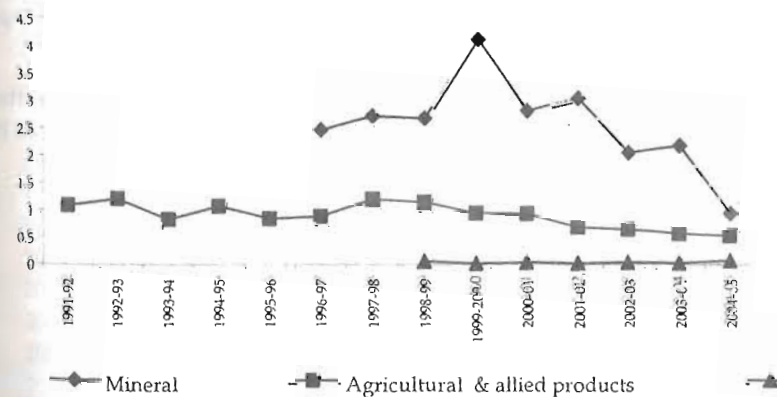
Year	Mineral	Agricultural & allied products	other products
1991-92	-	1.089	-
1992-93	-	1.204	-
1993-94	-	0.826	-
1994-95	-	1.068	-
1995-96	-	0.843	-
1996-97	2.459	0.883	-
1997-98	2.704	1.196	-
1998-99	2.669	1.141	0.057
1999-2000	4.156	0.947	0.025
2000-01	2.805	0.934	0.038
2001-02	3.032	0.693	0.028
2002-03	2.041	0.648	0.041
2003-04	2.17	0.569	0.027
2004-05	0.932	0.528	0.07

Source: Calculated from CMIE data, July 2006 issue and collected from the Office of the Commissioner of Customs, Shillong.

A mixed trend is observed in NEI's share in India's total export to the world. However, it has a reasonable presence in India's export market in the category of mineral of which coal and limestone constitute the major commodities. This is because of NEI's richness in mineral resources. They are directly exported to Bangladesh via LCSs along Meghalaya - Bangladesh border as well as Sutarkandi and Karimganj (Assam) - Bangladesh border without any value addition. In this category, NEI's share in India's export market has been around 4% in 1999-2000 which is really commendable. Its share in agricultural & allied products decreases from 1.089 % in 1991-92 to 0.528% in 2004-05. The declining share can be due to the factors like poor infrastructural facilities and institutional framework. Thus, NEI does not have a substantial presence in India's export of agricultural & allied products. In the category of other products, its share in India's total export is quite negligible.

Figure 3 shows the trend of NEI's share in India's total export to the world. The figure reflects that the share of NEI in the category of mineral products is the highest followed by agricultural & allied products and the share of other products is nominal. NEI's share in the category of mineral products initially increased and reached its peak of around 4% in 1999-2000. but decreased gradually. In the category of agricultural & allied products and other products, NEI's share shows a steady trend.

FIGURE 3
NEI's share in India's Total Export



Export Indices, Comparative Advantage and Measures of International Specialization

The importance of export trade for the economic development of NEI has made imperative to ascertain the comparative advantage of NEI's export trade. Measures of Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) and Revealed Symmetric Comparative Advantage (RSCA) have been used to help assess a region's export potential. The RCA indicates whether a region is in the process of extending the products in which it has trade potential, as opposed to situations in which the number of products that can be competitively exported is static. It also provides useful information about potential trade prospects with new partners. Liesner (1958) was the first to use post-trade data to quantify comparative advantages, and he attempted this by devising indices of relative export performance as proxies for comparative cost so as to measure the effect of an entry into the European Common Market on UK industry. The most frequently used measure is, however, Balassa's (1965) 'revealed' comparative advantage which adjusts Liesner's methodology by normalizing the export measure formulated. Balassa's (1965) revealed comparative advantage (henceforth RCA) approach assumes that the 'true' pattern of comparative advantage can be observed from post-trade data. RCA measures can be employed to analyse the changing pattern of comparative advantage across commodities as a result of a process of accumulation of physical and human capital that characterises economic development (Balassa, 1979). The RCA measure can be distorted by availability of data at various levels of aggregation and data biases can be created by government policy interventions such as non-tariff barriers (NTBs) and through export subsidies.

The RCA index of NEI for a commodity category j is often measured by the commodity's share in NEI's export in relation to its share in India's export.

$$RCA_{NEI_j} = \frac{\left(\frac{X_{NEI_j}}{X_{NEI_t}} \right)}{\left(\frac{X_{india_j}}{X_{india_t}} \right)}$$

where X_{NEI_j} and X_{india_j} are the values of NEI's export of commodity j and India's export of commodity j and where X_{NEI_t} and X_{india_t} are the values of NEI's total export and India's total export. A value of less than unity implies that the country has a revealed comparative disadvantage in the particular commodity category. Similarly, if the index exceeds unity, the country is said to have a revealed comparative advantage in the product.

Revealed Symmetric Comparative Advantage (RSCA) of NEI for a commodity category j is measured by

$$RSCA_{NEI_j} = (RCA_{NEI_j} - 1) / (RCA_{NEI_j} + 1)$$

A positive value of RSCA implies a comparative advantage in exporting the particular commodity category whereas a negative value implies a comparative disadvantage in exporting the particular commodity category. The values of RCA and RSCA for NEI export are presented in Table 3.

TABLE: 3
Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) and Revealed Symmetric Comparative Advantage (RSCA) of NEI's Export

Year	RCA Index			RSCA Index		
	Mineral	Agriculture/ Allied products	Other Products	Mineral	Agriculture/ allied products	Other Products
1991-92	-	5.591	-	-	0.697	-
1992-93	-	6.122	-	-	0.719	-
1993-94	-	5.532	-	-	0.694	-
1994-95	-	6.230	-	-	0.723	-
1995-96	-	5.203	-	-	0.678	-
1996-97	9.204	3.305	-	0.804	0.535	-
1997-98	8.771	3.878	-	0.795	0.590	-
1998-99	9.596	4.100	0.206	0.811	0.608	-0.659
1999-2000	16.701	3.806	0.101	0.887	0.584	-0.816
2000-01	13.980	4.654	0.190	0.866	0.646	-0.680
2001-02	16.715	3.822	0.155	0.887	0.585	-0.732
2002-03	12.699	4.030	0.254	0.854	0.602	-0.595
2003-04	14.636	3.840	0.182	0.872	0.587	-0.693
2004-05	8.923	5.052	0.672	0.798	0.670	-0.196

Source: Self calculated

The results indicate that NEI has been quite competitive in exporting minerals as RCAs values hovered around 8.9% to 16.7% from 1991-92 to 2004-05 and the RSCAs were very close to 1. Similarly, in case of agricultural and allied products, NEI has comparative advantage in exporting as revealed by more than unity values for RCAs and positive values for RSCAs. However, in case of other products, in almost all the years indicated a comparative disadvantage to NEI in exporting these items as revealed by less than unity values for RCAs and negative values for RSCAs. It indicates inefficiency in exporting of other items.

Thus, the present status of export trade from NEI with reference to its trading countries as stated in objective no 1 has been elaborately discussed. Now, the researcher proceeds to find out the impediments to export trade from NEI as stated in objective no. 2.

IMPEDIMENTS TO EXPORT TRADE

To have an elaborate study of the said objective, this part is put forward in two sub-groups namely, perceptions about infrastructure interventions and perception about non-tariff barriers to export trade.

Perceptions about infrastructure interventions

In order to ascertain the perceptions about infrastructure interventions as stated in the objectives and methodology, a partial field survey was conducted by the present researcher among 150 registered exporters located in different regions of NEI. Infrastructure development is a source of integration and competitiveness. It shows the dynamic role played by infrastructure in determining the trade flows within and outside the country. Many infrastructural problems hinder domestic development and international trade and thus constrain regional integration. They include a lack of capacity of existing institutions that regulate trade, unsatisfactory service quality of land custom point, non-availability of cold storage, warehousing to list a few.

The findings of the survey on the level of satisfaction about export related services and available infrastructure have been presented in table 4 hereafter. The information so received against the

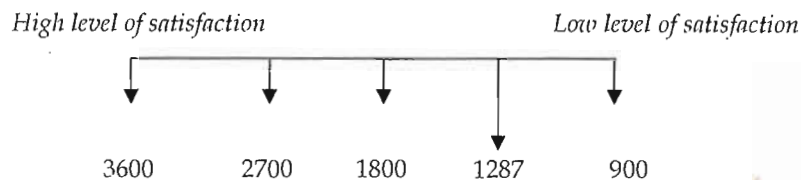
questionnaire has been synthesized into Likert Scale to assess the actual impact. Likert scale is a type of *psychometric* response scale often used in *questionnaires* and is the most widely used scale in survey research. When responding to a Likert questionnaire item, respondents specify their level of agreement to a statement. A Likert item is simply a statement which the respondent is asked to evaluate according to any kind of subjective or objective criteria. Generally, it measures the level of satisfaction. Here four ordered response levels are used assigning 4 weightage to outstanding level, 3 weightage to good level, 2 weightage to average level and 1 weightage to poor level of satisfaction. After the questionnaire is completed, an aggregated score for a group of items is created out of the responses gathered to assess the overall level of satisfaction.

TABLE: 4
Export related services and available infrastructure

Items	Level of satisfaction			
	Outstanding	Good	Average	Poor
Credit availability.	-	-	27 (18)	123 (82)
Service quality of land customs point.	-	-	126 (84)	24 (16)
Availability if export / import related information	-	99 (66)	36 (24)	15 (10)
Availability of cold storage warehousing, weigh bridge	-	-	-	150 (100)
Availability of loading/ unloading facility	-	-	-	150 (100)
Getting foreign exchange	-	-	-	150 (100)

Source: Field Work (n=150). Percentages are within brackets.

In the Likert scale based on the sample size of 150 numbers of exporters, six groups of items and weight assigned to each level of satisfaction; different scores obtained are shown below:



The aggregate score is 1287 which shows that the exporters are not satisfied with the prevailing available infrastructure.

The important observation that emerges from the field survey is the lack of infrastructure which remains the major problem for export promotion from NEI. Infrastructural constraints in most of the LCSs are lack of weigh bridges, good dumping ground, cold storage warehouse, loading / unloading facilities, truck parking space in the various LCSs, drinking water facilities, electricity, credit availability for export financing, medical and telecommunication facilities to name a few. Absence of warehouses and cold storage facilities pose serious problems for exporters of perishable commodities. Inadequate infrastructural support has been the immediate cause of low volume of trade. In fact, this is the sole reason which has made a few of the LCSs defunct. For example, the Balat LCS notified in 2005 has not yet become operational due to lack of road leading up to International Border. Inadequate infrastructural support in the LCSs in neighbouring nations is also a reason for low volume of trade in some LCSs and lack of trade in others.

The field survey has revealed that the lack of coordination among various agencies relating to exports is another infrastructural bottleneck. Even, law and other situation, insurgency etc. create numerous problems for export trade. Lack of awareness of export / import related information, marketing strategies and banking facilities are also some drawbacks for growth of export from NEI.

Therefore, NEI need to minimize trade infrastructural bottleneck by providing various trade related facilities. Export related problems could be tackled only through improved and integrated trading infrastructure, which is responsible for faster movement of goods and services across the nations.

Perception about non-tariff barriers to export trade

Trade liberalization has eliminated most of the distortions that a protectionist tariff system imposes on international business. However, nowadays non-tariff barriers represent a considerably larger barrier to trade than in past decades.

TABLE: 5
Barriers encountered by exporters

Items	Level of barriers			
	Too much	Much	Avg.	Not at all
Illegal trade causing problem for legal trade	102 (68)	48 (32)	-	-
Fulfilling statutory requirement of trade e.g. phyto sanitary measures	-	105 (70)	45 (30)	-
Banking transaction.	-	102 (68)	48 (32)	-
Limited items for export trade	48 (32)	102 (68)	-	-
Transportation bottleneck	-	105 (70)	45 (30)	-
Illegal taxation	150 (100)	-	-	-

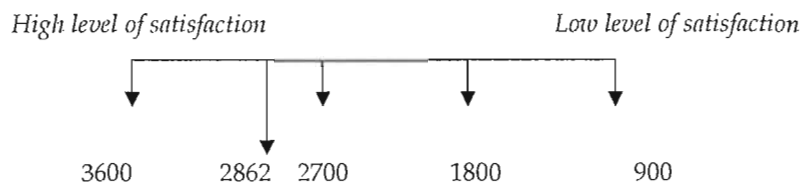
Source: Field Work. Data collected during 2005-06 (n=150). Percentages are in brackets.

Trade Competitiveness, however, will only be achieved by an improvement in non-tariff barriers at all points in the production-distribution chain. However, to proceed further with the analysis, the present researcher has done a survey on the same respondents. The findings of the survey on the level of barriers encountered by exporters have been presented in table 5 hereafter. The information so received against the questionnaire has been synthesized into Likert Scale method to ascertain their perception about barriers.

In this Likert scale the level of barriers encountered by the exporters are measured. Here four ordered response levels are used

assigning 4 weightage to too much level, 3 weightage to much level, 2 weightage to average level and 1 weightage to not at all level of problems. After the questionnaire is completed, an aggregated score for a group of items is created out of the responses gathered to assess the overall level of barriers.

In the Likert scale based on the sample size of 150 numbers of exporters, six groups of items and weightage assigned to each level of problem; different scores obtained are shown below:



The aggregate score is 2862 which shows that the exports are encountering barriers while exporting. The highlights of the field survey are enumerated below:

Illegal / unofficial trade

Illegal / unofficial trade exists between NEI and neighbouring countries. Although it is difficult to arrive at any estimation of the volume of unofficial trade but such trade is substantial. It has covered most smuggling prone bordering districts of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura.

Unofficial trade with Bangladesh is mainly operated through Fakiragram, Mankachar and Karimganj in Assam; Lichubari and Dawki in Meghalaya; Tlangbung in Mizoram and Kailashsahar, Agartala, Sonamora, Bilonia and Sabroom in Tripura. It is learnt that the volume of illegal exports of coal, limestone and agro-forest based products will be 4 to 5 times higher than the volume of official exports from Meghalaya to Bangladesh. It is also reported that the Rohu variety of fish produced in Andhra Pradesh is exported in substantial quantity through distant Tripura-Bangladesh border. Thus it can be concluded that informal export of bulk of items continues unabated.

This is often proved by the seizure list furnished by the customs authorities to the concerned agencies.

Unofficial trading with Bhutan is carried out primarily through two border points from Assam namely Gelephu and Samdrupjankar. The major items of unofficial exports are basically consumer goods like rice, sugar, clothes, kerosene, utensils etc.

Even in NEI and Myanmar border, big agencies from Aizawal, Guwahati, Imphal, Kohima, Shillong and Silchar export through local agents at different trade centers like Champhai, Khazwal, Lungwa, Moreh. In the bordering towns of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland, a large section of population including educated unemployed youths, women and children are involved in illegal trade. NEI's export to Myanmar include chemicals used in the manufacturing of narcotics in Myanmar, essential consumer items like baby food, tea leaves, cotton yarn, kerosene, cycle, diesel etc. The border towns of NEI, on the other hand, depend mostly on smuggling goods supplied from China, Japan, Thailand and South East Asian nations. It may be noted that the volume of unofficial trade is much larger than official trade. As such, it indicates that there are demands for such commodities across the region and the potential to which legal export can be raised but illegal exports restrict the growth of legal export from NEI.

Statutory requirement of trade

At present there is no quarantine office to issue clearance certificate for exporting of agricultural / floricultural/ horticultural items in Guwahati. In the entire NEI such facilities are at present available only in Karimganj & Agartala. As Guwahati is regarded as the gateway for the entire North East, a separate quarantine office may be set up for offering such facilities on Phyto- Sanitary measurers

Banking Transaction

With a view to create adequate banking infrastructure for international trade and border trade in the NEI, the banks functioning in this region should have corresponding arrangements with banks in neighbouring nations. At the moment, these corresponding relationships are restricted to the banks functioning in Kolkata. For instance, the only bank available at Moreh is United Bank of India (UBI). UBI branch at Moreh has been provided with a "C" class

currency chest of RBI. The authorization for the currency chest at UBI, Moreh is limited to only Rs.4 crores on the advice of the Ministry of Home Affairs to RBI. The normal export - import trade transaction has been affected as the authorization of currency chest is limited to only Rs 4 crores. Moreover, no MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) has been signed between the UBI, Moreh branch and the Myanmar Economic Bank at Tamu, Myanmar, both designated authorized banks, to enable normal trade under the letter of credit system. Thus, the Indian traders cannot conduct trade through letters of credit since corresponding arrangement for this purpose between the banks on both sides does not exist. The traders feel that in order to tap the demand of customers, other Nationalized Banks should also consider for opening their branches at Moreh.

Limited items under export trade

A few numbers of items are offered for export in relation to the total export basket of NEI. The majority of items offered for export are not even exported from any of the source of origin in NEI, although the items have been included in the export list.

Trade in the barter and exchange mechanism between NEI and Myanmar is restricted to only 22 items. Therefore, there is a dearth of commodities that can be exchanged / bartered. However, the 22 listed items are grown and available on both sides of the border and Myanmar has surplus of the same tradable items. It is learnt that instead of exporting forest / agricultural produce to Myanmar, NEI can export manufactured goods like motor cycles, bi-cycles and its parts, life saving drugs, fertilizers, insecticides, cotton fabric, agarbati and perfumery compounds, spices cosmetic, pan masala and zarda etc which reportedly enjoy a good demand there. Moreover, the unofficial exchange rate of currency appears to benefit the Myanmar traders. The existing official rate of exchange is approximately 6 Kyats for US \$ 1 and Rs. 7 for 1 kyat. But the unofficial exchange rate at Tamu or Namphaolong market is 1000 Kyats for US \$ 1 and 15 - 20 Kyats for Re1. Thus, Myanmar traders are not willing to transact business under the Normal Trade system under a Letter of Credit. Under such circumstances, barter trade appears to be the only viable solution. Therefore, it is imperative that the list of goods should be expanded further.

Transportation bottleneck

From the survey, it can be concluded that the transportation bottleneck remains the major problem of trade from NEI to Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. All the roads leading to different LCSs are in deplorable conditions. There is also frequent disruption of communication due to natural calamities. The roads from Karimganj to Sutarkandi LCS in Assam, Jowai - Dawki road in Meghalaya, Rahna Bazar in Tripura, Imphal to Moreh, Mon to Lungwa and Kohima to Pankhungri and Molei in Nagaland need to improve by widening and double laning to enable commencement of trade with emerging South Asian nations. However, so far as existing transportation linkage is concerned, the region is having better communication in terms of both road ways and water ways with Bangladesh than the other neighbouring countries. Transportation wise the land borders between Bangladesh and the NEI are more accessible and cost effective than the borders with other neighbouring countries i.e. Bhutan and Myanmar. Manipur is primarily a land locked state surrounded by hills and rocks, as a result, lorries are the only way for the surface export and the time needed to cross the land locked area is too expensive. Surface export is again expensive on account of increase in price of petrol and diesel. Hiring charge of trucks goes up. Insurance premium to be paid per truck escalates and so cost further increases.

Another challenge faced by exporters is the "behind-the-border" restrictions. Even South Asian countries depend on transport infrastructure in a major way but interlinked networks in the region are clearly absent. Cross-border trade can not succeed without improved trade facilitation in South Asia. Transport costs of regional trade are high in South Asia because of high inland transport cost, inefficiencies at custom points, and restrictive transport and security procedures. Trade costs are also high because of customs procedures, other trade procedures (health, agriculture), banking and payment procedures, and standards. It takes more than 10 days to get customs clearance on a container in South Asia compared to less than 5 days in East Asia. An exporter from India requires more than 250 signatures, 118 copies, and 29 documents, before he or she can export. Therefore, there is high demand in this regard to rethink to make shorten of sensitive list of products of developing countries and removing non-tariff barriers to ensure fair trade deal.

Illegal Taxation

Illegal trade is a cause of major concern and prohibiting legal trade to flourish. The legal traders are of the opinion that illegal traders often overtake legal trade in a liberal atmosphere. There are also chances of high rate of growth of allied activities like trade and commerce, banking, insurance, transportation, warehousing services and even hotel facilities in the transit points etc in the whole region after the removal of legal restriction on border trade. This will accelerate the general economic activities of this region because of inter-sectoral linkages and owing to push factors.

NEI and neighbouring countries, with their geographical contiguity, have a great potential for strengthening their trading activities. Over the years, India and other South Asian countries have taken a number of initiatives to remove tariffs and no tariffs restrictions at the unilateral, bilateral, and regional levels. Despite these initiatives, the intra-South Asia trade is not growing at the expected pace. Therefore, strengthening and interlinking the region's trading infrastructure should remove the region's trade barriers. Thus, the impediments to export trade from NEI as specified in objective number 2 has been elaborately accomplished.

Perceptions and observations of government officials

Having conducted the field survey amongst 50 government officials, the major observations and their opinions are highlighted below:

The trade agreements between India and its trading partners will definitely have certain positive implications on the economic prospects of NEI. The sub-regional co-operation of South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) will enhance inter-regional trade amongst the members of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) nations by way of trade across the region. This will consequently contribute to the development of NEI as it shares almost 98% with international border of Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Nepal.

The government officials are of the opinion that NEI will be benefited from the policy of 'Look East' because of her strategic location. In order to take advantages of the new liberalized trade regime in the SAARC region, state governments of NEI have taken

adequate steps to improve the provision of infrastructure facilities like transport communication system, banking and warehousing at the transit points. At the same time, government has undertaken studies for transport optimization as well as transit and transshipment arrangement with the neighbouring nations. In fact, they are of the opinion that there has been far improvement in the road and rail links from capitals of NEI to its neighbouring nations. But the most important infrastructure required for healthy growth of export trade is the social peace. Officials are of the view that ensuring social peace and tranquility is a pre-condition for international business.

An Inter-Ministerial Task Force (IMTF) under Ministry of Commerce has been set up to examine the trade opportunities and manufacturing potential for export. Officials are of the visualization that NEI has enough scope to develop export oriented projects / industries such as coal and limestone, petrochemical, agro, forest, medical plants, sericulture, jute, floricultural, horticultural handloom and handicraft based units.

To encourage export from NEI, the Government of India has liberalized trade policy and simplified procedures. The Government has declared Export House status house to Assam Industrial Development Corporation Limited (AIDC) in Assam and Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation Limited (MIDC) in Meghalaya. With a view to help the state governments in the creation of infrastructural facilities for export oriented production; Export Promotion Industrial Park (EPIP) has been envisaged for each state. EPIP Scheme was introduced in August 1994. Only those units have been allowed to establish in the park that give a legal undertaking to the state government to export not less than 25% of their total production in value terms. At present, one EPIP each has been set up in the states of Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya (Khunuta Chingjin) under the Ministry of Commerce. The same has been planned at Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh and Ganeshnagar (near Dimapur, Nagaland) which will provide facilities like power, water, roads, sewerage & drainage, telecommunication, mini market complex, community centers, banks, business center etc for export promotion. EPIP at Amingaon (Assam) have already started functioning and developed plots for industries and sheds have been allotted to around 28 units. There are established industries like Infosys, Hindustan Unilever, Reliance Petrochemicals, Godrej, Emami, Modi, Ujjala etc who have shown interest and have set up units in the region. There

are also export oriented units dealing in manufactured items like cigarettes, water storage tanks, PVC pipes, fabric whitener, stone crushing machines, cement paints, glazed tiles, ginger oil and paste, mosquito repellants etc. In Meghalaya, around 5 export-oriented units including one 100% Export Oriented Unit have been set up in EPIP at Burnihat. In other states of the region the process of establishing EPIP is in progress. Under the Software Technology Park of India (STPI), Guwahati around 26 units have got registered and at present only one unit i.e. Grace i-net Solution has been able to establish its contact abroad. It has undertaken exports using a data communication link or in the form of physical exports through a courier service. It has been permitted to import goods on loan from clients for a specified period. State governments of NEI from time to time have conducted general awareness programmes for the benefit of traders and business communities. These programmes have been found quite useful to the participants.

There is also a significant volume of informal trade between NEI and its neighbouring countries. Although there are formal trade agreements between India and its trading partners, the volume of informal trade through NEI is manifold. Informal trade exists with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar. Traders on either side of the border cross almost freely for carrying out informal trading activities. Since, the inhabitant on the either side of the border areas is ethnoculturally more or less homogeneous, it is easier to carry out trading activities. Moreover, there is practically no physical barrier in the form of border fencing. Traders from neighbouring nations often cross over to India and vice versa to buy their necessities and commodities. They usually pay in Indian currency which can be acquired at a small commission from the border agents.

Conclusion

To make the vision of export promotion a reality, one has to assist NEI to benefit more from export of goods and services and generate opportunity needed for sustainable growth. NEI has natural trading advantages and is certainly capable of manufacturing items that meet market requirements. Market access is vital but more important is the investments which are needed in human resources, institutions and in building a well-equipped physical infrastructure for trade to take place. Transforming market access opportunities into concrete gains

will also depend on willingness of the people to implement reforms at home to enable their firms to take advantage of untapped openings abroad which has enormous potential to foster export promotion. The very fact that the NEI is surrounded by as many as five countries with almost a 5000-km stretch of international border, amply speaks of how important could be the role of trade with neighbouring nations in fuelling the engine of growth and adding to vitality of socio-economic transformation of its 39 million residing people. Thus, the strategy in this regard is to identify new market for trade and improve upon infrastructural constraints.

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PROSPECTS OF EMPLOYMENT GENERATION THROUGH THE RURAL NON-FARM SECTOR IN ASSAM

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The role of Rural Non-Farm Sector in Employment Generation programmes in the developing countries has received considerable attention worldwide as regards to development strategies and policies. Many new employment opportunities in many developing countries are created in the non-farm sector whose rate of growth is higher than that of the farm sector. Despite continued rural to urban migration, a large number of population in many developing countries still lives in rural areas and are mainly poor with over 30 percent overall classified as poor (UNDP 2001).

As employment is an important variable in making economic growth pro-poor, it is important to examine what has happened to employment as a result of growth. There can be two ways of looking at the issue. The first would be to ask how employment intensive growth has been possible. This question can be addressed by using the concept of employment elasticity with respect to output growth. And this concept can be applied to the economy as a whole and/or to its major sectors. The second approach (that can actually complement an analysis based on employment elasticity) would be to examine how the structure of employment has responded to economic growth. For growth to be able to contribute to poverty reduction, it must lead to a transformation of the structure of employment towards sectors characterized by higher productivity and returns. For a state like

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Assam, this would typically imply a shift towards manufacturing and other modern sectors.

Again employment opportunities in rural areas of Assam may have to rely on strengthening the ability of non-farm agricultural (like agro-processing, post-harvesting) activities to absorb the labour. Diversification into the rural non-farm activities constitutes an average about 45 percent of rural incomes in developing countries and the 'push and pull' factors driving this diversification are bound to persist (Barrett and Reardon 2000). Push factors include changes in technology in agriculture that require less labour, creating labour surpluses and reducing agricultural labour opportunities and pull factors include employment generation in semi-urban areas from industry that raises wage-employment.

Further, the growing population puts pressure on the limited land resources for producing food and limits the capacity of the household. Instead of becoming a resource, the illiterate and unskilled population becomes a burden for the nation. The lack of physical capital and skills constrains the development of the industry and services sector and limits the generation of productive employment for the rising labour force. Unemployment and underemployment breed social ills like violence and terrorism that in turn hinders development.

The Way Ahead

In India, the economic growth rates of all states are not same. India's various states differ significantly in terms of employment generation, poverty reduction and policy processes. Over the past few decades, India has allocated 6 to 7 percent of budgetary expenditures, or 1 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), to its anti-poverty programmes, mainly supporting food subsidies, subsidized credit, improvement of rural infrastructure and rural employment schemes. The targets of the Government of India's Eleventh National Development Plan (2007-2012) include:

1. Improving access to and the quality of essential public services for poor rural people, including health and education, by implementing and improving specific programmes and involving the voluntary sector,

2. Creating a broader base for income growth by doubling the agricultural growth rate to 4 percent,
3. Harmonizing the government's various self-employment schemes and implementing an integrated self-employment programme, and
4. Giving special attention to scheduled castes, tribes and minorities, and especially to the economic empowerment of women in those groups.

The Eleventh Plan provides an opportunity to restructure policies according to a new vision of growth that will be more broadly based and inclusive, to achieve a faster reduction in poverty.

Ansari (2008) in his keynote speech delivered in the Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) Conference held in New Delhi, said that the redistribution of economic and political power, inclusion of rural areas and rural poor in development, enhancing access to resources and employment in rural areas, focus on non-farm rural activities, education and training activities and agrarian reforms continue to be important areas for public policy. According to him, in Asia in general, and in India in particular, poverty has a rural face. Rural development and poverty alleviation are thus two sides of the same coin. He also added that the world is facing an unprecedented global hike in the prices of agricultural commodities, with concomitant impact on food security for the poor and vulnerable. While macro-economic and globalisation issues have been debated, these remain the penumbra of the shadow of this agrarian crisis.

Indeed, the agrarian reform and rural development issues are inherently political in nature. While economic and social interventions are necessary, they are not enough to bring about the desired outcomes. It is therefore, the duty of policy makers to ensure that the interaction of politics with policy is constructive and synergistic. As important personalities influencing policy formulation and implementation, sharing best practices and benefiting from the experiences of each other would contribute to our common goal of promoting rural development and regional cooperation, he added.

In India too, the government approaches to these two issues have significantly changed in the past two decades. Given the federal structure, land reform legislation is a state subject and has not been pursued in a uniform pattern. Civil society movements like '*Janadesh*'

have therefore sought to mobilize opinion for a national land reform policy and a national land reform commission (Ansari 2008).

On the other hand, the Government of India has developed a noticeably sharper focus on poverty alleviation and rural development programmes and significantly enhanced its expenditure manifold - from Rs. 76 billion in 1993-94 to Rs. 340 billion in 2003-04 and Rs. 1200 billion in the current financial year. The Government's strategy has focused on five dimensions for targeted poverty alleviation and rural development (Ansari 2008):

1. Institute guaranteed wage-employment covering the entire country,
2. Promote self-employment,
3. Ensure rural connectivity and infrastructure augmentation,
4. Facilitate basic amenities such as housing, and
5. Provide social security especially for the aged, sick and other vulnerable sections of the society.

Hence, the economic reforms of 1990's that swept the country did not bring any significant change in the economic well being of Assam. People often argued that the North-Eastern Region of India remains a classic case of financial exclusion. The agriculture sector continues to be dominated by mono cropping that too by paddy, low level of farm mechanization etc., inhibiting its growth. The industrial development is also almost stagnant in the state. While every other state is making efforts to attract Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), Assam has not received any such investment so far unlike the Government's white paper dealings.

However, the rural non-farm sector has a tremendous scope for development in a state like Assam. In a survey, NABARD has identified ten sectors for development which includes sectoral schemes like Agriculture, Fish rearing and processing, Rural Retail Trade, Sericulture & Silk Textile, Fibre products, Construction, Small Plantation products, Handloom, Handicraft mainly cane, bamboo and wood products. These activities are to be developed for creation of additional employment in the rural areas. The development Departments like Agriculture, Handloom and Textile, Sericulture, Fishery, Veterinary, Panchayat and Rural Development etc. are

associated with these schemes to implement within a definite time frame.

Meaning of the term Employment Generation

The use and value of employment in targeting poverty is neither new nor is it restricted to any one region. Historically, the Poor Employment Act of 1817 in Great Britain represented a major milestone in the development of economic policy to reduce poverty through employment and development (Braun 1995). That Act and similar public interventions in later years in various countries have been largely based on the recognition that small firms are important generators of employment (Hobbs 2000). Hughes (2000) in interpreting the job-generating role of the small enterprises emphasizes the extreme skewness and volatility of the individual small business growth patterns, the low quality and sustainability of many jobs created by the mass micro enterprises. He observed that a relatively few firms exhibiting rapid and sustained growth account for the bulk of sustained job generation in small firms. This is especially so for the developing world where economic reforms are recent and hurried, and availability and access to market information is not uniform and assured. Those small enterprises that are better placed to access resources including information and technology thrive and offer sustained jobs while their disadvantaged contemporaries fizzle out.

The growth and development of small enterprises is pegged to the existence of some level of entrepreneurial climate or enterprise culture amongst the people. While entrepreneurial skills exist in all cultures it may vary in degree according to traditions, environment and history. Such skills and motivations should be supported by a well-defined institutional structure that is understood by the participants, and which includes formal rights and protections to physical and other property. Access to resources in the form of capital, labour and infrastructure will then lead to the development of small enterprises participating in marketing and/or processing of farm output. As Reardon et al. (2001) point out, household members will redirect their labour away from land-based activities with the existence of: (i) pull factors such as higher incomes in the non-farm sector relative to the farm sector, and (ii) push factors such as increase in agriculturally sourced risk (farming that cannot ensure year-round employment, income and consumption).

The main goal behind the enterprises is to generate income for the entrepreneurs and their families. In the case of marketing enterprises which requires that goods have to be sourced, transported, transformed and marketed, the physical assets involved, need to be acquired, serviced and repaired. All these activities require human labour fully or in part depending on the level of business sophistication and technology employed. Human labour has a price whether it is family labour (referred to as self-employment) or non-family labour (wage-employment). The remuneration received by family members is critical to a household's ability to access basic needs, improve livelihoods and create assets.

Employment can be categorized in two broad categories such as Farm sector and Non-Farm sector employment. Farm sector employment is mainly rural land based crop and livestock farming like fish culture etc. On the other hand, the non-farm sector employment is considered as semi-town based largely encompassing service sub-sector employment, processing, manufacturing and small-scale enterprises. There is a close linkage between the two broad categories especially in developing countries where the non-farm activities play a major role in complementing the activities of agricultural marketing and processing enterprises.

Moreover, employment generation is affected by the structure of the market particularly the distances in market channels and the types of products demanded by the consumers. Greater distances generally require more intermediaries and more labour as to do additional processing and handling for derived products. Seasonality plays an important role in affecting the stability of employment through the year. Again the policy environment interacts with all of these factors and can either ameliorate or exaggerate the effects.

In fact, the employment and income generation programmes are of two types such as: (i) self-employment, and (ii) wage-employment programmes. Self-employment programmes usually target the poor and assist them in undertaking income generating activities by providing them with credits. In some cases credit is accompanied by assistance in skill training and marketing. The wage-employment programmes create employment by using labour-intensive methods in constructing infrastructure.

Hence, for the economy of Assam generating productive employment for the growing labour force remains a dreadful

challenge. The capacity of absorbing the incremental rural labour force in agriculture is extremely limited because of (Hossain, 1987):

1. No scope of expansion of the land frontier,
2. The intensity of cropping has almost reached the limit,
3. The growth of crop production now depends almost entirely on technological progress resulting in low employment elasticity of output, and
4. The need for increasing labour productivity and reducing unit cost through mechanization.

It is true that a dramatic structural change has grown in the composition of rural labour force in favour of rural non-farm activities in Assam. Doubts however continue to persist about the employment generation and growth potentials of the rural non-farm sector due to lack of information on the types of activities, the nature of their operation and the constraints and opportunities.

Unemployment Problems of Assam

The problems of unemployment refer to the imbalance between the size and growth of labour force on the one hand and the opportunities of the productive absorption of labour offered by the existing economic structure on the other (Joshi and Joshi 1976). In defining employment for statistical purpose, developing countries usually follow the procedure of taking one week reference period, including even part time workers in the categories of employed and classifying as unemployed only those who did not work at all during the reference week and were actively seeking work. Thus, to qualify as an unemployed, one would first have to fail the test of working by not working even a single day during the reference week. Once one could be regarded as not working, one would then have to pass the test of 'seeking work' although this latter concept could be subject to a variety of interpretations.

In applying the concept of unemployment the importance of the underemployment problem also needs to be considered in the context of the economy of Assam. Like unemployment, underemployment also has different aspects and can be measured in various ways. The most widely used criteria for measuring this are time and income,

although productivity is also used in some senses. Underemployment is considered as a situation of underutilisation of labour time of persons under labour force leading to inadequate availability of employment and income. It is, thus, measured in relation to the number of hours worked and/or the size of income received by the employed persons during a given reference period.

In case of women employed in the informal sectors of the economy, open unemployment is less likely to be revealed, as women may not openly seek a job in such employment. Since the productivity of labour in non-farm occupations is higher than the agricultural wage rate, even for the land-poor households, the mobility of rural workers from agriculture to the non-farm sector is contributing to an increase in the productivity and earnings of rural workers. It supports the proposition of the existence of pull factors that the higher productivity and wage earnings in most non-farm activities are luring labour from relatively low productive, risky, and backbreaking farm activities.

The methods for measuring unemployment and underemployment are explained and suitable indicators for analysing underemployment in this context are put forward. Unemployment can be measured using two methods. The first chooses a norm for the standard hours of employment in a week and those who work less than this norm are identified as underemployed. In the neighbouring country Bangladesh, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) uses 35 hours as the norm for the standard hours worked in a week. Second, to take into account the extent of underemployment, the time criterion index of 'Unemployment Equivalent' (UE) can be used. The UE is calculated on the basis of the difference between a hypothetical norm of supply of days over a year and the actual days of employment of a worker (Krishna 1973; Khan et al. 1981; Rahman 1996).

Assam has a predominantly agrarian economy with weak industrial base. Most of the workers are engaged in agriculture and other allied activities such as livestock rearing, fishing, forestry, and plantation and horticulture. The total number of workers engaged in rural non-farm sector was 1.16 million in 1991 constituting 18.6 percent of the rural work force as compared to 17.7 percent for the country as a whole. This reinforces the fact that although the agriculture is the major economic activity, the rural non-farm sector provides a potential source for large scale generation of income and employment in the rural areas. Hence, the development of the rural

non-farm sector is of paramount importance which calls for adequate credit flow to this sector.

The Industries and Commerce Department of the Government of Assam as well as Assam Industrial Development Corporation are associated with various schemes for industrial development in the state. It has been observed that there is a discernible shift in the Index of industrial production in the state, which has risen from 132.46 points in 2002-03 to 125.87 points in 2003-04. However, the contribution of manufacturing sector in the total economy of the state was only 10.1 percent, which is not very encouraging. As at the end of 2002-03, there were 2695 registered factories providing employment to 96,031 persons. The Annual Survey of Industries (2001-02), reveals that in Assam, under the 'manufacturing sector', there were 1423 factories providing employment to 1,12,542 persons. As regards Small Scale Industries (SSI), there were more than 44,000 SSI units in Assam employing 1.85 lakh persons. Under the Pradhan Mantri Rozgar Yojana (PMRY) programme, during the year 2002-03, a total Rs 2684.87 lakh was disbursed to 9712 entrepreneurs in the state.

The employment scenario in the state during the year 2002, revealed that employment in the public sector showed a marginal increase of 0.85 percent, while that in private sector decreased by 8.48 percent over the previous year. As per the data available from the Employment Exchanges, the number of job seekers in the State increased to 15.72 lakh as at the end of December 2003 from 15.25 lakh during the corresponding period of the previous year indicating an increase of 3.1 percent. Of the total registered job seekers, 67 percent were educated. 54 percent of the total educated persons had passed SSC and about 29 percent were graduates. Thus, keeping in view the large scale unemployment problem in the state, self employment ventures hold the key to faster development. A sizeable portion of job seekers could be motivated to set up their own ventures through various schemes of the state government with financial assistance from banks.

The Government of Assam has formulated the Industrial Policy of Assam, 2003 (w.e.f October 1, 2003) with the objective of increasing the share of the Industrial sector in the State Domestic Product (SDP) from 13.29 percent to at least 18 percent by the end of the five year period ending September 30, 2008. NABARD on its part is implementing a Credit Linked Capital Subsidy Scheme (CLCSS) for technological upgradation of Small Scale Industry. The scheme is meant to promote

technological upgradation in 30 specified sectors / sub-sectors for setting up or upgradation of existing units by 'state or near state of art technology'. Replacement of existing machinery with the same equipment is not eligible for assistance under the scheme. Banks by provision of 15 percent capital subsidy are implementing the scheme. The maximum subsidy eligible is Rs. 6 lakh for SSI units having investment in plant and machinery upto Rs. 100 lakh.

Employment Opportunities in the Rural Non-Farm Sector in Assam

The rural non-farm sector holds the key to faster economic development. It has potential and promise for generating employment and increased income in the rural areas. At all India level, the rate of growth of employment on current daily status basis declined from 2.7 percent per annum during 1983-94 to 1.07 percent per annum during 1994-2000. In rural areas, it declined from 2.4 percent to 0.67 percent per annum during the corresponding period. Employment elasticity of output growth in agriculture declined from 0.7 percent to 0.01 percent. The situation in Assam is more adverse than all India position.

Fruits and vegetable consumption has high-income elasticity. Rising income will ensure that consumption growth will be sustained. It's not an easy task to provide food and employment for the additional people and the labour force. Among the growing population, the proportion of population in the working age group will continue to grow, putting additional challenge to policy makers for generating productive employment in Assam. In as much as a sizeable proportion of employment is available in the rural non-farm sector unlike the farm sector, it is sometimes treated as panacea for the growing twin problems of unemployment and poverty in policy discussions.

It is the expansion of the non-farm sector that has been contributing to increase in incomes of the households who are poorly endowed with assets. Many landless households have migrated to rural towns and cities and found jobs as transport operators or construction labourers. The impressive development in the rural road network in the last decade, coupled with the increase in marketed surplus rice and vegetables and fruits have created employment opportunities in transport operation and petty trading. This is the main reason why the supply of agricultural labour has declined in recent years and farmers have been complaining regarding the

scarcity of agricultural labour. The increase in the number of shallow tube wells, pumps, power tillers and rickshaw and rickshaw vans has created jobs as in the operation and repair and maintenance. Last but not the least, many marginal landowning households with some skills for utilizing capital have been able to generate self-employment in livestock and poultry raising, petty trading, and various kinds of personal services.

The non-crop agriculture generates substantially higher value added in post-production (processing, storage and marketing) activities that can create opportunities for higher productive employment for the land-poor households. Exploitation of this potential will however require support from the public sector for developing rural infrastructure in the field of transport, power and communications, investment in secondary and technical education as well as providing access to finance to the resource-poor households.

The movement of labour from low-productive agriculture to high-productive rural non-farm sector activities is a positive trend for poverty reduction and should not be an issue of concern. Farmers have started responding to the phenomenon by adopting mechanization. The government could facilitate the process by providing access to credit for financing mechanization and setting up small scale agro-processing enterprises, and removing policy distortions against small scale trading and business enterprises. Also, children from low-income households should be provided with greater access to quality secondary education to facilitate their occupational mobility and to improve the distribution of income from the rural non-farm sector.

In the post reform period, there is a structural change in the rural non-farm sector, which is especially favourable for poverty reduction through employment generation. During 1980s the rapidly increased labour absorption by the rural non-farm sector seems to have taken place in low-productivity activities to which the rural landless, pushed out of agriculture were drawn as self-employed workers. In contrast, during 1990s a less rapid shift of labour force into the rural non-farm sector was pulled in by the growth of wage employment in larger and more productive rural non-farm sector activities. The rural poor, therefore, found an improved opportunity of more remunerative wage employment in the rural non-farm sector in 1990s as compared to moving into overcrowded, low-productivity rural non-farm sector activities in the previous decade. The various dimensions of

employment opportunities in the rural non-farm sector in Assam can be categorised as below:

1. *Agricultural inputs related:* Irrigation pumps, fertilizers, spare parts, power tillers, small agricultural implements, threshing machines, and pesticides.
2. *Crop output related:* Paddy and jute stores, vegetable shops, fruit stalls, betel leaf and nut shops, rice and wheat stall, oilseeds and spices stores.
3. *Livestock related:* Sweetmeat and curds, chicken & eggs, milk trading, butcher shop, cattle trading.
4. *Fisheries related:* Fish trading, fish fingerlings trading.
5. *Forestry related:* Timber trading, fuel wood trading, bamboo and hogla leaves trading.
6. *Agro-processing:* Gur (raw sugar) making, rice and flour mills, oil mills, cheera and muri making, saw mill, fish drying, handicrafts, salt making, goldsmith, furniture making.
7. *Construction materials related:* Hardware shops, cement and rod, lathe machine, brick trading, stone and sands, brick field, lock and key business, bamboo fixtures, contractor for road and bridge construction, tin and iron trading.
8. *Transport operation related:* Vehicle renting, leasing ferry ghat, trawler renting, repairing rickshaw/van, transport business.
9. *Food services:* Tea stall, peddling tea, restaurants.
10. *Others:* Cloth shops, readymade garments, tailoring, phone and fax machines, electronics, utensils, glass, cookeries.

Evidence from developing countries can be cited to suggest that the rural non-farm sector generates more employment opportunities even under a hostile policy environment which summarily denies access to institutional credit, tax rebates,

input/output price support etc. Secondly, it is argued that only a fraction of the capital is needed which creates an additional work place. Thirdly, the rural non-farm sector generates demand for semi-skilled and unskilled workers whose supply is increasing both in relative and absolute terms. Fourthly, the rural non-farm sector plays an important role in recycling waste materials, which in many cases provide basic commodities for the poor. Lastly, the rural non-farm sector is believed to generate a more equitable distribution of assets and earnings. The benefits of higher employments and earnings and an improved status and living standard for women is emphasised in this context. In other words, the sector is positively geared towards the poor in two senses; it generates employment and earnings on the one hand and cheaper consumer goods on the other.

Assam is traditionally known for its rich Handloom and Handicraft products and the Government is ensuring promotion of this sector through various developmental schemes. The State Government should take all possible steps for getting Financial and Technical Assistance from the Government of India for implementation of such developmental schemes. There is a need to conduct survey on various Handicraft products and registration of Handicraft units time to time, as well as the government should strengthen the Handicraft Research and Design Center, Cottage Industries Training Institute and Cottage Industries Museum for the development of Handicraft Industries in the State. All possible measures should be taken to assist the craftsmen, artisans of various crafts and also the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)/ Co-operative Societies for development of Handicraft Industries in the State. The Government should also take necessary measures to export the Handicraft products to outside the country as well as to participate in exhibitions at various parts of the country to give exposure to the Handicraft products.

There is ample scope for development particularly in the rural areas for processing of cereals, fruits, vegetables, milk, meat and other agricultural products like jute, ramie etc. The Government is encouraging the development of Agro and Food processing industries by providing possible basic infrastructure to the industries. The Government of Assam should encourage setting up of Fruit Processing, Vegetable Processing, Spice Processing, Aquaculture; Horticulture based projects in the State. Apart from that, Government should also take necessary action to motivate the investors for commercial exploitation and processing and setting up of projects on

medicinal herbs, aromatic plants, rubber plantation and processing, Small Tea garden etc. The Government of Assam is very much aware about the viability of setting up of industries like diversified jute products and ramie based industries in Assam by prospective entrepreneurs, but unlike that there needs some kind of more efficient initiatives from both apex and grassroot levels.

The Rural Non-Farm Sector Activities in Assam

A large number of the rural poor in Asia are engaged in farm sector (including fishery and livestock) either as wage labourers or marginal farmers and self-employed. Interventions needed to alleviate their poverty should include policies and programmes to raise productivity in such activities on the one hand and labour market interventions (e.g., wage protection through legislation and increasing the negotiating power of the poor by promoting organization) on the other. However, it needs to be noted that a sustained reduction of rural poverty hinges critically on the growth of a productive and dynamic non-farm sector. Experience in Asia and elsewhere shows that the rural non-farm activities can be of two broad types: (i) activities where the rural poor turn to as a desperate measure to eke out a living when there is very little alternative and (ii) activities (often with strong linkage with agriculture) where productivity and wages are no less than agriculture and which have dynamic growth potential. It is through the promotion of the latter type of activities that one can make a significant contribution to the goal of poverty reduction. In formulating strategies for reducing rural poverty through the promotion of non-farm activities it is essential to take note of the two broad types mentioned above and identify the major constraints that hinder the growth of the relevant type. A number of studies on this topic are available now, indicating that while capital is an important constraint, infrastructure (e.g., roads, transport, electricity, education and skills of workers and access to markets - for inputs as well as outputs) are also critical. Policies and actions to promote rural non-farm activities with the goal of poverty alleviation should take this into account. However, like in the case of urban informal sector, it would be necessary to find means of action through which large-scale programmes can be undertaken.

The growth of agricultural productivity has however promoted a healthy development in the rural non-farm sector by triggering what economists call 'backward and forward linkages'. Agricultural growth

has generated opportunities for employment and income in the rural non-farm sector through its effects on: (a) the demand for irrigation equipment and chemical fertilizers produced and transacted in the non-farm sectors, (b) the demand for services for processing, storage and marketing of additional agricultural produce and (c) the demand for trade, transport, construction, education and health care services, as farm households spend a larger proportion of additional incomes for purchasing non-farm goods and services.

The examples of such industries are rice processing by *dhenki* (wooden husker), cloth and *gamchiha* making by pit looms, village pottery, mat and net making etc. The productivity of labour in these industries was very low (Hossain 1984); in most cases lower than the agricultural wage rate. Most of these low-productive industries have already disappeared under competition with improved technologies such as rice mill, semi-automatic and power looms.

The various examples of the rural non-farm sector activities which are related to the Micro and Small Enterprises are cited as below:

1. Brick making
2. Charcoal making
3. Marketing transport
4. Public transport
5. Small rural shops (food and non-food)
6. Rural restaurants
7. Small bakeries
8. Repair workshops (various items)
9. Small business centres
10. Blacksmiths and metalworkers
11. Carpentry workshops
12. Handicraft products (sewing, basket weaving, cloth making, etc.)
13. Batik, tie and dye
14. Small lodges (ecotourism)
15. Tours and guides (ecotourism)

Source: (IFAD 2003b).

Though militant groups operating in Assam usually draw a lot of unemployed youth to join them and strengthen their cadres, there are various Self-Help Groups which have transformed the lives of the youngsters' lives in several districts of Assam, especially in the villages. The Self-Help Groups' impact is prominently visible in the State's Jorhat district. Started by educated unemployed people, these SHGs have generated employment opportunities for the village youth and have provided a ray of hope for them who are otherwise sought after by militant groups. Bestiary Shams Goan, a non-descript village in Jorhat district is an example of how self-help groups with the available means and resources have generated employment opportunities to enable people to survive. With their individual efforts, these people have showcased how despite a difficult phase of life it is possible to bring change by consistent attempts. Nearly 90,000 Self-Help Groups are active in rural Assam. They are mostly related to the fields of handloom, agriculture, fishery farming, poultry and dairy. The SHGs have, in the recent times, got further momentum with the initiation of Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY), a Central Government programme aimed at eradicating poverty in rural areas. The success of the scheme is a testimony to the fact that the people of the region do not want to suffer militancy and do not want their new generation to be diverted towards underground activities because of lack of government jobs.

The rural non-farm sector covers a broad spectrum of activities outside agriculture in the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy pursued in the rural areas for reaping economic benefits. It covers the heterogeneous assortment of various groups ranging from medium units to tiny units harnessing intermediate technology and also traditional activities carried out in the decentralised sector covering rural artisans and craftsmen including non agricultural labourers engaged in small part-time jobs. The development of non-farm activities assumes special importance for reducing the pressure on land-based agriculture and providing alternative source of income and employment to rural people.

Floods and Soil Erosion are causing immense suffering to the people of the affected areas and damage to the standing crops including loss of livestock. Apart from floods, the State is also subjected to large-scale erosion of soil, occurrence of hailstorm, cyclonic storm, drought, earthquake, etc. The flood and erosion control measures taken up so far are short-term measures. For effective management of flood and erosion in the valley, long-term

measures in the form of storage reservoir in the upper catchments of the river basins and Watershed Management are a must. Suitable strategies may be evolved to address these problems immediately through appropriate measures for the economic resurgence of the State. Although these problems exist in the State, out of the three broad sectors of economy viz., Primary, Secondary and Tertiary, an impressive growth has been observed in case of Secondary sector.

Although new, one important phenomenon of the use of government wasteland by landless poor or by the SHGs for production process has tremendous output value. This is practised in Tamil Nadu and has got tremendous influence from the disadvantaged section of the people (Vidyanathan et al. 2007). Again in Rajasthan, RUDA is playing a vital role in organising and employing rural people in income generation process. The Assam Government must learn lessons from these institutions and implement them in the State.

According to Robb (2002), the issue of Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs) use participatory research methods to understand poverty from the perspective of the poor by focusing on their realities, needs and priorities. A participatory poverty assessment is a method to include poor in the analysis of poverty with the objective of influencing policy. The findings are transmitted to the policy makers, thereby enabling the poor to influence public policy choices.

Conclusion

The rural non-farm sector in Assam has immense potential to generate new jobs with relatively low direct investments, by utilising local skills and resources or by meeting local demands by adoption of simple techniques. Development of this sector would also prevent migration of rural population to urban areas in search of employment and reduce the pressure of increasing urbanisation. Rural poverty and proliferation of urban slums can be arrested only if government is able to move nearly a third of the landless labour in Assam from un-skilled on-farm to skilled non-farm jobs. This will be possible, only if public and private sector give concurrent attention to production, processing, packaging and marketing.

The recent move towards micro-credit system and initiative to set up of Grameen Bank, the tie up with Bangladesh is remarkable. People often questioned, is India a superpower of poverty? (Das 2008) or is

India a paper tiger? (Baru 2006). There will be real growth only when the partner states of Indian Union will grow equally. The rural non-farm sector is an alternative way of livelihood process when agricultural farming fails in India to engage all the rural poor.

There is no doubt that the rural non-farm sector activities in Assam have assumed a leading role in generating income and employment particularly in rural areas. The detailed profile of the non-farm activities suggest that most enterprises are small, generate self-employment for their proprietors and are mostly engaged in trading activities. They have very limited access to basic factors of production and services. Yet, these enterprises are not low productive residual and last resort type activities in Assam. Most enterprises are full time engagement for their owners and employees. Indeed, age and size profiles of the enterprises suggest that the rural non-farm sector activities provide rich breeding grounds for entrepreneurs in both urban and rural areas. The sector has shown strength over the last decade. Both employment and number of enterprises have grown strongly. Moreover, the desired structural transformation from home-based enterprises to enterprises with permanent structure has been underway. While average labour productivity in this sector is higher than agricultural wage, there are large variations in labour productivity and total factor productivity implying existence of constraints in technological upgrading and large entry and exit costs.

The policy options for the future growth of the rural non-farm sector are clear. Assam has to start from providing the very basic services and infrastructure to enterprises in the rural non-farm sector. These include electricity, communication, flood protection, road and improved transportation and perhaps more urgently access to finance for both investment and working capital. This represents rather daunting task but the pay-off from providing these basic infrastructures and services are significant.

Moreover, rural people need access to markets both as producers and consumers. The rural poor lack physical access to markets (such as rural roads linking villages to market areas), which increases transaction and communication, costs between traders and customers. The poor also lack the market-related skills needed to survive in competitive markets. Micro enterprise development that is linked to a broader rural development strategy might prevent such difficulties from arising. In addition, the rural poor are usually less informed about markets and opportunities. For the rural poor of Assam, efforts

are needed to disseminate market information through digital and non-digital means of communication (e.g. Radio, Television, Newspapers, even the Internet) in order to increase their chances of identifying and undertaking profitable and sustainable activities.

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VOTING BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY OF WOMEN VOTERS IN NAGALAND

Moamenla Amer*

Voting behaviour is one such study that explains the determinants and consequences of citizen's participation in democracy through voting. It seeks to explain why people choose to support a particular party or candidate when voting at elections and more importantly, what demographic and socio-economic factors can explain what motivates citizens to vote. Today, it connotes more than the examination of voting records, compilation of voting statistics and computation of electoral shifts (Pandhy and Tripathy, 1994). It is concerned with finding out series of psychological, cultural, social and economic considerations that go into individual's act of voting (Quraishi, 1979).

Though citizen's participation through voting is still the heart of democratic process, a genuinely participatory political culture involves far more than simply the periodic casting of votes. To gauge the level of citizen's participation based solely on voting ignores the influence of other modes of political behaviour (Millbrath, L & Goel, M.L., 1977). Therefore, in order to analyze voting behaviour of the women voters in its entirety, there is a need to go beyond the issue of voting, and try to look at women's participation in other modes of electoral activities as well. Compared with voting, a greater intensity of participation is possible, for instance, taking part in campaign activities, party membership, and political discussion. These forms of electoral activities may offer greater opportunity for influence or involvement of women.

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A number of factors influence the extent to which people participate in different modes of electoral activities and the ways in which they do so. One of the most common generalizations regarding citizen's participation in politics is that levels of socio-economic status, in which various resources constitute the key predictors, affect citizen's involvement in politics. This has been confirmed by a number of studies where electoral participation and socio-economic status have been shown to be strongly correlated. According to Verba & Nie (1972), socio-economic status of the voters is the most important key to understanding politics in a democratic state. Individuals with higher socio-economic status are more likely to participate (Almond and Verba, 1963; Goel, 1974; Zipp, *et al.* 1982; Ramachander and Lakshmi, 1993). The common explanation of this tendency is that, political participation generally requires political resources and that those with higher socio-economic status can more readily afford such investment.

The data used for the analyses is based on a research undertaken on a representative sample of women voters conducted in 2004-2005. At present Nagaland has eleven districts, out of which four districts (Kohima, Dimapur, Mokokchung and Tuensang) were selected for the purpose of the survey. Equal representation to the urban and rural units has been made for the purpose, of comparison. The four towns representing the urban areas are Kohima, Mokokchung, Tuensang and Dimapur. To represent the rural areas, four villages which spread across four districts of the state have been selected. They are Thizama (Kohima District), Chare (Tuensang District), Ungma (Mokokchung District), and Ghaspani (Dimapur District).

As it is practically not possible to make direct observation of every individual in the population, a representative sample of 80-90 respondents were drawn from the above four towns and four villages to make inferences about the entire women population. In the selection of the sample, the following factors were considered:

- A representative sample of eligible women voters residing in the urban areas and rural areas.
- All levels of socio-economic backgrounds are represented in the sample.

This allowed the writer to gather opinion from as wide a cross-section of the Naga women voters as is practically possible. The field work was mainly carried out as face-to-face interviews. The response rate of the survey, calculated as the number of completed interview is

85.39 per cent, resulting in a sample survey of 304 respondents. Apart from the respondents to whom questionnaire was addressed, women from various walks of life were interviewed to supplement and enrich the interpretation of results obtained from the questionnaire.

The sample electorate are classified in terms of their age, educational qualification, marital status, occupational status, and place of residence i.e., (urban-rural). The income variable is not included because the number of response was too small to allow firm conclusions to be drawn. The respondents are divided into four age groups of 18-29, 30-44, 45-59, and 60 and above. Measuring their respective level of education, the respondents are divided into four categories - illiterate, non-metric, under-graduate, and graduate and above. Based on marital status, the respondents are classified on the basis of married-unmarried dichotomy. Occupational status is similarly reported as a categorical variable. The respondents are classified into four occupational groups, namely, service, professionals, cultivators, and non-earners. To maintain a comparative perspective, the data concerning the geographical distribution of the respondents are classified according to the type of settlement they live in, i.e., their place of residence has been coded as either urban or rural. Electoral activities for the present analysis are indicated by five activities—voting, campaigning for a candidate, attending election meeting, party membership and political discussion.

Participation in voting is based on a single question, "Did you vote in the Nagaland Assembly Election, 2003?" with a two-response option-yes/no. For measuring participation in campaign activity, they were asked whether they had campaigned for any candidate or party. Similarly, they were asked whether they had attended any of the election meetings organized during the election campaign. For measuring party membership, they were asked whether they are a member of any political party, with a two—response answer-yes or no. Political discussion is measured by frequency—frequently, sometimes, and never - of discussing politics and public affairs with family members, friends, neighbours, and acquaintances.

The respondent's level of interest in politics was assessed by using the standard question on political interest: "How much interest do you generally have in what is going on in politics?" with responses, "a great deal, some, not at all". A media exposure index was devised to determine women's exposure index- as being high, moderate, low and no media exposure, basing on the responses given by the respondents.

Women's participation in electoral activities is examined against the background of their socio-economic status. The choice of socio-economic factors is limited to the following items—age, educational qualification, occupational status, marital status and place of residence, i.e., urban and rural. An examination of Table 1 given below suggests that there are large differences in participation among women from the four age categories.

TABLE: 1
Women's Participation in Electoral Activities

Variables	Voted	Campaigned for candidate	Attended election meetings	Party membership	Political discussion		
					F	S	N
Age							
18-29							
30-44	70	18.92	12.94	22.64	26.67	43.33	30.00
45-59	88.54	37.84	30.59	28.30	31.25	46.88	21.87
60 above	90.59	43.24	38.82	33.97	37.65	47.06	15.29
	75.76	0	17.65	15.09	30.30	45.45	24.25
Educational qualification							
Illiterate							
Non-metric	92.31	40.54	38.82	41.52	7.69	15.39	76.92
Under-graduate	90.82	29.73	29.42	28.30	34.70	28.57	36.73
Graduate	77.48	18.92	20	20.75	53.15	35.14	11.71
above	73.91	10.81	11.76	9.43	63.77	36.23	0
Occupational status							
Service	74.36	13.51	11.76	18.87	35.90	41.03	23.07
Professionals	62.75	10.81	9.41	13.21	43.14	39.22	17.64
Cultivators	80	35.14	37.65	30.18	23.33	30	46.67
Non-earners	97.39	40.54	41.18	37.74	21.74	40	38.26
Marital status							
Married	86.96	64.86	57.65	56.61	25.54	49.46	25
Unmarried	75	35.14	42.35	43.39	22.5	40.83	36.67
Place of residence							
Urban	78.1	40.54	40	37.74	26.95	44.91	28.14
Rural	85.63	59.46	60	62.26	21.17	42.34	36.49

Note: *F-frequently; S-sometimes; N-never

Source: Survey Report

The most politically active age groups in all indices of electoral activities are those women in the age group of 45-59 years. The older women (60 and above) tend to be relatively more active than the younger women (18-29). The apathy among younger women is a cause of concern, keeping in mind the fact that participatory norm among the women electorate as a whole is quite low, except for voting.

An extensive, empirical literature in political science has documented that education directly influences an individual's proclivity to participate in the political realm (Almond and Verba, 1963, Wolfinger and Rosenstone, 1980; Verba, et al, 1993, Shields and Goidel, 1997, Hillygus, 2005). However, this explanation raises an interesting paradox in the study. The level of literacy for Naga women has increased overtime (61.92 percent, Census 2001). Theoretically, the latter trend should have produced an increase in electoral participation among the more literate women. Yet the study observes precisely the opposite trend. In the more public modes of electoral activities—voting, campaign activities and party membership—women with no education (illiterate) and few years of schooling (non-metric) are found to be more active participants whereas the highly educated are found to be behaviourally passive in these kinds of activities. However, when it comes to political discussion, the picture is changed. The highly educated tend to discuss politics more frequently than the less educated. But they do not extend this kind of participatory norm to the more public forms of electoral activities.

Being employed is sometimes taken as a resource that facilitate political engagement and is also believed to encourage the development of political attitudes and thereby, participation in electoral activities (Verba, et al, 1995; Neil, et al, 2000). However, findings of the study do not show a clear picture of any significant association between women's occupational status and participation. Women who are not employed have a more concentrated presence in almost all modes of electoral activities under discussion. The findings also did not confirm the prevailing established observation that urban dwellers are more likely to participate than rural dwellers. Marital status does appear to be positively associated with electoral participation, with married women being more active in all indicators of electoral activities than the unmarried women. Many of the

unmarried women demonstrate behaviour that by most standards falls short of what it takes to be an engaged citizen.

Overall, the findings of the study do not show a clear picture of any significant association between the socio-economic status of women and their participation in electoral activities. In most of the electoral activities under discussion, high rate of participation have come from women with no education, unemployed women and those women from the rural areas. The more educated women appear unwilling to engage in any form of electoral activity, except for political discussion. This by itself should give pause to explanation that seeks to link higher socio-economic status to higher levels of participation. Therefore, as these results would suggest, the standard socio-economic factors does not seem to have significant impact in explaining the degree of participation among the women voters of Nagaland. The reason for this cannot be stipulated with any certainty, but one plausible explanation may be the possibility, indeed probability that electoral participation of women is not so much dependent on their socio-economic status, but can be traced both historically and contemporaneously to the prevailing socio-cultural values and political culture that exist in Nagaland.

TABLE: 2
Gender Difference in Voting in Nagaland Assembly Election, 1969-2003

Year	No of Voters		No of Voters who Voted		Polling Percentage	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1969	93829	83102	71751	66907	76.47	80.51
1974	224166	176159	161166	136464	71.90	77.47
1977	214812	183223	176606	154795	82.21	84.48
1982	330290	266163	240272	203700	72.75	76.53
1987	319379	262574	266023	225878	83.29	86.02
1989	320611	261805	273654	225168	85.35	86.01
1993	421250	381661	387446	347489	91.98	91.05
1998	136963	123683	110462	95326	80.65	77.07
2003	529477	485364	474181	417316	89.56	85.98

Source: Election Commission of India

The summarization of women's participation in different modes of electoral activities as highlighted by Table 1 reveals that Naga women voters duly go to the poll to cast their vote, infact, they are more inclined to vote than their male counterparts. Table 2 below reveals the difference in voting behaviour between the male and female members in Nagaland.

Yet the participation of Naga women voters is just marginal in other modes of electoral activities. This is clearly shown in Table 3.

TABLE: 3

Overall Participation of Women in Electoral Activities

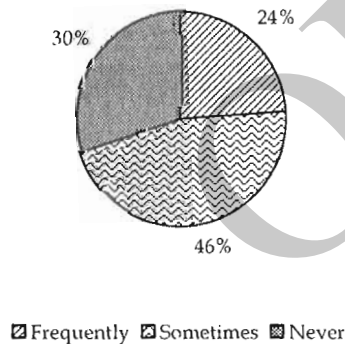
Electoral activities	Total number of respondents who participated
Voted	82.23 (250)
Campaigned for a candidate	12.17 (37)
Attended election meetings	27.96 (85)
Party membership	17.43 (53)

Note: *The numbers in parentheses are the bases on which the percentages were computed.

Source: Field Work

FIGURE 1

Overall Participation of Women in Political Discussion



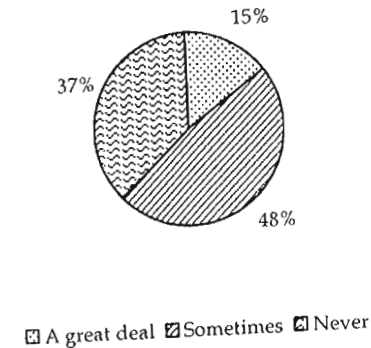
Source: Field Work

This indicates that women voters in Nagaland have been able to strengthen their political visibility only as voters. Campaign activity remains very much a minority pursuit for women in Nagaland with just 12.17 per cent of women (Tab 3) reported campaigning for a candidate or party. Campaigning for a candidate is a very public activity. One needs to be physically mobile which necessitates remaining outside the home at places at odd hours. Such activities also demand a significant, inflexible time, and commitment. Compounding this problem there is also the fear of gaining a bad reputation. Women who are involved in politics face seemingly public scrutiny about their character. This is mainly due to the fact that politics in Nagaland has come to have a very negative connotation. It is often labeled as dirty and corrupt.

Attending election meeting is moderately high as compared to taking part in campaigning (27.96) (Tab 3). Similarly, very few women (17.43) are members of a political party (Tab 3). Women's low membership in political party could possibly mean that the parties have not done enough to mobilize them. Such findings may pose significant challenges for the political parties in Nagaland.

FIGURE 2

Level of Political Interest among Women



Source: Field Work

The study also found that very few respondents (24 percent) engage in political discussion frequently, 46 per cent of them engage in political discussion sometimes, and 30 per cent of the respondents never

discuss politics (Fig 1). Discussing politics with others is a matter of interest and awareness. As indicated by Fig 2, majority of women (48 per cent) do not have an interest in politics at all. Another 37 per cent of them evinced some interest in politics and just a minority of women (15 per cent) reported having a great deal of interest in politics. The media exposure index illustrated in Table 4 reveals that majority of the women (37.83 per cent) are exposed to the different media outlets only moderately.

TABLE: 4
Index Score of Mass Media Exposure

Index score	Percentage
No exposure	12.5 (38)
Low exposure	31.91 (97)
Moderate exposure	37.83 (115)
High exposure	17.76 (54)

Source: Survey Report

There are many reasons why women in Nagaland are not able to sustain their participation in electoral activities beyond voting. In assessing this problem, one must examine the inter-connections between the socio - cultural values and practices that are firmly entrenched in the existing systems and structures of society. This is because in many cases the culture of the society determines the level of women's participation in the public sphere (Inglehart and Norris, 2003). In Nagaland though society recognize and advocate the desirability of giving equal opportunities to women in the political sphere, the social mindset regarding women's role in society still remain traditional. Women's low participation in electoral activities is often explained by the stereotype of their being uninterested in politics. There is a degree of disinterest among women to take part in electoral activities, but the reality that is often overlooked is that, in Nagaland, despite major changes in gender roles in recent decades, women are usually expected to take care of the household and related responsibilities and at the same time, for some, to handle a full-time job and a career. As a result, the basic responsibilities and patterns of their lives, with more focus on family, and related responsibilities, make it impossible for them to sustain their electoral participation beyond voting.

Some women have explicitly referred to the traditional conceptions of gender roles to explain why they participate less in

electoral activities. A respondent said "There is a sequence in what we should do as women: we go to school, then get married, have children, get them married and so on." Another woman expressed a similar view "I feel the women's place is in the home bringing up the children". These comments highlight the fact that traditional gender role stereotypes are still present in our society, leading women to conceptualize their roles in the political arena differently

The other reasons could be the historical exclusion of women from politics and political leadership in the state where women, who constitute almost half of the voting population (47.62 per cent), have been consistently sidelined in public life to the extent that they have never held positions in elective office. In Nagaland most of the elective office and structures of decision-making are male centric. Even after more than 40 years of statehood, there has been no woman member in the State Legislature. This indicates that the composition of decision-making body in the state is markedly at odds with the gender make up of the society. A domination that should not really be, because of the almost equal proportion of the two genders in the population. If the definition of democracy allows for participation of different groups in the society, then it cannot thrive by excluding women both in the context of participation as well as representation.

The traditional institutions around which the Naga social and political life revolves have never recognized the rights of women as primary decision makers. A case in point is the Naga Hoho, considered as the apex decision-making body of the Naga people and is represented by all the different Naga tribes. Till date it has no woman representative. At the grassroots level, the Village Council is the highest decision making body. However, traditionally women are not allowed to participate in the decision making of the Village Council.

Political parties in Nagaland are equally male-dominated. They have not genuinely taken up the issue of political participation by women, either inside the party through leadership posts or outside the party through candidacy on electoral lists. This is reflected by the total absence of women, especially in party leadership and thereby influence over party decision. Some of the women party activists who had been interviewed expressed their dissatisfaction with the gendered division of labour within the party structure. The activities of women in party organization, they opine, are more or less restricted to auxiliary and support roles. They expressed the view that, besides

casting their votes, their electoral activities is just confined to preparing meals for the party workers or home visitation, which in many cases, are to distribute material goods to the prospective voters. Women committees exist just for the purported purpose of activating female voters. It does not develop women political cadres. Some have even questioned the internal democracy of the party. These narratives reveal that the general commitment of the political parties in Nagaland to the advancement of women is very much of a token nature.

Some women have expressed the view that they are not encouraged especially by the male household members to take part in electoral activities. This is corroborated by some women respondents who expressed some kind of experience with resistance from male household members. Men dictate if not control the public spaces for women and this becomes quiet prominent when the subject is politics. The dominance of power in dictating who participates in politics is clearly evident by the opposition to the 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in local bodies - Municipal and Town Councils- on grounds of cultural rationales and unexamined assumptions. The ongoing opposition to the bill is only one example to illustrate the extent to which women's right to participate in politics is often abused if not sterilized by the so called 'cultural guards' of our society. This indicates the existence of biases against women taking part in electoral activities. Unlike their male counterparts, women do not receive positive reinforcement from the society at large for participation in politics. Naga women live with an identity of being marginal especially in politics.

Over the years electoral competition in Nagaland has deteriorated in terms of ethics and values. In Nagaland, the most important factors in electoral politics is money and muscle power (Moangsangba). It is widely believed that elections in Nagaland are considered among the most expensive in the country. Candidates spend even to the extent of Rs.10 crore in some assembly constituencies and on an average Rs.5 crore in most constituencies (Nagaland Post, Tuesday, June 30,2009). Money power is supplemented by unbridled flagrancy in the use of arms by political thugs and party supporters in spite of a code of conduct committing political parties to non violence. This is one of the reasons why democratic elections in the state are held under massive military presence to contain the outbreak of violence. Many women may not be prepared to be involved in a political environment, which supports an aggressive and a combative culture. These phenomena

may contribute to a situation where women may reject, dissociate or may be reluctant to become a part of male style politics. Such a culture may undermine the willingness and enthusiasm of not just women but also men to engage in electoral activities. This kind of electoral environment may be limiting, constraining or excluding women from participation in politics.

It is, thus, apparent that despite the introduction of modern democratic systems for more than four decades and notwithstanding the legal provisions of equality enshrined in the Indian constitution, political status of Naga women remains by and large a low-profiled and unrecognized. Men's dominance of leadership in almost all institutions of power may be producing, among women in Nagaland, what might be called a syndrome of detachment or indifference, resulting in electoral passivity in them. All these factors combine to define the functional boundaries of women's mobility, freedom, and choice to engage in electoral activities.

Conclusion

This paper set out to examine the extent and nature of Naga women's voting behaviour within the context of their socio-economic status. The analysis of data made in the foregoing pages indicate low participatory norm among women in almost all indicators of electoral activities except voting. This indicates that women in Nagaland have been able to strengthen their political visibility only as voters. The study also suggest that the voting behaviour of women is not so much determined by their socio-economic status as by the prevailing socio-cultural values and existing political environment.

As the study clearly suggests, low participatory norm among women, some suggestions arise from the survey findings. Study shows that visible women politicians have a role model effect on women, in particular by generating significant interest in political activity among women (Campbell and Wolbrecht, 2006). In this context, it is clear that political parties must rise to the challenge by recruiting and supporting female candidates. They should support women within its leadership structures and initiate steps to increase the presence of women in different spheres of political decision-making. The media should also make visible the aspiring women politicians.

Since gender awareness take roots in early childhood, school curricula can play a positive role in bringing about a change towards a gender-equal culture. In this connection, a review of school textbooks by way of changing stereotypical image of gender roles in school textbooks and accompanying illustrations may be taken up wherever possible. This may have positive results by way of inculcating equal values to both boys and girls right from childhood.

On the part of women, in order to overcome their marginality in politics, it is imperative that they develop a favorable attitude towards politics, be assertive in their demands and develop an interest in politics. There also should be a change in the mindset of the people at large towards women's participation in politics. If such a positive change of attitude towards women's involvement is brought about, it can socialize women into democratic participatory citizens.

Note

Media exposure index was devised basing on the responses given by the respondents. This was done to place the respondents in one of the four media exposure index - high, moderate, low and no media exposure. The respondents in the 'high exposure' category are those who watch/listen to news programmes on television and radio, and read newspaper regularly (daily). Persons in the 'moderate exposure' category are those who are often but not regularly (several times a week) exposed to the three media outlets, those who are seldom (several times a month) exposed to the three media outlets belong to the 'low exposure' category, and those who never watch or listen to television or radio news are placed in the 'no exposure' category.

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Research Note

PLANNING AT THE GRASSROOTS: AN EXPERIMENT WITH INTEGRATED DISTRICT PLANNING

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This short reflection has emanated from the author's involvement in a project on Integrated District Planning undertaken at the Institute¹ in the context of 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution; and about a year long experience of field work related to it. The note begins with an introduction, a brief account of the project and processes adopted therein; followed by a section that puts the issues, discussed in some detail later on, in perspective. Then, it goes on to outline the major academic and practical issues as well as challenges that emerged with an attempt to provide a critique of the whole approach towards decentralised planning in particular, and democratic decentralisation in general.

Background and Overview

It is now, almost unequivocally, held that the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, brought into effect in April 1992, envisage a major departure in reform of governance in the country. The Amendments attempt at ushering concrete and very significant changes in attitudes; administrative, planning and financial systems; institutions; and methods of working at the grassroots. The most significant and core aspect of these Amendments is that they accorded a constitutional status to institutions of local self-governance and

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made it a new, more politically underpinned platform of 'decentralised planning' in the country².

However, it is only in 2004, after more than a decade of Constitutional recognition provided to the Panchayati Raj Institutions through 73rd and 74th Amendments with definite role towards decentralised planning, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj was set up as an independent Ministry to give an impetus to the strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the country. Ministry convened meetings of the Chief Ministers of the States; taken up steps to review the status of actual devolution of powers to Panchayati Raj Institutions; and organised seven round tables of State Ministers of Panchayats to discuss the issues and to prepare a time bound road map for effective devolution of functions, functionaries and funds.

Following the recommendation of the Second Round Table³ of the State Ministers of Panchayats, an Expert Group under the leadership of V Ramachandran was constituted in 2005 for studying and making recommendations on planning at the grassroots level. In order that

² Decentralised Planning in India, however, has a stretched history. Starting with the First Five Year Plan of the Country, every Five Year Plan has made reference to decentralised planning in some way or other. There have been a number of Committees, Working Groups and Task Forces constituted by Government of India and Planning Commission to look at and operationalise the ideals of 'decentralised planning' in the country. One can refer to the most foundational and widely discussed reports of Balwantray Mehta Committee (1957), Ashok Mehta Committee (1978), G V K Rao Committee (1985) and L M Shingvi Committee (1988) texts of which including a dissenting note on Ashok Mehta Committee Report by E M S Namboodiripad are available at the Planning Commission's website. Besides, Report of the Administrative Reform Commission (1967), Planning Commission's Guidelines (1969), Report of the Working Group headed by Professor M L Dantwala (1978), Report of the Working Group headed by Professor C H Hanumantha Rao (1984) also make useful reading regarding the 'decentralised planning' in the country. It may be mentioned that Hanumantha Rao Committee recommended specifically devolution of functions, power and finances for effective decentralisation of the planning process. The report of the Sarkaria Commission went a step further in recommending formulation of a State Finance Commission akin to the Finance Commission to look into the issues of State level devolution of resources to the districts on an operational and objective basis. 73rd Amendment mandated State Finance Commission a constitutional requirement through Article 243 I.

³ The meeting was held in Mysore during August 28-29, 2004.

eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-11) is prepared in tune with the district planning process as envisaged in the Constitutional Amendments, the Expert Group was expected to draw up an action programme so that this could be materialised. The Expert Group submitted its report in 2006 where these issues are put into perspective and discussed in detail.

Accordingly, the Planning Commission issued guidelines of district planning in August 2006 with the main objective of "making district planning a reality in eleventh Five Year Plan"⁴. However, the Commission soon realised that "wherewithal for such a planning exercise was limited", and felt that "there existed wide variety of confusions regarding district planning at different levels". The Planning Commission, therefore, constituted a Task Force for preparing a Manual for Integrated District Planning, and the Task Force submitted the Manual in November 2008. The Manual tries to further clarify various issues relating to district planning in particular, and decentralised planning in general.

The Experiment

The project referred to here is an attempt to put in practice the Manual for Integrated District Planning prepared by the Planning Commission. It aims at preparing a district plan for Dibrugarh district in Assam in accordance with the guidelines prescribed by the Planning Commission's district planning manual.

The project merits on several counts. First, this is the first attempt of its kind in Assam, to prepare (integrated) district plan strictly following the Planning Commission's Manual and Report of the Expert Group on Planning at the Grassroots in particular; and within the overall framework of 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution. Second, it is the single attempt in the State that makes an effort to complete the all four phases of district planning mandated by the Expert Group viz. district visioning exercise, fifteen year perspective planning, five year perspective planning and annual

⁴ In Fact, the Eleventh Five Year Plan Document (Vol. I) incorporates a section on District Planning (pp. 226-227). However, the Planning Commission issued similar guidelines earlier (1969) also, following which many States have formulated district plans during Fifth Five Year Plan, although, barring a few, most of them did not integrate such plans into State Plans.

planning, which will be tried to prepare in PlanPlus⁵ and will be readily accessible online. Third, this is a joint, collaborative project of the Institute, State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD), Assam and Zilla Parishad, Dibrugarh. The Article 243 ZD of the Constitution specifically assigns district planning exercise to the District Planning Committee (DPC), constitution of which, however, is a prerogative of State legislature. As per the Rule 3(C) of the Assam Panchayat Rule 1995, DPC is to be chaired by Chair person of the Zilla Parishad⁶. The District Planning Manual prepared by the Planning Commission, on the other hand, mentions that in general, the responsibility of the capacity building and training for district planning exercise has been conferred upon the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD)⁷. It also makes a provision for a Technical Support Institution (TSI) to support the planning at the district level, which is to be notified officially by the State government. Till date, there is, however, no such TSI in Assam. Given the absence of the TSI at the State level, SIRD, Assam approached the Institute to engage in a process of "planning through PRI in an action research mode" in any of the districts of the State, which would "serve as a model and could be taken as a guidance in other districts". In this sense, the project fills up a critical gap in the area of technical support in district planning in the State⁸. Last but not the least; the entire exercise has been tried in a participatory mode as far as practically possible. It started with a district envisioning exercise following "back and forth consultations" as suggested by the Expert Group and the Planning Commission's Task Force, which included seven block level⁹ envisioning dialogue

⁵ PlanPlus is online planning software designed by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, initially for the districts covered by Backward Region Grant Fund (BRGF) later on extended up to non-BRGF districts as well. Visit website <http://planningonline.gov.in/MainPage.jsp>.

⁶ The Dibrugarh DPC was constituted accordingly on 19 August, 2008 vide notification DDO63/2006-08/47.

⁷ Refer P. 24, Integrated District Planning Manual, Planning Commission

⁸ Chapter 1 of the District Vision Document records detail of the process followed.

⁹ Decision of holding block level dialogue was taken because block boundary and Anchalik Panchayat boundary are co-terminus. For all practical purposes, block is the ideal "programme unit" and Anchalik Panchayat is important for "integration" purposes. Importance of these two has been discussed in the last section. In passing, it may be mentioned that the Deputy Commissioner of the

involving over 1200¹⁰ cross-section of people (one each for seven blocks), one for the Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), one with the district department officials followed by several meetings with people and administration. The inputs and issues that surfaced during the consultative dialogue were thoroughly documented, analysed and then corroborated with the secondary data to prepare a Vision Document covering next fifteen years for the District. The Document was then shared in a public meeting organised by the DPC and district administration (on 21 August, 2009); and presented to the people for their comments. It was made available in the public domain for wider circulation and comments¹¹. Upon receiving the comments from the people, it will be modified and placed before the DPC for necessary approval and adoption. Then, based on the vision, long term and short term perspective plans and annual plans will be drawn for the district¹². The project is still ongoing and this note is basically based on experiences derived out of the envisioning exercise that was carried out during the months of January and February, 2009.

district also opined that block 'should be the level of activities' as "scope and capacity of the GP is too limited" and "ambit of the ZP is too large" for effective planning.

¹⁰ Please note that this is not to be mistaken as "sample size", for this was a process of dialogue and large number of participants being elected representative of people reflected not their individual concerns but the concerns of the people whom they represented.

¹¹ The Vision Document is available at the district website of Dibrugarh i.e. <http://dibrugarh.nic.in>. A copy of the document has already been sent to all GP for their comments. Besides, the document, along with block specific results, is being also presented at the meeting of the Block Level Task Force (BLTF) in the district.

¹² The process of envisioning and perspective building has been financially supported by the SIRD, Assam while the process of preparation of GP level annual plans has been financially supported by the Unicef. It is to be noted that Dibrugarh is a Focus district of Unicef as well for its integrated approach. Unicef's integrated approach is, however, specific to child and mother's health and education and it focuses on sixteen monitorable indicators. Since overall district planning accommodates them, the effort has drawn Unicef closer to the Institute. The Unicef is also contemplating on establishing a district support unit in Dibrugarh to strengthen the process of district level planning in the district.

Decentralised yet Integrated

While looking at the trajectory of 'decentralised planning' in the country, one would find, *inter alia*, essentially three notable perceptions. First, principles and processes of decentralised planning have long been viewed in complementarities with the process of democratic decentralisation, or to be more precise, the process of 'democratisation' in the country. One needs to comprehend the specific context, connotation, intent and content of the term 'decentralisation' in order that one is able to recognise the crucial link between these two processes; and also to put them in proper perspective given the kind of fluidity, which the term is subjected to¹³. It is essential to understand that conceptually 'decentralisation' is more 'political' and goes beyond mere sharing and/or redistribution of administrative and fiscal authority and responsibilities¹⁴. While devolution of power, function and fund is still a key aspect in the process of decentralisation, yet it needs to be recognised that this entire process of reorganisation and transfer is very much part of the State structure, defined and provided *statutorily*. There is a common confusion and frequently mistaken notion that devolution of *any kind* amounts to a process of decentralisation, which often comes in way of effective decentralisation of the 'real kind'¹⁵. Interpretation of decentralisation in this fashion brings in the principle of "users' sovereignty", often encountered in the economic literature, which, in plain terms, means that users' should be provided with the 'cash' and let them exercise their 'sovereignty' in choosing their 'goods' rather than providing them with the 'goods' directly. This justifies devolution of funds to the para-statal governments or institutions of local self governance for deciding about the mechanism of their 'best spending'.

¹³ For an illuminating and intriguing discussion on it see "A Theoretical Note on Kerala-style Decentralized Planning" by Prabhat Patnaik in *The Marxist*, Vol. 20, 1; January - March, 2004

¹⁴ For more on this aspect see "Democratic decentralization and local Participation: a review of recent research" by Sylvia Bergh in *Development in Practice*, Vol. 14, No. 6, November 2004

¹⁵ For a discussion on this see Prabhat Patnaik (2004), *ibid*, p.9. He argues that creation of such confusion is a part of the deliberate ploy of the imperialism to dilute the whole notion of 'real' decentralisation, which is akin to Left lexicon.

Now, parting with the authority by the upper layers of governments over the 'fund' is essential for converting the possible ways of best-spending (of them) arrived at the lower levels in to 'projects' from a pure 'wish-list'. In this sense, providing a *statutory* space in the decision making process and encouraging people to exercise their 'rights' over that space is absolutely critical, which otherwise tends to be ignored. This explains the link between the process of 'democratisation' and 'decentralisation of planning'. However, this requires that people at the margin are organised and capacitated enough, failing which such users' sovereignty only breeds a petty political class, often comprising local elite intimidators, who become the sole beneficiaries out of this whole process pushing people further to the corner¹⁶.

Second, just like the term 'decentralisation', the notion of "decentralised planning" has also remained mostly vague, acquiring different meaning and shapes at different times and contexts, although, there has been surfeit literature on the subject including several reports. This vagueness has been candidly admitted by the Planning Commission itself¹⁷. Nevertheless, at present we have two 'official' documents viz. Report of the Expert Group and Manual for Integrated District Planning, which more or less attempt to clarify and operationalise the notion of decentralised planning in the country. This, indeed, is a great feat in itself. However, it needs to be pointed out here that District Planning is not only an issue for the districts where Part IX and IX A of the Constitution are applicable. In areas where Sixth and Fifth Schedules are in place, decentralised planning is even more important. Although, there is an Expert Group Report on Planning in Sixth Scheduled Areas, discussion on this is missing in the Manual, and thereby leaving a critical gap in the process of decentralised planning in the country.

Third, evidently, Planning Commission's Manual refers to 'integrated' rather than 'decentralised' planning. While articulating the Committee for District Planning, Article 243 ZD of the Constitution states that "there shall be constituted in every State at the

¹⁶ This has, precisely, been the argument in Left rank who considers 'decentralisation' as an instrument for forging their class-struggle in the society. For a discussion on this see Patnaik (2004).

¹⁷ See Foreword to Manual for Integrated District Planning, Planning Commission, Government of India, 2008.

district level a District Planning Committee to *consolidate* the plans prepared by the Panchayats and Municipalities in the district and to prepare a draft district plan for the district as a whole"¹⁸. Further, it also states that each District Planning Committee shall in preparing the draft development plan have regard to "matters of *common interest* between the Panchayats and Municipalities"¹⁹.

Clearly therefore, while the ideals of decentralised planning are founded on the principle of users' sovereignty, objective of the DPC is to 'consolidate' or so to say, 'integrate' the projects prepared de-centrally by looking at the "common interests". In tune with the recommendation of the Expert Group, the Planning Commission's Manual posits that consolidation is a task that goes much beyond compilation and connotes a degree of value addition through integration of local plans.

Process of integration, according to both Expert Group and Manual, can be of several kinds. First is the spatial integration, which means integration of schemes and/or projects across space. For instance integration of schemes of roads that runs through one or more planning units definitely add value. Second is the cross sectoral integration like integrating health sector programmes with water and sanitation programmes. This would help ensuring maximum impact upon different interventions²⁰. Third kind is the vertical integration. This is based on the precept that the higher level of planning units need to perform the activities, which have the advantages of scale and which can't be done by lower level planning units. This requires consideration of the lower level plans before finalising higher level plans. Fourth type of integration refers to integration of resources. This comprises of two aspects - integration of state schemes with the panchayat plan and integration of centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) with the panchayat plans. Further, the Expert Group also mentions about integration of local resources of panchayats as another important aspect of resource integration. The most important of aspect of integration of sub-district plans is the sectoral integration. This relates to integration of schemes within a sector. This not only helps in identification of lead sector(s) in the district but also provides the basis

¹⁸ Emphasis added.

¹⁹ Emphasis added.

²⁰ This is what much talked about subject of so-called 'convergence'. Limits to such convergence and practical problems are dealt with in the last section.

for integration of rural and urban plans at the district level. Integration and consolidation of rural and urban plans into district plan is of utmost significance in the consolidation process²¹. The Expert Committee views integration of rural-urban plans as particularly important in the light of increasing urbanisation and deems as an area where DPCs can contribute to a great extent.

How can one visualise integration out of decentralisation? Herein comes the role of vision. The Planning Commission's Task Force has defined envisioning as a "process of building up, through a consultative back and forth process, a set of priorities" for the district as a whole. Although plans are prepared de-centrally at each level of planning unit, they are guided by the same vision, which binds the plans together. In fact, the vision is shared by all planning units, and exercising their users' sovereignty, they decide to fit in their locally felt needs to it. We will see below that actual integration, however, need not and may not be a simple act of consolidation.

In the subsequent sections, we will try to examine how these thoughts implicate the process of evaluating decentralised planning and help appreciating practical hold-ups to it.

Problem of Aggregation

This section is particularly devoted to the issue of 'integration' of sub-district level plans into a (draft) district plan in a somewhat deeper theoretical perspective. This, in other words, will merit the project on academic interest and generate a genuine appeal for the kind of issues that the project is expected to produce at the end.

The overarching role of the DPC as a consolidator of sub-district level plans, in fact, introduces the classic problem of aggregation²². It has been argued, following the Planning Commission's precept, that district vision is the common thread that binds together the decentralised plans; and facilitates the process of integration at the district level. Also, district vision is all about "setting priorities" through "back and forth consultations", held, obviously, at the (possible) sub-district levels, in our case, say, at the level of blocks or

²¹ This is subject, which needs to be researched in some detail.

²² Note that mathematically the integration itself implies summation or aggregation.

Anchalik Panchayats. If the local felt needs (i.e. alternatively speaking, local priorities) are to be reflected in these set of sub-district level plans, the users' sovereignty, supposedly existing, is to be exercised in right earnest.

Now, exercising of users' sovereignty at each level of planning unit will result in n-number of arrays (in fact, n-tuple) of priorities or, say, preferences, from which one set of preferences need to be constructed, which should ideally be Paretian liberal²³. This is what the theory of social choice is primarily concerned with. The 'rationality' of such a "social choice" has been defined and refined over the time, which taken together, forms the subject of social choice theory²⁴.

The Planning Commission's attempt to resolve this problem i.e. obtaining a set of priorities for the district as a whole out of the n-tuple of priorities defined at the sub-district level by means of "common concerns" is, therefore, invites academic debate. Let us try to examine the underlying principle of 'commonality' a bit more carefully. Commonality can be evaluated with regard to two optimums i.e. minimum and/or maximum. In the first case, only those cases, in this context "social states", are *considered*, which are *repeated* by all. In the second interpretation of commonality, the number of times a particular preference is voiced repeatedly is considered, obviously, on the ground that by addressing them, we can perhaps, redress maximum needs.

Note that the second interpretation is nothing but familiar rule of *majority*, which has been popularly criticised as being Paretian illiberal²⁵. It has been argued that problem of endemic cyclical

²³ Paretian liberalism requires that "unanimous individual preference rankings must be reflected in social decisions" and that "each individual should have a recognised personal sphere in which his preference and his alone would count in determining the social preference". For more on this see "Liberty and Social Choice", Amartya Sen, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 80, No.1, Jan 1983.

²⁴ The rationality of social choice has been defined in terms of certain properties that need to be fulfilled. See "Choice, Welfare and Measurement", Amartya Sen, Oxford India Paperback, 1999 for a detail discussion on them.

²⁵ See for instance, "The Impossibility of a Paretian Liberal" by Amartya Sen in *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 78; No. 1; Jan-Feb, 1970. pp.152-157 and also "Rights, Welfare and Social Choice" by Prasanta K Patnaik and Kotaro

preference in case of social preference violates the condition of transitivity and makes the social choice irrational²⁶. The problem of cyclical preference, in turn, arises when there are "binary comparisons" and one way to resolve it to do away with the "binary comparisons" of alternatives²⁷.

Given this theoretical framework, let us now put the Planning Commission's suggestion in its perspective. The Planning Commission holds that prioritisation of sectors than anything else should be relied upon for the intention of integration. This makes, however, perfect practical sense since most of the 'project's are to be articulated in terms of "sectoral programmes" later on. Now the binary comparison of sectors within the planning unit is not only practically difficult but is also devoid of much sense. To resolve the problem of transitivity loss, *strong* ordering of sectors clubbing them together into distinguishable classes such as high priority sectors, moderate priority sectors and low priority sectors can be adopted. Since the 'bundles' will be possibly different for different planning units, comparison across them is not needed, instead, we can look for 'common' sectors figuring in priority classes.

Decision arrived at following this mechanism acquires Pareto optimality for the district as a whole at least in terms of *outcome evaluation* i.e. "everybody will prefer a 'state' where priority sectors are addressed over all other 'states'" without compromising the individual liberty of the planning units as they can still prepare projects following their set of preference orderings. The integrated district planning will simply 'place' those projects under the 'sector' along with its priority. This, no doubt, seems to be an appealing exercise but process of integration also involves many critical practical impediments. These, along with a few other practical impediments, are discussed below.

Suzumura in *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 82, No. 2, May 1994, pp.435-439.

²⁶ See "Preference aggregation, functional pathologies and Democracy: A Social Choice Defence of Participatory Democracy" by Radcliff, B & Wigenbach Ed in *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 62; No. 4, pp. 977-998

²⁷ For more on this see Part II of the Book "Choice, Welfare and Measurement"; Amartya Sen; Oxford India Paperback, 1999.

Practical Impediments

In the foregoing three sections, we have discussed also the decentralised planning process, and district planning as a part thereof, within a theoretical perspective, specifically referring to the challenges of 'integration' at the level of the DPC. The project under discussion is, in fact, an experiment with these challenges, and this section basically aims to provide a critique of the whole process.

It is, indeed, not hard to see that the Task Force relies more on "sectoral integration" based on the lists of subjects transferred to the rural and urban local bodies through 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution. The rural-urban integration at District level, however, has been found to be most challenging on practical reasons. The Task Force itself categorically points out that so far; the practice of rural and urban planning has been focused on "different objectives and tuned to different purposes". While the panchayat level planning generally follows a socio-economic and sectoral approach, urban "master plans" focus on mostly spatial planning aspects such as land use and zoning, grossly ignoring sectoral and social planning. The Task Force further adds that each of these approach suffers from deficiencies - just as urban plans lack sectoral component, rural plans also lack spatial component. The consolidation process should therefore, "complement each other to add value to each of these plans".

The current legal framework that mandates planning for urban areas has been, generally restricted to the Town and Country Planning Acts enacted by State governments following the Model Act (1960) prepared by Town and Country Planning Organisation (TCPO). This model was revised by the TCPO in 1985, which largely has been the basis of urban and regional planning in the country. These laws and models, however, pre-date 74th amendment to the Constitution and do not provide a formal role for the DPC. It is, therefore, needed that these legislations are modified on the basis of Model Urban and Regional Planning and Development Law (revised) prepared by the Ministry of Urban Development as part of Urban Development Plans Formulation and Implementation Guidelines (UDPFI). The Model Law provides a space for the DPC and formally accommodates the process of rural-urban integration for plans for area development.

In Assam, while the administration of urban areas has been regulated through the Assam Municipal Act of 1956 (except Guwahati, which is governed by Guwahati Municipal Corporation Act, 1969), the urban planning, on the contrary, was largely governed by Assam

Town and Country Planning Act of 1959 with subsequent revisions and amendments. These two acts divide and share the roles and responsibilities envisaged through 74th amendments to the Constitution. It is only in the year 2007 that Assam Nagar Raj Act has been enacted "to amend the laws relating to the Corporation and Municipalities in the State of Assam to institutionalise citizens' participation in Corporation's and Municipal functions". The Act also makes the provision that the "relevant sections of the Guwahati Municipal Corporation Act of 1969 and Assam Municipal Act of 1956 and rules made thereunder along with up to date amendments thereof inconsistent with the provisions of the Act, shall stand modified or amended, as the case may be, to the extent of such inconsistency" with the effect of enforcement of the Act.

The Assam Nagar Raj Act mentions about Area Sabha and Ward Committee with local planning responsibility. The Section 9 (a) of the Act says that Area Sabha will "generate proposal", "determine priority of schemes and development programmes" and "forward the same" to the Ward Committee, or in its absence, to the Corporation or Municipality, for "inclusion in the development plans" of the Ward Committee or Corporation/Municipality. The Section 16 (2) mandates Ward Committee that it shall "prepare the annual ward plan and forward the same to the Corporation or Municipality for its integration with the annual plan". The Section 15 (a) on the contrary, assumes District Plan and Municipal Plans as *ex-ante* and says that duty of the Ward Committee is to "produce the Ward Plans in a manner consistent with the District Plans or Municipal Plans" within a specified time.

It may be noted that Area Sabha as articulated in Assam Nagar Raj Act, 2007 is similar to Gram Sabha in principle whereas Ward Committee is a body comprising of the elected representative of the ward and not more than ten persons representing the civil society from the ward nominated by Corporation or Municipality. Ward Committee is to be constituted within six months of the constitution of the Corporation or Municipality.

The Act, however, does not provide any clear relation between Area Sabha, Ward Committee and Corporation/Municipality with the DPC as regard to the district planning. The Act, unlike the Assam Panchayat Act of 1994, is yet to be followed by an "activity mapping" delineating the devolution of power, functions and finance to the

urban local bodies. In the face of such indistinctiveness and lack of required legislations and enactments, rural-urban integration becomes extremely contentious.

The present practice of planning at the level of rural and urban local bodies has largely been driven by various schemes and programmes. This is evidently generating an enormous bewilderment at different levels, particularly at the lower level of Panchayats regarding the whole process of planning. The Expert Group has specifically recommended involving the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in implementation and planning of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS), and the operational guidelines of the CSS also provide a space for the PRIs. However, in most of the cases involvement of PRI is more customary than genuine²⁸. As such, there are lot of duplications and schemes lack 'convergence', hence, remain mostly disjointed. Adding to the complexity, multiple agencies are engaged in the planning and implementation of these schemes leaving the PRIs in an absolute state of perplex. It needs to be mentioned that, in doing so, agencies like District Rural Development Agencies (DRDA) and Municipal Development Authority (MDA) are intruding into the domain of rural and urban local bodies often resulting in conflicts of interest and authority²⁹. The consequence of such parallel planning has been pervasive. Instead of planning of these schemes being part of the overall district plan, district plan is now tending to become a composite of these sets of plans³⁰.

²⁸ For example, examine the operational guidelines of Sarva Siksha Aviyan (SSA), Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC). Village level committees constituted have more so-called monitoring responsibilities than planning responsibilities.

²⁹ Ideally, one would expect, after the 73rd and 74th Amendments, DRDA and MDA should cease to exist or become sub-ordinate agencies of Zilla Parishad. However, these agencies are continuing to exist as it was before these Amendments.

³⁰ This has created lots of practical problems. For example, if a GP decides to have an ICDS centre in a village then ideally it should plan various components of it say the building, water and sanitation, education and nutritional supplement etc. for it and should identify various schemes thereafter from which these components can be supported. In reality, various components are being planned specific to schemes result being that most of these centres are now defunct for they lack one or more components. This is how public money remain underutilized.

More importantly, the Information asymmetry and resultant inefficiency³¹ in decentralised planning has further been accentuated by limited financial devolution to the PRIs and vagueness relating to it. Funds are flowing to 'districts' from scores of sources through diverse channels³². Interestingly, funds are not flowing to the 'PRIs' directly. Arguably, effective district planning exercise necessitates a complete resource mapping so that the plan does not remain at the level of a "wish list". Although, government of Assam has completed activity mapping³³ requiring a Panchayat Window in the State budget in case of 'subjects' transferred to Panchayats, there is no clear district level figures for resource mapping to perform³⁴. Lack of proper financial devolution has been pointed out as one of the major limiting factors³⁵.

This calls for a thorough discussion on the issue of fiscal federalism and its functioning in the country. The present framework of fiscal federalism talks of two tier federalisms i.e. sharing of resources between Centre and State through Finance Commission; and sharing resources between State and Institutions of Local Governance through State Finance Commission. The important issue relating to the framework of this federalism here is that just as the State remains dependent upon the Centre in the first case, the PRIs also remain dependent upon the State in the second case. The reversal of this framework in order to buttress the PRIs, therefore, is an issue, which needs to be discussed in detail.

In this context, political will has been widely argued as most critical factor in strengthening the PRIs and decentralised planning.

³¹ Inefficiency, here, should be interpreted as "wastages".

³² Funds are coming in the form of CSS, State Schemes, MPLAD and MLALAD, BRGF, additional schemes, special assistance, loans, grants etc.

³³ See Notification No. PDA 336/2001/Pt-III/32 published in *The Assam Gazette* (Extraordinary), 25 June, 2007, No 214

³⁴ The Budget Document, 2008-09 of Government of Assam of the Department of Finance includes a "Statement of Transfer of Resources from the Consolidated Fund the State to Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies", where allocation, both plan and non-plan, are earmarked. However, the district level disaggregated figures could not be ascertained even after much deliberation with the Department till the time of writing this note.

³⁵ See State of the Panchayati Raj (SoPR) Reports and other studies

Lack of political will has been commonly explained in terms of conflicting domains of interests within the State structure³⁶. This has led to political manipulations that go to weaken the PRIs. Some would even go to argue that prevailing approach to development is responsible for the decline in the thrust towards decentralisation³⁷. One would be forced to view these attempts as the part of the neo-liberal policy of development where there is a deliberate dichotomy between the words and work³⁸, as has already been discussed.

To conclude, it appears as if the notion of decentralised planning had the implicit assumption that the people at the grassroots are, indeed, organised and capable of planning for their improvement. However, it has already been pointed out that the absence of such capacity at the grassroots level only helps to produce a petty political class depriving people of their benefits and rights. Massive corruption at the level of PRIs often reported can only be linked to deviation. Nonetheless, in principle, democratic decentralisation is to be preferred, no matter how unsatisfactory its immediate results, precisely on the grounds of greater accountability and subjectivity of people³⁹.

³⁶ In Assam, *Raijor Padulit Raijor Sarkar* (RAPRAJ) format can be viewed as a deliberate political ploy to hijack the notion of Gram Sabha. The RAPRAJ is convened by the district authority to discuss a specific issue starting usually with a message from the Chief Minister. This has been mistaken by the common people as Gram Sabha. See "Rejuvenating Panchayati Raj: Ideology, Indian State and Lessons from Periphery" by Bhupen Sarmah, OKDISCD and Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2006.

³⁷ See for instance "Political Decentralisation and Development Models" by V K Natraj, *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 26, June 24, 2000 p. 2215. Also see 87th Amendment Bill and responses to it published in *Economic and Political Weekly* Editorial Vol. 35, No. 18, 2000.

³⁸ In passing note that Planning Commission is non-statutory but the DPC is statutory entity. Overwhelming influence of the Planning Commission in carrying forward the development agenda in the country is well known. For an interesting debate see "Democracy, Development and Countryside: Urban Rural Struggles in India" by Ashutosh Varshney, Cambridge University Press, 1995

³⁹ See Patnaik (2004).

Note

I would like to thank Professor Bhupen Sarmah, who is heading the project together with the author for his comments and feedbacks on various issues raised in the note. This, however, does not mean that he is in agreement with all arguments put in it. I would also like to thank our field staff Abu Taleb Haque and Mridul Dutta for their insightful field work. Help received from the Zilla Parishad, Dibrugarh and district administration at various stages is also gratefully acknowledged. Usual disclaimer applies.

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Journal

The journal *Social Change and Development* intends to provide an academic platform to scholars belonging to the the northeastern region of India as well as outside to project issues focused particularly on the region, express their views and analyse the issues putting them in proper perspective, both historically and as guidelines for the future. However, issues cutting across the region's border are also welcome.

The unique diversity of the region in terms of ethnicity, culture, language and social institutions makes the region a challenging area of study for the researchers. Although, there has been a prolific growth of literature on the region, it is still lacking discussions with academic rigour. It is therefore, strongly felt that the social scientists would take up issues for academic debate and the journal acts as a platform for the exercise. This is expected to create a better understanding amongst the people of the region and the rest of the country. The geographical seclusion of the region from the rest of the country is sought to be broken through vibrant academic interactions.