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Book Review

The Constitution and Beyond: Negotiating Autonomy for the Plain Tribes of Assam

Joseph K Lalfakzuala and Bhupen Sarmah[1]

Abstract

The route of the plain tribe's movement has been traced from the colonial period, particularly with the demand for recognition, from the Simon commission to the provincial government including fair proportional representation in the assembly. At the time of framing the Constitution of India the notion of 'autonomy' was arranged for the then Hill tribes of Assam excluding the larger tribal communities living in the plains. Being kept out of the constitutional protection under the Sixth Schedule, the plain tribe seek different means to ensure the protection of their cultural identities and land, negotiating with both the centre and the state. It was in this context that the paper tries to understand the narrative of the plain tribe movement for autonomy which seek for political recognition. In the post colonial context, the movement for autonomy which was consolidated at the initial stages had been distorted in the later stage. Each of the major tribal community aspires to gain autonomy. The paper analyses the process of autonomy movement by the Mising, which ultimately results in the formation of 'autonomous council' under the State acts, different form the Sixth Schedule.

The instrument of autonomy designed as an integral part of the postcolonial Indian federal structure is inseparable from the logic of colonial interventions in the geographical space known in the colonial lexicon as the 'North East Frontier'. The Bordoloi Committee before the Constituent Assembly proposed the 'Autonomous District Council' with legislative, judicial and executive powers. Initially envisaging as a mechanism for protection of socio-cultural inimitabilities of the ethnic communities of the hill districts of Assam, it was accepted by the Constituent Assembly. However, the idea of Assam as a province of the postcolonial India retained the territorial boundaries of its colonial past, closing the eyes to the logic of linguistic division of the states, the process that started immediately after independence. The structure of autonomy appeared in the form of the Sixth Schedule to the constitution, avowedly with a concern for national security in the changed circumstances caused by the partition. Accordingly, district

[1] Joseph K Lalfakzuala,(jzuala@yahoo.com) Assistant Professor, and Bhupen Sarmah, (bsarmah64@gmail.com) Professor and Former Director, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

councils were constituted in 1952 in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Distract, the Garo Hills District, the Lushai (Mizo) Hills District, and the North Cachar and the Mikir Hills Districts uniting both into an 'administrative district', retaining the hills under the 'hegemonic' political control of the Assamese.

The structure of autonomy, however, has to be comprehended with the backdrop of the colonial construction of not only the Hill-Plain dichotomy, but also divide between the tribal and non-tribal. The laws promulgated by the Colonial Government viz., the Scheduled District Act 1874 and the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation 1880 were instrumental for such divisions. While the former was applicable to the whole of the newly created province of Assam with a perceived notion of 'backwardness', the later was for administration of the frontier tracts or hill districts. Chaube (1971) stressed that the idea of extending the Scheduled District Acts was mainly for the tribal population, which also inhabited the vast areas of the plains. For Hansaria (2010), the necessity of the act lies in the 'removal of uncertainty' with the operation of various laws under the British occupation. Even if there is ambiguity in the working of the Act, the second regulation had clearly demarcated the hills from the administration of the plains. The division had been reinforced by the Government of India Act 1919, which, under section 52A, had put all the frontier areas and the hills of Assam as 'Backward Tracts" leaving out from the constitutional reform (Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms 1925).

Again, with the coming of the Simon Commission, the then 'Backward Tract' was tried to be categorised as 'wholly excluded' by the officials of both Centre and Assam. In fact, this idea of exclusion from the reformed constitution had been encapsulated from the very beginning as to 'safeguard' the hill identity from the plain. In garnering support, the Naga under the banner of Naga Club submitted memorandum to exclude them from the reform (Chasie, 2017). Another hill area, particularly the Khasi-Jaintia Hills had shown mixed reaction on the question of reform. When the Simon Commission (Indian Statutory Commission) arrived in Shillong on January 2, 1929, the cleavage between the traditional chiefs and what (Syiemleh,1989) called 'middle class' was lime lighted. The apprehension was of losing their rights and 'exploitation' incurred in the form of inclusion in the reform constitution. They also noted that if their right was retained as well as included in the reformed constitution they were "pleased to have them both". The Jaintias also expressed the similar proposal (Syiemleh,1989). But, JMM Nichols Roy, the then Minister of Local Self- Government of Assam, pushed forth for the Khasi and Jaintia Hills to be included in the reformed (Government of Assam ,1930). With such mixed reaction from the hills or the then backward tracts, the hill districts were divided into Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded areas under the Government of India Act 1935 (under the Constitutional Order of 1936). The former would have no elected representative in the Provincial Council and the

subjects related to it would not be under the provincial ministry. However, the later would have representative and would be under the provincial ministry but the Governor would have 'special responsibility' in the administration.

The colonial divide that appeared as Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas did not decisively influence the envisaged mechanism of autonomy, because the Sixth Scheduled included both. Nevertheless, the Sixth Schedule reinforced Hill-Valley dichotomy as it was initially designed for fulfilling the political aspirations of the highlanders alone. It is in this context that the present paper attempts to examine the process, which culminated in making different provisions of autonomous councils for different the plain tribes of Assam. While the Bodos are given autonomy under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, some other plain tribes are given autonomous councils through the state legislation.

Struggle for Recognition under the Colonial Administration

The plain tribes of Assam clearly articulated their demand for political recognition as a distinct social category before the Indian Statutory Commission, popularly known as Simon Commission. The Kachari community and Bodo community in the name of Assam Kachari Jubok Sanmiloni submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission demanding their political recognition as a separate identity (Pathak,2010)[2]. The chief demand made by the tribal delegates to the Simon Commission was for separate electorate and reservation of seats in the various elective bodies (Basumatari; 5 GoI, 2004). This moment, for Barpujari (1998) had shown the division between the Boros from the caste Hindu. Starting with that, the political consciousness among the plain tribes of Assam had gradually taken shape of an organized political movement in the 1930s.

Politically articulating their distinct socio-cultural identity, the plain tribes of Assam, under the aegis of an incipient middle class, inaugurated the era of their organised political movement in 1933 by forming the 'Assam Backward Plains Tribal League', later came to be known as the 'Tribal League'. While "backwardness" was politically articulated to assert cultural exclusivity, it also essentially contested the socio-cultural hierarchy that legitimized an inferior position to the plain tribes *vis-a-vis* the caste Hindu Assamese. Such articulation was crucial at the particular historical juncture when the colonial state was heading towards the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1935. Although the Tribal League, from its inception, remained under the political control of the Bodos, formation of this broad political platform was quite crucial in the given historical context, and it played an important political role for more than a decade to come.

[2]Also see, for plain tribe movement during colonial period, Bodo in particular. Bodolandwatch, "Simon Commission: Tribal League For Reservation In Assembly. Is Bodoland Demand A Saga Of Failed And False Promises?", July 17, 2015. Source: https://bodolandwatch.wordpress.com/2015/07/17/simon-commission-tribal-league-for-reservation-in-assembly/. Accessed on October 26, 2017.

Political assertion of the Tribal League resulted in reservation of four seats for the plains tribes of Assam in the Legislative Assembly as per the Government of India Act of 1935. Consequently, four leaders of the plain tribes of Assam were elected to the Legislative Assembly in the general election of 1937. Amidst political instability caused by coalition politics and repeated change of government, the Tribal League with its four elected members entered an agreement with the Congress in 1943 at Shillong , and later helped the Congress to form the government under the leadership of Gopinath Bordoloi (Barooah, 2010). Politically, the agreement was crucial as it not only articulated the political aspirations of the plain tribes, but also firmly placed some of the basic issues pertinent the communities. The preconditions for supporting the Congress, that constituted essence of the agreement, included assurance from the Congress to retain the system of separate electorate for the plain tribes, until making provisions for reservation of seats for them proportionate to their population. In addition, the agreement also assured to include the Tribal Communities who embraced Hinduism or Christianity in the Schedule of the tribal people, provided they identify themselves as tribals; and for making adequate provisions for spread of education among the tribal communities. Addressing the question of land, the agreement also sought assurance to make provisions for giving settlement of lands to the landless tribals, particularly to the Miri people (Datta,1993; Choudhury,2007)

The coalition government, however, had to resign in 1939 paving the way for Syed Mohammad Saadullah to form the Government despite not having majority in the house. Consequently, the Tribal League decided to extend its support to form the Muslim League government led by Saadullah in 1939, repeating the same agreement now between Saadullah and the Tribal League in 1940 (Datta ,1993). The renewed agreement, with more emphasis on the question of land alienation, sought commitment of the government to implement the "Line System" required for protection of tribal land. The commitment of the Saadullah ministry to continue with the Line System was crucial, as the Muslim League was critical of the Line System and even a resolution for its removal was initiated in the Assam Legislative Council of Assam in 1937. The resolution was, however, withdrawn after opposition made by the two members of Tribal League (Guha 2016; also cited in Pathak 2010). The main argument behind the introduction of the Line System in 1920 was to prevent the 'immigrants' to further entered beyond the 'line' and to settle them in the 'segregate areas' in order to protect the alienation of the indigenous population (Chakrabarty, 2004; Pathak, 2010; Kar,2013). The system, however, became a political question, as a section of the political leadership demanded its abolition, while wanted to continue with certain adjustment for settlement of the ever-growing immigrant population, but at the same time, reserving land for future expansion of the indigenous population (Rao,1979; Boruah,1980). It was also found that the Line System encouraged corruption and nexus between the 'landholders' and the revenue officials

responsible for drawing the line (Kar,1980; Das & Saikia ,2011). Efficacy of the System was not independent of the initiatives of the district officers, especially the Deputy Commissioner (Rao,1979), nevertheless, lack of political will and apathy resulted in failure of the system to protect the best interest of the indigenous population when it comes to land settlement (Boruah,1980; Misra,1999).

Absence of any sincere attempt to implement the Line System and the gradual opening of land for settlement placed the plain tribes in a vulnerable situation. The ever-increasing size of the non-indigenous was allowed to indiscriminately occupy the available barren land, characterized as wasteland by the colonial state. Commercial interests, especially expansion of the tea sector, necessitated the colonial logic behind construction of the category of wasteland in the early part of colonialism in the Brahmaputra Valley. However, extension of the same logic to the agricultural land later resulted in opening up for settlement of the immigrants for revenue assessment (Guha,1991; Hilaly,2016). In 1936 nine members Line System Committee was formed with the member of the Provincial Legislature to look into the working of the system[3]. On the recommendation of the Committee, in 1939 the Government decided to constitute 'Protected Areas' in the Mouza where there was predominant population of backward classes. It was only after independence that the government adopted a resolution to protect the interest of tribal by laying down guidelines for creating Tribal Belt and Block in all the villages with more than fifty percent of indigenous population by adding Chapter X to the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 (Barooah,2010). No doubt, the new chapter in the ALRR brought significant change in the Protected Belts and Blocks in term of revenue administration[4]. However, in the post independence context the discourse of plains tribal politics gradually shifted to the question of protection of tribal identity through separate institutional arrangement and then autonomy.

The Post Colonial State and Exclusion: Reviving the Movement

The Constituent Assembly formed two subcommittees under the Minority Advisory Committee to look and plan for the future of the tribal living in the excluded and partially excluded of British India. The Sub-Committee headed by Gopinath Bordoloi was to look into the future arrangement of the Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas (Hill Districts) of colonial Assam and, the other Sub-Committee headed by A.V. Thakkar was entrusted to formulate the future plan for the then excluded and partially excluded apart from Assam. Thus, the tribal communities living outside the two categories were left out of the consideration of the Constituent Assembly. Such that, political aspirations and basic concerns of the plain tribal of Assam remained unaddressed at the time of making of the

[3] For detail see Report of the Line System Enquiry Committee, 3 Volumes, 1938, Shillong: Government of Assam Press. Assam State Archive File No. PHA No. 130 of 1938.

[4] To look into the detail of land system, see the GoA website https://dlrar.assam.gov.in.

Indian Constitution, may be with the 'hope' to be assimilated naturally with the greater Assamese society and polity (Rao, 1986 [1967]).

Learning their exclusion from both the Fifth and the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, Assam Tribal League submitted a memorandum to the Minority Advisory Committee and the Constituent Assembly of India demanding for creation of the Scheduled Areas in the plain districts of Assam for 'socio-economical and educational upliftment' of the Plains tribal (PTCA,1986). The League demanded an institutional arrangement in the form of a 'Scheduled Tribes Advisory Committee' to advise the State Government 'on all matters pertaining to economic, social and educational development of the Scheduled Areas in the State' (Memorandum submitted by the Assam Tribal League before the Constituent Assembly of India and the Minority Advisory Committee in supplement to the Memorandum of the 20th March, 1947 *in* Datta,1993). The memorandum also contains the issue related to land belonging to the tribal. Since there was no initiative on the part of the Central or the State Government to materialise the institutional protection for the plains tribes, the Assam Tribal Sangha placed another memorandum before Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes Commission of India, 1960-61 under the Chairmanship of U. N. Dhebar. It again reiterated the demand for the formation of Scheduled District by amending the Fifth Schedule.[5]

One of the last collective efforts of the plains tribal's movement for autonomy and separate governance was the formation of Plains Tribals' Council of Assam (PTCA). The idea of forming the Council was first initiated at the meeting held by the tribal leaders on February 27, 1967 which called for 'full autonomy' to 'preserve their language, culture and help them grow according to their own genius and tradition' (PTCA,1967). The significant of this February meeting was the formation of an Action Committee to travel across the state to mobilise the plains tribal for full autonomy. The February meeting was endorsed by the meeting held on March 18, 1967 and also formed the Plains Tribals' Council of Assam with Biruchand Doley as the first President (Hazarika,2005). The PTCA drafted their memorandum revisiting all the initiatives taken by the plains tribals for protection and institutional arrangement to submit it to the President of India on May 20, 1967.

There are two important chapters in the memorandum submitted by the PTCA in 1967. First, the term plain tribes as articulated in the chapter two of the memorandum includes all the major tribal groups of the plains of Assam viz., (1) The Bramans of Cachar, (2) the Boro-Kacharis, (3) The Deories, (4) The Hojais,

[5] Though Advisory Committee was form in 1958 for the welfare of Plains Tribals, it was argue that it was not a statutory body and since it main function was just to give advise. So, Most of the recommendation made by the Committee was never implemented because the Government has no obligation to follow as it is not mandatory (PTCA 1967: Chapter 11).

(5) The Kacharies including the Sonomwal, (6) the Lalungs, (7) the Meches, (8) The Miris and (9) the Rabhas. Second, chapter sixteen of the memorandum artciulated for 'full autonomy' to cover the 'predominately plains tribal areas of the northern tracts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar District, including all the Tribal Belts and Blocks of those areas'. The demand for autonomy implied (a) protection of their land, (b) effective check to economic exploitation of tribals by non-tribals, (c) protection of their language, culture, customs, (d) prevention of political domination by the non-tribal over tribals and imposition of anything, which would disrupt their traditions and custom; and to (e) grow according to their own genius and traditions.

The movement for autonomy launched by the PTCA, however, has to be seen in the context of the overall political milieu of the state. On the opposite side, being disappointed by the provision of limited autonomy provided by the Constitution, the political leadership of the Hill districts of Assam intensified their movement for separate state and started political mobilization under the leadership of the Eastern India Tribal Union (EITU) and later the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC). The creation of Nagaland as a separate state further inspired the movement for greater autonomy, and following the Nagas, the Mizo National Front (MNF) launched separatist movement. The Indian State responded to the movement with the idea of a federal arrangement within Assam. A statement was released on January 13, 1967 to re-organise Assam in the form of an Autonomous State (Mukerjee,1969). The promised dispensation of the Indian State inspired the political leadership of the Plain Tribes to form political organisation inclusive of all the plains tribal communities to push the Government of India to include the demand of the PTCA in the proposed 'federal plan' (PTCA,1967: Chapter 15). The demand for autonomy became a demand for a separate state, 'Udyanchal', in the 1970s, particularly for the Bodo and the Mising who provided leadership to the PTCA (Gohain,1989; Fernandes 1999; Goswami,2001). 'Udayachal Demand Week' was observed from February 27 to March 5, 1986 (PTCA,1987).

Distorting the Political Demand for Autonomy

The movement for autonomy launched by the PTCA though continued in a mild form, the Assam Movement (1979-85) relegated it to the backbench. The acceptance of the creation of a new institutional mechanism, the Tribal Development Authority, by the leadership of the PTCA in 1983 was perceived by another section of the leadership as a political betrayal [6]. Consequently, a new organisation called the United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front (UTNLF) came in to being on April 19, 1984 to intensify the movement for separate

[6] Section 2 of the Memorandum to the Prime Minister of India by United Tribal Nationalists' Liberation Front, July 10, 1985, New Delhi (in Datta 1993: 176).

state for the Plains Tribal.[7] The UTNLF till 1988 made continuous demand to the Government of India by submitting memorandums to the successive Prime Ministers for creation of separate state for the plains tribes. However, with a striking difference from the PTCA, the movement for separate state under the UTNLF came under almost exclusive domination of the Bodos. Alongside, the All Bodo Student Union (ABSU) joined the movement for separate state in 1987 further intensifying the movement by proclaiming 'Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty'.[8] When the historic movement of the Plain Tribes, being arrested by the ABSU, became a movement for a separate state for the Bodos, the political voices of the other tribal organisations had been overshadowed.

Comparatively, the movement of the plain tribes, however, had always been inspired by the apparent success of the movements in the hills. With the Assam Re-organisation (Meghalaya) Act 1969, Meghalaya was created as an autonomous state within Assam. It was followed by two simultaneous Acts, the Constitution (Twenty-Seventh Amendment) Act, 1971 and The North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971. Under the two Acts, Manipur, Tripura and autonomous state of Meghalaya were granted statehood and Mizoram along with Arunachal Pradesh were made Union Territory. Later Mizoram and Arunachal were granted Statehood in 1987. Though one may thinks that the political process in the plains and the hills cannot be compared, but still, the apparent success of the later has substantially influenced the movement of the plain tribes. The anguish of the political leadership of the plain tribes is that their aspiration for autonomy has always been ignored. Thus, their apprehension regarding their political existence as distinct ethnic communities amidst the multitude of non-tribal cultural and religious identities caused by unabated influx since the period of colonialism backed their movement for autonomy. However, unlike some of the movements in the hills, especially the Naga and the Mizo, the movement of plain tribes is not for secession from the Indian state (Gohain,1997). Gohain (1989) has put forth three major reasons behind the tribal movement – first, the discontentment with the colonial state for not granting permanent land rights to the tribes, and the influx of migrant along with the rise of moneylenders. Second, was the negligence on the part of the successive government, both colonial and post colonial, to promote literary and education. Third, the tribes, particularly the Bodo, are against the campaign for assimilation into larges culture as they felt that it has hampered the preservation of their own culture and identity.

[7] On May 2, 1984 two separate letters were drafted by the United Action Committee of the All Tribal Organisations Convention– One, to sent to Indira Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India to informed her about the formation of the new political organisation i.e., United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front and its objectives and demands. Second letter was sent to the Election Commission of India to registered United Tribal Nationalist Liberation Front as new Political Party.

[8] The Headquarter of ABSU released a document, *Divide Assam Fifty-Fifty (Fifty Three Questions and Answers),* passed by the Central Executive Meeting on August 23, 1987 at Kokrajhar. A more detail document, *Why Separate State?,* was prepared by ABSU and submitted to the President, Prime Minister and Home Minister of India on November 10, 1987.

Intensification of the movement for a separate state by the ABSU led to the enactment of the Bodoland Autonomous Council Act, 1993 by granting "maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for Social, economic, educational, ethnic and cultural advancement", within the state of Assam.[9] The provision under the state act soon proved insignificant for the Bodo. The General Council, which was designed to be the highest legislative body under the act was helpless on the ground when the law made by the council is repugnant to the law may the state legislature, and then the law made by the state shall prevail (For commentary, see Phukan G.C. 1993). With the discontentment on the arrangement of the autonomous council and the desire for separate state, the Bodo movement was rejuvenated leading to large-scale violence. In order to accommodate the political aspirations of the Bodos, a new arrangement was made departing from the 'district council' to the 'territorial council'. Finally, with more executive and legislative powers and functions Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was created under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2003.[10]

Multiple Autonomy under the State

The movement of the plain tribes, which finally culminated in formation of the BTC in lieu of separate state through the process of negotiating peace by the militant section of the Bodo leadership with the Indian State, was preceded by an ad hoc political mechanism with the enactment of the Bodoland Autonomous Council Act, 1993, as indicated earlier. Concomitantly, political aspirations of the other plain tribal communities were sought to be accommodated through similar legislative mechanism, as many of the ethnic communities started articulating their political existence with distinct ethnic identity, and contested hegemony of the Assamese nationality. Autonomous Councils were planned for all the major tribal groups (Baruah & Goswami,1999) by enacting six different statutory autonomous councils under the state Acts. The Autonomous Councils are:

1. **Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council:** It was constituted under the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council Act, 1995 and amendment was made in 2005 demarcating the areas/constituency and for formation of the legislative and executive functionaries. The area covers almost the entire district of Goalpara except some parts of the revenue circles of Matia, Balijana and Lakhipur.
2. **Mising Autonomous Council**: It was formed under the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 and covers parts of the districts of Lakhimpur, Majuli and Dhemaji.

[9] The Autonomous Council was the outcome of the Bodo Accord signed on February 20, 1993 between the GoI, GoA and All Bodo Student Union.

[10] This Act was the outcome of the Accord signed on February 10, 2003 by the the GoI, GoA and Bodo Liberation Tigers.

3. **Lalung (Tiwa) Autonomous Council**: It was formed in 1995, and it was the outcome of Accord signed between the Government of Assam and Autonomous Lalung District Demand Committee (ALDDC) on April 13, 1995. It covers parts of the districts of Morigoan, Nagaon and Kamrup (M). It headquarters is at Tiwashong in Morigaon district.
4. **Deori Autonomous Council:** Its headquarter is at Narayanpur in Lakhimpur district. Since Deori population are living in different places, the areas under the council includes the villages scattered in the districts of Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Sonitpur, Jorhat, Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Tinsukia of upper Assam.
5. **Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council**: It was formed in 2005 after the signing of the accord between the Government of Assam and the four organisation of the Sonowal Kachari community viz., All Assam Sonowal Kachari Students' Union, All Sonowal Kachari Jatiya Parishad, Sonowal Kachari Yuva Parishad and Sonowal Kachari Autonomy Demand Committee. The area covers the districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dhemaji and Lakhimpur, of upper Assam. The headquarters is at Dibrugarh, Dibrugarh district.
6. **Thengal Kachari Autonomous Council**: It was constituted in 2005 and the headquarters is at Titabar, Jorhat district.

The first three Autonomous Councils for the plain tribes were constituted in 1995 simultaneously with the formation of BTC while the later three were constituted in 2005 by enactments of the state legislature. The span of ten years is very significant in the history of Assam, particularly to the question of autonomy for the tribal communities. In 1995, apart from the formation of three Autonomous Councils for the Rabhas, Misings and Lalungs (Tiwas), the Sixth Schedule was amended to give additional powers to the Karbi-Anglong Autonomous District Council and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council by inserting new Paragraph 3A.[11] The delegation of more subjects to both the autonomous councils was also the strategy to pacify the long struggle for a separate autonomous state within Assam under the banner of Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) and Karbi Anglong North Cachar Hills Autonomous State Demand Committee (KANCHASDC) which was formed on May 17 and 25, 1986 respectively (Kumar,1998). ASDC was dissolved on November 30, 2012 and to replace it, Hill Democratic State Party was formed to spearhead the movement for autonomous state as provided under Article 244(A).[12] On the other hand, the granting of autonomous council

[11] The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution (Amendment) Act, 1995. This amendment is the outcome of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) reached between the Chief Minister, Assam and the Autonomous State Demand Committee, Karbi Students' Association, N. C. Hills Students' Federation and Dimasa Students' Union in New Delhi on April 1, 1995 in the presence of Union Home Minister. Notification No. HAD. 57/95/309. Dated December 31, 1996, Dispur, Hill Areas Department, Government of Assam.

[12] Here it is surprising to note that the two districts Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao opted out of autonomous Hill state i.e., Meghalaya under Assam has now demanded again the same autonomous state under Assa.

to three other tribal communities - Rabhas, Misings and Lalungs (Tiwas), was the outcome of the long standing demand made by these communities to protect and promote their ethnic identity through institutional framework under the state apparatus. Again in 2005 three autonomous councils had been enacted by the state to further accommodate tribal communities in the form of institutional autonomy.

There is an unending debate on the nature of the formation of the six autonomous councils under the state acts. First is the territory to be covered by each council, and second, the question of inclusion and exclusion entailed by the functions of the council as it not only excluded the 'non-tribal' but other tribal communities as well living within the territorial jurisdiction of the council. Thus, in order to clarify the territorial jurisdiction, another amendment was enacted to specify the areas to be covered. First, "Satellite areas" which means "the areas or areas consisting of non-contiguous cluster of villages predominantly inhabited by ST population having 50 % and above as a whole in the cluster and not necessarily in the individual villages". Second, "core areas" which means "the compact and contiguous areas predominantly inhabited by ST population having 50 % and above as a whole in the area and not necessarily in the individual villages". Another change that came along with the amendment in 2005 is that the particular tribe name has been removed and replaced with the term Scheduled Tribes to be more inclusive.[13] Thus, when separate acts were passed for the formation of autonomous council for the Deori, Sonowal Kachari and Thengal Cachari, no particular tribe name has been inserted, instead the word Scheduled Tribe has been used.

The question, nevertheless, is whether such legislative measures could fulfil the political aspirations of the plain tribes. Let us comprehend the political realities taking example of the movement for autonomy launched by the Misings, numerically the second largest plain tribal community of Assam.

Aspirations for Autonomy of the Misings

The movement for autonomy launched by the Mising has a long history, though it cannot be isolated from the movement of the plains tribes of Assam as a whole, as it has already been indicated[14]. The leadership emerged from the community also spearheaded the PTCA movement along with the Bodos. In terms of population, the Misings are next to the Bodo. Like all other major tribal groups, there are different sub-tribe of the Mising with close affinity amongs them ranging their settlement from present Arunachal Pradesh to plains of Assam (Bhandari,1984).

[13] See, The Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council (Amendment) Act, 2005. The same is with the Mising Autonomous Council Act and Lalung (Tiwa).

[14] The movement for autonomy had been traced back to the dawn of Independence, May 20, 1947, when North East Frontier Miri-Abor Sanmillan formed by the new educated class of Mising, Abors, Daflas, and Charak communities raised for separate political unit for autonomy (Bora 2014: 65-6).

One of the earliest initiatives to form a common platform for the tribe was the formation of *Mising Bane Kebang* in 1924 by the educated people from the community (Bhandari,1984).

Alongside the joint political movement with the other plains tribes, two important organisations of the Misings, the Mising Mimag Kebang (Mising National Action Committee) and the Takam Mising Porin Kebang (All Mising Students Union) took leadership of the Mising identity politics. The origin of the Takam Mising Porin Kebang (TMPK) can be traced back to 1933 with formation of the as Assam Miri Chatra Sanilan (Assam Miri Students' Conference) which was later renamed as Uttaparia Mising Chatra Sontha (North Bank Mising Students' Union). After Independence, it had merged with other Mising students organisation of both present Arunachal Pradesh and the south bank of the Bahamaputra, and finally emerged as the Assam-Arunachal Mising Students' Union in 1971 (Borah ,2013). The name was changed to All Assam Mising Students Union in 1978 and, finally it came to be known as the Takam Mising Porin Kebang (TMPK) in February 1985.[15] It is interesting to note that since the late 1970s, the political and ethnic movement had been led mostly by the younger generation and thus even among the tribal community, such movements articulated resurgence through the student organisations for political goal (Goswami,2001). In such case, Mising movement for autonomy is not an exception when TMPK accelerated the movement for autonomy of the Mising.

By revisiting the census date from 1871 to 1971, Hussain (1992) attempted to relate the question of ethnic identity of the plain tribes with the process assimilation to the larger composite culture of 'Asamiya nationality. To support his claim, Hussain (1992) argued that the percentage of the plains tribal population of the Brahmaputra valley had fallen from 22.5 per cent in 1872 to 10.7 per cent in 1971, as they were gradually integrated into the larger Asomiya culture. Evidently, the number of speakers of the langue of each tribal group is much leaser than the total number of population. The Mising population according to 1971 census was 2, 59, 551 but the number of speakers of Mising is 1,77, 226 and, the same thing happened to all other tribal communities of the plains (Hussain,1992). However, it is also equally important to note that the number of speakers of Mising language the by 1971 has substantially increased compared to 1951(57, 615) and 1961 (102, 920)[16]. By 1991, the number of speakers had seen tremendous rise to 3,81,562 and the percentage has increased from 1.21 in1971 to 1.70 in 1991 (Census of India 1991, Vol. III, Assam, Part I, also cited in Goswami,2001). This must be seen in the light of the growing ethno-cultural consciousness of the Mising, especially

[15] See,https://wethemising.wordpress.com/2009/06/30/autonomy-movement-of-the-mising/ accessed on 15 September 2017.

[16] Source: http://online.assam.gov.in/web/guest%20/people?webContentId=174762 accessed on 15 June 2017.

after the Assam Movement, essentially to contest the politico-cultural hegemony of the Asomiya nationalism. To protect their distinct ethnic identity, the Misings demanded recognition of their language and also to introduce as medium of instruction in the school (Pegu,1998; Bora,2014). By forming the Mising Agom Kébang (MAK), Mising Sahity Sabha or Mising Language Society in April 1972, the Mising attempted to revive their ethno-linguistic identity, placing their movement for autonomy in the backdrop. Therefore, the conscious attempt to revive and assert ethno-linguistic identity is always political and the politics of reconstruction of the Mising linguistic identity cannot be ignored.[17]

The All Assam Mising Students Union, however, reshaped the movement for autonomy, in its Dhakuakhana session in September 1982. Later, after the reincarnation of the students' organization as TMPK in 1985, the movement for autonomy was also renewed through mobilisation of the masses. However, this was to confront with the Mising Bane Kebang, the old parent body of the Mishing society, which did not support full autonomy[18]. As a result, the Mising Mimag Kebang (Mising Action Committee) was formed at the Mising National Convention Held in February 1993 at Jonai in Dhemaji district and, the Mising Mimag Kebang (MMK) along with the TMPK took prompt action for the materialisation of Mising autonomy. The two groups therefore, made a joint declaration in the Mising National Convention held again at Jonai on March 27, 1993 in which they outlined the history of the Mising in Assam along with their anguish and grievances of being neglected particularly by the State Government. Sensing the necessity to address the demand for autonomy made by various plain tribal communities, the state government invited TMPK and MMK for negotiation and proposed the idea of the Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) with the following conditions:

1. There shall not be any definite boundary and compact area for the MAC.
2. Revenue village having 50% or more Mising population would be identified and included unto the MAC.
3. The MAC will not have any legislative power; it will have only executive powers on 34 subjects enlisted under 11th schedule of the constitution of India incorporated after the 73rd amendment.
4. Fund to the MAC would be provided only from the tribal sub-plan of the state.
5. The MAC would be created under a state Act and not under any provision of the constitution.[19]

[17] For details see, http://www.misingagomkebang.org.

[18] See,https://wethemising.wordpress.com/2009/06/30/autonomy-movement-of-the-mising/ accessed on September 15, 2017.

[19] See,https://wethemising.wordpress.com/2009/06/30/autonomy-movement-of-the-mising/ accessed on September 15, 2017.

It was, therefore, obvious that the state government attempted to address the demand for autonomy to the Misings without much political commitment and sincerity, as the proposed MAC would be without any territorial boundary, and also it would exclude the Mising people in the villages having less than 50 percent population of the community. Moreover, the mechanism for devolution of fund was highly restrictive as the MAC would depend solely on Tribal Sub-Plan. Above all, the MAC would be created under the State Act. The TMPK and MMK could not concede with the proposal, particularly, the first two points and therefore, strongly proposed for the inclusion of tribal 'belts and blocks' along with the tribal sub-plan areas. In the process of the movement, while the TMPK and MMK initiated to consolidate for more defined form of autonomy, Mising Autonomous Demand Committee (MADC) arrested the movement in favour of the state government proposal for MAC, and also, the MBK entered in between.

While the TMPK and MMK continued the movement for autonomy, the State Government halted the movement by arresting the leaders on one hand and tried for an agreement with the other two groups, MBK and MADC. Finally, a Memorandum of Settlement (Mising Accord) was signed on June 14, 1995 between the Government of Assam and the MADC. Agreeing on the earlier proposal of the state government, the accord defined the structure of the autonomous council for the Misings. Finally, the Mising Autonomous Council Act, 1995 came as a political reality in 1995 and in the same year an interim body of the MAC was formed as authorised by the State government with its headquarters at Gogamukh, Dhemaji. The agreement was recalled by an old man in the interview during the field studies:

> *In 1995, during Hiteswar Saikia regime, there was a Bane Kebang conference held at Bilmukh, Lakhimpur. Chief Minister Saikia was supposed to announce the Mising Autonomous Council (MAC) in that conference. As the then MAC was a borderless (satellite) proposition, most of the community organization at once opposed the move. Except the Bane Kebang, rest of the community organizations hesitated the conference, which resulted in a clash in the scheduled venue. Accordingly, Boga Medak and Naresh Taid were killed in police firing on that fateful day of 16th April, 1995. Later, one Anjana Pegu succumbed to death after severe injuries. Since then, the 16th April has been observed as the Martyr Day by the community organizations, particularly by the TMPK (Interviewed with Mr. X on April 30, 2017).*

The TMPK-MMK made continuous deliberations for their demands, including dissolution of the interim MAC, and only at the initiation of the court order that the interim MAC had to be dissolved by the State government on March 11, 1998. This was followed by the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between

the Government of Assam with TMPK-MMK along with TMMK. The MoU provided for formation of high power review committee, amendment of MAC, required examination for withdrawal of all the police cases pending against the activists of the autonomy movement, election of the MAC within five months after review and amendment of the MAC act.

Structurally, the MAC Act 1995, provided for two important bodies to execute powers and functions. First, according to Section 6 of the Act, the General Council should consist of 40 (forty) members out of which 35 are to be elected while the remaining five to be nominated by the government among the groups residing in MAC areas which are not represented by the MAC. Out of 40 seats, 20 seats are reserved exclusive for the Mising community including six reserved seats for women. It also implies that other 20 unreserved seats are open for all communities residing in the MAC jurisdiction. Similar system has also to be applied in the case of formation of the Village Councils. According to Chapter V (Section 32) of the Act, there will be 10 members in the village council out of which 5 seats will be reserve for the Mising including one seat reserved for woman. In the village councils, there will be a President (Chief) and a Vice President (Deputy Chief) to be elected by the members of the village councils and, Secretary to be appointed by the government in consultation with the President. Moreover, the secretary will be the chief executive of the Village Council to act under the control of the President.

In terms of power and functions, the MAC has 'executive powers' on forty subjects specified in Chapter III of the MAC Act 1995, while the Village Council has 'executive power' on 29 subjects according to Chapter VI like that of the PRI. According to Chapter IV of the Act, there is a provision for the formation of the Executive Council comprising the Chief Executive Councillor, Deputy Chief Councillor and seven Executive Councillors. Therefore, it is clear that the MAC can only perform executive function, not legislative and judicial, that too under the direction and controlled of the State Government.

Therefore, it is clear that the MAC is far from the demand made by the Mising due to the limitation on side of the state government as well as the nature of the movement. While on the side of the government, the formation of the Mising Autonomous Council cannot be at the cost of all other communities including the other tribal and non-tribal communities. This limitation is not overseen by the Misings themselves, and therefore, separate clause was provided in the MAC Act for the protection of rights of the non-tribal and other ethnic groups.[20]

[20] The MAC also proposed an amendment to the principal act of MAC which mainly contain the proposed removal for 'preference being given to Mising community' also for the protection of non-tribals under Section 66 has been reiterated pertaining to section 19 and 44. Office of Mising Autonomous Council, "Proposed Amendment to the MAC Act (as amended up to 2005), 1995 As unanimously passed by the General Council of MAC", Gogamukh, Dhemaji.

Conclusion

The geographical space, now comprehended as the 'North East India', became a political reality reshaped by partition. The enigma of the Nation State was, however, to politically integrate the 'trouble periphery', which witnessed parallel (peripheral) nationalist discourse preparing for their own independent political existence dissociating themselves from the envisaged federal structure India (Sarmah,2018). Taking cognizance of the political realities as well as geo-political criticality of the region shaped by partition, the Nation State required specific constitutional technology for political integration of the troubled periphery. Initially, the constitutional provisions were conceptualized under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution without paying serious attention to the colonial distortions. The Nagas, the primary concern of the Nation State, as it was at the dawn of independence, categorically refused the constitutional mechanism and opted for asserting their identity politics for secession. The political leadership of the other hill societies, though accepted the autonomy provided to them under the Sixth Schedule initially, soon started political mobilization for greater autonomy, either with clearly articulated secessionist ideology or for separate states. The political movements of the hill societies finally culminated in redrawing of the map of Assam, the political question that was ignored by the nationalist leadership at the dawn of independence. As a result, the aspiration for autonomy politically articulated by the hill societies resulted in a departure from the colonial past, and liberated the hill societies from the political hegemony of the caste Hindu Assamese.

The plain tribe of the Brahmaputra Valley, were however, expected to be assimilated with the larger Assamese national identity, and therefore, the autonomy they aspired was completely ignored. Though all the plain tribes came under one political umbrella, the movement they launched was peaceful with a safe distance from secessionism. The hegemony of the Assamese Nationalism, was however, contested by cultural and linguistic identity movement. Taking a lead by the Bodos, now with their reconstructed cultural identity, the Bodos renewed their movement for autonomy with more political vigour. It assumed a militant form, especially in the post Assam Movement period, when the State attempted to politically manoeuvre by providing autonomy to the Bodos under a state legislation. Consequently, the Bodo dominated areas of the Valley experienced large scale violence, which was more inter ethnic in character in the given complex ethnic character of the political space, than against the state, albeit a frail influence of secessionism accompanied the Bodo identity movement especially since 1990s. Finally, the State negotiated peace with a fraction of the Bodo militant leadership and the Constitution was amended to accommodate political aspirations of the Bodos by proving autonomy under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

Political aspirations of the other recognized and numerically significant plain tribes attempted to fulfil through state legislations, essentially in anticipation of conflicts. The state manoeuvre, has largely been witnessed by the kind of political negations with certain section of the ethnic leadership, and the example of the movement for autonomy launched by the Misings clearly demonstrates it. Therefore, the question remains, can aspirations for autonomy of the indigenous communities be accommodated in the federal structure of India as a basic principle of inclusive democracy, rather than a mechanism of politically manoeuvred mechanism of peace negation with militancy?

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A Colonizer or an Anthropologist? Locating the Identity of the Christian Missionary vis-à-vis the Tea Garden 'Coolie' in Colonial Assam

Anisha Bordoloi[1]

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to study the role played by Christian missionaries in carrying out Mission work among the tea plantation labourers of Assam during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It explores how politics of power can function through multiple identities apart from the one that seems more visible revealing the non-monolithic identity of a colonizer. It also argues how the world of the general (the tea garden coolies) is constructed through perspectives emanating from the particular (individual Christian missionaries). Missionaries performed a political role in the way they carried out mission work in the tea gardens while simultaneously producing information and knowledge like an anthropologist about the tea garden migrant labourers amidst whom they set out to preach.Especially significant is the search for the 'heathen' that became a prime requisite for mission work, the construction of the tea garden as a 'field' through mission tours and visits, missionary interests in the plantations and the usage of print culture in the form of a newspaper such as the "The Indian Churchman" where debates between Charles Dowding, a missionary and colonial officials entrenched the idea of the subject and the colonizer further.

Introduction

> *Colonialism was made possible, and then sustained and strengthened, as much by cultural technologies of rule as it was by the more obvious and brutal modes of conquest that first established power on foreign shores.*
>
> -Nicholas B. Dirks[2]

A connection between the idea of civilisation and culture is an important factor in determining the identity of the colonizer and the colonized. Notions such as 'cultured', 'civilized', 'cultural/civilizational progress' and 'cultural/civilizational

[1]Anisha Bordoloi, (anishabordoloi.8@gmail.com) Research Associate,OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

[2] Dirks, 2001, p. 9.

backwardness' were very often used and referred to as part of an intellectual understanding of different human societies by those in authority of knowledge production. 'Culture' represented a context in which the phenomenon of power can be understood by setting the 'powerless' within the framework of their own virtues as the 'powerless'according to terms defined by the 'powerful'.

Interests of the tea industry compelled the colonial government to unearth features that homogenised different populations from different regions leading to deeper political ramifications other than the economic. It contributed in creating a wider and stronger hold of the empire over lands and people located at a distance from each other with Assam being connected with the empire more firmly and its easy access with a difficult geography no longer difficult to achieve. Studies associated with race science such as anthropology provided a rational basis and eased the pursuit of such colonial interests. Through an exploration of the origins, customs, religious systems and language of the subjects, the colonizer assumed the dual role of an anthropologist too. As the civilizing mission formed an integral part of colonialism, it not just signified the transformation of a colony from a stage of primitivity and barbarism to one of modernity, progress and development in relation to economy and society. This transformation attained an unofficial character too in aiming to change the nature of economy and society. Especially, if colonialism could find deeper roots in the lives of the people through a moral fabric provided by religion. In this case, Christianity.

Although it is convenient to locate many works associated with Christian missionaries and the impact of their philanthropic activities on the society and culture of Assam and other states of the North East, there are very few works that examine the relation between the missionaries and the tea plantation labour community in Assam. Therefore, a parallel can be drawn between the peripheral location of the tea labour community in relation to the larger society in the region which is reflected even in the number of historical literature produced on the subject. The subject finds mention in passing as part of a larger literature produced on Christian missionaries in Assam and the North East in general.[3]Most works have focused on various aspects of the impact of missionary work upon the culture and life of the natives, the way natives were represented in missionary literature, the association of Christian Mission with the greater colonialist project and linked with it the efforts to establish the superiority of Christianity over Hinduism, the way churches sprung up in different places and conversions had taken place, their contribution towards the development of English education, starting of schools and efforts in developing a vernacular language such as Assamese.

[3] Mention may be made of works such as Neill,1966; Dharmaraj,1993; Sangma,1987; Downs,1992; Sangma& Syiemlieh, 1994; Dena; Karotemprel, 1993; Stadler&Karotemprel, 1980; Kolsky, 2011; Gogoi, 2016 ; Ghosh, 2011; Bora, 2009.

What do these endeavours speak about the identity of the Christian missionaries themselves? Given that there are many layers and facets of their approach to native society, what does this kind of multiplicity of motives, narratives or the production of knowledge entail? The fact that the tea plantations of Assam provided a suitable groundfor carrying out Mission work among the newly recruited labour population, what remains to be addressed is the way Christianity perpetuated the stereotype of the 'coolie'[4] in the literature of the Mission. The way a large section of a subject population was easily accessible to the Christian missionaries, the way missionaries worked amidst the tea garden labour population treating the tea garden as a potential field of work, preaching the gospel among them, producing knowledge about them in their literature from a position of economic, political and psychological superiority, one is hence, compelled to draw parallels between the position of a Christian missionary and that of an anthropologist. More so because missionaries were central to the emergence and professionalization of ethnology and anthropology in Britain and in the way Britain envisaged its role in the colonies. Missionary education was a crucial factor in the emergence of secularizing strategies in colonial India.[5]

Keeping this possibility in mind that men and women of faith who carry out religious and welfare activities among the native communities could very often function like an anthropologist, this article attempts to explore how politics of power can function through multiple identities apart from the one that seems more visible. It is to be seen how the state operates through multiple domains of power that function along inter-personal lines in an unofficial manner.

The first section of the essay throws light upon how the search for the 'heathen' or the 'truly pagan' turned the tea garden 'coolie' as a suitable subject to carry out the Mission. The second part of the essay explores the anthropological treatment of the tea garden as a 'field' with a focus on the frequent 'tours', 'explorations' and 'visits' to the field. This is followed by an examination of how the Christian missionary's role as an anthropologist gets camouflaged into that of a colonizer as well. The essay ends with an examination of a primary text such as *Tea Garden Coolies in Assam- A Letter by the Hon'ble J. Buckingham, C.I.E., replying to a communication on the Subject which appeared in "The Indian Churchman". With Introduction and an answer by the Rev. Charles Dowding* set in the year 1894 that further entrenched the image of the Christian missionary-cum-anthropologist-cum-colonizer and the tea garden 'coolie' through the medium of print culture.

[4] The term 'coolie' emerges in most colonial documents as a common way to refer to the tea garden population recruited to work in Assam. It is also used as a general terminology to refer to labour in the colonies who carried load or worked in construction sites for roads and railways during the colonial period. Hence, the word would be used at various points in the essay in order to understand the colonial construction of the term.

[5] Pels, 1997, p. 172.

Mission Work and the 'Heathen' Coolie

Missionaries like Nathan Brown saw a tremendous potential to nurture the growth of mission activities in Assam, thus, compelling him to consider Assam as "one of the most important and encouraging fields in all the east"[6] with a promising supply of the 'heathen' – a requisite to create believers. The presence of the 'heathen' was identified by their qualities of 'primitivity', 'barbarism', 'lack of civilization and religion' which created a challenging task for missionaries to realize the worth of the Mission if they were successful in civilizing the 'wild', familiarizing with the mysterious or knowing the unknown. The 'heathen' as primitive, barbaric and uncivilized was synonymous to the identity of the tribe in colonial European racial vocabulary.

In missionary opinion, the solution to 'heathenism' or 'primitivity' lay in the idea of service to Christ which appeared synonymous to the idea of service to the colonizers. This kind of pre-occupation with the 'primitive' or the 'heathen' enabled the Christian Missionary to cope with one's sense of alienation from his/her own culture as well as advance oneself professionally. The very identity of a 'primitive' which is romanticized in several missionary writings, is an identity which was unacceptable in the missionary's own culture, thus precisely becoming the target of spreading the missionary zeal.[7] Therefore, what was admired in a state of primitivity was detested in a world of civilization.[8]With missionary efforts towards improvement of agriculture and industry, the planting of tea received a religious/moral sanction as a 'noble' venture started by Europeans as benefitting a colonized population given that it would contribute in improving their economic conditions by providing employment to the colonized.

As availability of a large number of the 'heathen' became an important factor for the success of mission work, the failure to influence the minds of Hindus and Muslims, turned the Christian missionaries to pay attention to races with the absence of caste or religion. Hence, when the Court of Directors in 1831 suggested the government to follow a policy of religious neutrality among natives,[9] in so far as the tribes were believed to be 'ungodly' or 'without religion', missionary interference among the tribal population of the land was not inconsistent with such a policy of 'religious neutrality'. Part of the missionary interest in the

[6] Sangma,1987, p. 30.

[7] Ward uses the terms 'unenlightened people' and 'rude race of savages' while citing the significance of *Orunodoi*, a journal begun by the Christian Missionaries in spreading knowledge of the gospel among the natives in Ward, 1884, pp. 9,10 ; Nathan Brown's reference to the native population as 'heathen' as cited in Sangma, 1987, p. 30; Reference to 'savages skilled in barbarous warfare' in *The Whole World Kin*, 1890,p. 111. The author further adds that 'the more cruel, ignorant and dangerous they were, the greater the reason for the work just undertaken' (p. 111) and refers to the 'heathen who are given to lying, theft, opium smoking…to everything wicked, rude and unlovely' (p. 140).

[8] Lewis, 1973, p. 584.

[9] Downs, 1992, p. 37.

tribals of North-East India also needs to be traced to Christianity's own pagan origins. The tribal population and their ethos of egalitarianism provided sites for missionaries to romanticize Christianity's own past, all the more so, when Sebastian Karotemprel, a man of the faith is driven to call Christianity as a "truly tribal religion".[10]

Populations which exuded tremendous potential for the development of evangelism and among whom it was the most successful in the plain areas were the tea tribes, especially, Oraons, Mundas, Kharias, Kols and Santhals. These included both the ex-tea tribes that settled in the villages near the tea gardens as well as those who lived and laboured within the premises of the tea plantations. For Christianity to avoid being portrayed as being imposed upon natives but embraced by natives out of their own will, it was important to target those populations who exuded a sense of vulnerability, who faced exploitation by colonial authorities and experienced a loss of dignity and discrimination at the hands of upper caste local Hindu population of the region. Immense potential to spread the faith was thus found among the tea tribes of Assam giving the Christian mission a cause, a reason to prevail in the region. Some among these tribes were already converted Christians before embarking on their journey to Assam. In missionary parlance, calling the community of tea tribes as "ignorant but sincere"[11], implied the ignorance of the community as essential precisely for the creation of a sincere population. A population, given their ignorance of the inherent meaning of Christianity, served it with loyalty. The attribute of ignorance that determined the position of the community as subjects, readily accepting the filtration of European Christian ideals ran as a parallel theme with a similar position of the community within the framework of a wage-labour regime in the colonial tea plantations. The English government commenced the cultivation of the indigenous tea plant in Jaipur in the year 1835 and in 1836, the year of the founding of the Mission, the first pound of Assam tea was sent to London.[12] Nathan Brown was hopeful that growing wild in abundance in Sadiya and its vicinity, there were great prospects if proper cultivation of the tea plant could be ensued.[13]The frequent visits of missionaries in the tea tribe inhabited villages and tea gardens indicate these spaces as strongholds of mission presence. In the year 1893, out of a total Church membership of 354 in the Sibsagar district, only 38 were Assamese while the rest comprised of tea tribes.[14] Success of missionary zeal among a large number of tea tribal population in a particular district implied success of the same for the entire district with tea planters too contributing towards its accomplishment by building Churches such

[10] Karotemprel, 1993, p. 520.

[11] Sangma, 1987, p. 57.

[12] *The Whole World Kin*, 1890,p. 124.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Sangma, 1987, p. 59.

as those at Amguri and Teok.[15]Although it is difficult to trace the first tea garden where missionary work actually began, nevertheless, it is possible to state that the Kols were the first community of tea plantation workers to be baptized in 1871 by the American Baptist Missionary E.W. Clark in the Sibsagar 'field'.[16] The kols are imported tea labourers from Chota Nagpur in Central India. The community of Kols from Mackeypur and Dolbogan tea gardens of Sibsagar district can be said to have first experienced the impact of missionary work for whom the main church branches consisted those located in Tiok, Bebejia and Mokrung. After Clark, A.K. Gurney took up the responsibility of conversion in the three stations mentioned above. Even W.E. Witter was another significant Christian missionary who carried out mission work among the tea garden population in the Sibsagar district of Assam.[17]In 1889, C.E. Petrick became a regularly appointed missionary for work at Sibsagar.[18]

Christianity can be linked to colonialism in so far as the veil of humanity was used to justify and conceal inhuman motives and treatment of the colonized such as in the case of the tea plantations of Assam. It was the success among the tea tribes that enforced the significance of Sibsagar as a possible station for the missionaries and preaching was expanded further from the tea gardens and villages to the bazaars too. In the opinion of colonial officials like Col. Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, conversions were necessary to turn Assam into a land of settlement and tea gardens.[19]

Although efforts at affiliating the tea tribes with higher education by missionaries is highly questionable, education at the primary level was mostly confined to the teaching of the gospel, of spreading Christian ideology. Spread of Christianity through education helped in building an intimate connection with the tribal worker who was otherwise placed at a distance in the lower rungs of the civilizational ladder. Begun in 1927, the Don Bosco school-cum-boarding organized by Catholic missionaries in the centres of Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Tezpur played an important role in spreading evangelization among the Adivasis/ the tea garden labour community in Assam.[20]

The tea tribes provided a safe gamble among whom missionaries were able to establish a stronghold given the loss of native roots from their original homeland as a result of displacement. Establishing a stronghold among this group helped missionaries to spread their influence outside this group and preach among those

[15] Ibid.
[16] *The Assam Mission*, 1887, p. 26.
[17] Ibid, pp. 27, 28.
[18] Bora, 2009, p. 19.
[19] Dena, p. 25.
[20] Karotemprel, 1993, p. 156.

who were placed at the lower rungs of the Hindu social ladder such as fishermen, farmers and traders.

After carrying out work among the Mundari speakers in Sibsagar, Lakhimpur too attracted the attention of missionaries as a prospective field with numerous tea gardens in its vicinity. Lakhimpur not just provided opportunities among the tea garden labour community but also for the mission to be carried out among the Garos, Daflas and Miri inhabitants of the nearby hills. Though communication and access to the hills was a major hindrance, most tea gardens, however, were located conveniently in the plains near major towns and well-connected with roads, waterways and railways. Many from the tea garden tribes were already converted Christians before they arrived in the gardens. Being displaced from their roots in their original homeland, weak links of identity with their native land exposed these people as easy targets for evangelism.

The Tea Garden as a 'Field'

Tea gardens were constantly referred to as the *field*.The extensive 'touring' and 'exploration' of the districts by missionaries like Nathan Brown, Oliver Cutter, O.L. Swanson, C.E. Petrick, Joseph Paul and John Firth provides us a glimpse of the anthropological role of the missionaries. The frequency of 'tours', 'explorations' and 'visits' was possible once the plantation as a field could be created. Tours and explorations formed an important aspect of the spread of Christianity and selecting converts. Their tours and explorations involved a process of selecting those populations who were easy and 'suitable' to baptize. In the bargain, the populations who acted as a hindrance to the cause of western religion and ideology were excluded from the religious propaganda of the missionaries, as in the case of high caste Hindus and Muslims.

On most 'tours', missionaries visited villages, markets (bazaars), road-side gatherings, gardens and coolie lines to name few spaces of daily activity of the selected groups of colonized subjects. The penetration of missionaries into such spaces of daily activity turned these spaces into areas of Christian conquest as they preached, sold books, distributed tracts, answered enquiries and baptized a few.[21]The missionary-cum-anthropologist hence, gained "unlimited right of access to data".[22]A subject-ruler dichotomy was realized in populated public spaces such as these through encounters, resistance and acceptance ultimately putting to test the success of the Christian ideology when natives positively reacted to it. Similar to an anthropologist, the "indigenous people were readily accessible to" the missionary too. "Preferential treatment" was received by him/her "not only from other Europeans in position of political power, but also from the subject

[21] Sangma, 1987, p. 146.

[22] Lewis,1973, p. 583.

people themselves" as he/she "was a member of the group in power".[23]Peter Pels compares the study of Christian missionaries as a major area of innovation in the anthropology of colonialism. He calls them 'colonialist indoctrinators' with 'harmless curiosity'.[24]

If preaching through tours, explorations and visits connected the different worlds of the missionary and the potential convert, then a relation between the two contrasting worlds was built also through language.Urged by the necessity to communicate the gospel, missionaries did probably more substantial recording of unknown languages than all anthropologists taken together. As all colonial relationships required a language of command, hence, very often, its dictionary and grammar were provided by missionaries.[25]C. E. Petrick notes that the 'aborigines' from West Bengal, Chota Nagpur and Central India form 'the best object for mission work' clearly indicating that for the best experience of mission work among the 'aborigines', it became utmost important to develop the language widely spoken by the 'aborigines'.[26]Given that a majority of the tea garden immigrants were acquainted with the Hindi language, especially, a large number of Kols, Mundas and Oraons, provisions were made at the Assam Mission Conference for examinations to be conducted in Hindi as well apart from Assamese, Garo, Mikir, Ao Naga, Angami Naga, Tangkhul Naga and Rabha.[27] Members of the Conference deemed it as the duty of the missionaries to outline a course of language study in the prescribed vernacular and to conduct the language examinations in accordance with the rules of the Exam Committee of the American Baptist Mission Union. The pastors of churches which had a large population of tea garden coolies such as Kols and Mundas preached in Hindi.[28]Mundari too is said to have been the vernacular of most of the Church goers and it was the language in which they conducted most of their meetings.[29] In fact, the New Testament was being sold at five annas per copy in Hindi and Mundari too apart from the above-mentioned languages.[30]

Due to the tremendous success of American Baptist missionaries among the tea garden coolies, their mission was termed as the "Cooly Mission".[31] A.K. Gurney points out that from 1876 onwards, the Mission was extremely dependent on the Kols, who were imported tea garden labour from Chota Nagpur as they were

[23] Ibid, pp. 582, 583.
[24] Pels, 1997, p. 171.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Petrick, 1899, p. 68.
[27] The Assam Mission of the American Baptist Missionary Union, 1899, pp. 5,6.
[28] Examples can be cited of Udmari and Balijuri churches in Nowgong district. Ibid, p. 26.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Moore, 1899, p. 22.
[31] Sangma,1987, p. 163.

considered 'a race without caste'.[32]Gurney wrote several letters and reports to the Missionary Magazine detailing the particulars of his work among the Kols, the Assamese and station work in general.[33]Kols and Santhals formed a large number of 'races without caste' (around 10,000) who were brought to the gardens. Sibsagar being a large tea district of Assam, the Mission received more of these converts than any other. The most important churches that constituted a large number of Kols were at Teok, Bebejia and Mokrung. In 1878, Henry Osborne proposed the sustenance of two native preachers in his tea gardens at Dibrugarh.[34]

A sense of permanency to the field was attached under the religious fold through frequency of tours and visits. For example, out of twenty five people who were baptized in the North Lakhimpur district during the year 1895-96, twenty were from the Joyhing tea garden.[35] Preaching and Baptisms eventually carved the way for securing land and compound in the station and clearing trees in the forest for building posts for a bungalow. The 'field visits', thus, not only led to a transformation in the identity of the population but also leading to a transformation of the landscape too. In the words of Firth, touring by missionaries revealed to them 'a region of darkness' in fields such as North Lakhimpur which had a large number of tea garden coolies.[36] The revelation of 'darkness' of a prospective field of work not only coolified the identity of a population with that of the field but also essentialised missionary work through a constructed image of 'darkness' both in physical/racial terms as well as metaphorically revealing ignorance and lack of knowledge. Firth further adds that benevolence to the 'dark', 'heathen' coolie lay in his/her conversion into a subject by proving 'faithful' to the way he/she would be shaped as a 'coolie' under the Mission.[37] The success of the Mission was determined by the number of heathen they could baptize indicating the worthiness of a tour which could successfully bring the intended subject within the realm of an intended politico-religious experience.

So much significance was laid on visits and tours to the heathen stations that if coolies did not turn up at the verandah of the Mission bungalow, then the visits and services are held in their villages in one of their houses. Even though it can be cited as a matter of convenience, it signifies the essence of the missionary 'field' as a space of deep intrusion even into the coolie homes to carry out 'field work'. The deep intrusion of the 'field' also gets reflected in the details produced in numbers about the 'field'. The detailed number of coolies who spoke Hindi, the number that resided in each district, the number of tea gardens in each district,

[32] Gurney, 1887, p. 26
[33] Ibid, p. 27.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Firth, 1896, p. 48.
[36] Ibid, pp. 48, 49.
[37] Ibid.

the number of different tribal groups that constituted the 'tea coolies', how many of them were already converted Christians and who were not - created a vastness of the 'field' reflecting potential, a precision in which data was collected and the missionaries' incredible access to organized information generated by the state through the instrument of the census – an important combination of knowledge creation and domination.

Association with stations such as Teok, Bebejia, Madhopur, Mackeypur etc. are defined in terms of 'trips', 'visits' or 'tours' to the fields and comparisons were made among them in terms of any interesting observations during the visits, trips or tours.[38]Trips, visits and tours to the mission field was not bereft of methodogy and planning as outlined in the chapter titled 'Methods of Mission Work' by M.C. Mason in a mission report.[39] The anthropological way is laid bare by Mason through tests and experiments in the field and in whose understanding-

> *Mission methods are human adaptations….to special conditions. Any method, therefore, must be measured, first by its harmony with the divine principles and second by its adaptation to its special conditions, not forgetting the characteristics and abilities of the man who is to execute the work. A method or man successful in one field might be quite the reverse in another. The question for us therefore, is what are our best methods?*[40]

A systematic outline is laid under the terms 'Guiding Principles' that combined religious preaching with a methodology beginning with preaching, persuasion, charities, creating signs for confirmation, teaching and building character.[41] In the case of 'Application of Principles', united effort was to be followed by division of labour and knowing one's field under which emphasis was laid on acquainting oneself with the field, knowing the habits, customs, beliefs, prejudices and labours of the people.[42] Travel was considered a beneficial change for the missionary from office and class-room work.[43] Missionary work, according to Mason is best realized when 'the roaming preacher does a good work clearing the way, surveying the field and in selecting sites'.[44]Work that was carried out by missionaries among different populations, villages or tea gardens, was reported in detail in the form of papers that were published in journals and magazines such as Report on the Assam Mission, *Orunodoi*, Baptist Missionary Magazine and

[38] Gurney, 1887, p. 28.
[39] Mason, 1887, p. 96.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, pp. 96-102.
[42] Ibid, p. 102.
[43] Ibid, p. 104.
[44] Ibid.

Missionary Conference Reports in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The way data is organized and compartmentalized after a field visit, similarly, one of the final tasks for the missionaries was to organize 'the Assamese and Kols' into Churches.[45]

Interlinking the Missionary-Anthropologist and the Colonialist

One of the main reasons for missionary interest among the tea tribes of Assam was determined by missionaries' own interests in tea gardens. Either some like Reverend Charles Dowding were heavy investors in tea plantations or some like Reverend Henry Osborne were themselves owners of tea gardens. At many instances, where missionaries embarked on preaching, they ended up securing land for themselves and building bungalows to preach. Apart from preaching, the vast availability of the 'primitive'/the 'uncivilized' in the form of the newly arrived numerous tea tribes in Assam provided prospects of improving their career and personal mobility in the social ladder too. Working among 'the wild', 'the primitive' and 'the uncivilized' was meant to expose the masculine, paternal and courageous attributes of missionaries thus, placing missionaries in the same platform as the colonizers. Assam opened up opportunities for those for whom all avenues of self-improvement seemed bleak back home. Concern about their own future was very much reflected in the words of missionaries like O.L. Swanson-

> *...I became more and more concerned about my future...Pastor Peterson and other friends encouraged me to consider the possibility of full time Christian service...I was not educated, I had no talents, I was successful in business and must not leave it, and when all else failed the tempter, I was confronted with the compromise of doing what I could in the church, but leave the idea of the gospel ministry alone. But the Holy Spirit did not cease to remind me of the fact that I must do the will of God.*[46]

Invoking "the will of God" justified the evangelical work undertaken by missionaries like Swanson as a natural phenomenon with those like Swanson being naturally the 'chosen one' to spread the message of the Lord. There was a new found glory, pride and dignity at being referred to as the "sahib"[47] by the locals. Preaching elevated their stature as few individuals like them were now responsible for the life and future of a large number of subject population. Pride was derived at being treated like the "absolute monarch".[48] Personal convenience was one of the important factors while pursuing evangelism in the colony with a good communication system as mentioned earlier. Their preference for areas

[45] Ibid, p. 116.
[46] Swanson,1944, p. 24.
[47] Ibid, p. 48.
[48] Ibid, p. 52.

which were well administered by the British determined their choice of tea coolies as preferred subjects who could be found in and around "semi-civilized"[49] territories of the tea garden.

Mission work among the tea garden labour community received mixed reactions from planters. While some welcomed the spread of Christianity among the coolie population in the gardens, others expressed vehement opposition to the same. In plantations where Christian doctrines were allowed to be preached, missionaries believed that Christianity worked in favour of the planters as it contributed towards curbing labour unrest or any kind of opposition to the established hierarchy in the plantations. Christian coolies"took no active part in...demonstrations, but were loyal to their employers and reasonable in their demands."[50] The rigid time-work-discipline routine which workers were forced to follow, not just played to the advantage of the smooth workings of the plantation but also in the words of a Christian missionary : "once accustomed to a strict discipline the worker (found) it easier to adapt himself to the demands of his Christian faith and conduct too."[51]

Just like anthropologists' engagement with field work was derived "from the subjugation by his own government of the people he was studying",[52] similarly, a Christian missionary's engagement with the natives was derived from a similar position of subjugation of the latter by the government in power that he was a part of. A validity was derived from a shared position of power that also enabled missionary activities. Preaching was considered among the tea tribes, especially in the gardens, to prevent their minds from plotting evil against those who oppressed them. Christianity provided a channel to vent out their anger, frustration, dissatisfaction or the breeding of revolutionary thought against the planter-colonizer nexus. Although Christianity helped these people to build their lives around the cult of faith, regain a lost sense of self-respect and find solace in their service to Christ, Christianity did not really prevent them from the evils of colonialism. An oppressive structure provided significance to 'humanitarian' projects and the survival of the latter was very much dependent on the former. No matter how great a Christian missionary's aversion to the colonial system, just like an anthropologist, he too was unable to function outside its realm. It was not easy for him/her to remain in a colony without participating in the power and privileges of the dominant group.[53]

Religion, thus, acted as an important agent in the production of loyal subjects to colonial capitalist imperatives. 'Peace', therefore, was believed could prevail in

[49] Ibid, p. 64.
[50] Ibid, p. 149.
[51] Stadler &Karotemprel, 1980, p. 69.
[52] Lewis,1973, pp. 582, 583.
[53] Lewis, 1973, p. 583.

the colony if all the 'heathen' were Christianized – peace as a necessity clearly from the colonial point of view.

In some cases, missionaries contributed towards organizing the tea garden labourers into communities of tribes, districts of origin and gathering general information regarding their life in Assam in order to prevent labourers from escaping the garden premises into the vast wild expanse of Assam under the veil of extending them 'pastoral care'. Missionaries, thus, helped planters better manage their labour force, prevent them from intermingling with locals outside the premises of the garden and maintain the essence of the colonially created plantation as a 'garden', as a civilized territory and as a paradise. For such a purpose, Fr. Carbery in a compilation titled *Missionary work among the Tea Garden Coolies and Settlers in Assam*, detailed information concerning emigration, tea plantations, tea tribal colonies in Assam, their living and working conditions.[54] Others like Fr. Rudolf Fontaine, brought together scattered populations of tea garden workers and arranged them into small settlements in the vicinity of the tea gardens.[55] These settlements formed a prelude to villages inhabited by tea tribes which also ensured a steady supply of labour to the planters. Whether it was the hill population who were prevented from intermingling with the plain population or the tea tribes prevented from being 'lost' in the vast Assam plains, an important link in all of this can be traced to the interests of the tea industry. The protection of the tea industry was a vital factor in determining colonial and evangelical policies in dealing with a varied population in the North East for maintaining peace, law and order for a smooth functioning of the former.

Dowding's Letters

If Christianity in the North East helped cater to the interests of the fertile agricultural plain tracts and particularly, the sustenance of the tea industry, then an examination of a primary text such as *Tea Garden Coolies in Assam- A Letter by the Hon'ble J. Buckingham, C.I.E., replying to a communication on the Subject which appeared in "The Indian Churchman". With Introduction and an answer by the Rev. Charles Dowding*set in the year 1894 would help in a deeper understanding of missionaries' perception about the colonial functioning of tea plantations and treatment of its coolie inhabitants in Assam.

The significance of the text lies in the fact that it is a lengthy tract containing back-and-forth correspondence between a number of men-of-opinion ranging from government officials like J. Buckingham, planters, civil surgeons and those of the clergy such as Rev. Charles Dowding. The newspaper that provided the refurbishment of their opinions was *The Indian Churchman*. I have chosen this

[54] Karotemprel, 1993, p. 155.

[55] Ibid, p. 399.

text for review in order to draw insights into the views of individuals like Charles Dowding, a Christian missionary, who was situated outside the confines of the territorial space of the tea 'garden' regarding the idea of the tea garden and its coolie inhabitants.

If I am to quote Satadru Sen-

> *For an imperial state, a frontier –i.e., a politically empty or exempted space - has a certain ideological value : it facilitates various kinds of escape, experimentation, differentiation and fantasy [emphasis in italics are mine]…a realm beyond the nation and yet located within its claimed boundaries.*[56]

The tea garden within this 'frontier' had to be compatible with the notion of empire where the untamed are tamed for the benefits of empire and the territory of the tea garden turned into a museum for an exhibition of the 'exotic' and the 'wild' quite similar to M.V. Portman's attempts at trying to reduce the Jarawas in the Andamans to the status of animals in a forest reserve in the 1890s[57] thus creating a group of people who represented the inverse ratio of the modern[58], making them attractive enough to populate a landscape (Assam) similar to their image- 'jungly' and 'primitive'. The idea surrounding the 'primitive',' the 'jungly', the 'wild east' in the north eastern region of the sub - continent just got intensified in the confines of the colonial tea garden especially when the 'primitive' was placed in the same territorial space as the 'progressive' and the 'modern'[59].

The well-being of the coolie as a crucial subject of back and forth correspondence between Charles Dowding, a Christian missionary and various other men-of-opinion seemed more like a means of establishing their own positions of reason and power by choosing an object of unreason - the tea garden coolie. He/she has been cited as an object of unreason/irrationality because the coolie as in this text, is known by the contractor who supplied him/her, the planter who ruled over him/her, the Christian missionary and the various correspondents who discussed over him/her, the garden that he/she lived in and the region that he/she hailed from but there is no information coming from the coolie himself/herself. Thus, the identity of each of the above is entrenched upon a body provided by the coolie disallowing the coolie to exist on one's own. He/she is perhaps assumed not to possess the freedom and the reasoning/thinking potential to identify himself/herself but is identified by others who recognize 'the coolie'. This very capacity to think and

[56] Dowding, 1894, p. 8.

[57] Sen,p. 7.

[58] Here, the term 'modern' refers to a comparative positioning of a group of people who constructed their superiority by identifying the non-progressive and backward nature of an 'other' and the identified 'other' representing the past of a people who consider themselves progressive and technologically advanced compared to the 'other' in 'a' present.

[59] The 'progressive' and the 'modern' implied the white planters.

be able to identify the 'self' over the 'other' prepared the imperialists as distinctly different from indigenous society.

While the torchbearers of empire are debating amongst themselves, there is no space left for the native/indigenous response with the entire series of correspondence compiled primarily for British readership – here a crucial role played by print culture, for example, newspapers like *The Indian Churchman* which gave voice to opinions of those in authority and in making authority be heard. This equalled a written stamp on the non-malleability on the position of those who wish to be heard because to be heard also meant an acknowledgment and legitimization of the existence of the dominant and the influential through writing about them. Without a dismissal, the 'experts' like Dowding might have sought a privileged location among the natives from a perspective of the metropole, the civilized and the centre which makes it pertinent to think about the history of the coolie in the modern state where he/ she is placed in a geographical location far from the metropole and the centre.

The significance of state sponsored newspapers like *The Indian Churchman* can also be gauged from the fact that they enabled a colonial, 'white' journey into the realm of the 'dark', the unknown and the exotic. Prevalence of sheer anonymity of knowledge about themselves-

> *I saw a court Babu recently trying to find out by question from some score or more of people , where their homes were, that they might know where they were to be sent. They were asked what was the name of the Railway Station nearest their home. "who knows!" some replied. "How far is it from the Railway Station to your home?" "Who knows – ten kos". "How many days to do that Journey?- "eight days or six days…"*[60]

made memory look blurred and uncertain often leading to an erasure of knowledge about oneself and therefore relegating such individuals to the thin margin between remembering and forgetting. Such blurring of memory as evidence from a text from the colonial era such as this can be seen as an attempt to deprive the migrant labouring community of a sense of history, to 'know' about themselves and what better way to show such fading of memory when it comes from the coolies' themselves as if to legitimize a 'truth' by Dowding by adhering to his European Enlightenment roots of proving the 'truth' through evidence provided by the coolies themselves.

The real motive could have possibly been to establish the fact that the superiority of the European body with knowledge in its possession can best understand a

[60] Dowding, 1894, p. 61.

native body as though the very act of 'thinking' is completely a domain of the whites. Dowding himself says-

> *I am myself, a small shareholder in a very large tea concern. This greatly quickens [...] my interest in the subject.*[61]

One is left to wonder whether Dowding would be really concerned with the death rates of the coolies if he did not possess any shares in the industry? Being a shareholder meant that he equally participated in the entrenchment of the empire and his concern over the death rates was to probably open the eyes of the colonists to the fact that increase in death rates also meant a defeat in the logic of empire as it showed nothing but a reduction in the number of subjects.

By throwing light upon the motives of Christian missionaries like Dowding who took interest in native matters, one thing seems clear that Dowding does not speak against colonization anywhere in the text. He only seems concerned over the death rates. Dowding's references to the facts produced by the Sanitary Commisioner of Assam and the Chief Commissioner- both government officials, underlined the necessity to substantiate the arguments put forward by him.[62] Similar examples can be cited from other regions such as Chotanagpur where Christian missionaries like Father Constant Lievens, although sided with the tribals in helping them fight court cases against their oppressors, at the same time, he was very careful not to alienate the British government[63].

The discussion over the death rate of the migrant tea labouring community makes it pertinent for us to talk about the tea 'garden' and its significance as part of the empire. This showed an urgency on the part of the collaborators of empire such as Dowding to keep the romantic aspect of the 'garden' alive, to keep a past alive which was not possible if the coolies kept dying. Hence, the need to do away with the perils of modern elements like capitalism to preserve a romantic past - a pre-modern nostalgic past of the colonizers themselves which they seemed to have lost in the present. Romanticisation of this past involved in keeping the coolies in a romantic state of decay but not upto the extent of their perish.

When we are discussing about Charles Dowding, a Christian missionary and his sympathetic stance towards the coolies, it is important to build a connection between religion and empire which attaches the notion of morality in the way capital is extracted, hence, emphasizing the moral aspect of obtaining profit. Morality provides a kind of legitimization to the goals of the empire, all the more

[61] Ibid, p. iv.
[62] Ibid, p. 2.
[63] Sinha, 2010, p. 17.

so, if it can successfully bring the subjects too under the sphere of domination and exploitation, thus lending a moral legitimation to their exploitation. However, the very lack of consideration for the migrant labourers' well-being had the tendency of turning colonial rule as inhuman, immoral and illogical , "…nothing less than a blot on the Administration, and a discredit to Englishmen."[64]. Colonialism is marked as an era of violence that completely drained the humanitarian aspect out of such a venture. It also endangered the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized. In order to rectify the saturation of such a situation, colonialism had to penetrate the lives of the subjects in a more subtle, non-aggressive manner. Here, religion seemed like a prospective criterion that could further the task of colonialism.[65]Therefore, Dowding attempts at making the authorities as well as men of the Company realize the 'illegitimacy' of such a rule that does not follow the norms of religion and morality as he laments-

> *...we might also sin through becoming the tools of a system.*[66]

Or for another instance-

> *...a great and honourable profession, such as that of the lawyer, and that of the clergy, has again and again, arrived at a point, where it stood convicted, by the outraged conscience of its fellows of the most inhuman injustice, harshness, cruelty, greed, ambition; so, a propertied class has before now come to build up its stability in the most monstrous oppression.*[67]

Dowding's sympathetic approach towards the coolies lent a personal and intimate edge to the understanding of his relationship with them which would, otherwise, jeopardize the task of subjugation. Such sympathy had the tendency to camouflage a relationship of domination governed along the lines of the family[68]- with a personal and intimate side to it. S. Endle, another missionary from Assam attempts at bringing the reader's attention to the act of the recruiting agents who-

> *send up sometimes the father of a family, with perhaps one grown-up son and daughter, the wife and other children remaining behind. Many obvious evils follow from this vicious system, the father perhaps forming new (i.e., criminal) ties in his new home, and the deserted mother perhaps doing the same.*[69]

[64] Dowding, 1894, p. 25.

[65] Lewis, 1973, p. 581.

[66] Dowding, 1894,p. v.

[67] Ibid,p. v.

[68] The family forming the basis of dominance, order and discipline through the establishment of personal, intimate relationship between members such as the father-the head of the family vested with authority and the rest of the family members vested with the duty of obedience and discipline.

[69] Dowding, 1894,p. 37.

From the perspective of someone devoted to the Church, forming new ties were termed as criminal because it defied the notion of the family and its moral boundaries. New families were formed on immoral grounds in the new land. Therefore, whatever did not suit Christian and European notions of morality were viewed as 'immoral', 'criminal' and 'illegal'-

> *But if in future, recruiters of labourers can be prevailed upon to avoid sending up isolated members of families, and will, in particular, take care not to separate husband from wife, and parents from their children, then no small service will be done to a cause which we all have at heart, that of morality and righteousness.*[70]

By calling the Church as the "natural protector of the weak"[71], the Church's position of authority and the position of the weak - both are assumed to be pre-given and thus, natural. To be called the 'natural protector' also meant the wiping out of contestation to the Church's position of power. Therefore, it seemed important to create categorization of those who are being ruled under the terms 'weak', 'poor' and 'jungly' in order to erase any potential threat to its seat of authority. Discussing issues related to the natives within a religious framework tended to impose a sanction of legality, morality and subjugation along with instilling a sense of authority and dominance upon the forbearers of religion when they talked about a group of people, thereby, appointing themselves in the seat of authority while the coolie becoming the site of contest for the harbingers of religion and those of capitalist enterprises for the conquest of a 'pre-modern' people.

Even when Dowding refers to the migrant tea garden laboring community as 'coolies', through the usage of such pre-given categories, he is not really contributing in reducing the social difference between the subject and himself even when he talks in favour of the former and hence, as a consequence only further entrenching such pre-given categories and naturalizing them.

Dominance, in the words of Franck Poupeau, "…is an illegitimate exercise of power by a fraction of the population which masks particular interests under the general interests, the critical project then linked to an emancipatory interest."[72] I quote Poupeau here because the power of the speaker (Dowding) is established not just by what he/she says but because those to whom it is conveyed (the British colonial audience) recognize them as possessing the authority to say it or rather, recognize the institution through them which gives them the right to say it.[73]

[70] Ibid, p. 38.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Poupeau, 2005,p. 95.

[73] In this context, the institution being the Church.

This also brings us to an interesting observation by Satadru Sen in the context of the aborigines of Andamans, for whom "to discipline the drinking habits and sexual habits of tribals meant mapping and patrolling the zone of exclusion" of natives from the realm of authority[74] with administrators and missionaries like Dowding imagining the 'savages' as normatively free and therefore, patrolling this freedom.

Conclusion

The anthropological sway is very much reflected in the travel writings, reports or visits penned down and published by Christian missionaries as they encountered new cultures and ways of life in the colonies. The missionary-cum-anthropologist struck a balance and a negotiation between primitivity and civilisation. Missionaries clearly performed a political role through textual representation of native society. In order to avoid colonial struggle, anthropological knowledge and planning became a part of colonial strategy of rule which also suited missionary approach towards their dealings with a colonized population. Their writings and representations became sites of struggle which got produced in the form of texts, archives and reports as a result of encounter with a section of population who represented living specimens of the missionaries' own romanticized, utopian, uncivilized, exotic past.The exotic was turned into a 'field' of numbers to be observed, worked with or worked upon that also paved the way to visual bias. The practical visits to the field get translated into documentation evidence from the missionary anthropologist's perspective in the form of autobiographies, travelogues or reports. Missionaries thus, engaged in a simultaneous process of religious preaching and information gathering and producing which in turn contributed towards the construction of what the idea of a 'tea garden coolie' waslike and what it ought to be like through religious preaching. Colonialism was much more than official administration. It can be said to be an outcome of complex practical interactions.

Through the examination of a primary text such as Dowding's letter not only has one been able to establish a history of generals, i.e., the native 'others' through the perspective of a 'particular' (Dowding), but one is also able to gain an insight into the general world of the 'particular' (his religion, race, nationality) from where these 'particulars' derive their authority to talk on behalf of the natives. Second, it has brought to focus the non-monolithic identity of the colonizer vested not just in the authority of the governmental officials or the planters but also in the 'moral', 'humanizing' endeavours of the disciples of religion such as Charles Dowding. The tea garden and the coolies within it become sites of realizing the relative supremacy of those who speak about them or discuss what ought to be done about them. The absence of voice of the subjects themselves who lived in the

[74] Sen, p. 4.

tea plantations of Assam as is revealed from a text such as this, makes one come to the deduction that those situated outside the territorial confines of the tea garden played a major role in deducing ideas about its inhabitants and where they ought to be placed in the social ladder depriving any sort of agency to natives to define themselves and this is precisely what defines the logic of a colonial tea 'garden' in Assam - a product of modernity sheltering the 'pre-modern'.

As mentioned earlier, the politics of power can function through multiple identities apart from the one that seems more visible. As anthropology itself emerged as a discipline to further colonial endeavours through information gathering and knowledge dissemination, the identity of a Christian missionary as an anthropologist as well as a colonizer cannot be seen in disjunction from each other and it is this idea of multiplicity that this essay attempts to convey.

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Understanding Conflict in Manipur: A Socio-Historical Perspective

Veronica Khangchian[1]

Abstract

This paper intends to trace conflicts in Manipur that were prevalent during the pre-colonial (1759-1826) and colonial period (1891-1947). The numerous conflicts in Manipur where the people directed their grievances or hostility against a 'common enemy', also eventually manifested itself into violence and enmity amongst tribes and communities. In the beginning, the conflict was between the people of Manipur and its neighbouring state, Burma (Myanmar) which resulted in bringing the kingdom of Manipur under the Burmese rule for seven years (1819-1825) which is known in Manipur's history as, 'Seven Years Devastation'.The aftermath of this war with the court of Ava (Myanmar) was followed by even more uprisings and revolts against the colonial power. After the defeat of the Manipuris in the Anglo-Manipur war of 1891, an administrative system known as the 'Native Rule' started and the administration of Manipur was controlled through a British representative. The seeds of non-cooperation being sown between tribes;the beginning of hill-valley divide;along with other factors, the past conflicts provide us 'background knowledge' for understanding complex contemporary ethnic relations in Manipur.

Historical Background of Conflict

With the beginning of the involvement of external powers (Burmese and British) in the politics of Manipur, political consciousness which gradually developed amongst the people of the State particularly in response to the oppressive British policies turned significantly into ethnic conflicts over time.The ethnic identity thus recognised, gradually gave way to conflict among the various communities, against a backdrop of significant poverty and inequalities, dramatically influencing the economy and society. (Khangchian, 2017). In Manipur, almost all the communities or tribes have their 'armed outfits' with their respective demands as well as overlapping goals.In contemporary Manipur, ethnicity and consequently 'nationality' became the 'master identity' in the context of the various communities particularly the Nagas, Meiteis and the Kukis. Neither religion nor race nor

[1]Veronica Khangchian (verokarujiliu@gmail.com) Assistant Professor at Department of Conflict Management and Peace Initiative at Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong

class is exclusively relevant to nation formation in the context of Manipur and that the minimum condition for a nation to emerge and exist are only 'common homeland' (ibid: 319). In this context, Eriksen's (1993), argument of looking at the majority of nationalisms as ethnic in character whose ethnic identification claims a collective historical destiny for the polity and/or its ethnically defined members proves relevant.

Ethnicity is interactional, a product of conquest, colonization and immigration and the consequent disengagement between culture and territory (Oommen; 1997).This can be seen in the history of Manipur where external powers or factors have played an important role; the Burmese and the British in handling the affairs of the state.British policies indeed laid the foundation of ethnic conflicts in the post-colonial Manipur who were otherwise more concerned about issues such as inter-village feuds.

The well-documented period of history of Manipur starts from the middle of the 18th century with the entry of the British in the politics of Manipur. It re-shaped the Manipuri society through its journey to the modern age. At the outset, the Raja Jai Singh *alias* Bhagyachandra(1759-98) invited the British by entering into alliance at Chittagong in 1972, primarily for help in their fight against the neighbouring Burmese kingdom, which had become very powerful and was threatening them. (Sharma, 2000). Historically, the state retained its independent political identity well after the British India had consolidated its position in the region. Manipur had consistently maintained a belligerent approach towards Myanmar (Ava). The resultant wars highlighted plunder, devastation of the land and dissemination of the population. The first recorded instance of armed Burmese incursions and wars dates back to 1562 and continued well up to the early part of the 19th century (Gopalakrishna, 1995).

From the middle of the 18th century onwards the history of Manipur is marked with palace intrigues, treachery and deceit due to greed and ambitiousness of the members of the ruling family to capture the throne. Frequent internal domestic quarrels in the Manipur royal family gradually weakened the strength of the kingdom. It was rendered vulnerable to the attacks by the Burmese who were seeking an opportunity to avenge their defeat during the regime of Garib Nawaz (1909-48) (Sharma opcit, 2000). Mackenzie writes: "The early history of Manipur was barbarous to the extreme. It was constantly marked by constant raids of the Manipuris into Burma and of Burmese into Manipur, but also by internal wars of the most savaged and revolting type, in which sons murdered fathers and brothers murdered brothers, without a single trait of heroism to relieve the dark scene of blood and treachery" (Mackenzie,1884,2001).

The period between 1754 and 1824 saw the state entrapped in power struggle.

The loosening of Manipur's control over Imphal valley and the surrounding hilly periphery along with the decline of the Ahoms in the Brahmaputra valley became the threshold point in the regional activity. It signaled the significance of intervention and the role of extra regional powers. This transformed the traditional relationship and equations and introduced elements that encouraged potential destabilization tendencies. Revival of Ava-Burma's forward policy in 1750s was important as this power began to expand southwards to incorporate with the Arakan and the coastal regions and then towards the west in Manipur. They penetrated Imphal valley and devastated the territory. This expansion coincides with the British East India Company expansion in the Indian sub-continent. (Gopalakrishna, 1995). It was obvious that the British were ambitious to promote their influence and control wider areas of the sub-continent. They were keen in the northeast region first, to use the land route through this region for trade with China and secondly, to curb the increasing influence of the Burmese who had intruded into a large area of Assam and were challenging the supremacy of the British regime (Sharma ,2000). The frequent war of attrition between Manipur and Burma and the former seeking the company's assistance to repel were all-conducive for the power in the west to establish its presence in this part of the region. The Burmese expansion in the beginning of the 19th century, the internecine power struggle, decline of the Ahoms in Assam Valley and the inability of Manipur to check the Myanmar expansion all combined to give prominence to the destabilization tendencies in the region.

In 1819, the Burmese force invaded and occupied Manipur. A powerful Burmese army under the command of General MingiMahaBandula routed, defeated and ravaged the Manipuris forcing King Margit Singh and his supporters to flee to Cachar. A large portion of the population after having been vanquished were unable to bear the torture and harassment by foreign invaders fled to Cachar, marking the dark period in the history of this once tiny independent kingdom (Tarapot,2003). During this period the history, the population of Manipur was reduced to less than half due to fleeing or massacre of people by the Burmese forces. In such invasion the Burmese forces used to capture people from Manipur and take them to Burmese territory and employ them as labor force. The Burmese forces were notorious for brutality and massacre of civil population of their enemies during their invasion. They appear to be following an old Burmese saying, "*Chupenkukchungoumachane*", which means, when you cut Chupen (a wild thorny plant), never leave the stem behind. The Burmese had also branded the Manipuri forces equally notorious in this regard. (Sharma,2000).

From 1819 to 1825 was the period of devastation. During this period the Burmese also invaded the various parts of the northeast and put their puppet ruler at the throne of Manipur, bringing the kingdom under their rule for seven years (1819-1825), which came to be known in Manipur's history as 'seven years devastation'

(*chahitaretkhuntakpa*in Manipuri) (Tarapot,2003). The Burmese then entered Assam and further invaded Cachar posing a serious threat to the British paramountcy in the northeast region. Such widespread invasions by the Burmese in this area forced the British to directly involved themselves and encounter the advancing Burmese forces. The westward expansion also involved the inhabitants of the hill and the mountain section of the region that supported one or the other contenders. It was this situation that introduced the European element in the regional politics. (Gopalakrishna, 1995)

Finally, in 1825, a Manipuri prince Gambhir Singh supported by the British forces pushed out the Burmese forces from Imphal and further chased them to vacate Kabow valley (highland valley in northern Burma (Myanmar), Western Sagaing division). According to historical account, the British found that Prince Gambhir Singh, the youngest son of Raja Bhagyachandra (Jai Singh) was bold, brave and a courageous fighter who could prove useful to them against the Burmese. They decided to give him the support to raise a contingent of army at Sylhet. (Sharma, 2000). As Burmese decided to strengthen its grip, more reinforcements arrived in Manipur sometime in November 1820. While the state was in turmoil and chaos with Burmese forces ransacking, ravaging and devastating the country, Ghambir Singh with whom the British government had negotiated an agreement, raised among his supporters a body of 500 men which was raised to 2000 in 1825. They contributed to the British troops in driving out the Burmese forces from Cachar. It was paid, accounted and supplied with ammunition by the British government. (Mackenzie,1884,2001). Ghambhir Singh marched from Sylhet on 17th May 1825 accompanied by British officer Lieutenant Pemberton and reached western limits of the valley of Manipur on the 10th June 1825. By then, the Burmese forces had fled from the valley and thus Manipur territory was retrieved from the Burmese possession. Later in a second campaign during December 1825 and January 1826, Gambhir Singh with the help of the British forces pushed out Burmese from the Kabow valley also (Sharma, 2000).

The British forces advanced further, occupied Yandaboo only 25 kms from Ava, the capital of Burma. As the chances of defense diminished, the war came to a close by the treaty of Yandaboo signed on 24th February 1826. Under the treaty the British and the Burmese agreed for 'perpetual peace and friendship', with the king of Ava (Burma) renouncing "all claims upon and will abstain from all future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies and also with the continuous petty states of Cachar and Jaintia'". (Tarapot,2003). The treaty also recognized Gambhir Singh as Maharaja of Manipur. With this treaty the open conflict between Manipur and Burma ended for all times to come.

The British Influence

After freedom from the Burmese possession, although Manipur remained an independent state, it functioned under stiflingBritish influence, which they exercised through their excessive 'Political Agents'. According to the statistical account of Manipur by a former British official, Robert Brown, on the conclusion of the Burmese war by the treaty of the Yandaboo in 1826, Manipur was declared independent. Thus Manipur restored her independent kingdom after the Yandaboo treaty. (Tarapot, 2003).

The British influence and interference is evident from the manner in which the British made over vast forest area of Kabow valley to the Burmese king of Ava in 1834, without obtaining consent of Raja Gambhir Singh. The Kabow valley, a rich agricultural tract lying between the present eastern border of Manipur and the Chindwin (Ningthee) river, or more narrowly defined 1200sq. km strip of territory, was the principal bone of contention between Manipuri rulers and the court of Ava, having been with Manipur of and on from the first half of the 15th century. (Verghese, 1996). The British kept their imperial interest foremost while sacrificing Kabow valley in favor of the Burmese king. They were primarily guided by the desire to avoid any future war with Burma and second they intended to seek favor from the Burmese government to allow them use their sea-port at Pegu and Shapuree. In lieu of this loss, the Raja of Manipur was given a monthly "stipend" by the British (Verghese, 1996). The Kabow valley which was considered as the traditional and national frontier and by location in the predominantly hill and mountain region was economically very important and this loss of the valley was etched in the psyche of the population of Manipur. This then forms one of the repeated claims of the insurgents in Manipur today. (Gopalakrishna, 1995).

Till the effective British consolidation of the Northeastern region was achieved, Manipur was supervising the intermediary territories occupied by the Naga Confederation of Tribes. Right from the early part of the 1870s, colonial administration gradually extended their political control and administration and this was completed with the annexation of upper Burma in 1889. This coincided with the worsening of relations between British India and Manipur. This formally led to the Anglo Manipur war of 1891. (Gopalakrishna, 1995). The Manipuris lost the two successive battles of Thoubal on 8th April 1891 and the final battle at Khongjom on 26th April 1891. Further, on 26th April 1891, the British forces reached Imphal and on 27th April 1891 morning, the flag of the Raja of Manipur was pulled down from Kangla fort and the Union flag was hoisted. The Kangla fort was then occupied by the British forces and was converted into a British cantonment. In this way the British colonial regime annexed Manipur. The independence and sovereignty of Manipur was lost forever and it became a part of the British colonial rule.

After annexation, the British decided to keep Manipur in the fold of their control in the form of an administrative system known as the 'Native Rule'. Under it, a suitable king was placed on the throne with limited powers and the administration controlled through the British representation.

Uprisings During British 'Native Rule'

Revolts and rebellions have taken place in Manipur in the 20th century at almost regular intervals. Such anti-British tribal uprisings, like the Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919), the Zeliangrong Naga Uprising (1930-32) and the anti-feudal and anti-monopolist *Nupilan*, the great women's agitation of the 1939-40 broke out in the colonial period. (Kabui, 1984).

The period (1891-1907) was well utilized for introducing several changes in the form of administrative reforms in the state. During this period, the system of 'Lallup', under which every adult male of the state was required to work for the king for ten days every month without remuneration, was abolished (Sharma, 2000). Despite the abolition of slavery or 'Lallup' system, the British rule was unwelcomed and the people were hostile to it in the beginning. (Tarapot, 2003)

Raja Churachand was handed over the charge of the state on May 1907. A new system of rule was introduced by the British government in which the Raja was made the president of Manipur Durbar consisting of the other members including a British officer to function as Vice president. The administration was carried out mainly by the 'Manipur State Durbar' (MSD) formed under the 'Rules for the General Administration of the State' (RFGAS). In a strategic move, the administration of the hills of Manipur inhabited by the Naga, Kuki and other tribes was separated from the valley and was kept under the charge of the Vice President of Darbar leaving little scope for Raja to interfere in its administration. This new arrangement was made with reasoning that the people of the hill tribes were different from the valley-based Manipuris and were having entirely different customs and languages. This change in the administrative system of Manipur created a deep-rooted alienation between the people of valley and the hills which widened with the passage of time (Sharma, 2000). Placing of hill and valley under different sections of the RFGAS thus created a chasm among its inhabitants after the state came under the native rule.

The Kuki Immigration

The Kukis and the Nagas of Manipur share a bloody history of ethnic conflict, reaching deep into the British colonial era, and beyond. The animus was widely manifested through the 1990s (1992-1997), when over 1,000 people were killed in Kuki-Naga clashes in the Hill Districts of the state. The Nagas believed that they had the right over the land, as they were the original settlers in the Manipur

Hills, while the Kukis migrated into the region after they were driven out from Myanmar's Chin Hills, their ancestral land, in the 19th century. Many a time in the past, these conflicts have been played out on the State's highways, affecting thousands of people. The economic blockade has, in fact, become part of the 'culture' of the State.(Khangchian, 2011)

The Kuki exodus and their settlement in Manipur, North Cachar Hills and Naga Hills was a phenomenon of great economic, social and political importance in the nineteenth century. The kukis moved into the Naga areas in the after the British conquest. There were a large number of Kuki raids on the Naga villages leading to death and destruction. But the British political agents and the Maharaja of Manipur or his Darbar followed a policy of non-interference, a biased policy of neutrality toward the Naga Kuki feuds. Taking advantage of this attitude of neutrality, the Kukis moved into and established many villages in Manipur Hills before their rebellion.This policy of leniency and accommodation followed by the British in the nineteenth century was contrary to the aggressive policy followed by them towards the Nagas and Lushais (Mizos) as also towards the Kamhao and Paite and their chiefs (Kamei, 2004).

The problem was that of land which was vast and used by both Nagas and the Kukis, but the Kuki chiefs sent out many small batches of immigrants in different villages of the Nagas, in whose vicinity they established small settlements which were given recognition by the state authorities. As long as there were enough land, there was no problem, but the organized Kuki penetration caused the alienation of the Naga community land- which was greatly resented by the Nagas (Kamei, 2004). During that time, there was no tribal solidarity of the Zeliangrong people nor was there organized resistance. The Zeliangrong villages were more concerned with inter-village feuds than resisting the Kuki immigration, though there was a feeling of apathy towards the Kukis.

The Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919)

The Kuki Rebellion was a widely studied historical event both by the British official writers and the historians including the scholars of the country. Colonel L.W Shakespeare's *A History of the Assam Rifles* (1929) gives the account of the campaign against the rebels. ColonelShakespeare was the Deputy inspector General of the Assam rifles and was a participant in the Kuki punitive measures which were regarded as part of the World War 1. Sir Robert Reid's History of the Frontier areas bordering Assam (1883-1941) gives a comprehensive picture of the political and administrative aspects of the rebellion including the inquiry report of Dr. J.H Hutton who was appointed to examine why the Kukis rebelled. In the post-independence period, historians like J. Roy, R.K Jhalajit Singh and R.K Sanahal Singh deal with the event as anti-British and an imperial movement. An

attempt is made by K. Kipgen in his 'ThadouKukis, their history and culture', to give a historical interpretation of the Kuki rebellion.

The Kuki rebellion is undoubtedly a great watershed in the history of Manipur. Though short-lived, it successfully exposed the shallowness of the British control over the hill territory of Manipur. Prompted by the urgency of the First World War, the state authority donated Rs, 13,400 as war loan. In addition to this the Manipur labour corps was raised and 2000 Nagas and Kukis were recruited and sent much against their will to France in May, 1917. They were sent as laborers for digging trenches, carrying loads and building base camps. The proximate cause of the rebellion was the objection of the Kuki chief in allowing their subjects to be sent to war fronts with the labor corps, which had been raised earlier. Driven by the urgency of the task, Higgins, the Political Agent, proceeded to the hills in September 1917 to meet a deputation of chiefs declined to give coolies, but offered to give money instead. (Lal Dena, 1991) Frustrated with the outcome of the meeting, Higgins flatly told the chiefs that they had to either supply recruits within a fixed period or to submit to punishment. As a challenge to this stern warning, Ngulkhup, chief of Mombi, sent around message the Kuki inhabiting villages that if they sent coolies their village would be burned and their women and children be killed. Arrogant as he was, Higgins took this as an issue of prestige and proceeded to Mombi to punish the reluctant chief on 17th October 1917. On failure to arrest the chief he burned the village to the ground (Lal Dena, 1991).

Meanwhile, ChingakhambaSanajaoba Singh, who lived with some disciples at Kuki village near Moirang and who was believed to possess some supernatural power joined with the hands of Kuki people and played an important role for the outbreak of this rebellion. He spread among the Kukis that the power of the British government had been reduced and was coming to an end and wanted his people to be killed at the same place with them (Thongkhochon, as cited in Joy Kumar Singh, 1991). Then he went to Wakha, called ten Kuki villages and looted the forest toll station at Ithai on December 19, 1917 (Lal Dena,1991). This attacked is considered 'as a mark of open declaration of war against the colonial authority'.

The outbreak of the Kuki rebellion in the year 1917 is closely related with the political, economic and administrative changes which were introduced gradually since the occupation of the country by the British in 1891. Since then, the Kuki people began to face a lot of hardships in the hands of the alien ruler. So the grievances faced by them under the colonial rule were mainly responsible for the outbreak of the movement (Kigpen, as cited in Joy Kumar Singh, 1991). Their secured economic relations with the people of the plain areas were disrupted by the colonial policies which also got worsened due to their inter-village feuds and warfare.

The introduction of the hill house tax at the rate of Rs. 3 per house per annum gave a severe blow to the economy of the Kuki people. This imposition was a great burden to them. It mentioned that 'persuading a chief to pay one's own house tax by offering him a jar or *ju* record, the tribesmen had contributed about Rs. 70,000 a year in the form of house tax but in return received nothing, either financially or in development works'(Singh, 1991).

Another factor for the rebellion or the long-standing cause of the rebellion was the administrative policy of the British authority towards the hill people. The hill territory which formed the ninth-tenth of the total area of Manipur with practically no roads, and in most part consisted only of jungle tracts passable only by travelers on foot, had been placed in the hands of the vice president of the MSD who was a British I.C.S officer. Separate rulers for the administration of the hill tribes were framed but adequate provision for the administration of the hill areas was not mentioned in the said rules. This officer who was already burdened with his duty in the durbar failed to keep himself in touch with the people in the hills. The ultimate cause was the attempt made in the past to administer a vast tract of hills with a wholly inadequate staff which resulted in the British officers getting out of touch with the hill tribes and being unable to take control over the situation when the crisis arose or either to appreciate the gravity of the situation or to take effective steps to ally the panic (Lal Dena, 1991). This led to the growth of a serious lack of understanding between the rulers and the ruled. This administrative pattern was the main character of the British colonial administration (Lal Dena, 1984). The contact between the hill and British administration was made through an official known as *Lambu* whose position in the Pre-Colonial period was not more than a peon. They felt that the *Lambu's*, who are not more than a peon in the pre-British period, treated them as their subordinate. Therefore, those chiefs who always tried to maintain an equal status resented the concept of *Lambu's* superiority.

The *pothang* system or forced labor system was another cause for the discontentment of the Kukis. This system was already abolished in the year 1913 but the same practice was still going on in the hill areas. According to this system, the concerned villagers had to carry baggage of the government officials, whenever they visited their village. In order to remove this unbearable harassment, the people made a number of petitions to the government in the year 1915-1916 and requested the authorities to exempt from this system. (Singh, 1991).Then came the policy of the labor recruitment. The village chiefs thought that the recruitment of labor forces from the hill areas itself was a mark given to their tribe by the authority. Therefore, to keep their identity the Kuki people declared war against the British (Singh, 1991).

Though the labor recruitment was the immediate cause of the conflict between the British and the Kukis, we see that there are other causes which led them to revolt.

The British were not the only forces whom the Kukis fought with during the rebellion. Up to March 1918, the activities of the rebellion were directed solely against the British authority. After this they committed a series of outrages against the surrounding neighboring villages. In three months they raided 19 villages and it brought the loss of 193 persons and 21 missing (Administrative Reports of Manipur 1919, in Singh, 1991). The causes of the raids were old feuds and other reasons were that the villages either had refused to help the rebels or suspected of having helped the government. In October 1918, 20 Kabui Naga villages were raided and burned with a loss of more than 85 lives. Tingdong mostly carried out these raids, chief of Layang who declared war on the KabuiNagas in retaliation against the latter's raid on the NatjangKuki village. No wonder the Kabui Rebellion of 1930-32 was directed both against the British and the Kukis (Lal Dena, 1991). The attack on the KabuiNagas was the opening of new front of the Kuki Rebellion. The creation of a new enemy was rightly regarded as the unwise act of the rebels. This situation had compelled them to fight a number of lonesome battles against the British. Thus, the Kuki rebel leaders unnecessarily opened many fronts against them (Singh,1991).

The Zeliangrong Movement (1930-1932)

The Zeliangrong movement was a counter product of British colonial rule and their apathy towards the Zeliangrong Naga tribes of Manipur during and after the Kuki Rebellion (1917-1919). This movement covered three tribes-Zemei, Liangmei and Rongmei; the prefixes of each of these names were taken and combined into one name, Zeliangrong (Ze+Liang+Rong). The Zemeis and the Liangmeis were sometimes known as the KachaNagas and the Rongmeis as kabui (Kabui, 2006)

The movement started by a Kabuileader named Jadonang and continued by 'Rani' Gaidinliu has been described by the British officials and historians by different names. Robert Reid, a Governor of Assam called this phenomenon of Jadonang and Gaidinliu as the rebellion of the Kabui and Kacha Naga (Reid,1942). A historian described it as a Kabui rebellion because the leaders of the rebellion belong to the Kabui (Roy,1958). The chief secretary of Assam Mr. Crosgrave called it a Naga Raj movement based on political Agent J.C Higgins' telegram that a Kabui Naga Raj was proclaimed at Kambiron (a village in Tamenglong district). Another writer describes it as a Naga struggle against the British (Yunuo,1982). Yet another certain historian prefer to adopt the term, "The Zeliangrong Revolt" to mean the momentous and historic movement of the Zeliangrong people with significant impact on the social and political development of the people (Kamei, 2004). The movement covered the Zeliangrongs of the state of Manipur and the province of Assam.

The Zeliangrong movement in the early phase is a classic example of a millenarian

movement. It initially was purely a non-violent movement launched under the dynamic leadership of Jadonang, a young Kabui Naga of Manipur. The outbreak of this movement was renaissance of the Zeliangrong people because it has touched almost all aspects of the collective life of this tribe. (Singh, 1991). On the other side, of it was an alien challenge posed by the British colonial rule and apathy towards the Zeliangrong people during and after the Kuki rebellion of 1917-1919. Gangmumei Kabui writes; "The Kukis who had migrated into Manipur in the 18th century had forcibly sometimes with government connivance occupied the land in the Zeliangrong" (Kabui, 2006)

The movement was carried out through the several stages with different objectives. At the first part, this movement was carried out on the line of a millenarian with an objective to generate the old religion of the Zeliangrong people against formidable approaching force of Christianity. Then in the second stage, it assumed a radical political overtone, the reason for this second step was closely related with the negative attitude of the colonial British rulers towards the Zeliangrong people. They strongly felt that during that during the movement of 1917-1919, they suffered a lot at the hands of the rebels. At that time, they had a strong loyalty to the ruler and hoped that the authorities would extend their protection, but contrary to their expectation, they did not receive any type of protection from the British government despite their loyalty to the colonial authorities. So it created a great disappointment among the people. And after this incident, their mind was highly colored by anti–imperialist and anti–colonial tendencies and the character of the movement also became more militant and political. Then gradually they became more concerned to the question of their self-identity. Later on, the objective of the movement was inclined mainly to the cause of social unity, cultural resurgence, economic upliftment and political integration.

The root cause of the revolt lay in the oppressive nature of the colonial British rule, the hill house taxes, which the poor people could not pay annually, as it was a back breaking colonial taxation. From the very beginning, the Zeliangrong people did not welcome the British rule. They did not pay the house tax of three rupees willingly. It was forcibly imposed and collected by the British government. Though they had declared that they have abolished the feudal service called *Lallup* in Manipur, the forced labour was imposed on the Zeliangrong people. They had to render free labour for repair and maintenance of the government road, the Cachar road from Bishnupur to Jirighat. It was a continuation of the feudal service imposed by the rulers of Manipur. Then the British imposed a levy on the villages to meet the cost of local hospitality for the officials touring the hill villages and carry the baggage of the officials. The system was known as Pothang Begari, "forced labour" and Pothang Senkhai, monetary levies for the feeding of the Government officials. The people detested the house taxes, and despised the forced labour and the monetary subscription.

The British rule at the village level was the rule of the *lambus*, road muhorrirs and the peons. Their attitude and the action were very oppressive. The oppressive rule of the lambus was responsible for the alienation of the common people from the Government. The British partiality towards the Kukis was quiet well known, so also the Meitei friendliness towards the Kuki immigrants. The Kuki settlement in the Naga areas was resented and not wanted by the Zeliangrong people because the real conflict lay in the possession of the land. The land and the forest, which were once used by the Zeliangrong people alone, had to be shared by two, the original settlers and the migrant settlers. The productivity of the land also decreased, and the rotation of the Jhum cycle also decreased. Moreover, the Kuki polity controlled by their hereditary chiefs was autocratic. Their attachment was transitory while the Zeliangrong attachment to their village and land was deep, strong and emotional. There was not enough land for the two. The ZeliangrongNagas blamed the Meitei kings and the British for this serious land question. The agriculture was also unpredictable and unproductive. (Kamei, 2004)

Another writer (Bimola Devi as cited in Tarapot,2004) puts it, "the Kukis encroached on their lands and the British did not prevent this although they collected the house tax subject to the condition that the British would protect the interest of the KabuiNagas". During the Kuki Rebellion, the Kuki rebels attacked the Zeliangrong villages, killed men, women and children, and resorted to head hunting. The ZeliangrongNagas expected the British authorities to give them protection. The Manipur Government not only failed to give them protection but also ignored the request of the people for protection. Only when the Assam Rifles took up a full-scale campaign, the Kuki rebels were defeated in the Zeliangrong Area.

Jadonang knew that the Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei tribes of Tamenglong were not united. He found that the people were deeply rooted in the social and religious orthodoxy while Christianity had come to the hill and started challenging the traditional religion, its old values and ideals of the Zeliangrong people. Being religious minded, he wanted to save the religion from the onslaught of the alien religion and reform and revitalize the religion of his people (Kabui,1991). But they were quite helpless to check this silent invasion of the Christian religion, because at that time there was no social or political unity among them. With this understanding he made a successful attempt to bring the three different groups of people together which was latter on framed under 'Zeliangrong' in the mid-forties (Joy Kumar Singh,1991).

The Naga Raj: *Makam Gwangdi*

The concept of the "Raj" was new to the Nagas. It was developed out of the

popular slogan "*Makammeiru Gwang Tupuni*" (Makam people will be the rulers, king) given by Jadonang. The idea of the Makam Gwangdi (Makam Kingdom) was a "fresh idea and attractive to his people who had been oppressed, persecuted and victimized by the alien rulers. This political ideology made Jadonang clash with the colonial authorities. And the British called it a 'Naga Raj'. The Makam Gwangdi was romanticized by Ursula Graham Bower as 'a sort of Naga heaven, 'a millennium on earth where there would be prosperity, no wants and no suffering (Bower, 2003). Jadonang insisted that people should worship God so that "the villages might have prosperity. This aspect of the Jadonang movement has led the sociologist and historians to describe it a tribal millenarian movement (Singh, 2006). Jadonang was trying to achieve the political integration of his people under a "kingdom" after the attainment of the social unity through religion. His movement was not directed against the Christians. It was more an imaginary fear of the Christians rather than the real danger. It was also not anti Kuki. "The Meiteis have their King, the Indian! (Tajongmei) have their rulers, why should we not have our own King? The white men and we are all human beings. Why should we be afraid of them? All men are equal. We are blessed people. Our days have come. We shall pray and worship God. With his grace we shall become the rulers. He was regarded by his followers as the messiah (deliverer), for whom they were waiting for. No one knew what the tradition of the Messiah (deliverer). But it was a popular feeling engrossed in the psyche of the Zeliangrong, a psycho social phenomenon of a "mass fantasy to escape the suffering of the contemporary social, economic and political hardship (Kamei, 2004).

By 1929, his movement had gained momentum and took a semi-military, semi-religious and political character. In 1930, Jadonang plan had been well informed to all the villages. What he promised was a 'Naga Heaven' a 'Millennium on Earth' where there would be no want; it would be a land plenty (Kabui,1991). He repeatedly declared that 'the days of the Kabuis and Kacha Nagas had come at least and the days of the government, Manipur and Kuki are over. He instructed that the villages should stop paying taxes to the government; they should disobey the unjust laws of the state (his program of action coincides with the civil disobedience movement in India). Then, the Raj would be proclaimed; the people should pay tributes to the new kingdom; then all able-bodied men should be ready to fight against all foreigners who would be driven out (Kabui,1991).

With the movement gaining popularity, Kukis settling either in North-West of Manipur, Cachar or in Nagaland became panic. Frequent gatherings of the Nagas at several villages also disrupted the cultivation of Kukis who on several occasions abandoned their fields, stayed away from cutting crops and took refugee in jungles for days for fear of attacks. The Kukis fear the Nagasmight do the same thing they did on them before or during the Kuki rebellion.

As the movement spread to interior smaller villages, various Naga villages, which had earlier differences of opinion and were locked in tribal warfare made peace with one another. To some extent Jadonang brought together mutually quarrelling and independent Kacha Naga villages (Tarapot,2003).

After the execution of Jadonang by the British, the leadership of the movement was taken over by Gaidinliu, a Kabui Naga girl and a close associate of Jadonang. Under her leadership, the activities of the movement were further spread over a large area. The character of the movement became more militant (Singh,1991). Indeed her only desire was to materialize the objectives of her master Jadonang. Gaidinliu told the people, "We are free people, the white men should not rule over us, we will not pay house tax to the government, we will not obey their unjust laws like forced labor and compulsory porterage subscription" (Kabui, 1991). Her political program was the translation of Jadonang's idea. It is mentioned that she told the people that the British would soon be driven out by Gandhi, and she began to praise him. Thus she made an attempt to bring the Zeliangrong movement as a part of the Indian national movement (Singh,1991).Gaidinliu went underground to direct the rebellion. The people gave money for the cause and a large number of fighting men volunteered for the cause and for the fight against the British (Kabui,1991). The British government then decided to suppress the rebellion and capture Gaidinliu which they succeeded on 17 October 1932 through secret information about her activities and movements. After her arrest, some of her followers tried to sustain the movement. But they were not able to carry the movement. As a result of this, the vigor and intensity was completely lost. Latter on this movement was again activated in an institutionalized way by forming the KabuiSamity in 1934, the Kabui Naga Association in 1946, the Zeliangrong Council in 1947, etc.Zeliangrong religious ideas were later crystallized in the Heraka cult led by 'Rani' Gaidinliu (Kabui, 2006)

In the more recent period, we also see the formation of armed group, the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) which vowed to carry forward, the ideals of their leaders Jadonang and 'Rani'Gaidinliu in 'protection' of their tribe (Khangchian,2011).

The Zeliangrong movement was indeed an epoch making event in the colonial history of Manipur. The outbreak of this movement may be marked in the beginning of the struggle for the political emancipation from the hands of the British imperialist. Apart from this, it also played a great role for bringing a unity among the different groups the people. This movement had completely wiped out all the differences among the different villages and inter-village feuds and rivalries and brought sense of solidarity and unity among the Zeliangrong people and helped the growth of national consciousness among the people (Singh, 1991).

The Women's Agitation of 1939-41

The Women's agitation is considered a serious agrarian crisis, which encouraged widespread protest movements in the state. This agitation is known as Second *Nupilan*, the first one being in 1904 which was against the British Policy of 'forced labor' imposed on Manipuri male population.After the two tribal movements, the state witnessed a great mass movement against the colonial and feudal authority of the state. It was carried on solely by the women folk. It broke out in 12th December 1939 (Singh, 1991). The nature of the movement in Manipur emphasized for the upliftment of the economic condition of the state and thus the leaders of the movement challenged the colonial economic policy of the British.

Khwairamband bazaar, located in the British reserved area, was the center of the economic activities of the state. Most of the traders had their godowns and shops at the Sadar and Maxwell bazaar located in this complex. Inside the market complex, there were a large number of women vendors dealing in varieties of local products (Singh,1998). The most important trade/industry of the women of Manipur was the rice trading business where their involvement was enormous (Singh,1991).

In regard to the role of the women of Manipur, some writers tried to analyze it from two different directions. One was the pre-occupation period, and another was the post–occupation period. In comparison with the post occupation period, the women of Manipur got better advantageous position in the field of their economic activities. During this period in Manipur, there emerged a strong conscience for having a self–sufficiency in the economy and every household became a great center of production. The responsibilities for these economic activities were entirely on the shoulders of the women folk of the state. But from the year 1891, i.e. after the introduction of direct colonial rule, the whole system was changed. Very soon they began to exploit the whole traditional economy of the state in order to get advantageous position in the introduction of their colonial system (George Rudenko in Singh,1991).

In order to implement their desire very successfully, they utilize the service of the big traders from outside the state. This new economic trend degraded the importance of the women folk of Manipur in the economic life of the state. Then the outside traders gradually began to capture the monopoly of trade, which at one time was under the management of the women folk (Singh,1991). The British authority introduced a free trade policy, which ultimately gave a great economic benefit to the colonial economic policy; the British officials began to control the trade and industry of the state.

Till the year 1925, the export policy began to assume a peculiar character and

the Marwari traders began to take over the monopoly of export industry from the local traders (Singh,1991). The immediate cause for the outbreak of women's movement was directly related with prevailing export policy of the authority and milling activities of the Marwari traders. The serious economic problem created by the colonial authority was further intensified by the shortage of food grains. It was caused by several factors. Excessive rains during July–August 1939 severely damaged the standing crops in various parts of the valley. Again heavy rain coupled with a severe hailstorm in mid-November adversely affected the harvest of the 'early paddy' and the incoming grain was less than what was expected. The Marwaris took advantage of the situation and bought up the entire paddy that they could find (C. Gimson in Singh,1998). Realizing the unusual market situation, the MSD passed a resolution on 13th September, banning the export of rice. But the MSD, on 25th September, reversed the former order and allowed the export of rice to Kohima(Nagaland) civil station and further liberalized the export policy on 24th November (N. Lokendra Singh,1998). The *imas*(mothers)particularly the grain dealers and paddy huskers, many of whom were thrown out of their jobs, were very much disturbed. With the installation of rice mills, the rice dealers too, who were mostly females, lost their jobs because both the common people as well as the rice exporters started buying rice from the mill owners (Singh,1998).

According to Administrative Reports of Manipur on December 1939, one AribamChaobiton Devi from Tara Keithel, took the initiative of protest by organizing a small group of about four or five women of her own business circle and tried to stop the bullock carts which carried paddy for Marwari traders. The colonial authority regarded the outbreak of this movement as the most important event of the year event 1939. Some writers regarded this movement as a dividing line between the oppressive economic and administrative policies followed by the Maharaja and the political agent and the new Manipur emerged out of the *Nupilan* (Singh, 1991). The movement of women known as 'Nupilan' which had started to stop export of rice was later joined by other social leaders and organization. The character of this movement also changed as it was diverted towards the major political issues relating to the constitutional and administrative reforms in Manipur (Sharma, 2000).

Added to the existing woes of the state,from the year 1942–45, Manipur was completely under the smoke of the Second World War. The MSD, which was seriously considering the issue of certain basic administrative changes as a necessary response to the demands of the agitators, again got its attention diverted to the wartime mobilization works when the Japanese forces occupied the neighboring Burma and its invasion of Manipur was becoming almost certain. (Singh,1998).

Conclusion

Over the period of time, the nature of conflicts in Manipur have been transformed. Hostility toward a common force during the colonial period, have turned into war between 'its own' in contemporary Manipur. Conflict understood as between tribes is now shifted majorly to study of ethnic groups in the post-colonial period as also against the classical anthropologists'interests of focusing in single 'tribal societies'. Unity amongst kindred tribes was brought about leading to formation of ethnic groups. The question of ethnicity certainly is not proved redundant despite the 'modern social order', in the context of Manipur. Genesis of contemporary conflicts in Manipur, can be traced to the revolts during the colonial period that we have discussed.The origin of the widely known Naga-Kuki conflict particularly in the 90s and which lingered on till date can be traced to the period of kuki rebellion and the Zeliangrong movement against the British. The ZeliangrongNagas were then unhappy about the lenient policies of the British in allowing the Kuki immigrants of Myanmar to settle in Naga Lands. In this context, we also saw in 2016, the creation of new districts (which include exclusive Kuki district) in Manipur in the wake of much protest by the United Naga Council who oppose the creation of new districts as 'it encroach the ancestral land of the Nagas'. Also, it would not be inappropriate to deduce that the 'insider' and 'outsider' issue has a long history which goes back to the women's agitation or *Nupilan* of 1939. In the light of all these, it can well be concluded that contemporary conflicts in Manipur has its origins in various colonial policieswhere ethnic consciousness and accordingly the struggles for 'rights' or more specifically of 'homeland' of each ethnic groups became even more pronounced in recent times.

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A Temporal Analysis of the Growth of Manufacturing Industries in Northeast India During 1981-82 to 2014-15

Anna Lalruatfeli Hrahsel and Sumarbin Umdor[1]

Abstract

Government of India has made concerted efforts for industrial development of the North Eastern Region of India with a major initiative in the form of North East Industrial Policy in 1997 followed by a more inclusive North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy implemented since 2007. Based on Annual Survey of Industries data from 1981-82 to 2014-15, the paper examines the growth of manufacturing industries with respect to few selected variables and analyses the impact of the special industrial policies of the Government of India on industrial development in the region,. The analysis indicates that there has been growth of manufacturing industries across various states in the region. For the region too, there has been positive growth for all the variables under study. It has been observed that the manufacturing sector is more capital-intensive, with low level of employment generation over the years. However, the increase in industrial activities has not led to a major structural change in the economy of the region as the share of manufacturing sector in Gross State Domestic Product has increased marginally during the period under study.

Introduction

Disparities across regions are intrinsic to the process of development, and these often get aggravated by regional variations in industrial growth. In a developing country like India, inter-regional disparities in levels of development and income is a major concern as it has social and political ramifications. The industrial scenario of India has also been impaired by regional inequalities in terms of industrial development, which is highly uneven across states and regions. Industrialisation in India so far has clustered around only a few states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Haryana, Punjab, Delhi and Karnataka, whereas states like Bihar, Jammu & Kashmir, Rajasthan, Orissa, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have continuously been dominating in the list of underdeveloped states (Sharma & Khosla, 2013). The states in the North Eastern Region (NER) are particularly

[1]Anna Lalruatfeli Hrahsel (annahrahsel@gmail.com) and SumarbinUmdor (sumdor11@gmail.com) are with the department of Economics, North East Hill University.

worse off among the industrially backward states of the country.

There are various studies on industrialisation in India undertaken at the sub-national level. These studies throw light on the unevenness of industrial performance of various states and regions in the country. Even though growth has been buoyant in the economy including industrial sector of many states and the country as a whole, the problem of inter-state disparities continued to persist (Jalaja, 2004). Disparities exist within the states too, and this is notable in the study of industrialisation in a highly backward state like Orissa where there are large intra district variations over time (Vyasulu & Kumar, 1997). The case of interstate disparity in industrial growth can also be seen in case of Karnataka whose industrial performance till the mid-eighties was at par with those of the industrially advanced states like Maharashtra, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh but the other states outperformed it subsequently (Upendranath, Vijayabaskar & Vyasulu, 1994). Another comparative study between the industrial performance of Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat during 2000-01 to 2010-11 revealed that while the former had a higher number of factories, the overall performance of industrial sector of the latter was certainly better as reflected in various indicators (Mishra & Yadav, 2013).

There are many studies which highlight the positive impact of economic reforms initiated since 1990s on industrial growth across states in India. Some studies have brought out the improved performance of the industrial sector of states like Gujarat and Kerala after the liberalisation policies (Unni, Lalitha & Rani, 2001; Malhotra, 2008; Sahadudheen, 2015). In case of Maharashtra, there was a recovery in the manufacturing sector in terms of growth of output, employment, fixed capital and value added during the post-liberalisation period (Burange, 1999). On the other hand, other studies have reported an unimpressive picture of industrial growth in India after the 1991 economic reforms. Though the manufacturing industry of Kerala improved its growth performance over time, the growth rates recorded during the 1990s at the macro level are not higher than the corresponding figures for the 1980s. This has been attributed to high growth rates observed in a few industries only accompanied by low growth rates in a large number of industries in the state (Subrahmanian & Azeez, 2000). The industrial sector in Punjab was found to have decelerated since the commencement of economic reforms in 1991 (Sharma & Mohan, 2016). In Andhra Pradesh regional inequalities in industrial activities increased within the state in the post-reform period as compared to the pre-reform period (Alivelu, 2014).

The NER continues to take a backseat in terms of industrial growth in the country. The structural change that the states in the region are undergoing indicates a shift from the primary to tertiary sector bypassing the secondary sector particularly the manufacturing sector (Das, 2005). However, understanding the process of

industrialisation in the region, particularly the impact of the special industrial policy implemented by the Government of India (GoI) since 1997 is limited by the scarcity of analytical studies that use the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) data. One such study that has used ASI data, albeit in a limited way, dealt with the progress of industrial development in the region in the post-liberalisation period and found that North East Industrial Policy (NEIP) 1997 has not made much meaningful impact on industrial growth in the region. The study showed that since the implementation of NEIP until the year 2002-03, industrial development in the region deteriorated as compared to early 1990s, with the number of factories and number of workers in the organized manufacturing sector showing a declining trend in the region except for Tripura. Growth in capital invested and per capita net value added also showed a negative trend in the other states except Assam during the period (Das, 2012).

Within NER, intra state disparities in industrialisation are also prominent, and the industrial sector has mainly grown around tea and timber in Assam and mining, saw-mills and plywood factories in other parts of the region (Bahadur,2009). However, much of the existing literature on industrialisation in the region mainly deals with the patterns and problems of industrial development in the region, focusing on a few specific states and a few specific industries particularly small-scale industries (Khanka, 1998; Ahmed, 2007; Daimari, 2008; Srivastav&Syngkon, 2008; Kabra, 2010). Studies which dealt with industrial development of the region as a whole are limited and mostly concerned with the bottlenecks existing in the way of industrial development (Sarma & Bezbaruah, 2009; Choudhury, 2013).

Given the paucity of literature on industrial development in the region, the present study is an attempt to examine the growth of manufacturing industries in NER with emphasis on the impact of the successive specific industrial policies on NER implemented by GoI, using data from ASI for the period 1981-82 to 2014-15.

Implementation of NEIP and NEIIPP in NER

The industrial backwardness of the region has been recognized way back in 1980 in the Report on Industrial Dispersal of the National Committee on Development of Backward Areas (Planning Commission, 1980). However, a major policy initiative to kick start industrial activities in the region was launched by GoI in the form of a package of incentives under the North East Industrial Policy (NEIP) of 1997 in order to attract industrial investments in the region. The policy which was in operation for a period of ten years from December 24, 1997 to December 23, 2007 covered the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The NEIP 1997 laid emphasis on development of industrial infrastructure and provision of fiscal incentives and subsidies to 18 thrust sectors identified by GoI for the purpose of developing local resource based

and high employment generating industrial sectors in the region. Under the policy, provisions were made for a comprehensive insurance scheme, concessions to industrial units for development of infrastructure, subsidies for transport, capital investment, interest on working capital, and exceptions were made on excise and income tax for a period of ten years. Apart from these, the policy also provided provisions for export of products of the region to neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan, providing grants for techno-economic studies on industries and infrastructure of the region, and development of village and small industries through trainings, exhibitions, etc.

The limited success of NEIP 1997 led the GoI to approve another package of fiscal incentives and other concessions for the NER, viz. the North East Industrial and Investment Promotion Policy (NEIIPP) 2007, effective from April 1, 2007 up to March 31, 2017 which also included the state of Sikkim. The NEIIPP 2007 was introduced with a substantial increase of fiscal incentives and other concessions prescribed in NEIP 1997. Under NEIIPP 2007, capital investment subsidy was enhanced to 30 per cent from 15 per cent in the earlier policy, and subsidies on transport, interest on working capital, excise duty refund, income tax exemptions, etc. were continued for industries in the region. The distinction between thrust and non-thrust industries made in NEIP 1997 was withdrawn and incentives were made available to new as well as existing industrial units in NER on their substantial expansion. Besides industries in the manufacturing sector, benefits of the new policy were also extended to service sector, bio-technology and power generating units. However, goods produced by petroleum oil or gas refineries, goods pertaining to tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes, pan masala as covered under the Central Excise Tariff Act 1985, plastic carry bags of less than twenty microns and goods in respect of which only peripherals activities take place were exempted from the benefits of NEIIPP 2007.

Despite more than 20 years of the implementation of the special industrial policy for the region starting with the NEIP in 1997, not much effort has been made to study the impact of the policy on industrial development in the region as a whole and also within states in the region. In 2004, an impact evaluation study of the NEIP of 1997 was undertaken by Tata Economic Consultancy Services (TECS) which revealed that much of the benefits of the policy was cornered by Assam and Meghalaya which together accounted for 94 per cent of the total investments post 1997, and the states of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura accounting for the remaining six per cent, while the states of Manipur and Mizoram did not attract any investment proposal. Resource-based industries like tea, cement, jute, rubber and coal, metallurgical sector and excise intensive sectors like food and beverages accounted for a major share of investment, whereas other resource-based and high employment sectors such as handloom, handicrafts, bamboo, agro-forestry, etc. did not avail the benefits of the policy. The report brought to

light the skewed pattern of development within the region, which was a setback to the fundamental objective of achieving balanced economic growth across the different states of the region (TECS, 2004).

Data and Methodology

The database of the study is drawn from ASI for the period 1981-82 to 2014-15 across the various states in NER which come under the purview of ASI survey. The period of analysis is chosen in such a way as to capture the growth trends of the manufacturing industry before and after the implementation of NEIP 1997 and NEIIPP 2007. The state of Mizoram has been excluded from our study since it was not covered by ASI survey, and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh were included in the survey only from ASI 2009-10 and 2014-15 respectively, and accordingly the results for these states are reported for limited period only. In case of Nagaland, data was under-reported for a number of years prior to 1989-90 and hence estimations for the state could be done only from 1989-90 onwards which is another caveat that needs to be added here. Finally, since the analysis is based on ASI data, the limitations of the data due to collection and compilation procedures of ASI will automatically affect our analysis.

The variables used for the study are number of factories, fixed capital, total persons engaged, value of output and net value added. These variables have been chosen so as to have a fair insight regarding the position of registered manufacturing industries in the region, how these industries have engaged people in various manufacturing activities directly or indirectly, whether the industries are labour or capital intensive and most importantly, to look into the contribution of these industries towards the process of overall industrial production as reflected by net value added, which is one of the most crucial indicators of the performance of the manufacturing sector. To smoothen fluctuations in the data, three year moving average has been calculated for all the variables. The variables with monetary values were deflated using the all-India wholesale price index (WPI) of manufactured products taking 2011-12 as base year for analysis. Thus, there is a probable limitation of taking the all-India WPI to the state level analysis since the state level deflators are not available so far. The index number for the year 1981-82 was given with 1970-71 as the base, 1982-83 to 1993-94 with base 1981-82, 1994-95 to 2004-05 with base 1993-94, 2005-06 to 2011-12 with base 2004-05, 2012-13 to 2014-15 with base 2011-12. The price index corresponding to the years 1981-82 to 2014-15 have, therefore, been converted into the 2011-12 base before deflating the series.

The analysis is carried out at the aggregative level using the five variables viz. number of factories, fixed capital, total persons engaged, output and net value added. Growth rates of the manufacturing sector for the entire period in the

various states as well as the entire region are estimated by fitting a semi-log trend of the form:

$lnY_t = a + bt + U_t$

where,

Y_t = dependent variable (number of factories, fixed capital, total persons engaged, output and net value added)

t = time (1981-82 to 2014-15)
a and b = regression coefficients
U_t = error term

This method has been used in studies by Vyasulu and Kumar (1997), Malhotra (2008), to study industrial growth in states like Orissa and Gujarat. To analyse the impact of industrial policy on industrial growth, the entire period is divided into three sub-periods, as was done in the earlier section. The division of the year in 1997-98 and 2007-08 is to capture the impact of NEIP 1997 and NEIIPP 2007 respectively, taking into consideration the time-lag involved in policy implementation. Growth rate is estimated for the three sub-periods by breaking the data in the year 1997-98 and 2007-08 and fitting a 'Kinked Exponential Model' (Boyce, 1986), which has also been used by Burange (1999), Subrahmanian &Azeez (2000), etc. for comparison of industrial growth in the pre and post liberalisation period. As the data is broken at two points k1 and k2, we use the two-kink exponential model of the form:

$$\ln Y_t = a_1 + b_1 (D_1 t + D_2 k_1 + D_3 k_1) + b_2 (D_2 t - D_2 k_1 - D_3 k_1 + D_3 k_2) + b_3 (D_3 t - D_3 k_2) + U_t$$

where,

b_1 = growth rate for sub-period 1
b_2 = growth rate for sub-period 2
b_3 = growth rate for sub-period 3

D_1, D_2 and D_3 = sub-period dummy variables which assume the value 1 accordingly and 0 otherwise

$k_1$and k_2 = break points (1997-98 and 2007-08 are taken as break points)

a_1 = constant
U_t = error term

It may be noted here that the growth rates for Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim cannot be analysed separately using this model as data for these two states were available only after their inclusion in the ASI survey, i.e. in the third sub-period. However, they are included in the NER total, as was done for estimation of semi-log growth rate.

Contribution of Manufacturing Sector of NER to GSDP

Despite its vast natural resources, NER is one of the least industrially developed regions in the country. To have an overview of the industrial development in NER over the years, a detailed look into the sectoral composition of gross state domestic product (GSDP) is warranted. As a precursor to assessing the industrial progress in the NER using ASI data base, we examine the average percentage shares of the primary, secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy to the GSDP at constant prices (2004-05) for the region, individual states in the region and all-India status (Table:1). For this, the period of our study has been grouped together under three time periods, namely (i) the period from 1981-82 to 1997-98 before the implementation of the NEIP of 1997 (ii) the period of implementation of NEIP (1998-99 to 2007-08) and (iii) the period of implementation of NEIIPP 2007 (2008-09 to 2014-15). Within the secondary sector, we have focused on the shares of manufacturing sector to show the status and performance of industries in the region vis-à-vis the country.

The estimates of sectoral shares in GSDP highlight the unsatisfactory development of the secondary sector of NER particularly the manufacturing sector as compared to that of the all- India situation. The regional averages of the percentage share of secondary sector to GSDP were lower than the all-India averages in all the three periods under consideration. The average share of secondary sector in NER to the to the total GSDP has been steadily increasing from 16.7 per cent during the period prior to implementation of NEIP to 18 per cent during period of implementation of NEIP and subsequently to 20.5 per cent in the period of implementation of NEIIPP (Table:1). However, these figures are well below the corresponding figures for all-India average.

The average percentage share of manufacturing sector to states' GSDP in NER has recorded only a marginal increase from 6.7 per cent during the period prior to implementation of NEIP to 6.9 per cent in period of implementation of NEIIPP. However, in all the three periods under consideration the average percentage shares of manufacturing sector to states' GSDP were less than half of the corresponding all-India average (Table:1). In fact, in majority of the states like Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura the percentage share of manufacturing sector to GSDP has dropped during the phase of implementation of NEIP and NEIIPP compared to period 1981-82 to 1997-98.

On the other hand, Sikkim has recorded a significant improvement in manufacturing sector particularly during the period of implementation of NEIIPP. Until the implementation of NEIIPP, Sikkim's industrial development as revealed by share of this sector to the GSDP was comparable to other states in the region. During the period of implementation of NEIP, the share of manufacturing sector was 4.1

Table 1: State-wise Sectoral Shares in GSDP at Constant Prices (2004-05)

	1981-82 to 1997-98				1998-99 to 2007-08				2008-09 to 2014-15			
	Pri.	Sec.		Ter.	Pri.	Sec.		Ter.	Pri.	Sec.		Ter.
		All	Mfg			All	Mfg			All	Mfg	
Arunachal Pradesh	55.8	22.1	2.2	22.1	42.5	23.1	2.5	34.3	31.9	29.7	3.3	38.4
Assam	48.9	16.8	9.8	34.3	37.4	16.1	8.9	46.5	27.8	17.2	7.8	55.0
Manipur	35.9	29.7	5.4	34.4	24.9	33.4	4.7	41.7	21.9	30.2	4.7	47.9
Meghalaya	38.9	13.4	2.3	47.7	32.5	16.5	3.3	51.0	23.9	22.5	5.7	53.6
Mizoram	NR	NR	NR	NR	24.7	17.3	1.5	57.9	22.3	17.5	1.3	60.2
Nagaland	22.9	12.0	4.5	65.0	31.1	13.3	2.0	55.6	27.5	12.9	1.8	59.5
Sikkim	33.4	23.4	7.7	43.1	18.7	26.8	4.1	54.5	10.5	54.0	31.8	35.5
Tripura	45.9	10.0	5.6	44.1	28.7	21.1	4.1	50.2	25.8	23.2	3.4	50.9
NER	44.8	16.7	6.7	38.4	34.4	18.0	6.6	47.6	26.3	20.5	6.9	53.2
All-India	34.4	25.3	16.0	40.2	23.3	26.2	16.1	50.4	16.8	26.3	16.1	56.9

Source: *Calculated using CSO data on National Accounts Statistics collected from Economic and Political Weekly Research Foundation.*
Notes: Figures are in average percentages of the time period grouped together.
Mfg. = manufacturing sector, NR = non-availability of data, Pri. = primary sector, Sec. = secondary sector, Ter. = tertiary sector.

per cent while that of NER average was 6.6 per cent. It is only in the NEIIPP implementation period that one can observe a manifold jump in the share of the sector which leaped from 4.1 per cent during NEIP implementation period to 31.8 per cent during period of implementation of NEIIPP (Table:1). This is indicative of the phenomenal impact of the NEIIPP on the growth of manufacturing sector in the state. Other states like Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh have also recorded increased share of manufacturing sector to GSDP since implementation of NEIP and NEIIPP, however the increases are only marginal and the share of manufacturing sector to GSDP continues to remain well below the national average. During NEIIPP implementation period, the share of manufacturing sector in the GSDP of Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh were 5.7 and 3.3 respectively, while the corresponding figure for all India was 16.1 per cent (Table:1).

Results and Discussion

In this section we examine the changes in the relative share of individual states and the region as a whole in the manufacturing sector in terms of the five indicators used for the study that have been calculated using ASI database. The changes in the shares of states in terms of the five indicators have been shown at three points of time, namely 1981-82, 1997-98 and 2014-15 (Table:2). The three points of time have been purposely selected to reflect the changes in the industrial scenario in the region starting from 1981-82, the year from which data are available for most of the states in the region. The year 1997-98 represent the period at the start of the first north east industrial policy, while 2014-15 is the latest year for which the data have been analysed.

Among the states in the region, Assam accounts for the majority share with respect to all the variables under consideration, and percentage shares of all the other states taken together is less than the share of Assam which reflects the dominance of industrial sector of the state in the region. In 1981-82, about 83 per cent of the total industries in northeast were located in Assam. At the beginning of the implementation of NEIP 1997, the state accounted for 77 per cent of the total industries with marginal decline to 75.5 per cent in 2014-15, indicating high concentration of industries in the state. The dominance of Assam in the industrial scenario of the region is also evident when we compare other variables. For example, in fixed capital, share of Assam was 75.3 per cent in 1981-82 and 72.6 per cent in 2014-15. Assam also accounted for major share in terms of the other three indicators, viz. employment, value of output and net value added for all the periods under consideration, and it was higher than the combined shares of all the other states.The dominant position of Assam is mainly attributable to its rich resource base (tea, limestone, coal, jute, etc.), large population (67 per cent of region's total population in 2011), its geographical position as gateway to the region and its clear edge over other north-eastern states in terms of infrastructure,

logistics and connectivity to mainland India. The hilly topography of the other states in the region coupled with institutional barriers such as communal land ownership and restriction in entry of outsiders to most of the tribal majority states put Assam in advantageous position to receive most of the investments among the states in the region.

Among the other states, Tripura accounts for the second highest share in terms of number of factories and employment in all the three periods under consideration whereas it lags behind Sikkim and Meghalaya in terms of share in fixed capital, value of output and net value added (except in 1997-98 for value of output an net value added). Although Tripura stands second in respects of percentage share of number of industries and total persons engaged in manufacturing sector, yet in terms of fixed capital, value of output and net value added the state lags behind other states in the region indicating the labour-intensive nature of industries that have come up.

On the other hand, Meghalaya and Sikkim performed relatively well in terms of the three variables, with the former accounting for the second highest share in fixed capital during the three reference period of time. Sikkim (which was not initially under the ASI survey) accounted for the second highest share in output and net value added in 2014-15. Sikkim's share of 31.1 per cent in net value added in 2014-15 was particularly significant as there is simultaneous decline in the relative share of other states particularly that of Assam (from 80 per cent in 1997-98 to 57.5 per cent in 2014-15). Even though Sikkim has the least share among the NER states in terms of number of factories, its share in terms of value of output and net value added, is higher than all the other states (barring Assam), which clearly alludes to more capital-intensive industries being present in the State.

Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh are the laggards in the region and account for the lowest percentage shares in terms of most indicators of industrialisation analysed here. Manipur and Nagaland have not shown any improvement in terms of percentage shares of fixed capital, employment, output and net value added as their shares in terms of these indicators have decreased over the period of study. In case of Manipur, there was a marginal increase in the percentage share of factories over the years, but this has not resulted in increase in percentage shares of the state in the other variables. The declining percentage share of Nagaland in terms of all the indicators is palpably visible and the state continues to lag behind compared to other states in the region. The share of Arunachal Pradesh, which recently came under the ASI survey in 2014-15 is still not very significant, but seemed to keep pace with the other states particularly in terms of its percentage share in output and net value added which is higher than Manipur and Nagaland in 2014-15.

An interesting observation that arises is that even though Assam occupies a dominant position in terms of industrialisation in the region, we find that pace of industrialisation has been picking up across other states in north east India. There is also diffusion of the process which is noticeable from the fact that the percentage share of Assam in terms of number of factories has decreased from 82.9 per cent in 1981-82 to 77.9 per cent in 1997-98 and further to 75.5 per cent in 2014-15. Similarly, in respect of share of employment, value of output and net value added created by the manufacturing sector in the region in the 34 years of study Assam's share has declined considerably and share of fixed capital too declined to an extent. This can be regarded as an improvement in terms of intra-regional imbalance in industrial situation in NER as the dominance of Assam has been scaled down and shares of other states have improved.

Having analysed the changes in the relative shares of states using five indicators of growth for the manufacturing sector in NER, it would be to examine the growth rates of selected variables during 1981-82 to 2014-15, excluding Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram for reasons explained earlier.

The estimated semi-log function for the period under study shows a positive trend coefficient for the region as a whole and all the states except Nagaland which registered negative growth of fixed capital and employment (Table:3). Meghalaya recorded the highest growth rate in the number of factories (4.26 per cent) which is well above the region's sluggish growth average of 2.09 per cent, followed by Sikkim (3.71 per cent). Fixed capital of the manufacturing sector shows a high average growth rate of 7.22 per cent for the region with Sikkim (15.59 per cent) achieving the highest growth among the states in the region. The growth in number of persons engaged in manufacturing sector has been slow for the region (1.6 per cent) except for Sikkim (15.87 per cent) and Manipur (4.02 per cent) over the study period. In terms of value of output, Meghalaya's growth rate was exceptionally high (14.02 per cent) followed closely by Sikkim (12.86 per cent), compared to other states and the region's average (8.69 per cent). Meghalaya recorded the highest growth (11.96 per cent) in terms of net value added, much higher than the regional growth rate (7.05 per cent).

Overall, we find that growth in number of factories and employment in the region over the 34 years of study period has been rather sluggish and much lower as compared to the growth rates of fixed capital, output and net value added, which is an indication of the capital-intensive nature of manufacturing sector in the region accompanied by low employment creation.

It is worth mentioning that some states have shown an impressive growth in terms of certain variables over the years with Sikkim notably standing out in terms of high growth of fixed capital and employment, whereas Meghalaya leads in growth

Table 2: State-wise Shares of Manufacturing Industries in No. of Factories, Fixed Capital, Total Persons Engaged, Output & Net Value Added

	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Tripura	Nagaland	Sikkim	Arunachal Pradesh	Total NER
Number of Factories								
1981-82	1,851 (82.9)	53 (2.4)	47 (2.1)	281 (12.6)	NR	NR	NR	2,232
1997-98	1,861 (77.9)	77 (3.2)	43 (1.8)	243 (10.2)	165 (6.9)	NR	NR	2,389
2014-15	3,717 (75.5)	160 (3.3)	109 (2.2)	548 (11.1)	197 (4.0)	67 (1.4)	124 (2.5)	4,922
Fixed Capital (Rs. Lakh)								
1981-82	27,048 (75.3)	262 (0.7)	7,661 (21.3)	966 (2.7)	NR	NR	NR	35,937
1997-98	425,482 (83.9)	15,027 (3.0)	27,251 (5.4)	26,141 (5.2)	13,468 (2.7)	NR	NR	507,369
2014-15	1,616,940 (72.6)	11,374 (0.5)	350,312 (15.7)	32,428 (1.5)	20,029 (0.9)	176,248 (7.9)	19,175 (0.9)	2,226,506
Total Persons Engaged								
1981-82	121,633 (82.2)	6,141 (4.1)	6,071 (4.1)	14,170 (9.6)	NR	NR	NR	148,015
1997-98	154,909 (86.3)	4,440 (2.5)	6,550 (3.7)	8,659 (4.8)	4,856 (2.7)	NR	NR	179,414
2014-15	195,567 (72.6)	7,591 (2.8)	14,339 (5.3)	28,871 (10.7)	5,519 (2.0)	13,675 (5.1)	3,684 (1.4)	269,246
Value of Output (Rs. Lakh)								
1981-82	71,661 (94.2)	499 (0.7)	2,394 (3.1)	1,520 (2.0)	NR	NR	NR	76,074
1997-98	751,290 (87.3)	21,397 (2.5)	22,435 (2.6)	32,759 (3.8)	32,383 (3.8)	NR	NR	860,264
2014-15	6,176,083 (79.4)	37,736 (0.5)	431,852 (5.6)	151,764 (2.0)	44,889 (0.6)	802,006 (10.3)	134,873 (1.7)	7,779,203
Net Value Added (Rs. Lakh)								
1981-82	13,994 (90.8)	303 (2.0)	736 (4.8)	387 (2.5)	NR	NR	NR	15,420
1997-98	126,751 (80.0)	9,301 (5.9)	9,182 (5.8)	10,559 (6.7)	2,693 (1.7)	NR	NR	158,486
2014-15	818,933 (57.5)	6,976 (0.5)	62,697 (4.4)	47,161 (3.3)	12,225 (0.9)	442,439 (31.1)	33,964 (2.4)	1,424,395

Source: Calculated using ASI database (various issues) collected from Economic and Political Weekly Research Foundation.
Notes: Figures in brackets indicate percentage figures, NR = non-availability of data.

Table 3: State-wise Growth Rate of Manufacturing Industries in Number of Factories, FixedCapital, Total Persons Engaged, Output and Net Value Added (1981-82 to 2014-15)

Growth rate (Per Cent)					
State	Number of Factories	Fixed Capital	Total Persons Engaged	Value of Output	Net Value Added
Assam	1.80*	6.96*	1.19*	8.21*	5.68*
Manipur	2.94*	4.27*	4.02*	9.70*	6.40*
Meghalaya	4.26*	7.14*	2.43*	14.02*	11.96*
Nagaland#	1.14	(-)0.82	(-)1.34*	4.43*	5.96*
Sikkim@	3.71*	15.59*	15.87*	12.86*	10.44*
Tripura	2.07*	4.67*	2.69*	9.27*	8.92*
NER!	2.09*	7.22*	1.60*	8.69*	7.05*

Source: Same as Table 2.
*Note: * indicates significance at 5 per cent level,# indicates growth rate from 1989-90 to 2014-15, @ indicates growth rate from 2009-10 to 2014-15, NER! includes Arunachal Pradesh for 2014-15.*

of number of factories, value of output and net value added. States with comparatively low initial figures, such as Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura experienced growth rates higher than the regional average and that of Assam in terms of employment and output. The high growth rate of Meghalaya in terms of number of factories, output and net value added is also undeniably due to the low initial figures recorded by it as compared to Assam, for which the initial figures of the variables under study were distinctly high. Strategic location of Meghalaya, particularly the Byrnihat-Guwahati belt that provides ease of road and rail connectivity, availability of low cost electricity in the state has helped in attracting investments to Meghalaya and in turn leading to the high growth rate. The subsidies and tax exemptions offered under the industrial policies, low power tariff and easy access to power have attracted power intensive industries which accounts for a large share of the total energy sale by the state (Umdor, 2016).High growth of manufacturing industries of Sikkim has largely been brought about by the concerted efforts of the Government of Sikkim in addition to the GoI schemes.

Impact of NEIP 1997 and NEIIPP 2007

To analyse the impact of NEIP 1997 and NEIIPP 2007, the study period has been divided into three sub-periods, as mentioned in the previous sections. The growth rates have been estimated for each of the three sub-periods by using a two-kink Exponential Model. The state-wise growth rates of manufacturing sector for the three sub-periods are presented in Table 4.

Prior to implementation of NEIP 1997 (1981-82 to 1997-98), the performance of the region and the constituent states in the region in terms of growth in number of

factories was dismally low, barring Nagaland (17.39 per cent) which was followed distantly by Manipur (3.43 per cent), and these were in fact the only states in which growth was positive during this period. The employment situation was not satisfactory either- employment growth was marginal in the region and in most of the states and in Meghalaya and Tripura growth rates were negative. When it comes to growth in terms of the other three variables viz. fixed capital, output and net value added, the regional growth rates were fairly good. Manipur and Nagaland were the best performing states in the region registering growth rates higher than the regional averages for most variables, whereas Meghalaya with its growth rates lower than the regional averages was the worst performing state during the period. However, the results for Nagaland should be read with caution because of the under-reporting of data in the initial years prior to 1989-90, which could have partly resulted in the high growth rate of the state in the subsequent years of the first sub-period.

In the second sub-period i.e. the period of implementation of NEIP 1997, the regional growth rates have improved for all the variables under study except fixed capital which showed a marginal decline. Highest growth rate in number of factories was recorded by Meghalaya whereas Nagaland registered a negative growth, in sharp contrast to the first sub-period in which growth rate of Meghalaya was negative and Nagaland was the highest. Manipur also registered a decrease in its growth rate during this period. A striking result was observed in case of Manipur and Meghalaya during the first two sub periods. Growth rates of fixed capita and output was highest in Manipur and lowest in Meghalay during the first period under reference. During the second period, there was a reversal of the growth rates and Meghalaya registered the highest growth while Manipur registered the lowest growth. Tripura recorded significant growth in employment, whereas there was a decrease in respect of Assam and Nagaland. Growth in net value added was palpably visible in most of the states except Manipur and Nagaland. The increase in growth rates was marked in the states of Meghalaya and Tripura, while there was deterioration in case of Manipur and Nagaland during the period.

During the third sub-period (period of implementation of NEIIPP 2007), regional growth rates for number of factories, fixed capital, employment and net value added showed an improvement. However, there was a slowdown in regional growth rate for output during the period. Nevertheless, Manipur showed marked improvement during the period in respect of all the variables under study compared to its dismal performance in the second sub-period, thereby registering the highest growth rates among the states for all the variables studied. Except Meghalaya other states in the region witnessed growth in number of factories during the period. There was a surge in the growth rate of fixed capital in all the states except Assam for which the growth rate declined. In respect of employment, growth rate of Tripura which was the highest in the second sub-period declined, whereas

growth improved in other states particularly Manipur and Meghalaya. There was an increase in the growth rates of output and net value added in Manipur and Nagaland which were lagging behind in the second sub-period, whereas well-performing states like Meghalaya and Tripura recorded a significant decline during the third sub-period. This decline in growth rate in the third sub-period could be attributed to the withdrawal of certain industries like petroleum oil or gas refineries, tobacco and manufactured tobacco substitutes, pan masala, etc. from the benefit of NEIIPP 2007. Net value added was high in states having oil, and gas or mining industries like Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura (Sachdeva, 1998), and the withdrawal of these industries from the benefit of NEIIPP 2007 could have been one of the reasons for this decline in growth of net value added.

The introduction of NEIP 1997 has bolstered the growth of manufacturing industries in the region, and its impact was felt most in terms of growth in output which more than doubled. This is also true for the states which registered a significant growth in output, except Manipur and Nagaland which registered a decline in growth of output as well as net value added after implementation of the policy. NEIP 1997 also resulted in increase in growth of number of factories, employment and net value added in the region. However, the policy did not seem to have much positive impact on growth of fixed capital. The period following the implementation of NEIIPP 2007, growth of fixed capital in the region gained momentum, and growth in number of factories, employment and net value added showed a continuous increase. On the other hand, growth of value of output in the region took a downward turn. Overall, the impact of NEIP 2007 was felt mostly in Meghalaya particularly in case of output and net value added, whereas the impact of NEIIPP 2007 was more pronounced in the state of Manipur.

Conclusion

When it comes to industrial development, NER has always been lagging behind in comparison with the rest of India. The manufacturing sector of the region has not shown much progress over the years accounting for a relatively low percentage share in the GSDP, which has in fact deteriorated for most states. The manufacturing sector of Sikkim, however, has shown a marked improvement towards the end of the study period. As observed from the study, inter-state differences within the region in levels of industrialisation are conspicuous, with Assam accounting for a major chunk in terms of all the variables under consideration largely on account of its geographical size, population and better connectivity. But an interesting observation here is that even though the dominance of Assam in the region is prominent, the shares of manufacturing sectors of other states have picked up over the years as seen from the foregoing analysis. This is a clear indication of the growing spread of industries across various states in the region which in turn heralds a more balanced industrial development in the region.

Table 4: State-wise Growth Rate of Manufacturing Industries in Number of Factories, Fixed Capital, Total Persons Engaged, Output and Net Value Added During Pre and Post NEIP 1997and NEIIPP 2007

	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Tripura	Nagaland	Sikkim	Arunachal Pradesh	Total NER
Number of Factories								
1981-82	1,851 (82.9)	53 (2.4)	47 (2.1)	281 (12.6)	NR	NR	NR	2,232
1997-98	1,861 (77.9)	77 (3.2)	43 (1.8)	243 (10.2)	165 (6.9)	NR	NR	2,389
2014-15	3,717 (75.5)	160 (3.3)	109 (2.2)	548 (11.1)	197 (4.0)	67 (1.4)	124 (2.5)	4,922
Fixed Capital (Rs. Lakh)								
1981-82	27,048 (75.3)	262 (0.7)	7,661 (21.3)	966 (2.7)	NR	NR	NR	35,937
1997-98	425,482 (83.9)	15,027 (3.0)	27,251 (5.4)	26,141 (5.2)	13,468 (2.7)	NR	NR	507,369
2014-15	1,616,940 (72.6)	11,374 (0.5)	350,312 (15.7)	32,428 (1.5)	20,029 (0.9)	176,248 (7.9)	19,175 (0.9)	2,226,506
Total Persons Engaged								
1981-82	121,633 (82.2)	6,141 (4.1)	6,071 (4.1)	14,170 (9.6)	NR	NR	NR	148,015
1997-98	154,909 (86.3)	4,440 (2.5)	6,550 (3.7)	8,659 (4.8)	4,856 (2.7)	NR	NR	179,414
2014-15	195,567 (72.6)	7,591 (2.8)	14,339 (5.3)	28,871 (10.7)	5,519 (2.0)	13,675 (5.1)	3,684 (1.4)	269,246
Value of Output (Rs. Lakh)								
1981-82	71,661 (94.2)	499 (0.7)	2,394 (3.1)	1,520 (2.0)	NR	NR	NR	76,074
1997-98	751,290 (87.3)	21,397 (2.5)	22,435 (2.6)	32,759 (3.8)	32,383 (3.8)	NR	NR	860,264
2014-15	6,176,083 (79.4)	37,736 (0.5)	431,852 (5.6)	151,764 (2.0)	44,889 (0.6)	802,006 (10.3)	134,873 (1.7)	7,779,203
Net Value Added (Rs. Lakh)								
1981-82	13,994 (90.8)	303 (2.0)	736 (4.8)	387 (2.5)	NR	NR	NR	15,420
1997-98	126,751 (80.0)	9,301 (5.9)	9,182 (5.8)	10,559 (6.7)	2,693 (1.7)	NR	NR	158,486
2014-15	818,933 (57.5)	6,976 (0.5)	62,697 (4.4)	47,161 (3.3)	12,225 (0.9)	442,439 (31.1)	33,964 (2.4)	1,424,395

Source: Same as Table 2.
*Note: * indicates significance at 5 per cent level, # indicates growth rate from 1989-90.*

The region as a whole and the constituent states except Nagaland recorded a positive growth for all the variables under study. There are but variations with growth rate being sluggish for some and significant for some other variables under study. However, growth has been uneven across the states. Meghalaya and Sikkim lead the region with respect to the variables under consideration. The manufacturing sector of NER is apparently more capital-intensive rather than labour-intensive, exhibiting a low level of employment creation over the years.

It has been observed that with the introduction of NEIP in 1997, the industrial sluggishness in the region started to ameliorate. The various concessions and incentives offered by the policy paved the way to increased growth of industries in the region, as revealed by the different indicators particularly the value of output. The introduction of NEIIPP 2007 has also led to an expansion in growth of number of factories, fixed capital, employment and net value added in the region, although there was a slowdown in growth of output. It has been observed that barring a few states in respect of some of the variables, the implementation of the policies have resulted in the growth of number of factories, fixed capital, employment, value of output and net value added in the region. Nonetheless, the increase in growth rates of fixed capital, output and net value added without adequate growth in number of factories and employment over the years is an issue which needs to be dealt with.

Overall, the industrial policies for NER implemented by the GoI to promote industrial development have given a boost to the growth of manufacturing industries in NER. However, this increase in industrial activities supported by the special incentives under GoI policies have not led to a major structural change in the economy of the region in so far as augmenting the contribution of manufacturing sector to GSDP of states in the region, which still lags far behind the all-India average, not to mention the industrially developed states.

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Farm Size and Trade Relations of Small Tea Growers (STGs) in Assam and North Bengal

Abdul Hannan[1]

Abstract

The current research addresses the nature of farms, holding-size distribution, land rights of Small Tea Growers (STGs) and procedural issues relating to their emergence in Assam and North Bengal. Though they came in existence in early 1990s, yet within a short span of time, they have become an important contributor in tea economy over the years in terms of production and employment in rural areas in both the state. Secondly, it highlights the role of state and how its various agencies have neglected the STGs sector over the years from provincial and national governments. It further focuses on how Tea Board of India has failed to regulate the green leaf market in the tea supply chain and allowed the entry of an army of leaf agents (middlemen) to exploit the STGs in both the states vis-à-vis other Indian states. It also analyses an Industry. The local initiatives and development from below has impacted and surfaced in tea processing and marketing either individually in Upper Assam or collectively in Dooars of North Bengal by progressive STGs and their Associations.

Introduction

There has been a major shift in tea economy in early 1990s in North and North-East India. The production of tea has become a household economy in comparison to estate economy of yesteryears. Even the hill states of Northeast have taken up tea cultivation which had never been a part of its economy. This has not only boosted local economy but is competing with estate gardens and pose newer forms of challenges to the provincial and national governments and invite policy dialogue. Unlike estate gardens, where labour and capital are imported to the local economy, the STGs are situated and emerged within local geographic setting and many unemployed youth have ventured into small tea growing. Assam and West Bengal are two states which have witnessed spurt in the growth small tea gardens. In West Bengal, the spread of STGs are limited to five districts of North Bengal whereas in Assam they are widely distributed over all the districts.

[1]Abdul Hannan (ahannan@cus.ac.in/ahannansku@gmail.com)Assistant Professor and Post-Doctoral Fellow (ICSSR), Department of Geography, Sikkim University, Gangtok

In 2017-18, the STGs produced 621.61 million kg tea in India out of total 1325.05 million kg. The state of Assam and West Bengal contributes 493.36 million kg tea which is almost of 80 percent (79.37 per cent) of the total tea produced by STGs in India. Assam STGs produced 285 million kg (42.18 percent) of the total tea produced in the state and in West Bengal STGS with 208.12 million kg production contributed 53.66 percent of the total tea produced. The size of STGs economy is relatively small in South India and it contributed 112.60 million kg (18.11 percent) in India despite its existence since 1960s. Despite a late start, STGs in Assam and West Bengal have grown at a faster pace and have been competing with estate sector in both the states. The present paper is an attempt to understand and explore the variations of farm size, land rights and its procedural problems, trading opportunities in tea supply chain and institutional mechanism which facilitate and support better farm gate prices to the STGs.

I.2. Objective and Aim of the Paper

Against this backdrop, the present paper seeks to address few specific concerns of the sector:

1. Whether all the STGs in Assam and North Bengal are uniform in their farm size as defined by Tea Board of India? What kind of land rights and spatial distribution are found in both the states?
2. What is the nature of trade environment that exist in STGs gardens? What are the policies available in protecting farm gate prices of their product and its changes?
3. How the green leaf market is organized and whether all the STGs receives equal access of market or it varies across farm size? Is there any role of middlemen exist in the supply chain?

Section-II: Farm Size, Land Rights and Spatial Dimension of Small Tea Growers

II.1 Assam

In Assam (2017-18), the STGs contribute 42.18 per cent out of total tea production in the state. The share of STGs in the states of West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka is 50.4 per cent, 55.8 per cent, 17.1 per cent and 5.5 per cent respectively. The overall contribution of STGs sector in India is 45.01 per cent (Directorate of Tea Development, Kolkata: 2017). In 2016-17, the total production of made tea was 1250.49 million kg and the productions of STGs and Estate Gardens were 550.3 and 700.2 million kg respectively. Though the STGs exist in all the districts in Assam, they are densely concentrated in the districts of *Dibrugarh*, *Tinsukia*, *Sibsagar*, *Golaghat* and *Jorhat* districts. The STG owners in these districts have switched over from production of horticulture crops (Field Survey: 2006-07). Until, 2006, in Assam there were 206 BLFs of which 172 are located in five districts of Tinsukia (68), Dibrugarh (51), Golaghat (24), Jorhat

(15) and Sibsagar (14) (TBI, 2007).

The land under occupation of STGs belong to diverse categories of land classification[1]. Unfortunately, most of the STGs occupy *Tauzi land*, hence Tauzi Patta or rent receipt is the required for individual registration with Tea Board of India (Field Survey: 2006-07). Land cultivated by STGs in district Biswanath in Assam falls under three categories: agricultural land (low and high), forest land and grazing land and small gardens exist on high lands (Sharma and Barua: 2017). In Lakhimpur land available for small tea plantation can be divided into three categories: *myadi* land (permanently settled), *eksona* (yearly settled), and *tauzi* land (Pachoni: 2016). People use all categories of land for tea plantation in the district. The small tea growers who have *myadi* land or land ownership document receive the benefit of registration under Tea Board of India and avail loan and subsidy from Tea Board of India and other financial institutions.

In 2001[2], there were 28585 small tea growers with a total of 27878 hectares of cultivated area. Out of the total tea production 453.5 million kg, 257.6 million kg was contributed by STGs in the State. However as mentioned earlier, STGs are concentrated in five districts of Assam, viz. Dibrugarh (30.26 per cent), Tinsukia (21.97 per cent), Jorhat (13.42 per cent), Golaghat (12.44 per cent), and Shivsagar (11.08 per cent), (Baruah and Taparia:2004-05). An estimated 2.40 lakh people are directly employed in STGs sector in Assam which includes family labour, labour from neighbouring tea estates and sub-staffs. In 2013, Assam had 220 BLFs in the state with average employment ranging between 20-25 workers and the numbers of STGs is 68465 with plantation area of 118058.30 hectares (Borah: 2013).

The number of STG registered with Tea Board has increased over the years (Table: 2). From a total 42390 growers recorded under All Assam Small Tea Growers Association in 2002-03, the total number of registered STGs in the State increased to 84591 growers with tea plantation area of 82250.47 hectares. The average farm size however shrunk from 2.76 hectares to 0.97 hectares. There is a marked difference in farm size between two sets of data sources i.e. Tea Board of India and All Assam Small Tea Growers Association (AASTGA). Field interaction revealed that only well-informed STGs were registered with Tea Board. The STGs which have problems with land holding records have registered with district level units of AASTGA as registration with TBI requires unambiguous land holding records. Though the proportion of such growers is small, yet there is need for state intervention to regularize the land records and extend support to organize then

[1] *Tauzi land* (locally known as *Tauzu Bahi)* is government land but can be under individual possession in lieu of nominal rent to the government. For *Tauzi*, the occupant can pay land tax/revenues for the use. On the other hand, on *Myadi land* the owner has every right to claim as per legal provisions. Thus only Myadi Patta holders are the actual owners of a land. There is another type called eksonia, it is an intermediate phase in obtaining *myadi* ownership.

[2] Directory of Small Tea Growers (2001), Government of Assam.

Table-1: Share of Production of Made Tea in India (2017-18)

States /Region	No of Districts	Production (M. Kg) of Made Tea in India			% Share in Tea Production within State/Region		% Share in Tea Production in India	
		Estate Sector	STGs Sector	Total	Estate Sec.	STGs Sec.	Estate Sec.	STGs Sec.
Assam	22	391.07	285.24	676.31	57.82	42.18	55.59	45.89
West Bengal	5	179.74	208.12	387.86	46.34	53.66	25.55	33.48
Sub-Total	27	570.81	493.36	1064.17	53.64	46.36	81.15	79.37
North-East India*	44	401.45	296.57	698.02	57.51	42.49	57.07	47.71
North India**	8	180.94	212.44	393.38	46.00	54.00	25.72	34.18
South India	14	121.05	112.60	233.65	51.81	48.19	17.21	18.11
All India	66	703.44	621.61	1325.05	53.09	46.91	100.00	100.00

[Note: North-East India includes Assam and North India** includes West Bengal]*
Source: Computed from Tea Board of India

into clusters or co-operatives or SHGs like the Industrial Co-operatives exiting in Nilgiris of Tamil Nadu. However, majority of the STGs in Assam are small and marginal and 85 per cent of STGs possess less than four hectares of land holding (Table-3). The small growers with such marginal land holdings are covered under *Price Stabilisation Fund Scheme*. However, growers not registered with Tea Board of India cannot avail this benefit. Higher the proportion of registered tea grower firms with Tea Board higher would be the transparency at farm gate prices.

The classification of STGs in Assam can be further sub-grouped into (a) non-cultivating landowners (above 25 acres), (b) semi-middle peasants (10-25 acres), (c) middle peasants (5-10 acres), (d) small peasants (2-5 acres), (e) marginal peasants (below 2 acres) and (f) landless wage labour (Sharma and Barua: 2017). The first three categories of growers have sound economic support while fourth and fifth group do not possess enough land for production of rice to support their family and therefore have taken up tea cultivation in the available land for family sustenance and additional income. Unlike the estate gardens which have hierarchical employee structure, the STGs gardens have only one category of employees i.e. labourers. However, gardens with size of above eight acres engage two categories of workers: supervisors locally known as *Mahari*[3] and the labourers. Most of the STGs gardens below five acres are managed by individual families. A distinctive feature of the STGs is the wide variation in the wage rates e.g in 2016 the wage rate in STGs gardens varied from Rs. 120-140 across locality and also seasonally (peak season and lean season). This uncertainty in wage rate is largely because of the absence of labour market institutions to look into the causes of labourers in STG.II.2 North Bengal

In North Bengal, the STGs are mostly pineapple growers of yesteryears in highlands and they switched over to tea cultivation during 1980s. Their emergence and geographical spread is limited in four districts of North Bengal i.e. *Darjeeling*, *Jalpaiguri*, *Cooch Behar* and *Uttar Dinajpur*. This is basically a farmer-based tea cultivation occupying small tracts of land. Owing to the paucity of available market for the pineapple, the farmers shifted to tea cultivation. Since pineapple is perishable, absence of downstream processing market and storage facilities led farmers switching over to tea cultivation. Most of the produces from pineapple were sent outside the region particularly to cities like *Delhi*, *Kanpur*, *Agra*, *Nagpur*, and *Kolkata* etc. involving an army of middlemen and the prices realized by farmers were non-remunerative. There was no readily available local market for pineapple besides household-level consumption in the region. Consequently, the vast pineapple growing area gradually was replaced with tea bushes. In 2016, the STGs in West Bengal produced 154 million kg made tea accounting to 52 percent share of total tea produced in West Bengal (Table-4).

[3] A *Mahari* discharges the role of multitasking as manager, field supervisor, accountant and driver at times.

However, the STGs of West Bengal are besieged with same set of problems that at one point led farmers switch over to tea cultivation from pineapple. There are institutional bottlenecks in respect of market and credit availability. To meet the working capital requirements informal sources are accessed which carry high interest burden often leaving farmers in perpetual debt. In respect of labour wages, the STGs are treated at par with the large tea estates. There is periodic revision of wage agreements between STGs and representing trade unions of the respective districts like that in case of organized tea industry in North Bengal. The STGs, continue to perform remarkably, n terms of employment generation and currently an estimated 1.63 lakh people directly derive their livelihoods from the sector in the state (Hannan: 2006, 2017). Till, 2016 (the latest data available) 176 BLFs were in operation in North Bengal depending on the supply of green leaf from STGs. The STGs have changed industrial map of rural pockets in North Bengal. The rising number of BLFs indicates that this sub-sector within tea industry has potential to grow if STGs receive fair deal in the supply chain and receive proper institutional support which ensures distributive justice.

As per the available sources (2017), there are 35140 growers situated in four districts of West Bengal. In 2009, it was 20,352 with a total area of 25708.06 hectare. Most of the growers are not registered with Tea Board due to non issuance of No-objection Certificate (NOC) from the Land and Land Reforms Department, Government of West Bengal. Till 30.06.01, only 6041 growers submitted their application to the Land Reforms Department out of which only 1783 growers received NOC as per the records available on 31.12.2005. The highest number of growers is concentrated in the district *Uttar Dinajpur*[4] with tea cultivation area of 10993.32 hectares. The average farm size in the State is 1.27 hectares (Table-5). It is to be mentioned that the current data on STGs include only members affiliated to associations. There are many marginal STGs in the state who are not even affiliated to any organization and cultivate tea like any agricultural crop and survive at the mercy of leaf agents. The state government (West Bengal) is yet to provide NOC and regularize the STGs in the state unlike in Assam which has somehow negotiated procedural problems and allowed STGs to register with Tea Board of India.

The NOC guidelines by the Government of West Bengal were notified in 1994 and the Land Reforms Department of the State was instructed to complete the entire exercise within a period of three months (Hannan, 2013). It is unfortunate that the said task has not been accomplished by the respective agency of Government of West Bengal.

Although Uttar Dinajpur has the highest concentration of STGs, approximately

[4]The highest number of STGs is concentrated in the district of Uttar Dinajpur in North Bengal and the *Chopra* block is considered as birthplace of STGs in North Bengal.

Table-2: District-wise Number, Area and Average Farm Size of STGs in Assam

	2002-03 (AASTGA)			As on 31.03.2006 (Tea Board of India)			As on 18.06.2012 (Tea Board of India)			2014-15 (Tea Board of India)		
Districts	No	Area (Ha)	Farm Size	No	Area (Ha)	Farm Size	No	Area (Ha)	Farm Size	No	Area (Ha)	Farm Size
Kokrajhar	24	89.6	3.73	9	46.65	5.18	115	417.33	3.63	335	998.81	2.98
Dhubri	86	90.4	1.05	1	1.04	1.04	3	13.07	4.36	13	28.7	2.21
Goalpara	96	96.13	1.00	1	6.25	6.25	13	31.54	2.43	154	154.22	1.00
Barpeta				1	1.51	1.51	1	1.51	1.51			
Morigaon	20	44.27	2.21	7	7.35	1.05	7	12.7	1.81	7	12.7	1.81
Nagaon	321	219.07	0.68	119	300.17	2.52	145	345.13	2.38	1032	1659.19	1.61
Sonitpur	1412	837.33	0.59	493	1047.06	2.12	1073	1896.96	1.77	8750	8677.09	0.99
Lakhimpur	448	262.27	0.59	133	349.15	2.63	266	511.89	1.92	1815	1649.22	0.91
Dhemaji				54	111.42	2.06	80	168.06	2.10	536	447.74	0.84
Tinsukia	11714	13789.47	1.18	218	496.52	2.28	265	605.29	2.28	18595	16674.24	0.90
Dibrugarh	10876	5723.07	0.53	190	490.05	2.58	208	528.98	2.54	19160	15433.77	0.81
Sivasagar	7047	5389.2	0.76	121	332.01	2.74	290	676.21	2.33	10868	11149.42	1.03
Jorhat	3320	1325.47	0.40	183	247.87	1.35	194	365.51	1.88	6366	6158.83	0.97
Golaghat	6526	5566.93	0.85	868	1905	2.19	1387	2715.62	1.96	9503	9160.06	0.96
K. Anglong	380	574.67	1.51	286	1961.68	6.86	489	2627.29	5.37	1520	3345.43	2.20
Dima Hasao				1	4.68	4.68	1	4.68	4.68	2	10.22	5.11
Cachar				31	127.7	4.12	172	604.97	3.52	172	604.97	3.52
Karimganj				7	36.28	5.18	9	44.17	4.91	10	57.5	5.75
Hailakandi				4	23.84	5.96	4	23.84	5.96	4	23.84	5.96
Bongaigaon	45	113.33	2.52	23	60.3	2.62	52	121.76	2.34	696	595.9	0.86

Chirang										8	4.78	0.60
Kamrup	25	45.6	1.82	7	26.95	3.85	8	30.55	3.82	8	29.42	3.68
Kamrup Metro										3	2.4	0.80
Nalbari	16	9.6	0.60	8	29.42	3.68	8	29.42	3.68			
Baksa							21	75.6	3.60	257	339.56	1.32
Darrang	34	49.47	1.46	162	476.07	2.94	165	502.05	3.04	4	2.83	0.71
Udalguri							77	121.27	1.57	4773	5029.63	1.05
Assam	42390	34225.88	0.81	2927	8088.97	2.76	5053	12475.4	2.49	84591	82250.47	0.97

Source: Computed from Unpublished data collected from AASTGA, Dibrugarh for the year 2002-03, TBI-North-East Zonal Office, Guwahati for the year 2006, Statistical Handbook of Assam 2012 and 2016

Table-3: Holding-Size Distribution of STGs in Assam

Holding Size (Hectares)	% of Growers	
<0.67	10.28	
84.76		
0.67-1.21	25.63	84.76
1.35-2.56	34.68	
2.70-3.91	14.17	
4.05-5.26	6.37	
15.24		
5.40-6.61	4.32	
6.74-7.96	2.32	15.24
8.10-9.31	1.49	
9.45>	0.74	
All Groups	100.00	

Source: Baruah and Taparia (2004)

Table-4: Growth of Small Tea Growers (STGs) in North Bengal

Years	No. of STGs	No. of BLFs	Production(M. Kg.)	% Share in State	Avg. Green Leaf Price (Rs)
1996	2000	10	05	03	16
2004	15000	77	46	28	15
2016	40000	176	154	52	15

Source: Computed from Uttar Banga Sambad, August 23, 2017, p. 11.

Table-5: Status of Small Tea Growers in North Bengal and their Legal Recognition

Districts	Small Tea Growers (As on 31.12.2009)			Status of NOC Issued to STGs (30.11.2004)		
	No of STGs	Area (Ha)	Average Farm Size (Ha)	No of Applications Received	No of NOC given to STGs	% of STGs received NOC
Uttar Dinajpur	10397	10993.32	1.06	1860	561	5.40
Jalpaiguri	5777	8986.36	1.56	1947	845	14.62
Darjeeling	3637	4062.59	1.12	2005	249	6.85
Cooch Behar	541	1665.80	3.08	129	44	8.13
Total	20352	25708.06	1.27	5941	1699	8.35

Source: Computed from Unpublished data collected from the local level STGs Associations and the Land and Land Reforms Department, Government of West Bengal cf. http://www.telegraphindia.com/1100115/jsp/siliguri/story_11985634.jsp accessed on 25th April 2010.

83.55 per cent of STGs have small and marginal land holding size below 2.43 hectares[5]. Around 93 percent growers possess tea holding-size of less than four hectares which justifies that STGs are entitled to register under *Price Stabilisation Fund Scheme* of Government of India, 2003[6]. Therefore, more than 18 thousand growers would have been benefitted under Price Stabilisation Fund Scheme but only 132 numbers of STGs are enrolled since the inception of the scheme (54th Annual Report, Tea Board of India). The case of North Bengal seems to be in the same direction as in Assam and the Price Stabilisation Fund Scheme. The Policy has not found much enthusiasm among the STGs because of the long drawn administrative process associated with it and benefits remained behind the long drawn administrative processes. The CAG Report of 2012 on records that even after five decades of existence of STGs, the Tea Board of India has failed to discharge its basic regulatory role effectively and more than 80 percent of them continue to exist outside the ambit of regulations of Tea Board (Das, 2014).

Table-6: Holding-Size Distribution of STGs in West Bengal

Holding-Size (Ha)	% of Smallholders	
<0.80	46.84	83.55
0.80-1.62	27.85	
1.62-2.43	8.86	

Source: Unpublished data, Department of Commerce and Economics, NBU collected from United Forum of Small Tea Growers Associations, Jalpaiguri

Three types of farms exist under STGs in North Bengal according to holding size. The *Family Farms* (0-5 acres) are defined as those farms which are managed collectively by all the family members of the farm including children and women and have the presence of family labour as well as hired labour; the *Owner-Supervisory Farms* (5-15 acres) managed by the farm owner individually including technical advice and work schedule and have the presence of hired

[5] The number of blocks, STG (area) and farm size each block wise as taken from: http://uttardinajpur.nic.in/dlro.html accessed on 02.02.2019 is:

Blocks	No of STGs	Area (Ha)	Farm Size
Chopra	7654	18328.50	2.39
Islampur	2069	4297.57	2.08
Goalpokhar-I	82	511.28	6.24
Goalpokhar-II	9	15.00	1.67
Uttar Dinajpur	9814	23152.35	2.36

[6] The *Price Stabilisation Fund Scheme* was introduced by Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India in 2003. The small and marginal growers /farmers of tea, coffee, rubber and tobacco with an operational holding of four hectares or less are eligible to enroll as member of the scheme. The objective of the scheme is to provide financial relief to the STGs when prices of these commodities fall below the specified level. The period of operation of the scheme is 01.04.2003 to 31.03.2012.

labour; the *Staff-Supervisory Farms* (15-25 acres) fully managed by staffs called *Munsi* (multi-tasking) either technical advice or work schedule or even payments and have the presence of hired labour (Hannan, 2006). Majority of the STGs are owner supervisory farms in North Bengal as most of them have switched over from pineapple cultivation on their small farm land.

Section-III: Locating Trade Relations of Small Tea Growers (STGs)

III.1 *Price Stabilisation Fund Scheme* and Role of Ministry of Commerce, Government of India

The Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) Scheme was introduced by Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India w.e.f. April, 2003. The small and marginal growers or the Plantation Crops viz. tea, coffee, rubber and tobacco with an operational holding of four hectares or less are eligible to enrol as beneficiary member of the scheme. The objective of the scheme was to provide financial relief to the STGs when prices of their commodities fall below the specified level. The period of operation of the scheme was w.e.f. April, 2003 to March, 2012. The financial support was provided through the members PSF savings bank account, by the Price Stabilization Fund Trust in a given year and was based the categorization of the year as Boom/Normal/Distress Year. Such categorization was done on the basis of a Price Spectrum Band which was fixed and announced every year.

In *Distress year* Price Stabilisation Fund Trust contributed upto Rs.1000/- to the members PSF Savings Bank Account; in *Boom Year* the member had to contribute Rs.1000/- to his PSF Account and in *Normal Year* both the Price Stabilisation fund Trust and the member each contributed Rs.500/- to the members PSF Account. A uniform band of 40 percent for all the four crops was adopted with the Price Spectrum Band of +/-20 percent from the seven years' moving average of international prices of the crops. In accordance with the Price Stabilisation Fund Scheme, the Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, has, on the basis of data relating to seven years' international prices of each commodity obtained from the Commodity Boards, fixed the Price Spectrum Bands for Tea.

The progress of Price Stabilization Fund Scheme however was not satisfactory. Out of 42619 numbers of STGs are proposed initially, 14883 are enrolled i.e. only 34.92 percent of STGs were enrolled under the scheme since its inception (51st & 52nd Annual Report: TBI). There were several factors responsible for the slow pace of progress of the scheme. *First,* the premium amount paid by the government was barely able to meet the farm management costs. *Second*, the formalities for getting enrolled under the scheme had too many administrative procedures and most of STGs in India are not even registered with Tea Board of India and this was a major

issue. *Third*, the categorization years as *Boom/Normal/Distress* were not linked at the actual farm gate price of green leaf of STGs across the country. *Fourth,* Price Spectrum Band did not consider and undertake regional dimension of tea price particularly in north and south India. Lastly, PSF scheme was not connected with Price-Sharing Formula implemented by Tea Board of India. Ultimately, the ambitious programme failed to deliver the result to the smallholders.

III.2 *Price-Sharing Formula* and Role of Government of West Bengal

Initially the STGs operating in North Bengal sold their green leaf to the estate garden factories, but later number of BLFs evolved to cater the needs of the STGs. Besides, some estate garden factories also purchase green leaf from STGs. In North Bengal, the purchase of green leaf is controlled by *Farias* (leaf agents). During the period of 2001 to 2003, the STGs were adversely affected by the poor price realization despite considerable improvement in the plucking standard i.e. two leaves and a bud (Chakraborty, 2003). The *Report of the Committee on the Tea Industry in West Bengal* (2004), submitted to the Tea Board of India suggested in Para 5.1 (b):

i. "The Tea Board should lay down a Price-Sharing-Formula in terms of which the sale proceeds of made tea produced by the BLFs is shared in fixed proportions between the STGs and BLFs. The TMCO 2003 has a provision to this effect, and this practice is already being implemented in Sri Lanka. This will ensure that STGs get a reasonable price for the green leaf, which they sell to the BLFs. At present, this market is a buyers market in which the BLFs are able to fix the price at which they will buy green leaf from the STGs and other new non-estate plantations".

ii. "In order to ensure further transparency and fairness in the trade in green leaf, there should be a one-to-one linkage between each BLFs and STGs. The Tea Board can chalk out the tagging of selected STGs with each BLF, keeping in view the capacity of each BLF and the geographical location of the BLFs and the Small Tea Plantations. This one-to-one tagging means that a particular BLF can buy green leaf only from the Small Tea Plantations tagged to it, and it cannot buy green leaf from any other source. Similarly, the STGs can sell green leaf only to the BLFs to which they are tagged, and they cannot sell to any other agency. This will ensure further stability in the price of green leaf, and can be introduced along with 100 per cent auction. There is such a system prevailing in Tamil Nadu, though there it has developed on its own over time".

Eventually considering the interests of the STGs, Tea Board of India introduced the Price-Sharing-Formula between the green leaf suppliers and manufacturers through the Tea Board circular; *vide circular No. 12 (23)/2003/XII/3317 dated*

19/20.01.2004 and 12 (23)/LC/2003/XII/ dated 26.03.2004 and issued an order to implement Price-Sharing-Formula w.e.f. April, 2004.

III.3 *Price-Sharing Formula* and Role of Tea Board of India

The formula[7] came into effect from 01.04.04 through a notification by Tea Board with prior approval from the Government for ensuring reasonable returns to the STGs for the green leaf supplied by them to the BLFs/Estate Factories for processing. Under this formula, the manufacturer has to share the sale proceeds with the STGs in the ratio of 40:60 based on the sale price of the manufacturer vis-à-vis average auction price for the corresponding month. While calculating the actual price for the green leaf, the outturn percentage is also taken into consideration. The out turn percentages applicable for Tamil Nadu is 23%, Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal is 26.40% and for rest of India it is 21.50%. These changes induced significant repercussions on the functioning of the STGs gardens especially in respect of production, pricing and seasonal price variations of green leaves, involvement of middleman in selling green leaves, price-sharing rise in wage rate.

Table-7: Region-Specific Percentage Share of Gross Sale of Made Tea

States/Regions	Percentage Share of STGs and Factory	Outturn Percentage
Assam	60:40	21.50
West Bengal	60:40	21.50
Nilgiris	60:40	23.00
Kerala	60:40	21.50
Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal*	52:48	26.40
Tripura	60:40	21.50
Bihar and Rest of India	60:40	21.50

Source: Computed from the Circular No.12(23)LC/2003/XII/3317 on 19/20th January 2004, Tea Board of India, Kolkata.

The implementation of Price-Sharing Formula differed regionally and also across states in India. The Tea Board could barely handle this variation efficiently. The monthly average price for CTC tea (from auction and non-auction route) was calculated by Controller of Licensing, Tea Board of India, Kolkata. It is done in first week of every month for the previous month and copy of the same is circulated

[7] The Price-Sharing-Sharing-Formula envisages sharing of sale proceeds between green leaf supplier and manufacturer in the ratio of 60:40 in all tea growing states except Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal, where the sharing is in the ratio of 52:48, so long as the prices realized by the manufacturers remain either at par with or lower than the state average. When the price realization exceeds the state average price, the differential is required to be shared in the ratio of 50:50. While calculating the actual price for the green leaf, the out turn percentage is also taken into consideration. The out turn percentage applicable to Tamil Nadu is 23 per cent, Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal it is 26.40 per cent and for rest of India it is 21.50 per cent.

to Tea Board regional offices located in different parts of North India, i.e. Assam, West Bengal, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh[8]. Similarly, for South India, the monthly average price for CTC teas (from auction and non-auction routes) was calculated by Joint Controller of Licensing, Tea Board of India, Cochin. It was done in first week of every month for the previous month and copy of the same was circulated to Tea Board's regional offices located in different parts of South India, i.e. Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. The variations in prices of tea also left the STGs vulnerable.

In order to protect the interests of the STGs, Government of India amended the Tea Marketing Control Order (TMCO) and made special provisions for green leaf price monitoring through a well articulated functional norm for District Green Leaf Pricing Monitoring Committee (DLPMC).It is to be highlighted here that there are twenty-seven (27) districts in Assam and five (05) districts in West Bengal that grow tea. Interactions with the office of the Collector/Deputy Commissioners of districts revealed that small tea growers are not aware of such green leaf price monitoring committees of the Tea Board of India. Field survey revealed that very few meetings of DLPMC[9] were organized keeping up with the norms in the circular issued despite the fact that Tea Board had constituted and notified Small Tea Grower Development Directorate (SGDD) in 2013 and recruited officers

[8]Additionally, the Tea Board regional office located at Siliguri prepared BLFs-wise monthly green leaf price paid to STGs and average price of CTC received for made teas for North Bengal tea growers as per price-sharing formula and circulated it to the Board's notice board (see Example in Annexure-I). This practice was not in existence in Assam and other North Indian states.

[9] The Tea Board of India notified vide ref. no. SO 1012 (E) dated 15.04.2015 and circulated to all stakeholders vide ref. –Law/08/2013 dated 21.05.2015 for its effective implementation. The Clause as included is 30A.

District Green Leaf Pricing Monitoring Committee – (1) There shall be a green leaf price monitoring committee in each tea growing district comprising of two representatives each from Bought leaf factories, small tea growers and estate factories and one officer of the Board not below the rank of Assistant Director and the Collector or Deputy Commissioner of such tea growing district shall be the ex-officio Chairman. The officer of the Board shall be the member secretary of the committee.

(2) The Registering Authority shall notify the constitution of the committee and the tenure of the committee shall be for three years from the date of such notification and the committee shall be reconstituted after the expiry of every three years.

(3) Upon the death or resignation of any member of the committee, other than the Chairman and officer of the Board, the Registering Authority can re-nominate new member from such category that the deceased or, as the case may be, resigned member represented and the tenure of such re-nominated member shall be for the remaining period, as if such death or resignation of the committee members has not happened.

(4) No member of the committee representing Bought leaf factories, small growers or estate factories shall be a member of two consecutive terms.

(5) The committee shall undertake the following functions, namely:-

(a) to monitor the average green leaf price payable to the small tea growers for each succeeding month based on the last month average auction price of Bought leaf factories of such district by applying price sharing formula as notified by the Registering Authority under the provision of paragraph 30;

(b) to oversee the compliance of payment of such average price to the small tea growers and bring to the notice of the Registering Authority about the errant Bought leaf manufacturer.

(6) The member secretary of the committee shall ensure to conduct at least one meeting of the committee in a month

in all small tea growing districts in the country. There is a complete absence of monitoring mechanism by SGDD of Tea Board though there exists of 67 sub-regional offices (SROs) in India including Assam (39) and West Bengal (15). The SROs of SGDD have failed to provide the basic extension services and farm gate price monitoring as mandated in TMCO. In Assam, Price-Sharing Formula is not properly implemented (Pachona: 2016). The DLPMC constituted by government has failed to stabilize the prices of green leaves. During peak plucking time, BLFs or tea estate refuses or bargain to buy tea leaves. It has serious consequences in laboring conditions and wages. In North Bengal, situation the wage rate in STGs gardens was Rs. 132.50 plus ration of Rs. 1.80 in 2016-17 which increased to Rs. 150.00 plus ration of 1.80. At the same time, the green leaf price realized by STGs during peak season (July-September) in 2017 was Rs. 4-5 / per kg (Uttar Banga Sambad, Octoner 12, 2017) and Rs. 9-10 / per kg in 2018 (Uttar Banga Sambad, May 09, 2018).

III.4 Development from Below and Initiatives of Small Tea Growers

Assam

The processing of own leaf would represent a big step towards self-sufficiency for the STGs. In comparison to the large tea factories, the small-scale tea processing units present different picture. The case studies from Assam reveal that STGs have moved ahead with individual initiative. There is no collective move towards organizing the STGs. Individual initiatives have pushed the sector. The case studies from fields of Assam reveal how individual initiatives by the STGs have helped them overcome various challenges and establish profitable ventures and secure a livelihood through small tea garden.

Lachit Neog and *Hemanga Gohain* bought 9.5 hectares tea garden at *Amlongchang* in central Assam in 2002 and converted it to organic production. It was certified by SKAL, Holland in 2006. Neog and Gohain have set up a small tea processing unit in the garden itself: the machinery cost is Rs. 6 lakh, two generator sets cost is Rs. 2.9 lakh, the building and sheds cost is Rs. 80,000 and the furnace fired by paddy husk costs Rs. 30 thousand with total project cost of Rs. 10 lakh. The unit is processing about 120 kg of green leaf per day and fine quality orthodox tea with future plans for producing green tea. As revealed during interaction, there are about 30 such small processing units in Assam and the Tea Board of India yet to recognize these units. The efforts of the two young men have helped them to create their own production units and have also saved the uncertainty of uneven bargain in selling green leaf to factory gardens at nominal rates. The investments have helped in ensuring livelihood and security and economic well being.

Ranjit Chetia, a B.E. in Chemical Technology, a STG, and a resident of Golaghat district, have also developed a small-scale CTC processing unit and experimented

in his house yard. He is on the process of patent right with two of the scientists at Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, Jorhat. Presently, there are two production units: one is at Arunachal Pradesh, which has been approved by the Tea Board of India, and the other has been set up at Golaghat town. Both the processing units have started production. The small-scale processing unit has a threshing capacity of 1000-1500 green leaf/per day and cost is Rs. 13-15 lakh. His family has been STG for long and his experiences has helped him to understand the challenges that lie in this trade as well. He was fairly well acquainted with the market monopoly of BLFs which is exploitative in nature. It was to break free of this exploitation that he developed his processing unit with a small-scale technology. The young entrepreneur also believed that fellow STGs can also use this small technology which could help them break away from non-remunerative production process. The young man also supported fellow STGs with his technical and other expertise with respect to production and marketing.

Pabitra Lingda, a member of Sighpho Tribe[10] of Ketetong Gram Panchayat of Tinsukia district has also set up a small-scale processing unit of orthodox tea at his residence. In the same village, there are two other such units under operation. He has 10 acres of tea cultivation adjacent to his house, which he started in the year 1992. In, 2002, he initiated his plan to convert it into organic tea cultivation and currently he produces organic tea production without any use of chemicals and fertilizers. Compost, cow-dung and urine are used in resisting pest attack in his plantation. It was revealed by him that after switching over to organic cultivation, birds are regular visitors to his fields and also help in keeping away pests and insects by feeding on them. Currently he plucks 30 rounds in a year from March to November. He sells his orthodox tea locally at Rs. 300-400 per kg. Generally, army officers and government employees purchase from the retail outlet that he runs from his house. The efforts to switch over to organic cultivation have also brought better results in terms of quality and price of his orthodox tea manufactured at home.

The STGs in Assam have been driven by individual family run enterprise. Family members are actively engaged in the garden and seasonal labourers are employed only. The STGs have been developed using areas which had hitherto been unutilized or under untilized and an estimated 20 million hectares of land were brought under tea cultivation during the last decade by the small growers (DES Report: 2013). At least five workers are employed in each small garden and an estimated 2.40 lakh people are directly employed in the sector of which 1.45 lakhs are ex-tea garden or excess number of workers from the nearby big tea estates, especially women labourers (DES: 2013). The STGs in Assam is still in its

[10] The *Sighpho Tribe* is distributed over 19 villages in upper Assam and almost all the villages are located adjacent to each other. Some of the households have developed organic tea production and marketing it locally and abroad in Cannada.

nascent stage and is unorganized sector. As majority of the STGs do not have their own processing units and leaves are sold to BLF which is a form of dependent subcontract. Unregulated growth of STGs has also added to the uncertainty of leaf price and wide fluctuations. Notwithstanding the challenges the private initiatives has also helped the sector to sustain.

North Bengal

The STGs in North Bengal mostly sell their leaves through leaf agents who play a major role in leaf trading. They provide advance to the growers and exploit in terms of quantity and quality of leaf. The indebtedness of the growers to the agents leave them virtually trapped in the clutches leaf agents. The reason for selling green leaf through *Farias* is many and is complex combination of situational issues, assemblage and other economic factors (Hannan: 2006). An often repeated quote by the STGs is "*we follow the movement and direction of the wind"*.

In most STG farms prior indebtedness is the primary reason for selling green leaf at low prices to the *Farias*. The farm size is a natural constraint for regular production which also restricts access to avail the factory vehicle. Higher the size of the farm, regular is the production in the farm by rotating plucking in different fields on daily basis and better the incentive for factories to collect green leaf. The *Farias* play a mediating role by providing the vehicle and collecting the green leaves from the STGs. Therefore, this new intervening community is an outcome in response to the gap between the STGs and their nearby factory tea production units which procure their green tea leaves. In addition to being the link, the *Farias* also provide advance money, cash payment and other support services to these STGs to sustain their plantation and livelihood.

To overcome such an exploitative situation, the STGs have joined hands together and formed SHGs in Duars of North Bengal. There are three such societies: *The Panbari STGs Society, The Jai Jalpesh STGs Society,* and the *Naba Jagaran STGs Society*. Though the governance and conditions for establishment of *Tea Producing Societies* (SHGs) by Tea Board of India seems to be same, yet the other three states i.e. Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala, such models are yet to establish and transform their farms into processing and visible in marketing. The *Panbari* is the first STGs Society in India and *Jalpaiguri STGs Association* has played an active role in establishing such units. The agro-extension services and leadership qualities of the association propelled the STGs of the region to take the initiative of forming SHGs. Registering its product as *Mahalaxmi Tea* brand the group has been selling its tea in the auction market. The *Jai Jalpesh* society has its own registered brand named *Shib Bari Jai Jalpesh Bari Tea* since 2013. The factory has a retail outlet within its garden premises and promotes direct marketing. The entire production of the gardens is sold through auction. The Society has procured

export license in 2016 from Tea Board of India and have demonstrated their product in Russia and Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

There is an underlying process of change in the nature of implementation of policies of Government of India by the Tea Board with wide regional variations. A major limiting factor for the STGs have been the ownership rights over the land used for STGs which has also hampered the process of being registered with the Tea Board of India. The TBI is yet to engage in addressing this issue with state governments. The result has been that STGs which is an unorganized sector faces the uncertainty and challenges that are faced by any other production unit in the unorganized sector. Coupled with the market monopoly of BLFs, the STGs have been left with weak bargaining power. Lack of market information, absence of proper storage facilities, transportation problems ultimately bring down the price of green leaf.

It is worth mentioning that two countries i.e. Sri Lanka and Kenya where more than 60 per cent production of tea comes from smallholders, the respective governments and the regulatory agencies have put in relevant measures. There are elaborate mechanisms to secure better price to farmers and transparency in auction and non-auction markets which ultimately percolate down to the STGs in the supply chain. The TMCO has made provision for equitable sharing of the tea price between the STGs and BLFs by taking into account the cost of production of green tea leaves in the smallholdings and the cost of manufacturing and marketing by the BLFs. It is seen that the Association of BLFs are well connected to dictate their terms and conditions, while STGs have weak base to negotiate their terms of trade and it is reflected in implementing the Price-Sharing-Formula. The SGDD and SROs of Tea Board are yet to play an effective key role in implementing the objectives of District Level Price Monitoring Committee (DLPMC) of the respective district of their jurisdiction.

Most of the small tea gardens in Assam are on Government ceiling land without formal ownership. The Land Act of Assam restricts the transfer of ownership right to the growers. This restricts the growers to qualify for registration with Tea Board and avail the benefits under various schemes. Similarly, in Bengal the policy of providing NOC is required to register the farms. But the Govt. of West Bengal has withheld the process of issuing NOC to growers since 2001 and therefore the STGs cannot register with Tea Board and avail financial benefits from the formal sources. On the contrary, BLFs have been encouraged in both the states unlike the initiatives in Tamil Nadu where co-operative model was taken up and an INDCO factory model was started since 1960s.

Approximately fifty per cent of the production of the STGs farms (green leaf) come during the months between *July to September* (third quarter), while it is in this period STGs receive minimum price for their product. The introduction of proper irrigational measures and implementing catchment planning in the small tea-growing areas can enhance the farm production during February to June. This requires institutional support and incentives from Tea Board of India and respective State Governments. Per unit production in the small farms as compared to large ones is higher. Higher productivity in the small farm is on account of the relatively young plantations as the tea bushes are young ranging between 20 to 30 years as compared to old bushes in estate gardens. Small tea growers are merely price takers and sell their green leaf at whatever prices offered by the estate factories or BLFs. BLFs mostly procure through leaf agents who have become the major link between the growers and the factory/estate. The major share of green leaf prices are siphoned off by the *intermediaries* as the STGs are not directly linked with BLFs. In order to ensure a remunerative price to the STGs who are the dominant suppliers of green leaf to factories, there need to be some regulation on quality control, price of green tea and direct payment transfer system to the STGs from BLFs/estates. This would help in incentivizing the STGs and ensure due returns on their product.

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Annexure-I

Declaration of Green Leaf price under Price-Sharing Formula

Sl No.	Name of Factory	TMCO NO.	As Per E-Return (July 2006)	
			Made Tea (Rs/Kg)	Green Leaf (Rs/ Kg)
1	Aryaman Tea Factory	(RC. 1545)	N.P.S.	N.P.S.
2	Balasan Tea Factory	(RC. 1672)	58.89	7.60
3	Bansibihariji Tea Factory	(RC. 1672)	58.00	7.48
4	Dalmiya Tea Plants & Ind. Ltd	(RC. 1759)	62.64	8.08
5	Darshanand Holdings Factory	(RC. 1720)	61.06	7.88
6	Duke Tea Private Ltd.	(RC. 1767)	56.77	7.32
7	Durga Tea Industries	(RC. 1776)	60.25	7.77
8	Essels Tea Factory	(RC. 1665)	61.52	7.94
9	Fatapukur Tea Factory	(RC. 1415)	56.00	7.22
10	Gobra Agro Tea Factory	(RC. 1483)	50.00	6.45
11	Gupta Tea Factory	(RC. 1732)	63.99	8.26
12	Himalayan Tea Factory	(RC. 1555)	60.58	7.82
13	Hindustan Tea Processing	(RC. 1412)	70.01	9.03
14	Hanuman Tea Factory	(RC. 1641)	N.P.S.	N.P.S.
15	Jogihara Tea Factory	(RC. 1782)	65.00	8.39
16	Kanchan Agro Products	(RC. 1501)	55.98	7.22
17	Kanchanjanga Tea Factory	(RC. 1740)	59.00	7.61
18	Kayan Agro Tea Factory	(RC. 1549)	62.55	8.07
19	Limtex Steels Tea Factory	(RC. 1758)	59.49	7.67
20	Limtex Tea Factory	(RC. 1461)	59.65	7.69
21	M. Rudra Tea Factory	(RC. 1766)	N.P.S.	N.P.S.
22	Manakamna Tea Factory	(RC. 1638)	57.64	7.44
23	Mars Tea (India) Pvt. Ltd.	(RC. 1714)	49.89	6.44
24	Mount View Tea Factory	(RC. 1661)	55.87	7.20
25	Mohitnagar Tea Factory	(RC. 1681)	53.01	6.81
26	P.C.M. Tea Factory	(RC. 1619)	59.64	7.69

27	P.P.S. Progressive Tea Factory	(RC. 1531)	Closed	Closed
28	Parag Tea Factory	(RC. 1450)	59.17	7.63
29	Parsuram Tea Factory	(RC. 1697)	60.61	7.82
30	Pioneer Tea Factory	(RC. 1420)	60.71	7.83
31	Seal Tea Factory	(RC. 1463)	58.12	7.50
32	Sevok Tea Factory	(RC. 1593)	20.00	2.58
33	Shree Ganapati Tea Factory	(RC. 1464)	61.10	7.88
34	Shree Rama Tea Factory	(RC. 1528)	56.35	7.27
35	Sujali Tea Factory	(RC. 1693)	58.60	7.56
36	Sondeep Tea Factory	(RC. 1735)	58.22	7.51
37	Sundaram Agro Tea Factory	(RC. 1537)	62.39	8.04
38	Super Klass Tea Factory	(RC. 1541)	63.54	8.20
39	Shakti Tea Factory	(RC. 1467)	59.94	7.73
40	Shanti Tea Factory	(RC. 1647)	60.39	7.79
41	Tea Tops India Tea Factory	(RC. 1462)	65.86	8.50
42	Teesta Tea Co. Pvt. Ltd.	(RC. 1749)	63.21	8.15
43	Terai Dooars Tea Factory	(RC. 1746)	55.15	7.11
44	Terai (Karjeepara) Tea Factory	(RC. 1721)	58.92	7.60
45	Terai Tea Factory	(RC. 1644)	47.18	6.09
46	Terai Tea Factory (Exp)	(RC. 1628)	57.30	7.39
47	Topline Tea Factory	(RC. 2914)	57.38	7.40
48	Unique Tea Born Factory	(RC. 1630)	N.P.S.	N.P.S.
49	Ushasree Tea Factory	(RC. 1536)	61.41	7.92
50	Vrindaban Tea Factory	(RC. 1770)	54.88	7.08

N.P.S.-Not Properly Submitted
Source: Tea Board Regional Office, Siliguri, West Bengal

The Grammar of Desire: Of Restraints and Controls

Snigdha Bhaswati[1]

Abstract

Human bodies have been the primary sites of control, restricted by norms and traditions in order to keep the brahmanical, patriarchal societal order functioning smoothly. The essay here is an attempt at getting a glimpse of lives of a few women in 19th and 20th century Assam- the protagonists of certain selected works of Assamese literature. The idea is to analyze the tales that these literary masterpieces spin and locate the trajectory of lives of the women therein. Puberty, marriage and widowhood have been used as the three main tropes providing vantage points to view the ways in which the lives of these female protagonists have been directed here and the idea is to get a very broad picture of how female sexuality and sexual desires are kept under strict control lest they dare challenge the prevalent hierarchies of the society.

Introduction

With changing times the ways in which certain concepts had been perceived in the past have underwent major transformations keeping in sync with the present necessities and lifestyles. 'Love' and 'desire' remain two such terms, the conventional notions of which have been contested in the contemporary times in more than one ways; however, these still remain limited and for a large majority of the population in most places, there are undeniable continuities in the ways in which these are comprehended. Over time, across spaces, the human body has been controlled in myriad ways by the frameworks that the society manufactures to retain its order. Engels provides deep insights into how societies have made their journeys from a state of group marriage to that of monogamy- something that he understands as the struggle between the sexes and the final subjugation of the females by the males, that which was unknown in the previous periods of history (Engels,1985)- in a bid to determine the patrimony of the children which was not possible until the body of the female was restricted to a single male[2].

In this essay, our aim will be to look at the tropes of puberty, marriage and

[1] Snigdha Bhaswati (snigdha7.sb@gmail.com) pursuing masters in History, Ambedkar University, New Delhi.

[2] Engels explains in details how the structures of families change over time and how property relations become a major determinant in the process (Engels 1985, 18-44).

widowhood (the landmark stages in the life of a woman pointing at the conceived beginning, peak and demise of desire) and how at each phase the society attempts to box the female body with the grammar of desire that it drafts, elucidating its acceptable expressions and restraints.

History is omnipresent; it can be found wherever one can look for it. As sources, this essay primarily makes use of works of Assamese literature and at places a few folk songs of the state echoing the voices that are otherwise not heard of in the several bulky volumes of the canons of historical accounts. The view that they present is not from the apex but from the roots, forming the other half of the story. Under consideration are a few such works-'*Ayanaanta'* (Kalita ,1998)','*Swarnalata*' (Misra 1991), '*Makam'* (Chaudhury 2011),'*Pass Chotalar Kathakata*' (Kalita, 2000) and '*Mrigonabhi'* (Kalita,1996)[3]. What we aim to draw out of these works is a picture of the 19th and 20th century woman in Assam and how her desires were dictated by the syntax of society. However, it becomes extremely necessary here to add a disclaimer that in no way does the essay claim to represent the life of 'the Assamese Woman', which in itself is a non-existent homogenous category devoid of the many differences of class, caste and tribes that constitute the social fabric of the region. It only traces the lives of the female protagonists of these literary master pieces- which at best attempt to put across a basic idea of the living realities of a certain section of the caste Hindu women. To aid this effort we will also take up the case of a few folk songs of the state and hear what the woman had to say about her own life. Through these we will look at instances of how women have expressed their desires and how the filters of puberty, marriage and widowhood formed the pointers to a prescribed societal grammar, outside of which the language of desire was and still is seen as flawed and invalid.

Puberty: The Inception of Vice

The first signal for a civilized society that one of its constituent second class members- women- has become capable of desire is when she attains puberty. This becomes the turning point in the lives of many girls in the country whose bodies now become the primary site of control for the family; her newly raging hormones have to be kept in check lest these tempt her to step out of her boundaries of chastity. *Swarnalata*, set in the 19th century, placed utmost importance on the notion of pre puberty marriage. Even while the girl was supposed to remain at her paternal house until she attained puberty, she was supposed to be married off before; this was a way of ensuring that when she became ripe, the fruits of her young, slowly

[3] Unlike the other works, the story line and central characters of 'Swarnalata' are not fictitious. It is set primarily in Nagaon, a small town in Assam and the story unfolds in the house of the eminent Gunabhiram Barua (father of Swarnalata- the protagonist). Gunabhiram Barua was one of the few Assamese high ranking civil servants who was posted in Nagaon in the capacity of 'Extra Assistant Commissioner'. Gunabhiram Barua had close association with the Brahmo Samaj and he was a pioneer of the causes of widow remarriage and women's' education.

maturing body were consumed first and only by the husband and none else. The novel talks about how the nine year old Lakshmi, daughter of Swarna's teacher - a devout Brahmin, had her education at halt when she was wedded to a man she had never seen before. Swarna's father, owing to his association with the Brahmo Samaj was however strongly opposed to child marriage and was of the opinion that it was important for both the man and the woman to be physically and emotionally mature at the time of marriage, the larger the age gap between the husband and the wife, the lesser would be the intimacy of their relation. As we move to *Ayananta*, set in 20th century Assam we see that the insistence on pre puberty marriage dampens, nevertheless the significance of attainment of puberty remains immense. The attainment of puberty for a girl was, and still is, a celebrated event in Assam. In times of pre puberty marriage, of course, it marked the girl's eligibility to move to her husband's house, and eventually, as marriage became a post puberty affair, it became an event signifying the daughter's matrimonial and reproductive eligibility. On the surface, it sounds liberating, unlike in most other parts of the country a girl's menstruation is celebrated and looked upon as an occasion of happiness here, but on the core, things tend to be quite the opposite. The celebrations essentially consisted of a paraphernalia of brutal rituals for the girl, most of which are still observed. *Pass Chotalar Kathakata*, has a brilliant description of the same. She is kept in solitary confinement and is not allowed to meet or see any male member of the house; she is allowed just one proper meal a day, only before sunset and this may continue from around seven days to as long as three months. It is now when a girl's fortune is glanced into and depending on what is predicted, different rituals are observed. The promise of a happy married life is the desired prediction, while prophecies of widowhood or prostitution are feared and various ways are then adopted to please the gods to change the future prospects; all of the above mentioned predictions are based on the date and time of her attainment of puberty. She is conditioned to believe that the prime goal of her life is to be married and give birth, what more is anyway the cause of a woman's existence?

The celebration of a girl's first cycle of periods is hence a festive beginning of a lifelong process of confinement, of the first rules of the grammar of desire-that which was only legitimate if used for procreation with the husband (Mathur 2008, 55). The superstitions attached to it demonstrate how the husband's long and healthy life was assumed to be associated with the control over the woman's body; the greater the control, the longer and happier the husband's life. The process of isolating women during menarche moreover does not stop with the rituals observed the first time and carries on until menopause. It is hence also important to note how ideas of pollution are strongly attached to menstruating women, and how their seclusion for a certain number of days each month also becomes a way of constantly designating the status of impurity and inferiority upon them (Das,2008).

Marriage: The Ideal World

The case of Jeuti in *Ayanaanta* is an interesting story in itself, something which might have now changed noticeably. Jeuti, who had committed the grave sin of acting in a motion picture, was to face drastic and cruel consequences for her actions. She was forced to live in isolation with an imposition of ill repute, assigned a particular corner in the banks of the river to fetch water from or bathe in, away from the reach of the other women of the village on whom she would have had a 'bad' influence. She was seen as someone who dared to stage her body in public, who could therefore motivate other women to freely acknowledge their bodies, which were the sites of desire and which then had the potential to taint the honor of their families. Jeuti was hence to be kept aloof. The same Jeuti however, became a figure of reverence and beauty when she was finally married off to an affectionate lawyer who sympathized with her situation. This presents a classic example of how the position and perception of the woman in the society was determined by her marriage, implying that her desires were now tamed and under control, an assurance for the smooth functioning of patriarchy.

The burden of keeping a 'marriageable' girl in the house was immense; her youthful, tender body made her vulnerable and she herself could not be trusted with the safe guarding of her chastity. She was seen to be full of desires which if not streamlined through marriage, could prove to be dangerous for the honor and name of the family. The fact that a young girl could wish to set out in a pursuit of pleasure for her body was unacceptable and had to be avoided at all costs. Marriage, the other major trope in the grammar book of desire, had to be arranged by the family. In *Ayananta*, we see the haste in which the protagonist Bina's wedding was finalized post her growing intimacy with a young Christian boy. Bina was married to a man with character polar opposite and life thereafter changed for her losing its charms and vigor. Another instance depicted in the same novel is that of one of Bina's neighbours- Ruma, who too was married off to a man she never liked after her affair with a young revolutionary from the village. The girl lost her sanity post the wedding as she could never accept her husband as her partner. Ruma was denied medical treatment by the family, by her own father, and spent the rest of her life being a complete imbecile who was unaware even of the birth of her own daughter. She was chained and locked in a shed where she slept, excreted, and ate what could be supplied secretly by her mother. Her daughter who was born in that very shed was also not acknowledged by the family and was ultimately looked after by Bina and her grandmother. The honor and dignity of the family came over and above anything else. Love and desire were dangerous and no stones could be left unturned in the efforts to prevent these. Conjugal life was an imposition. This is made further clear in *Mrigonabhi*, set in the late 20th century, where the bright young protagonist Sontara was required to marry a man she developed immense dislike for. When she goes and complains to her

mother about an incidence where her fiancé had kissed her by force and that she did not wish to marry him, the latter only reiterated how the female body was meant for the consumption of the males and that it was an unavoidable reality. The woman was supposed to be the sponge to soak in the untamed desires of the man while refraining herself from taking agency over her own life. Marriage was the only niche where desire was approved for the woman, and if need be, she had to manufacture it in order to sustain the relationship with her husband. For the man, of course, heterosexual desire came as a package deal with masculinity. We see through these stories how the women tried to resist the course of events that unfolded in their lives only to be suppressed further, be the case of Sontara who approached her mother for help or Ruma who denied accepting the man she was married to physically and emotionally even at the cost of her own sanity.

Many folk songs from the state echo the cries of the wives whose marriages were unsatisfactory and who then blamed their parents for having married them off to husbands who were extremely poor or were addicted to opium, which again was a rampant practice.

"O Aai kene biya dila baape
Morilu Morilu Somulai morilu
Jotiya bhangurar taape.
Aaither ghorote jau moi Bhangura,
Taate he emuthi pau
Kartik , Ganapati
Duguti sampatti
Taako moi logote niu"

This is one such song where the woman wails on her misfortune and talks of her opium addict husband. She says she must go to her mother's, for it is only there she will get something to fill her stomach with and she must also take her only wealth, the two sons along. The women, oppressed and subjugated by the conditions of the society found in these songs an outlet for their frustrations; through these they sang their dissent and registered their protests.

In parts of lower Assam the custom of bride price prevailed for some time in the course of history before it fizzled away[1]. The roots of the practice must have been associated with the daughter being an important productive force in the family. For the father, marrying her off meant losing a hand at work, hence the

[1] The reason why the custom of bride price came to be opposed later must have been because it was a practice that had more adverse affect on the groom's family and not the bride's. Since the trouble had to be incurred by the boys and their kin. However, as a reversal of bride price, dowry became a common practice in the state.

groom was asked to compensate for the loss[2] (Randeria and Visaria,1984). This was before dowry became the vogue and practice, and a folk sung in Goalpara (a district in Assam) perhaps is the most moving description of the plight of the women literally 'sold' in marriage.

"Mon mor kande rey
Raati nisha ore kande
Ninder aalishe poti mok
Maa buliya daake
Mon mor kaande rey
Baapo kaana maa o kaana
O daroon o bidhi kaana parar log
Poicha r lobhe
Bechiya khaiche
Shwami nabalok
Mon mor kande rey

Koya den mor doya'r baba ko
O kaga ok dudho pathiyare diben
Shei na dudho khaya
Kaga mor poti manush hoiben
Mon mor kandey re"

The woman grieves and wails in the darkness of the night as her husband, in his sleep calls her 'Maa'. She blames her parents and even her neighbors and calls them blind, for having sold her to a groom who was still a child, and hence a lot younger to her. In the last stanza the unfortunate wife requests her father to send her some milk, consuming which her husband would become a 'man'. This demonstrates the agony of a woman whose marriage fails to meet her expectations and her desires hence remain unquenched. This is again an example of how the patriarchal societal set up directly controlled the body and needs of the women.

A sharp contrast here is presented in *Makam*. Unlike the severe, demanding, apparent 'civilized' society, the tea tribes which were basically amalgamations of people from different places, from China to areas in and around present day Bihar and Jharkhand, appeared to be more liberal when it came to their social customs. Marriage there was a matter of companionship and affection between the bride and the groom, a decision that they took for themselves. When a Chinese bonded labor married an Indian widow the entire tea laborers' community celebrated in

[2] This is a broad understanding of the practice drawn from the classical African experience where it was rampant, and it has been pointed out by scholars that the same logic might not be applicable to all instances of bride price.

heartfelt glee unlike in the caste Hindu societies around, where it would be an act of criminal proportions and would lead to banishment of the couple. The workers whose lives in the tea gardens were only marginally different from slaves, found solace in marriage, and which was more a matter of emotions than norms. Besides, in a setting where everyone was uprooted from their native soils being indentured labors, with hardly any tradition to hold on to, the tea laborers devised their own merriment. It was not considered essential for girls to be married at an age where they could scarcely comprehend the essence of the bond, instead mature adults made their own decisions when they deemed best. The structuring of the grammar of desire was different owing to the unique circumstances therein.

One can see a similar celebration of desire during the festivities of Bihu, which essentially is an agricultural festival revolving around the seasons of sowing, growing and harvesting of paddy. Scholars opine that behind these festivals the key idea was the production of crops and children, the latter being essential for the former and the former for the sustenance of life- *"dancing girl of the open field is the personification of the spring earth. The dancing boy represents the monsoon-cloud mad for union with the virgin earth. As an expression of their (cloud and earth) union, rains come down. The womb of the earth is fertilized with the seed of production. Procreation results. The boys and girls of the Bihu-field give symbolic expression to this biological aspect of nature's existence. The posture of Bihu dances, particularly of the waist-line of the boys, indicates sex-approaches. The vibrations created on the nerves by the music of the drums, buffalo-horns and Bihu songs intensify the emotional reactions of the youthful boys and girls. Thus in the Bihu dance-arena often life's partners are found. For a dancing girl to run away with a dancing boy is a common experience of the Bihu-field*' (Barua,1973). The following is a stanza of one of such songs to be sung by the girl

Amona dhanoke daboloi goisilu
Bauli Botahe Paale,
Kaasi doli mari Habite xumalo
Uthote Borole Khale

The girl here is describing how she had gone to the fields to harvest the paddy and was met by the stormy winds, an indication to her lover; she dropped her sickle and entered the forest for her lips to be stung by the bee which again, as is clear, is another euphemism here. On another instance, the boy sings-

Poka tul tul bilahi oi
Pasi bhorai dila hi oi
Gote gote gilibor mon

Here, the boy is referring to the bosoms of the girl using the metaphor of robust, ripe tomatoes that she offered to him and which he wants to savor immediately.

There was an unabashed admission of desire and lust here, set against a typical agrarian setting, often used as prop in the expression of their emotions. However with the coming of colonialism and the changing perceptions of the newly emerging Assamese elite by the second half of the 19th century, the festival came to be increasingly looked upon as a vulgar practice with its suggestive dance moves and lyrics. It was only post independence that it assumed the status of a cultural symbol of the state enthusing nationalism. By then as the demands for population growth reduced, owing to declining mortality rates, better health facilities etc. the festival ceased performing its earlier function of being a signifier of fertility and went on to be carried out as a matter of tradition (Barua,2009). With these changing circumstances and sensibilities, the lyrics of the Bihu songs and also the dance steps to a great extent came to be sanitized in order to make it as suitable as possible to the societal expectations while still retaining the element of romance. Once again, the rules of grammar shaped the open celebration of desire to fit into the framework of marriage, honor and patriarchy.

Widowhood: The Termination of Life

After her marriage, the woman becomes a necessary agent for reproduction and the unpaid servant of the household. However, the ideal wife's status would drop down suddenly from a home maker to a lumber too heavy to bear in case of her husband's demise. Widowhood became a life time reality, and as Uma Chakravarty puts it, with the death of her husband the widow too ceased to be a person (Chakravarty,1995). The worst scenario was perhaps for those who were widowed even before they could go to their husband's house and start their conjugal lives. Child widows were many and they were made to live a nightmare the causes of which they probably could not even grasp clearly at their tender age. An eight year old is made to mourn the death of a person whom perhaps she had seen only at the time of her marriage. She is made to live with the guilt that the reason of her husband being dead was nothing but her misfortune alone. In *Swarnalata*, we see how Swarna's friend Lakshmi was widowed even before she could start her married life, and how it was she who was blamed for the calamity, even while the cause of death was physical illness. *Pass Chotalar Kathakata* has managed to give an extremely sensitive and moving description of the condition of Assamese child widows - how their mothers lamented with the pain of seeing their young daughters' lives change in a moment, the girls who loved to have meals with fish and meat, were forced to accept a vegetarian diet, their bodies now had to be covered only with white robes and lives were restricted to the boundaries of their household. The little, growing girls reeled in hunger while they were allowed just one meal only in the daytime. The mothers tried different ways to keep their daughters fed, for instance an account was given of a mother who tied her widow daughter's hand, when she would take her afternoon nap, to the plate of rice that she was served in the day so that her hand won't move away from it

and the mother could fill up more in the same plate when the daughter woke up just before sunset. For the daughter it would be continuing the same meal as her hand wouldn't be washed nor would the plate be changed. Hence, even though in reality she would have eaten twice, it would count as only one meal in the day, saving the little widow of intense hunger. In circumstances as dire as these, the concept of widow remarriage was abominable and impossible, the Widow Remarriage Act passed in 1856 was merely inked on paper than anything else. The widow was to live a life of the dead and all the different forms of restraints imposed on her were to ensure that her body could not grow or flourish enough to harbor desire, for again the syntax of society does not validate any form of desire other than what was expected in a marriage settlement. *Mrigonabhi* where the story line is comparatively more recent than the other works considered here (set in late 20th century), depicts how Sontara, a modern day working woman, a single mother, and widow of a man known for his notoriety who was murdered for his very acts of sexual harassment, was but questioned and ridiculed when she finally found companionship again. When the family of her deceased husband turns her son (who she had single handedly raised) against her, the story brings forth the question- how and why a single woman finding love interpeted as moral degradation and an act of injustice towards her dead husband? The curbing of a widow's freedom and desires were again directly related to matters of property and whether or not she had a share on her deceased husband's wealth. Her association with an outsider could mean loss of property for the family, especially if she had a son who was to inherit his dead father's fortunes. To prevent situations like these, it was convenient to chalk out standard norms which then became contributions to the syntax of the language of desire.

Conclusion

The language of desire is as old as humankind. Human bodies have wished to be embraced and pleasured. The bindings of what we understand today as romantic, heterosexual, monogamous love might have been later additions to the changing fabric of inter-personal relations which are deeply entangled to the material world around; wherein the ideas of property and inheritance determine what is acceptable and what constitutes perversion and vulgarity. As mentioned earlier in the essay, the society made its own grammar book of desire, a set of structures and rules which tried to captivate the physical desires and longing in humans, especially women, the control over whose bodies was essential to determine the patrimony of the children that would be born out of her womb. This was an important knowledge as the location of the birth of a child sustained the entire foundation of the society, which religion or caste the child was born into, what occupation a child could pursue and what a child could inherit. Women, as a separate category of control, in relation to kinship networks is hence constructed primarily within the family and defined by it (Mohanty,1984). The dominated

body of the woman also became a reflection of masculinity by 'being the site of its absence'; the more the absence of powers of decision making for the women, the more the proof of prowess of the males in the family who keep their females well subdued (Butler,1990). What is but interesting is that the presence of such strict rules in the first place is indicative of the fact that attraction and desire were only the most natural sensations which had to be curbed with coercion and fear. More often than not we see people daring to break these rules, and register their small attempts of dissent, instances which formed backdrops and stage for writers and other artists to work upon. These small voices were however significant, reflecting the under-bellies of the functioning societies, portraying what became acts of subversion under varying circumstances and how over time the perception of the same behaviors could vary drastically. Taking puberty, marriage and widowhood as the three landmarks, this essay has made a preliminary attempt at comprehending how the expression of desire was constricted through control over the female body. The essay has tried to explore this reality of women's life with examples from Assamese literary sources. The grim reality is that most of these restrictions are still observed and some have changed forms over time to keep up with the pace of the changing world. Control over the bodies of one section of the society is a tool to ensure that they forever remain the subjugated lot and their subjugation is the foundation for the rest to flourish upon; methods have changed but this basic idea remains the same. An ideal society free of suppression, free for expressions of love and desire, a society with equal opportunities for all is often conceived as an utopia. However, what is the truth after all? Is not the labeling of a vision as utopian only a means to ascertain that the dream is never strived for, that ultimately complacency with the present is the only rational, practical way to live? Had that been the truth, would societies have not stagnated ages ago, at the very instance of their inception?

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Thoughts on North East India

Amar Yumnam[1]

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The North East part of India bordering South East Asia and with Bangladesh as a big chunk lying between the rest of India and the region has been in the news particularly since the mid-1970s. This has aroused intense interest in the region.

Development Economics enjoyed a high tide from the birth in the 1950s and during the 1960s but suffered low credibility and consequent decline in popularity for about a decade and a half from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s. The researches in mid-1980s have turned out to be a robust grounding for recovery with gusto. This was a period with Chaos Theory in Mathematics and Post-Modernism in Philosophy influencing the rethinking at issues and reality. Further it was also a period when big-data analyses became possible with the availability of powerful computers and accompanying programmes. In keeping with the methodological changes in Mathematics and Philosophy, in Economics (particularly in Development Economics) the emphasis on contextualisation for understanding Economic Phenomena and evolving Development Interventions gained momentum. The late 1980s (post-1986 in particular) and the early 1990s are landmark years for the robust rebounding of Development Economics. During this period, various theoretical innovations in thinking about development and emphasising significance of contextual realities emerged. The Endogenous Growth Theorists, Institutional Economists and New Economic Geographers made their contributions during this period. All of them – Robert Lucas, Paul Romer, Douglas North, Oliver Williamson, Elinor Ostrom, Paul Krugman – have already been awarded Nobel Prizes in Economics. The contributions of these economists enabled the scholars to identify the areas where we should be looking for realities. In this context, the Economists started emphasising the primacy of evolving evidence-based policies for development intervention; India's Professor Kaushik Basu (former Chief Economic Advisor of India, former Chief Economist at the World Bank and now back to Cornell University, Ithaca, New York) is one of

[1] Prof. Amar Yumnam (amar.yumnam@fulbrightmail.org)is with Manipur University.

the main protagonists of this articulation. The recent Randomisation approaches for evolving development interventions are a natural progression of the discipline. Development Economics is the in thing once again.

In this context, it is a very refreshing and relevant occurrence to have a book on the transformation of the North Eastern Region of India from an Economist who justifiably claims "*I am a development economist."* Atul Sarma is yet the Best Economics Mind the North East has produced. Second, though from the region, he has all along made his presence felt as an Economist in places outside the region academically as well in policy debates. Second, though, except as a Vice Chancellor of Rajiv Gandhi University in Arunachal Pradesh, his professional placements have all along been outside the region; the Sardar Patel Institute in Ahmedabad, the Indian Statistical Institute in Delhi, and various Finance Commissions besides the international engagements outside the country. Third, though always engaged in positions outside the region, he has all along been present in discussions, debates and recommendations on development issues concerning the North East right from the late 1970s to till date.

With the earlier interventions for addressing developmental transformation failing to deliver in the North East, there naturally had emerged intense hunger for evolution of contextual development interventions. The earlier process of framing policies based on homogenising an essentially diverse country in all the critical multidimensional properties had failed. Approaches to development intervention in the region have all along lacked endogeneity. Further the so-called experts - administrative or otherwise – had their knowledge of the understanding of the region from a visit of only a few days to the region; in most cases, they came to the region with solutions in their pockets and concentrate on looking for areas for application of the solutions. In fact, the lack of appreciation of the differentials prevailing in the region, and non-evolution of policies based on contextual realities have been the undoing. The approach of the Government of India (GOI) to the development needs of the North Eastern Region (NER) has been well-summarized by the High Level Commission, popularly known as the Shukla Commission thus: *"The Northeast tends to be seen as a distant post, some kind of land's end. Yet it was until recently a crossroads and a bridge to Southeast and East Asia, with its great rivers ending in ocea*n *terminals……the Northeast must be enabled to grow at its own pace and in accordance with its own genius. It cannot be treated merely as a resource region, market dump and transit yard. There is a strong resentment over what is seen as an earlier phase of "colonial exploitation" in which wealth was extracted for others' enrichment. Such a path of development is not advocated."*

This weakness is coupled by weaknesses of regional governance to articulate unique requirements and dovetail regional policies to the unfolding national

and global challenges. Well, it is a general feature in regions of poor regulations and weak governance that the people in the decision-making positions look at governance predominantly from the perspective of rent-seeking. For the public it is as if what Rousseau wrote in *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality: "*All ran headlong to their chains, in hopes of securing their liberty; for they had just wit enough to perceive the advantages of political institutions, without experience enough to enable them to foresee the dangers… Such was, or may well have been, the origin of society and law, which bound new fetters on the poor, and gave new powers to the rich; which irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, eternally fixed the law of property and inequality, converted clever usurpation into unalterable right, and, for the advantage of a few ambitious individuals, subjected all mankind to perpetual labour, slavery, and wretchedness." No we cannot allow such a situation to prevail and sustain in the North East. There is a fundamental contract between the people and the government for attending to the needs for general welfare. As James Buchanan writes in his celebrated C*alculus of Consent* the collective choice responsibility is given to the government because; "The attainment of consent is a costly process, however, and a recognition of this simple fact points directly toward an "economic" theory of constitutions. The individual will find it advantageous to agree in advance to certain rules (which he knows may work occasionally to his own disadvantage) when the benefits are expected to exceed the costs. The "economic" theory that may be constructed out of an analysis of individual choice provides an explanation for the emergence of a political constitution from the discussion process conducted by free individuals attempting to formulate generally acceptable rules in their own long-term interest. It is to be emphasized that, in this constitutional discussion, the prospective utility of the individual participant must be more broadly conceived than in the collective-choice process that takes place *within defined rules…*The areas of human activity that the reasonably intelligent individual will choose to place in the realm of collective choice will depend to a large extent on how he expects the choice processes to operate". The government of any day is supposed to work within this framework and keeping the expectations of the people in mind. I would like the prevailing provincial government to remember what John Rawls has said in his classic A theory of Justice that "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others" and inequality is to be accepted only in so far as it means to promote the "greatest benefit of the least advantaged,"

For these critical reasons, when Atul Sarma writes on the region of his love and based on the exemplary principles of his core discipline, Economics, the world has to listen. When I say the world, I would inevitably at least include the Indian intelligentsia, the governments at both provincial and national levels and the scholars engaged on thinking about the issues of the region. The North East happens to be the marketing interest of book publishers, and thus publications

keep coming out. Unfortunately there are few of these which deserve burning the midnight oil. In my life, I have completed only two books at one go – first was the A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens and the second is the book I am reviewing today; the first book is such a wonderful narration of the cost of the First Industrial Revolution and the second is an exemplar articulation of the development challenges in the North East.

The book under review is a collection of sixteen papers already published at different locations, but here it gives us the opportunity to have a look at the core articulation of Atul Sarma as an Economist preoccupied with the rather lack of transformation of the region. On constraining development in the region, the author talks of "five I's – Initial conditions, Infrastructure lag, Insurgency, Imperfection/ distortion in factor and product markets, and Indifferent governance" in the very first Chapter and this framework is salient in the other chapters as well. One can see Gunnar Myrdal, Institutional Economists and New Economic Geographers in his articulations on Initial Conditions, Factor and Product Markets and the regional context. The author argues and quite rightly that development does not happen in a vacuum. Here he also argues that a clear perspective of development from the side of governance is paramount. On the lack of emergence of any meaningful development transformation, the author mentions inter alia three significant governance characteristics. First, any major development intervention in the region has been more out of "ad hoc responses to public agitation rather than following from a development perspective." This has had the unfortunate consequence of "[w]idespread corruption and cynicism of the bureaucracy [as] both cause and effect of the casual approach to development." Second, the governance approach to the policy intervention in the region has been rather security-centric rather than focused development articulation. Third, the absence of contextualisation of governance approaches had expectedly led to the failure of any significant sectoral development failing to link with a potential sustained transformation of the region. In this, the author gives the examples of Tea and Oil in Assam.

Further, the security orientation rather than development orientation of governance is also critiqued in the book; how the Asian Miracle had happened may be recalled here. Since the kind of democracy India professes to follow is not uniquely indigenous, and has traces of a long Western trajectory, it would be interesting how the debates relating to government-imposed restrictions have evolved there. Before stretching the history far into the past, we can start with a 1849 piece of a French economist, Gustave de Molinari (1818–1912). This Belgian-born French economist has a brilliant lineage on either side of pedagogy; he was a student of Jean-Baptiste Say but teacher of Vilfredo Pareto. He was for several decades the editor of the Journal des Économistes, the professional journal of the French Economic Association, the Societéd' Économie Politique. His February 1849 piece

on "De la Production de la Securité" has been translated by McCulloch in 1977 as "Production of Security". In this there is one portion relating to government provision of security where de Molinari writes: *"If, on the contrary, the consumer is not free to buy security wherever he pleases, you forthwith see open up a large profession dedicated to arbitrariness and bad management. Justice becomes slow and costly, the police vexatious, individual liberty is no longer respected, the price of security is abusively inflated and inequitably apportioned, according to the power and influence of this or that class of consumers."* While one may not go to the extent of market-driven provision of security, the observations on consequences of government monopoly of this provision are absolutely apt for our case as well. Let us look at the Indian legal system, the arbitrariness of government functioning, deep rooted rent-seeking in running the affairs of the state in the name of the state by the government, and the massive inequitable apportionment of rights to decide by the Centre on issues relating to provincial governance, particularly those relating to the North East, and Manipur.

This critique of the government is reflected strongly in the twentieth century writings as well, particularly in the essays of Albert Jay Nock. In this connection one paragraph from the classic book written by him, On Doing The Right Thing, is very telling: "Everyone knows that the State …forbids private murder, but itself organizes murder on a colossal scale. It punishes private theft, but itself lays unscrupulous hands on anything it wants, whether the property of citizen or of alien. There is, for example, no human right, natural or Constitutional, that we have not seen nullified by the United States Government. Of all the crimes that are committed for gain or revenge, there is not one that we have not seen it commit—murder, mayhem, arson, robbery, fraud, criminal collusion and connivance. On the other hand, we have all remarked the enormous relative difficulty of getting the State to effect any measure for the general welfare. Compare the difficulty of securing conviction in cases of notorious malfeasance, and in cases of petty private crime. Compare the smooth and easy going of the Teapot Dome transactions with the obstructionist behaviour of the State toward a national child-labour law. Suppose one should try to get the State to put the same safeguards (no stronger) around service-income that with no pressure at all it puts around capital-income: what chance would one have? It must not be understood that I bring these matters forward to complain of them. I am not concerned with complaints or reforms, but only with the exhibition of anomalies that seem to me to need accounting for."

Atul Sarma have put forth powerful arguments, and there are quite a few other issues in the book besides those mentioned here which need pondering over, like the disconnect between the product base and the diversifying consumption in the region. All these are issues the public and the governance need to seriously apply their mind.

Besides, the important issues confronting the development transition in the region being expounded in the book, I would definitely like the book to be read by all the budding scholars in the Social Sciences in institutes around the region. One big challenge today in Social Science research in the region is the rising dominance by mechanical approaches rather than the application of a critical mind. The present book gives a robust display of the application of Economics Mind on issues confronting the region; this is the way to go about.

Overall, I would definitely recommend the book to be read by all the academics, general public and the policy-makers in the region. I could think of only one weakness in the book where the few discussions on Insurgency do not get appropriately linked with the core arguments of the book.

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