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Editorial

As I welcome you to a happy and prosperous 2012 I would like to announce my desire to retire from the editorship of this journal that I nurtured, almost like my own child, for the past 10 years almost single-handed. During the last 10 years the journal was published regularly, albeit delayed at times due to unavoidable reasons. It has stabilized and its list of subscribers is growing slowly but steadily. When I started I needed to solicit articles; today it is refereed and two out of six submissions get rejected and yet articles are ready for the next issue as well. I also take this opportunity to thank all the referees who read the articles without charging any fees and give me valuable guidance on whether or not to publish them. I sometimes overrule their advice for certain ideological values I have upheld but that is what an editor is expected of. Now, I would like someone from NEHU community to take up this responsibility, someone who is willing to walk an extra mile for the institution that our seniors have so dearly built, someone who is ready to give away one's own personal books to the reviewers if need be, someone who loves editing work which otherwise goes unacknowledged even by those contributors whose articles often greatly improve after editing, and someone who is willing to run the office of the editor alone from one's desktop computer. If there is none who wants to come forth I would think that we have failed to develop a sense of belonging to the institution that gives us bread, butter, and identity not just while we are in service but even after we retire!

In this issue I first present the second out of three Dr. Verrier Elwin Endowment lectures delivered by Professor A. N. M. Irshad Ali in March 2011. This lecture deals with an aspect of the hill areas of Northeast India about which very little is known – the history of Muslims and how they slowly became an organic part of the region. The next article by Professor Binod Agarwala is a critical reading of the tribal cultures of the region based on the theoretical premises of Jean-Francois Bayart, as explicated in *The Illusion of Cultural Identity* (2005). While one may disagree with his formulations of the tribal cultures, or his liberal reference to Bayart, one cannot ignore the arguments he builds in this article. This is followed by Jyotirmoy Prodhani's article on the Rajbanshi poetry. Prodhani successfully builds his argument that the Rajbanshi poetry resonates the pain, frustration, sense of degeneration, and a desire to rise up as Rajbanshis whether they are living in the districts of North Bengal or western Assam or for that matter in other areas where they are found in less significant number. The fourth article is by Harpreet Vohra who compares two Indian novels - Anjum Hasan's *Neti Neti* and Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August* - in which the main characters suffer from a sense of 'dislocation' from their former 'locations', Shillong and Calcutta respectively.

The next article on diabetes among the Khasi and Jaintia population by Don Syiem and others is based on preliminary findings by a group of scholars but contains something that may be taken note of by health planners and administrators of Meghalaya as "readings on the wall", which we often tend to ignore until it is too late. The next article by Md. Abdullah Khan, S. Ahmad and Huma Matloob is also related to health. The authors in their article try and show the role of changing landuse pattern and house designs in affecting human health in Imphal Valley of Manipur, the easternmost state of Northeast India. Although the generalizations drawn are still rather inconclusive the article provides early warning against indiscriminate expansion of human habitations, which in the ultimate analysis, is detrimental to human health, if not the health of other species as well. The last article is also in a way related to health, but that of tea industry in Sikkim, which as Manjushree Mishra and Sapna Poti argue has its own share of challenges despite huge potential and a proactive industrial policy of the state government.

T. B. Subba

Contents

Islam in the Hill Areas of Northeast India

[Second Lecture, XV Dr. Verrier Elwin Endowment Lectures, Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, March 29-30, 2011]

A.N.M. Irshad Ali

I

Islam originated in Arab after the turn of the seventh century. In the subsequent centuries, it spread to Middle or Near East, lower Nile river delta, Mediterranean coast of North Africa, Western Sudan, North East Etopic dry plains, East African coast, Central Asia, South Asia and Iran, South East Asia, etc.

The complexity of studying the Muslims of the world in terms of hundreds of languages and ethnic groups may be simplified by identifying larger culture areas. Such a system assumes that ethnic groups within a single area will have some cultural commonality. To an extent this is feasible, especially where culture areas embrace a major linguistic area or encompass relatively simple physical environment (Weekes 1984). It is possible to identify nine culture areas in which most Muslims live. [Culture area here refers to a geographical area in which the inhabitants share most of the elements of culture such as language, ecological conditions, economic systems, socio-cultural and ideological systems.]

1. The dry lands of Southwest Asia, often called the Middle or Near East, is the heartland of Arab culture. Largely semiarid with mountains and plains, but fertile river valleys, it includes the countries of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. Its people, almost totally Arab except for the Turks and Jewish Israelis, are largely rural, either as cultivators or nomads, but with strong and active urban populations in such cities as Beirut, Damascus, Amman, Baghdad, Mecca, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv-Yafo, Izmir, Istanbul and Ankara.

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2. The lower Nile River delta is the home of nearly 45 million Arabs who were once non-Arab Egyptians. The narrow inhabited area along the Nile has a population density exceeding 2,000 persons per square mile.

3. The Mediterranean coast of North Africa, called the 'Maghreb' in Arabic (sunset), hosts a culture composed of pre-Islamic traditions overlaid by Arab culture. The people, Arab and Berber, follow coastal living patterns as well as arid mountain and fertile valley life-styles.

4. The Arabs called the area to the South of the Maghreb *Sudan*, meaning "black". It is a 1000-mile-wide belt stretching 3000 miles from the Red Sea in the east to the Atlantic Ocean in the West. The northern edge of the Sudan is desert, which becomes dryland plains (called Sahel) and, finally, forest in the South. Western Sudan was the site of the great empires of Mali and Songhay, whose people were converted to Islam by the Berbers and Arabs beginning in the ninth century. Central Sudan, around Lake Chad, is dominated by the Muslim Hausa and Kanuri, who farm the dry plains along the Niger River and northern Nigeria. Eastern Sudan is the dry plains area around the upper Nile in the Republic of Sudan in southern Egypt.

5. The northeast Ethiopic dry plains, forest and sea coast constitute a culture area of semi-sedentary Muslims who were converted to Islam by Arab armies and missionaries soon after the advent of Islam. The people include Afar, Somali, Tigre and Oromo (Galla), who are noted for their fiercely independent spirit.

6. The East African coast, forested and with numerous trading cities, is culturally heterogeneous. Arabs, Persians and many ethnic groups from South Asia settled here – some to intermarry with the native Bantu, others to establish endogamous societies.

7. The Central Asian steppes reflect a culture area whose people are primarily Turkic speakers. The highlands are dry and suitable to pastoralism, while the rivers and valleys support such famous Muslim cities as Samarkand and Tashkent. This is the land of the Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Tatars and Turkmen.

8. The great Aryan migrations of 2000 B.C. established a broad culture area reaching from Iran in the west to the border of Bengal (and beyond) in the east. The geographical area of South Asia embraces Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bengal, Assam, Northeastern

India, etc. It is a land of mountains and plains adaptive to both pastoralism and sedentary farming. The people speak languages of the Indo-Iranian family. Their cultures include elements of an occupational caste system (South Asia and Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Assam, Northeastern India).

9. Southeast Asia beginning with the rivers of Bengal is an area of rivers, forests, peninsulas and islands whose people have developed cultures based on wet rice farming and seafaring. Their conversion to Islam came later than in the western culture areas, and their religion is strongly syncretistic (hills and mountains of Northeastern India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Malaysia).

The introduction of Islamic beliefs into different local societies involved radical socio-political changes, apart from the more personal aspects of conversion (Rigby 1966: 268). As Islam spread to various parts of the world, it gradually took over many elements and features of indigenous folk traditions. The presence of indigenous folk elements in the social life of various local Muslim communities is to some extent explainable in terms of proselytization of local populations into Islam. While examining the interrelationships between the Islamic doctrines and the local cultures that have become Islamized, G. Von Grunebaum (1955) states that there are different ways in which conflict, coexistence and interaction of the Islamic high culture and local cultures can be described. Anthropological and sociological studies on the spread of Islam have concerned themselves mainly with the problems of 'culture contact' or 'acculturation'.

Several anthropological and sociological studies in culture contact between Islam and various local communities and cultural traditions, in parts of the world, have demonstrated the extent of Muslim influence on various spheres of social life of the traditional cultures and the patterns of adoption and assimilation of Islamic elements by the traditional cultures. Religious and cultural syncretism is a worldwide phenomenon arising out of culture contact. The interrelated aspects of this phenomenon are culture change, reinterpretation, assimilation, etc. the concept of syncretism was originally proposed by Herskovits (1938) when he observed the extensive blending of African tribal religious meaning and Christian forms among the New World Negro cultures. Syncretism refers to the combination and blending of elements from different cultural and religious traditions. This is a general feature of the development of cultural and religious systems over time, as they absorb

and reinterpret elements drawn from other traditions with which they are in contact (Smith 1968). Some of these studies have also referred to a 'syncretism' between Islamic and traditional customs and rituals (Geertz 1965, Greenberg 1941,1946, Lewis 1966, Rigby 1966, Weekes 1984). Such syncretism is also discernible in Northeast India in general and Assam in particular (Ali 2006:141-49).

II

The process of the spread of Islam to various parts of North-East India and Assam started as early as the thirteenth century. This region came into contact with the Muslims when expeditions were undertaken by a number of Muslim invaders. Between 1206 A.D. and 1662 A.D. several expeditions were made by different Muslim invaders to this region. Every Muslim invasion contributed a little towards the strengthening and propagation of Islamic faith in this region. Migrations of the Muslims into different parts of Northeastern India at various times and conversion of local people to Islam are some of the primary factors responsible for the growth of Muslim population and the formation of a number of discrete Muslim communities in the region.[1]

The spread of Islam (since 1206), Sikhism (since 1668) and Christianity (since 1826) along with the people coming from outside the region resulted in acculturation among these religions and the different local societies. In the process, conversion of groups of local peoples to these religions took place and also these religions gradually took over many elements and features of indigenous folk traditions.

Islam among Khasis and Garos

Khasis came into contact with Muslims around the 17th century. Muslims paid occasional visits to the Khasi hills as wanderers, traders, fortune tellers, hunters and in other capacities. In the course of time these Muslims adopted Khasi customs. In some places of the Khasi hills, some Muslims were even honoured with chieftainship (Mathur 1975: 122-32). The Syiems of Mawiong are believed to have descended from four migrant Muslim families. The Muslims of Sylhet made repeated efforts to invade Khasi hills.

Historical evidences show that Khasis maintained some trade relationships with the Mughal emperors through their viceroys at Murshidabad. During and after the British rule, a number of Muslims from Kabul, Kashmir, Punjab, Jaipur, Allahabad, Madras, Calicut, Lucknow, Banaras, Chapra,

Gauhati, Nagaon, Cachar, Sylhet and Dhaka migrated to Shillong and settled there for trade and commerce. Many of them married Khasi women. Thus, there is the presence of a group of Muslim Khasis within the tribe, which is the result of marriage between Muslim males and Khasi women. It has been observed that children born out of the union between a Muslim father and a Khasi mother are considered Muslims as far as their religion is concerned. But for all practical purposes they are treated as Khasi. Bareh (1967: 392) is of the opinion that the decorations of the graves of Khasi chiefs have been influenced by the decorations of the *taziya* of Muslims. [*Taziya* is a model or representation of the shrines of Hassan and Hussain, sons of Ali, cousin and son-in-law of Prophet Muhammad.]

Clan among Garos is known as *chatchi* and there are five known exogamous clans among them. They are Sangma, Marak, Momin, Shira and Areng. Some scholars are of the opinion that originally Garos had two matri-moieties – Sangma and Marak and that at a later stage Momin and other *chatchi* came into existence. It is generally believed that the Momin *chatchi* originated from the union of a Muslim man and a Garo woman (Roy Burman and Thukral 1970: 80).

Islam in Naga Hills

Azan Fakir, who was the chief force of consolidation of Islam in Assam valleys in the 17th century, also undertook missionary work for the propagation of Islam in parts of present-day Nagaland. He also asked one of his associates, Saleh Saheb, to stay in the Naga hills to undertake propagation work. The descendants of Saleh Saheb have come to be known as Parbatia Dewan – literally the 'Chief of the Hill' (Bhuyan 1975: 181, Sarkar 1972: 70).

During the early part of the 20th century, a Muslim from Bengal, Keramat Ali, undertook works to propagate the faith of Islam in the foothills of Naga Hills. However, the spread of Islam in Nagaland did not result in the emergence of a clearly identifiable tribal Muslim community in this hilly region.

The Manipuri Muslims

Muslims constitute 6.99 per cent of the total population in Manipur. A large number of Muslims from undivided Bengal entered this region through the western boundary at different historical times and settled there.

The present day Manipuri Muslims (known as Pangans) are believed to be the descendants of the Bengali immigrants and war captives who had

come to this region in the beginning of the 17th century. These Muslims, some of who married Meitei women, in the course of time formed a distinct community. Among the Manipuri Muslims the traditional clans are still in existence. It has been reported that in a village called Prompat in the Imphal valley, the Muslim householders belong to 11 *sagai* or clans namely, Ipham, Kulaibaum, Koijing, Wang, Bogi, Yumikhaibaum, Mogjai, Chesham, Moinam and Phisubaum (Siddiqui 1990).

Influence of Islam on Bodo Kacharis and Rabhas

The Bodo Kacharis, who constitute an important plains tribe of Assam, observe various ceremonies and festivals connected with birth, death, marriage and agricultural activities. Baisagu and Kherai are the two important festivals of Bodo Kacharis. Baisagu is a spring time festival and Kherai is a religious annual community festival. During the Kherai festival they worship and offer sacrifice to a number of gods and goddesses. One of these gods is called 'Nawab Badshah' or Muslim God by Bodo Kacharis. At the time of offering sacrifice to this god, the priest wears a *dhoti* in the fashion of a *lungi* and the sacrifice is made by facing west. While sacrificing the cock, the priest utters the word *Bismillah* – in the name of Allah (Narjee 1966: 249).

As in the case of Bodo Kacharis, some influence of Islam is also discernible among Rabhas – another plains tribe of Assam. Rabhas celebrate Baikho and Khoksi festivals annually with the intension of propitiating Baikho, the goddess of wealth and prosperity. The Rabhas of Baida area in south Goalpara sacrifice a cock in the name of 'Sainnas Thakur' – one of the gods of Baikho. During the sacrifice, like Bodo Kacharis, a Rabha priest faces west, wears a *dhoti* in the fashion of a *lungi* and utters the word *Bismillah*.

Matriliny and Islam

Matriliny is rare among Muslims and presents an interesting problem of anthropological and sociological studies. Studies on the coexistence and interaction of Islam, which is essentially patrilineal, and various matrilineal societies have been undertaken by a number of scholars (D'Souza 1976: 141-67, Dube 1969, Kutty 1972, Weekes 1984). Many of these studies have dealt with the problems of adjustment and accommodation between apparently incompatible principles.

It appears that one of the most significant aspects of Islam-tribal contact situations in Northeast India is the contact between Islam and the

matrilineal tribal societies. It has already been pointed out earlier that in Northeast India, the matrilineal Garos and Khasis have come into contact with Islam. Of these two groups the influence of Islam is clearly discernible in the latter. The socio-cultural life of the Muslim Khasis exhibits a mixture of the principles of Islam and matriliny. The children born out of marriages between Muslims and Khasi women are of two categories: one follows the Khasi tribal tradition and the other follows tribal Islam. The pattern of family, kinship, marriage, inheritance and residence of the Muslim Khasis clearly indicate a compromise between Islam and matriliny (Mathur 1975: 122-32).

Among Khasis, the youngest daughter (*khadduh*) is the custodian of the ancestral house, traditions and religion (*ka bat ia ka niam*). However, among the Muslim Khasis, the youngest daughter neither enjoys any special rights and privileges nor has any religious duty to perform. With regard to inheritance unlike the tribal and Christian Khasis, the youngest daughter among the Muslim Khasis is treated as equal with her sisters. Contrary to matrilocal Khasi custom, the tendency among the Muslim Khasis is to leave the family of orientation after marriage. A majority of the Muslim Khasis reckons the descent through the female line and use Muslim surnames along with maternal clan titles. The Khasis are exogamous and Muslim–Khasi kinship alliances have not remarkably affected the clan organization of the Muslim Khasis.

The preceding discussion indicates that the introduction of Islamic beliefs into different tribal societies of Northeast India did not result radical socio-cultural changes. The tribals of the region who have embraced Islam have organized their way of life primarily according to the dictates of their tribal traditions. At the same time one also notices that various elements from both tribal and Islamic traditions coexist within the same socio-cultural framework of the tribals. Thus, a kind of 'syncretism' between Islamic and tribal customs and rituals has taken place. The socio-cultural life of many of the tribals who have come under the influence of Islam is guided more by their tribal traditions than by Islamic tradition.

Note

1. The sign of Islam appeared in Northeastern India after the invasion made by Malik Yuzbak in 1257. Yuzbak, for the first time, erected a mosque in Assam to celebrate his victory. Following this, a number of mosques were constructed in Assam by different Muslim invaders. It may be noted here that the ruins of a very old mosque have been found at Kimin in Arunachal Pradesh (*Tindiniya Agradoot,*1999).

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Performative Culture of Tribes and Modernity in India's Northeast

Binod Kumar Agarwala

Abstract

In this essay we attempt to answer the following question: What culture is performed by tribes in Northeast India? Two divergent cultural phenomena strike any onlooker: cultural differences between tribes are vanishing and at the same time there is an attempt of one tribe to differentiate itself from another. The tendency toward vanishing of differences is taking place through anonymous agencies of appropriation of modernity. The same modern material culture embodied in consumption, dress, hair style, politics, economy, education, healthcare, religion etc. is the culture which is lived and is a matter of daily performance. On the other hand differentiation of tribes is also part of culture, but not by way of everyday living and performance, but more by way of annunciation and pronouncement in academic institutions and political arena. The ideal culture, which is presented as basis of differentiation, is the invented primordial culture, which is no more in being in performance, but resides as objects in museums and photographs and described in anthropology and sociology textbooks. These modernization-induced claims of differences are not differences inherent in culture; rather differences are invented due to factors exogenous to so-called traditional culture.

Key Words**:** Tribe, modernity, identity, culture, change

Introduction

It was noted in an earlier essay[1] of mine, that culture is not an object lying out there in space and time like a table or a chair enduring through time by sheer inertia of its substance. Our contention is that there is no 'objective culture'. Culture is in being because people belonging to it perform it. Culture in its being shares in the aspect of game, festival, drama, language etc. To be in being a game needs to be played, a festival needs to be celebrated, a drama needs to be performed, and a language needs to be spoken. In the same way to be in being a culture needs to be performed. Hence it is to

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indicate this aspect of culture we have used the locution 'performative culture' in the title.

In this essay we attempt to answer the following questions: What culture is performed by tribes in Northeast India? Is it the same culture that is performed by all the tribes, even when they distinguish themselves from each other? Is it a unique culture which is performed by each tribe, and hence, is different culture being performed by different tribes? How is modern culture appropriated by tribes in the region? To answer these questions we will be using the theoretical framework articulated by Jean-Francois Bayart in his book *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*.[2]

Vanishing Cultural Differences and Multiplication of Cultural Identities

With performative understanding of the mode of being of culture when we have a look at the living culture of tribes in Northeast India to try to figure out 'what it is' that is presented in the performance and celebration of culture we notice an aphoristic situation. Two divergent cultural phenomena strike any onlooker: cultural differences between tribes are vanishing and at the same time there is an attempt of one tribe to differentiate itself from another.[3]

The tendency towards vanishing of differences is taking place through anonymous agencies of appropriation of modernity in all tribes. Every culture in the region has anonymous agents of appropriation of non-tribal modern culture. They are school children avid for knowledge, college students thirsty for learning English, Science, History etc., religious believers of the Christian churches, consumers of outside goods (clothes, cosmetics, consumer durables, like television, computer with internet connectivity etc.), hospital patients, nurses and doctors, and those intellectuals for whom the sordid politics of universities have become second nature, the musicians in various bands, the clerks who insist on carrying out bureaucratic procedures, the government officials and ministers absorbed in the spending of central funds, the political activists talking about 'sovereignty', 'human rights', 'right to self-determination,' 'ethno-nationalism,' 'sub-nationalism,' 'civil society,' 'good governance,' 'democracy' etc., functionaries of NGOs lobbying at various levels: provincial, national and global, even sports persons playing volley ball, foot ball etc. These are the anonymous agents who are not only opening up their culture to modernity but also appropriating modern culture to enlarge and enrich their culture and in the process all tribes are becoming similar. This is the culture which is lived and is a matter of daily performance and

hence to use Renan's phrase this culture is a 'daily plebiscite.' Let it be emphasized that the vital culture of a people is a matter of daily performance. "Culture is created from time to time, but it is performed all the time. Once it is created, constant performance keeps the culture alive. Doing culture is a performance whether it is the industrial or business processes we do in work hours, or ritual, or preparing a meal. Culture can be stored in the form of artifacts and writings; it can be remembered in peoples' heads. But to be living, vital culture, it has to be performed constantly."[4]

On the other hand, differentiation of tribes is also part of culture, but not by way of daily living and performance, but by way of annunciation and pronouncement in academic institutions and political arena. But this is an irony of such cultures that annunciation of difference is taking place in that part of performative culture which is same in all cultures, e.g., universities, schools, state politics etc. Annunciation of difference is made by being oblivious of the lived performative culture, which these institutions represent. When people make film on specificity of their cultural past they are not only reproducing representation of that cultural past as performative culture, but also filmmaking becomes the part of performative culture.

One can clearly hear the fear of the spectre of differences vanishing due to modernization and globalization.[5] According to postmodern anthropologists the 'reinvention of difference' is inherent in the process of modernization and globalization.[6] That is to say both the phenomena are due to modernization. There is a generalized fear that under the impact of modernization and globalization everything will become uniform and identities will vanish. This fear leads to reinvention of difference and exacerbation of identity-related particularisms.[7] No doubt differentiation of tribe has become a cultural phenomenon, but it is erroneous to attribute this claim of irreducible difference to the influence of 'culture', or more precisely to the exclusive relationship each individual is supposed to have with 'his' culture.[8] This is an un-argued assumption. There is no demonstration that modernization induced claims of differences are cultural differences. No doubt, there is no activity, even of an economic nature, that does not immediately produce meanings and symbols. No doubt understanding a social, economic or political phenomenon amounts to deciphering its 'cultural reason'. But it is not certain that the 'cultural reason' that people think they depend upon actually determines their actions, or even that it exists as a totality or a tangible system now in Northeast India. In fact invention of difference is due to factors exogenous to so called traditional culture.

Northeast culture is under the grip of culturalism, which defines culture in an objective substantialist manner and assumes that substance of culture has causal power to determine political action,[9] leading to generation of phobia of other cultures and giving rise to dream of autonomous political territory for one's own culture as a kind of inexorable inevitability.[10] It is this political dream of autonomous political territory for one's own culture that is inducing tribes to invent differentiation. Unfortunately culturalism produces malign inebriation, which is invalidated not only by facts but also due to the very mode of being of culture explained above. Culture is not a substance which can harbor causal power. It is also not something that can endure through time by inertia of its substance. Here it must be kept in mind that when people open up to modernity and yet want to retain fidelity to tradition, then tradition has more or less to transform giving rise to contradictory interpretations even on the part of actors themselves, who are native to the tradition.[11] There can be no choosing between tradition and modernity. There is also no question of any determinate political action following from fidelity to cultural tradition in the context of modernity. Here two important factors play their role: the social complexes creating narrow limited solidarities and the dream political autonomy.

Narrow limited solidarities are created and maintained by three fundamentally related complexes within the tribes. (1) The extended family, the kinship relation, based on a principle of sharing and solidarity is being utilized for defining a tribe and this also serves as a principle to exclude one who is not a member. Here, within the tribe, one gives oneself to the others, and expects the others to do likewise. This is a question of the merging of selves in a larger collective life project. This also is in turn the principle of exclusion of others, the outsiders, who must relate if at all externally. (2) The second is the principle of committing oneself to the needs of others of the extended family and the principle of organization of the collectivity, but it can also be understood as a general strategy of personal relatedness requiring investment of time and resources exhibited by frequent visits, meetings and common festivities. (3) Third is the principle applied to land. Love of the land is the relation of man to a sacred nature upon which he is totally dependent and for which he has to care; the concept of caring, as in stewardship, is being promoted as central to tribal collective land holding. But in this land holding the outsiders can have no share. These three complexes together create and maintain solidarity of a tribe.

These complexes are instrumental aspects of tribal identity today, i.e.,

instrumental for the dream of various kinds of autonomy. These complexes are clearly continuous with what might be described as tendencies toward tribal closed-corporateness that may have emerged in the l9th century and that might be accounted for as social defense mechanisms in face of an encroaching British culture. Whether the tribe and its closure predate the colonial period is difficult to ascertain. But love of any particular land could not have been defining character of tribes of the region from the beginning as they were migratory. It might be argued that this closed corporate solidarity is itself in its turn generative of the principles of sharing, love of the land, and extended family in the service of political dreams. But all this is projected as cultural differences. To give an analogy: this is like similar companies competing with each other for the same profit through the same mechanism of market yet presenting themselves as culturally different, i.e., distinguishing themselves by claiming cultural uniqueness.

Invention of Identities

Culturalism maintains that a 'culture' is composed of a stable, closed corpus of representations, beliefs, or symbols that is supposed to have an 'affinity' with specific opinions, attitudes, or modes of behaviour.[12] There is no truth in the substantialist definition of ethnic groups or tribes, which are only political artifacts and fabrications. Culture is always open, i.e., open to other cultures. Culturalist kind of falsehood is perpetuated by deliberate academic subterfuges. To take an example: A 'Khasi' obviously is a Christian if he goes to church. If he is not a Christian he is a 'Seng Khasi.' But whenever in the Department of Philosophy[13], there is a thesis related to 'Khasi Worldview,' 'Khasi Religion', 'Khasi Culture,' what we discuss is a 'Seng Khasi' worldview, religion or culture. The same goes about other tribes of the region.

Invention of tradition has itself become a cultural phenomenon, and it is now a fundamental constituent of the formation of the tribes and ethnicities in the region.[14] Main characteristic of the invention of tradition is the recycling – whether instrumental or unconscious – of fragments of a more or less phantasmal past in the services of social, cultural or political innovation.[15] Generally the process of ritualization and formalization of custom goes hand in hand with an intensification of social change. Fixation of official sartorial code of the tribes is a certain example of late product of modernity.

Traditional culture of tribes started to lose its being as a lived phenomenon and began to become an object of exaltation and reification with the British occupation of Northeast India and these two tendencies

intensified through subsequent incorporation of the region after independence. With colonial state formation the peoples and cultures of North-East India were studied, described, listed and photographed for libraries and museums. The colonial rulers defined who was a Khasi, Naga, Garo or a Mizo.[16] While the British administrators fabricated the essence of particular tribes, their native inheritors formulated their respective particular tribalness by resorting to strategic syncretism. This involved structuring one's identity in opposition to the Other by assimilating the latter's prestigious and efficacious cultural characteristics. The appearance of an external threat awakened among the native people of a culture a feeling of vulnerability, and even an inferiority complex, that justified a reform of their particular tribalness borrowing from the dominants their strong points, under the cover of a return to primordial culture that was largely invented but whose xenology remained active. The reinterpretation of tribal past by tribal intellectuals and their instrumentalization of tradition for militant political purposes has sustained political identities in the cultural landscape of the Northeast, by incorporating foreign representations into tribal life – e.g., vocabulary of egalitarian democratic rights, right of self-determination, (sub)nationalism, proselytisation, eclesiatical structures – and by seeking to homogenize in order to create a particular tribe, a social formation that is characterized by differentiation of sub-tribes, clans etc.[17] More the native agents self-consciously instrumentalized the past incorporating foreign representations more the traditional culture lost its vitality and the foreign elements which were modern started becoming part of their lived performative culture.

On the Northeast political chessboard, the celebration of a golden mythic past by almost every tribe has become a mere fig-leaf to conceal their obscene modernity. Modernity has been adopted, practiced and performed in the region emptying it out of all its great ideals: there is progress in consumption, but the Idea of Progress is shunned as progress will take them out of their tribal formation, there is faster and faster hankering after wealth, but the idea of production as a source of wealth has disappeared. Democracy is paid lip service, but public sphere of free and frank discussion of political issues by citizens is not allowed to develop, while the electoral process is reduced to legitimization of ethnic hegemony. Equality is extolled but individual performance and achievement is not judged so that equality is allowed to become an escape from standards: one hears all around, "Don't judge us, but accept us as equals regardless of our performance." All great ideals of modernity have met with such banal destiny in this region due to its

refusal to entertain any theoretical and critical foundation for its culture as required by modern enlightenment and its justifying its present condition in the name of its primordial culture. Even institutions like university are not spared. University, which is part of culture, is not valued so much for its academics, i.e., teaching and research, but valued more as institution through which funds flow into the community and also valued more as an employment agency for the community. Since this kind of regressive modernity needs resources which are not being generated, as that productive aspect of modernity is not adopted, it leads to conflict over resources both political and economic. It is to create a winning combination of people strong enough to fight for resources and yet small enough to have maximum per capita value of resources, the unity and differentiation of tribes is taking place and this has become a part of culture of almost every tribe now, which itself is a modern phenomenon.

In such a situation of regressive modernity identity related strategies potentially become totalitarian. First, because the tribal culture imagined to be authentic is defined in opposition to neighbouring ones that are seen as radically different, and because this alleged alterity entails a principle of exclusion whose logical conclusion is ethnic cleansing. And second, because the imagined culture assigns to those individuals who are supposed to belong to it a simplified identity that they are expected to endorse, if necessary via coercion. This is like providing an identity kit for the tribes. Extreme forms of ethno-nationalism draw on great ways of misreading others and in turn misreading oneself.[18] Even though imagined communities resulting from the invention of tradition have totalitarian tendencies, they need not always be realized. The actual processes of 'building' identity-related autonomous areas of various types of autonomy require compromise with the processes of political organization. The complex interaction of forces and social institutions, the influence of demography, the limits of economy, and the practices of the actors involved, both native and non-native, all have impact on the totalitarian tendencies. Northeast India is in the grip of the invention of political modernity hidden behind the veneer of invention of tradition. Ethnicity in the region is ambivalent, as it is simultaneously a principle of exclusion and due to its totalitarian tendency, a vehicle of a new moral economy of the *tribal hegemonistic provincial state* replete with compromises limiting the totalitarian tendency.

Identity Creation and Dialectical Unity of India

By asserting the irreducible difference of tribal identities culturalism contributes

in a strange way to the dialectical unity of India and its culture. It has legitimized the unacknowledged borrowings of mainland educational model, governmental and bureaucratic organization, Christian ecclesiastical schemas, and modern consumption pattern. This has generated great dismay among the backward looking people of various tribes. The borrowings are generally justified by claiming that these would serve the destiny of tribes without altering 'culture.' This is no doubt a healthy view. But this goes against the very philosophical premises of culturalism, which fails to notice, acknowledge and accept that in the very process of these borrowings the primordiality of cultures are compromised. Hence none of the tribal culture as it exists can be reduced to the differentiated 'official culture' of these tribes, which they have sought to instrumentalise with varying success, for the purposes of carving out an autonomous political territory with varying degrees of autonomy in post-independent India. This is how the so-called native people of the region are inserting themselves in the state and culture of modern India.

The imagination of the tribal community in Northeast India has not only validated a territorial framework of various kinds of autonomy, the development of new political and administrative institutions, and the allocation of economic resources or social status, but also led to the emergence of new moral, economic, and political values that have been disputed, but generally ending up providing legitimacy to tribal-hegemonistic political formation of various kinds. The natives who collaborated with the British served not only their own economic interests along with those of their supposed masters, but also incarnated ideals, norms, lifestyles, bodies of knowledge that might inspire sympathy or fascination. In this task of inventing tradition and imagining the tribal community, the British and native often acted together, sometimes within the same institutions, the same intellectual currents, and the same beliefs. Thus the British were the first to attend to the reification of custom and culture in the region. This was done to differentiate the British themselves from the natives. It allowed them to consolidate their racial identity and their social status in a context whose precariousness we tend retrospectively to minimize. In this way the British administrators forged a quasi-aristocratic lifestyle in order to overcome the isolation in which they found themselves and to preserve their dignity as 'civilized' people among and against the 'barbaric' natives.

The culturalist interpretation of the tribes of the region is an outcome of the experiences of fear of the British administrators. The colonizers were not abstract agents of social change. They were flesh and blood actors and

came from concrete historical societies. In their own society they had experienced relationships of inequality, participated in political debates, and acquired mental representations, occupied precise positions and had harboured ambitions, frustrations, convictions, and dreams. Colonizers were a divergent lot: their origins and values were disparate, their colonial project divergent, and their culturalism was not of the same kind. Hence, there were conflicts between the administrators and the missionaries and it raised the problem of cultural relativism in many ways. For the administrator the cultural difference between themselves and the natives was for respective mastery and servitude. The missionary also saw that the tribes, in their nonage, are perfectible. Thus the missionaries saw in this situation an opportunity to raise the native to the dignity of modern individualism and the nuclear family, even at the cost of recasting the tribal social formation. The contradiction of the colonizers percolated to the tribal communities through the medium of the school and the mission. The natives perceived and related differently with the two components of the British colonialism: the administration and the mission.

The British were also responsible for another aspect of the officially projected culture of tribes. British imperial expansion was concomitant of industrial revolution. Industrialization threatened the innocence of countryside and corrupted the cities in industrial England. The colonizers carried this sensibility to their colonies. Hence, Christian missions put a great stress on the idealized representation of the rural life in the colonies. But the missionaries' attitude was very confused and constantly oscillated between two positions. On one hand, they rejected backward and barbaric customs and hence sought to reform the tribes in order to lead them to the threshold of civilization, for example, by encouraging trade. On the other they had naïve respect for tribal authenticity, which could only be rural, and which had to be defended against the cupidity of traders, the brutality of administrators, the corrosive effects of money, the foolish attraction to the trinkets of modern Western civilization, and, last but not the least, the pernicious evangelism of competing missions and denominations. Tribes creatively transformed European cultural forms, rejecting both these approaches. They neither became individualists nor shunned the cities. While remaining faithful to Christianity, they developed ecclesiastical institutions and rituals, they started wearing shorts and trousers, and went off to become urban city-dwellers. But the missionary myth of village community did not die. Even the British colonial administration which laid great emphasis on its ethos of the bureaucratic 'gentry' and was convinced of the benefits of Indirect Rule, took pleasure in this vision of

tribal life, going so far as to create protected inner lines to save the idyllic rural culture of tribes from the corrupting influence of the outsiders. The same policy was adopted after independence. The joint invention of tradition by the British and the natives is inseparable from the key concept of the rural village community. The strengthening of the village structure is largely attributable to the British bureaucracy, which co-opted its notables as intermediaries, and expanded their para-administrative functions. Even now one hears the expression 'gaon burah' meaning the village headman, who was a key figure for administration of tribes. This explains why romanticism of rural life is part of invented official culture of tribes even though it is never a part of life they actually aspire.

The romanticism of village life is in fact an eulogization of the 'ethics of subsistence.' It is also a calculated aversion to risk in an economically precarious situation in the name of social justice. The emphasis placed on reciprocity, and the defense of traditional rights and obligations, in short the rural 'moral economy,' is not really a resistance on the part of backward-looking communitarian representations of natives when confronted with progress. Rather, it is the development and outcome of conflict in a modern context where countryside is undergoing a transformation under the pressure of modernity. The village community obliterates simultaneously the place of outsiders on the margins of the village, and inequality among insiders within it. Even though such 'village community' is a myth, but through this allegory British administrators, nationalists, religious men, 'developers', intellectuals, businessmen, and tourists discussed the genesis of modernity, a process in which they were directly involved, and to which they were – in the name of the interest of the village life - strongly opposed. The British administrators were concerned to defend the village life of tribes, the embodiment of their exotic culture against the activities of predatory outside traders and lazy bureaucrats. Nationalist leaders, who were also in search of genuine development from below, tried to retain collectivization programmes centered on the village. Men of religion dreamt of a mythical village in the form of a robust parish. Foresters and planters negotiated with the appropriate 'chief' in order to win over the village whose land they coveted for investment. Now the dialogue among various speakers of the fable of the idyllic tribal village life has become surreal and absurd. But that is not the essential point. What is important is that in its multiple versions more or less racist, relativist, or substantialist, culturalism provides precisely one of the idioms through the intervention of which more and more actors in Northeast India interact with

each other. As the idiom of village community is becoming stronger in the culture, it is not really strengthening village community; rather it is utilized for the flourishing city life in the region. It is the city dwellers who are eulogizing village life while the villagers aspire to dwell in a city and migration from rural to urban areas in the region is indeed increasing.

Even though Christianity brought global universalism to Northeast India yet it culturally codified particularism conceived in terms of ethnicity and tribes. Missionaries translated the scriptures into native languages and helped in standardizing them in order to make these languages better vehicles for their preaching. With Protestants co-opting the indigenous leadership, local religious entrepreneurs soon reinvented difference by establishing many so-called 'independent' Christian churches, structured ecclesiastically but inspired by local tribal ethos, and hence making themselves exclusive churches of this or that tribe. This is not only the revenge of the region's cultures on Christianity or 'inculturation' of the Testament, but also the establishment of religious bureaucratic organization in the region. These independent churches during last few decades have been heavily influenced by global political, economic, and religious transformations. They enable the religious entrepreneur to extract resources from the international environment, and even from the community of faithful. At the same time, in the best cases, the latter are provided with a few tangible benefits such as free education. These churches have adopted identity-related strategy of culturalist and particularist type, and are also active in that preachers can infer from their doctrines the necessity of supporting one political group against another in the latter's political struggles. But the political character of religious mobilization goes beyond the problem of the apolitical stance affected by most religious organizations. The connection between the religious sphere and the political sphere is neither explicit nor functional. These churches are participating in the diffusion of a bureaucratic *imaginaire* and in appropriation of a modern provincial state organization (a Western phenomenon), to which their emphasis on morality and their sense of the collectivity is leading, and this is giving rise to a new form of legitimacy different from a tribal one. A new political subjectivity is taking place more than ever through the mediation of religious mobilizations, and that through this play of mirrors between tribal culture and the western culture the relation between local tribes and the processes of 'modernization,' and 'globalization' is constantly being negotiated. In some cases the entire tribal society, like Hmars of Manipur, has become church society and yet such societies claim to be tribes with primordial culture.

Cultural Dynamics

The intersection of the processes of inventing tradition, which has been constitutive of the general movement of modernization and globalization, reminds us that there is no culture that is not created, and that this creation is usually very recent. Moreover, the formation of a culture or a tradition necessarily involves dialogue, and occurs in interaction with its regional, national and international environment. As it was mentioned, the culturalist argument implicitly takes for granted that a political community corresponds to a cultural coherence, whether the latter is original and hereditary or rationally determined and chosen. This is an illusion. It is also necessary not to be duped by the ferocious identity-related conflicts. These events are themselves merely the late harvest of the cultural closure of earlier times. We need to understand not only identity related closure but also the indecisiveness about identity or processes of cultural expansion. That is to say we need to understand the dynamics of homogenization as well as those of heterogenization. Here culturalism cannot help us because it is beset with three methodological errors: first, it maintains that a culture is a corpus of representations that is stable over time; second, it sees this corpus as closed on itself, and, three, it assumes that this corpus determines a specific political orientation. Thus, it fails to understand the dynamics of evolving culture.

As soon as one begins to reflect on culture, one has to take into account of heritage, of what is received from earlier ages and inculcated in new generations. But if we are really cultured, i.e., have a cultivated mind we cannot afford to forget here the production of the new in the culture, the creativity of culture. One is greatly tempted to remember only the first aspect of the concept of culture, and to emphasize transmission, reproduction, permanence, continuity and weight of culture. Hence, culture has come to be represented as a principle determining attitudes that resist transformation. But history attests to the fact that culture in reality does not exclude transformation, and hence culture is also innovative and creative. Cultures undergo evolution, transformation and even metamorphoses. In this dialectic of old and new many a time new is nothing but revitalization of something old. The dialectic of permanence and transformation of culture proceeds *in part* from the relationship that *every* society is bound to have with its political and commercial environment. Ancient societies, instead of being isolated from each other, constituted a system of political, commercial, and cultural relations, and were structured by those ties with outside.[19] Naga tribes for instance had relationship with Ahom kingdom. Hence, modernization does

not consist in a universal endogenous evolution from the traditional to the modern society; rather it involves regional or international emulation.[20] The emblems of cultural identity often result from borrowing. Emblematic habits of the tribes in Northeast India are often a late product of emulation. The emblematic guitar of the Khasi popular culture is borrowed. Similarly, ethno-nationalism or sub-nationalism in the region is nothing but recycled European nationalisms.

The culturalists fail to take note of the roles played by innovation and borrowing by assuming that a central, hermetically sealed core of intangible representations persist over centuries. Culturalists also fail to notice the ways in which the social actors produce their history in a conflictual manner, by defining themselves both in relation to their conception of the past and in relation to their conception of the future. At least four cultural operations recur with regularity in the field of politics in conflictual cultural identity formation according to Bayart: tactics or strategies of extraversion, practices of transfer, procedures of authentification, and the processes of forming primordial identities.[21] In cultural extraversion one uses foreign cultural elements in native culture to achieve some objectives. It may be used as a strategy or tactics. The post independent tribal syncretism through extraversion, which was institutionalized through the mediation of various tribal-sub-national movements, was a strategy for the project of totalizing the adversary, i.e., Indian nation, in a distinct, visible, and objectivisable space.

British domination of the region before independence had opened an immense field for tactics of extraversion, whose accumulation ultimately affected the political formation of tribes. Tribal adoption of Christianity provides a good example of this kind of historical experience. Faced with the Christian missionaries who deployed an evangelism of a culturalist type and sought to legitimize native culture to the point of taking care to respect its established hierarchy, the tribes chose to submit and to accept Christianity. However, they converted to remain as tribes. Hence, over a longer period, this cultural intersection resulted in tribes Christianizing themselves while at the same time remaining tribes in their being and in their beliefs. As remarked earlier the administrators and missionaries gave them a sense of tribal collectivity by collecting their history and describing their culture. Not only did Christian missionaries and British administrators play a role in this but they also were chief matrices of subsequent ethno-nationalism and ethno-sub-nationalism of various tribes. Conversion to Christianity was one of the stages in the native actors' participation in the new political formation and

their instrumentalization of state apparatus and their invented culture.

According to Bayart, "…cultural extraversion implies a second operation: the transfer of meaning from one practice, one place, one representation, one symbol or text, to another, for it is, almost by definition, a reinterpretation and deviation."[22] The Christianization of tribes in Northeast India led to osmosis between the foreign faith and ancient beliefs. The tribal celebrations found their niches in the interstices of Christian celebrations. Christianity had not been averse to appropriation for its own purposes the power of the sites or symbols of tribal religions by transfer of sacredness to these sites and symbols. Transfer of meaning links culture as heritage and culture as innovation to maintain continuity through political transformation. Symbolic shift from one sphere of society to another is systematic, and is basic to the processes of shaping the politics. Hence one should not be surprised if transfer of meaning characterizes the extreme identity-related strategies and if forgetfulness or lies play an exaggerated role in the reading of the past, as in the claim that Nagas were always a 'sovereign nation'. Even anachronistic meanings on texts were given for this purpose. One is not surprised if the leaders of NSCN (IM) tried to bring unity among the Naga tribes by raising the slogan 'Nagalim for Christ,'[23] if someone reads western enlightenment in Soso Tham's lamentations on the lost cultural heritage, or finds 'worldview' in the tribal outlook, and even discovers an 'epistemology' and 'rationality' to compete with modern epistemologies and rationality and hears the claims regarding Naga "sovereignty" from time immemorial. But such transfers of meaning should not be viewed as subterfuges peculiar to identity-related radicalism, rather political action of any kind depends on such transfers of meaning, very much like oscillation of meaning of 'Hindu' back and forth from religion to culture in the vocabulary of some political parties.

How is such transfer of meaning possible? Bayart answers, "An everyday procedure of social life, the transfer of meaning is based on ambiguity and artifice."[24] Culturalists demand authenticity for culture, and if culture is not authentic, authenticity can be fabricated. They claim to preserve the original purity of tribal identity from external pollution and the aggressions of the Other, if need be by reconstituting, in an authoritarian manner, their pure culture, at the end of the regressive process. One hears so much about the need of protecting the admirable innocence of rural native tribals. But unfortunately determining the criterion for what is or is not authentic is always problematic. Authenticity is not established by the immanent properties of

the phenomenon of culture. What one finds authentic depends on the perspective, coloured by desires and judgments, from which one looks at the past. This perspective is always the perspective from contemporary context in which one is situated. Hence, authenticity is always conventional and socially constructed. Thus, authentic past of a culture is always a partially reconstructed past. This is how the "official costume" of Nagas becomes their authentic culture and the fabled original absence of clothing is not recognized as authentic Naga culture. Why do tribes indulge in this kind of discourse on an entirely reconstituted, fantasized authentic past? The reason is there is dissatisfaction among them with the present state of their cultures. This dissatisfaction with the present finds expression in quest for authenticity, as it is an implicit critical commentary on the present state of culture.[25] Hence, authenticity is also a matter of bitter dispute, as the concern for authenticity is often connected with transformation of tribe and authenticity determines the changes in scale of reference. The NNC factions and NSCN (K) were questioned by the NSCN (IM) thus: "How could there be unity between the dead and the living, between darkness and light, between rust and steel, between the reactionary traitors and the revolutionary patriots, between tribalism and the socialism of the NSCN? It is simply a pity for one to talk of unity between the totally perishing Phizo's clique and vigorously risen forces of the NSCN."[26] Quest for authenticity is thus one of the expressions of modernity and globalization. Culturalist reasoning posits the existence of a permanent inner core peculiar to each culture that confers on the latter its authentic nature and determines the present. But what actually happens is the process of elaboration of culture in the areas of ideology and sensibility that speaks to contemporaries by fabricating the past.[27]

The genesis of particular tribal identities in the post independent political space is not so much for rejection of Indian state, as these are an inventive adaptation to the radical political changes represented by independence for appropriating its institutions (provincial political institutions) and sharing in its resources. Identity related strategies betray the hunger of the new tribal elites, eager to be integrated, for power and wealth. Tribal identities were formed as minimum winning coalition, large enough to secure benefits in the competition for spoils, but also small enough to maximize the *per capita* value of these benefits.[28] The middle classes, bureaucrats, intellectuals, and students (or dropouts) have played a far greater role in the radicalization of identity-related conflicts, as witnessed in the region, compared to the masses. These elites did not activate already constituted communities whose identity

was dormant. Far from pre-existing the state, primordial groups ethnic or tribal, of which they claim to be representatives, are the more or less creation of the state itself. In most of the cases crystallization of particular tribal identities, such as we know them today, took place in the British period, under the combined (but possibly conflictual) action of the foreign occupiers, their native collaborators and their adversaries. Colonial state was only one contingent factor in the process of identity formation. Post independent state and economic change also produced identity related logics.

Weberian approach correctly sees tribe as a political artifact generally established by the state, colonial or otherwise, of which it is a subdivision. This approach denied the utility of the concept of ethnicity.[29] Unfortunately Weber does not pursue his thought to its logical conclusion, and instead contrasts ethnic membership or 'presumed identity' with a group based on family relationships and endowed with a 'concrete social action', whose historical character he nonetheless recognizes. In fact, family relationships are also an artifact, 'an idiom rather than a system', through which actors constantly negotiate their membership in groups and their social allegiance. As such, it is above all a field of conflict – for example, it was the main site of head hunting in Nagaland – before possibly becoming a field of solidarity and collective action.

Here one should not be confused by expressions like 'community bound by ties of blood and commonality of fate,' which are denizens of the domain of illusion and have no real foundation. Tribe is a city in the head. Tribe is less a basic solidarity than a basic animosity. The habit of differentiating oneself from Other is primordial, and solidarity with one's own people is only a ricochet action. The old adage says, 'With my brother against my cousin, with my cousin against my neighbour, etc.'[30]

When we are theorizing about tribes we must keep in mind that possibilities of matrimonial alliances have long been transmitted within networks in which family ties and matrimonial strategies are closely intertwined. These networks are not fixed entities, and it would be futile to classify them. These networks are not more or less identifiable groups but set of potentialities that may be realized in accord with concrete situations. For example operation of voting is one of the phases in which this relational system is actualized. No tribal identity can be fixed through the possibility of matrimonial alliances, even if the tribes did not allow matrimonial alliance outside the tribe. The tribal identities we talk about are made (and unmade) only through the mediation of such indentificatory acts, in short, by their enunciation. For

example Naga identity and Bodo identity are prime examples of making of identities through mediation of identificatory acts.[31]

An individual's acts of identification are always contextual, multiple and relative. For example, the same person can be a Dimapuri, a Mao, a Naga, a Northeast tribal, an officer, a Catholic, a husband, and a sick person. Each of these identities is presumed and may promote integration into a social group in the political sphere. None of these identities exhausts the totality of identities that an individual can claim. "The cultural argument is flawed because, not being satisfied with erecting into an atemporal substance identities in continual mutation, it conceals the concrete operations by which an actor or a group of actors define themselves, at a specific historical moment, in given circumstances for a limited time."[32] There is no doubt that Nagas and Kukis killed each other in the name of their respective tribal identities, but if both of these groups were motivated solely by this one identity-related factor, then they did not need to wait for almost seven decades to kill each other again. Anyone who studies a concrete society constantly encounters such changes, as well as leaps from one identity-related register to another. The nature of inter-tribal violence defies explanation if we do not take into account these changes of identity register, which is sometimes accompanied by violence. Although we are convinced of the artificial origin of the common ethnicity and tribe, we must acknowledge the terrible efficacy of identities that are *felt* to be primordial. "In some sense, primordial identities 'exist', but only as mental facts and regimes of subjectivity, not as structures. Instead of being explanatory factors, they must themselves be explained: while we agree that 'identity considered ethnographically, must always be mixed, relational, and inventive,' that is 'conjectural and not essential', it remains to be understood under what conditions a group of individuals apprehends it in the form of a permanent, primordial core in order to follow political magicians who instrumentalize this illusion to their own advantage."[33] The production of identities, and thus also the production of cultures is relational; it reflects a relationship to the Other as much as a relationship to the Self. The identity emanates less from a privileged institutional site of the symbolic process and from the heart of societies, than from their fringes and their hollows.[34] Naga identity did not spring from the *morung*s or other traditional Naga institutions but from the Naga club, where the returnees from the First World War met to discuss organization of football matches.

Culture does not exist so much as a matter of conforming or identifying as it is a matter of constructing and performing. It requires fabricating

something new out of something old, and also sometimes making something old out of something new. The final error of culturalism is not only it fails to understand the logic of such cultural operations but also it attributes these cultural operations to precise political orientations. Cultural identity does not emerge from political actors' negotiation with a single cultural corpus, namely their culture; it also involves borrowing from other cultures. Identity assertion or identity-related withdrawal is an inventive response to the challenges of the changing world, i.e., of creation of independent state or globalization. Hence in studying any concrete tribe, we discern a plurality of cultural repertoires. What we call about a political culture is a result, a more or less muddled synthesis, of these heterogeneous elements. Obviously independent state formation and globalization has intensified and systematized effects of juxtaposition or osmosis. But the phenomenon was already in evidence before globalization and independent state formation as it is the very essence of the reality of culture. To understand a political culture one needs to reconstruct the cognitive connections between one era and another, which often consists in exchanges between one culture and another. The logic of cultural closure, which is also inherent in the invention of tradition, conceals these linkages intentionally or unintentionally. Thus the fabrication of tribal identity by European scholars and their native emulators has led to a de-Christianized understanding of tribe, while in fact they are steeped in Christianity. The Christian stratum in the tribal identity cannot be ignored even when it is concealed by silence. In the tribal identity one can discern multiple layers and osmosis of local culture, British legacy, Christian heritage, Hinduism etc. Do tribes not look for myths of origin - like genesis in Bible - in their fables? Are not most of the tribal languages written in borrowed scripts from the West or mainland India? Are the traditional robes not created? According to Bayart, "The complex relations between political action and cultural repertoires are created precisely in the darkness of these muddy waters that all the ethnic cleansing in the world will never make clear… But unfortunately culturalists still believe firmly in the existence of an incandescent core at the heart of each culture, which traverse undisturbed across centuries. Ultimately, it is this very concept of culture that is the problem…"[35] It is this concept which gives support to the illusion of cultural totalities and coherences with their lethal power, where in reality we find indeterminism, incompletion, multiplicity and polyvalence.

As reading of a text is part of its production, so also reception and perception of a cultural phenomenon is part of its formation. Philosophy of

culture, cultural anthropology, cultural sociology, political science are not innocent disinterested perceptions of what is there but part of the interested production and formation of culture. In fact in the field of politics or political field utterances and announcements are performative.

Social *Imaginaire*

There is no culturally homogeneous political society. Political societies do not form cultural wholes. Every political society is characterized by the radical heterogeneity that culturalism – along with other trends in the social sciences – seeks desperately to conceal. Yet how is the illusion of culturally homogeneous political society maintained?

Here what French scholars call *imaginaire* comes into play to correlate culture and politics.[36] According to Bayart, the *imaginaire* is not unreal, but the inability to distinguish the real from the unreal.[37] *Imaginaire* although irreducible to any of the two or both – passion and imagination – shares in the properties of both. As the seat of passion, and of imagination, of aesthetics, of symbolic activity, the *imaginaire* is by definition both a domain of immediation and a domain of ambivalence. Both are utilized in tribal identity creation to make it a basis of political identity. In all societies, in Bayart's view, the blotter of the *imaginaire* soaks up the ink of political action. Ultimately the *imaginaire* becomes delirious inducing a kind of deep incapacity to distinguish what belongs to the present from what belongs to the past, what belongs to reality from what belongs to dream. The world of images can be identified with the major issues in a society to the point of incarnating them. All electoral campaign and advertisement depend on this principle, and hence, the torrent of electoral marketing and advertisement turn image and vision into a reality. The *imaginaire* has played a crucial role in formation of political tribal identities. This has happened through the theatricalization of politics. This is the most potent operation of the political *imaginaire* in the creation of the political tribal identity. Here empathy links the political 'actor' and his 'spectator', political orator and his audience. The spectators and the audience participate in the plot woven by the political actor through their exclamations or replies, by their laughter or tear, and by whole-heartedly accepting magic of the 'illusion' and the 'illusion' gets the appearance of the immediate reality. The act of imagination builds up something so that it "stands" for a while. According to Bayart, "The immediacy – or, to adopt the philosopher's term, 'immediation' – of political rituals, grasped in their evanescence, has to do with the 'emotion', 'passion', or 'feeling' they elicit"

from the onlookers and "…the emotional spectrum of politics is broad: it involves hatred, fear, grief and tears that are not necessarily explained by fear or grief."[38] These reactions should not be taken too lightly. Spinoza saw in passions the causes and the foundations of political society, of its institutions and their disorders.[39] What political actor brings to "stand" for a while is for a purpose, to utilize it to achieve his political goals and hence it is a false culture. Since this has only instrumental value, the instrument is discarded after the goal is achieved. It never becomes a permanent lived performative culture. It vanishes when the political identity is forged.

But it leaves a permanent intended identity and also leaves a permanent trace in subjectivation. These emotions evoked by the political actor works towards production of subjectivity, i.e., work towards subjectivation. "Subjectivation is the production of modes of existence or lifestyles."[40] According to Bayart, "The sphere of politics constantly interacts with the process of subjectivation, even when the latter seem to emerge uniquely from the heart of private life."[41] This relationship between the conception of subjectivity and political action is not only permanent but also crucially work in both ways. If the political actor works for subjectivation, so also without being necessarily aware, on whom he works for subjectivation also in turn shapes his subjectivity. People expect their political leaders to have specific qualities. The repertoires of subjectivation are draped in the mantle of tradition and culture and they are fundamentally ambivalent, and this ambivalence is merely the flipside of their transience as this subjectivation is for a creation of permanent tribal hegemonistic state. One of the qualities one expects in leaders of the region is to deal with 'India' perceived and totalized as a superior alien power. This quality may be named *mètis*. In ancient Greece, *mètis* "presided over all activities in which a man had to learn how to maneuver hostile forces that were too powerful to be controlled directly, but which could be used in spite of themselves, without ever confronting them face to face, in order to realize in an unexpected way the goal one had in mind."[42] Further, "In any situation of confrontation or competition … success can be obtained in two ways. Either by superiority in 'power' in the domain in which the battle takes place, the stronger winning, or by using procedures of another order, whose effect is precisely to falsify the results of the trial and to cause to win the one who might have been thought certain to be beaten. The success provided by *mètis* thus takes on an ambiguous meaning: depending on the context, it can lead to contrary reactions. Sometimes it will be seen as the result of fraud, the rules of the game not having been followed. At other

times, it will arouse admiration, in proportion to its unexpectedness, the weaker, against all likelihood, having found within him sufficient resources to put the stronger at his mercy. In some respects *mètis* is oriented towards dishonest trickery, perfidiously lying or treachery, despised weapon used by women and cowards. But in other respects it is sort of absolute weapon, the only one that has the power to ensure in any situation, and no matter what the conditions of the battle might be, victory and domination over the other."[43] The agent, in politics, economy, and education of the region – whether he is preacher or teacher, trader or trafficker – borrows his characteristics which pertain to *mètis* to reverse his alliances, deceive the adversary, fool the naïve, set up schemes of financial fraud, or cross borders. Even in academic field academics is defeated by borrowing procedures from alien field, i.e., field of politics. Evidence of this is can be found in the ceasefire politics of militant groups who use ceasefire as an opportunity to regroup. Similarly evidence of this is to be found also in the embedded practice of whitewashing presented in front of review committees of central government. This is not a mere response by a dependent out of dependency, rather such activities have their own positivity and degree of autonomy under the euphemism of image building. There are people who act as agents of law and order at one moment and causing mayhem at another like rebel groups who protect and also cause mayhem. This type is also visible in the academia adorning the positions of power to maintain law and order but who have no compunction in siding with lawlessness and condoning violence on the campus at the drop of a hat. In the larger society people insist on implementation of law when it suits them, but the same people resist implementation of and flout law when it protects and suits 'Others'. When there is heat on militants by the armed forces there are loud protests by many NGOs who become active brokers of peace but when 'Others' are killed in the region there is a deafening silence all around.[44] It is through such social types that Northeast India inserts itself legally as well as illegally into national and international system. It is such social types that are active in illegal drugs, arms trade and fraud. The frequency with which trickery is employed as a form of action is an indication of one of the key characteristics of people in the region, namely negotiability, convertibility and malleability of their constituents. This is exhibited by the experience of people in terms of their relationship to the tribal world and conversion to Christianity, invention of ethnicity as well as easy implantation of the money and consumer goods of capitalist economy.

These procedures of subjectivation are woven through the fabric of

society, all the more because they often invoke the redefinition, or even the refoundation of the *tribal political formation* and its subjects. "They tend to set in motion representations that claim to be primordial, appealing to blood, sperm, land, identity, or authenticity. Insofar as they are procedures of subjectivation, the interweaving of tradition, on which identity-based political strategies are found, becomes so passionate, and even phantasmal and phobic, that they end up becoming sinister *imaginaire* of purity."[45] The Other is then seen as polluting the integrity of the community, the race and the place. "This threat is felt in the arcana of sexuality as well as in those of death. The futile quest for pure identity is always pursued in specific, complex social contexts. But it can be reduced to a tragically simplifying equation that shows the superiority and integrity of the Self through the physical degradation and symbolic destruction of the Other. This is, in particular, the meaning of the modern form of torture that no longer seeks to obtain information or confessions, but to create the Enemy, to purify the social body of its soiled elements, to deconstruct the humanity of the subversive."[46] Here what comes into operation is the ambivalence of the culture in that culture without being false is not true either. The *imaginaire* has to do with this grey area between the true and the false, which is revealed in the twofold act of instrumentalizaion and adhesion. In other words, it is the principle of ambivalence, which political operators cultivate.

As the seat of passions, of aesthetics, of symbolic activity, the *imaginaire* is by definition both a domain of ambivalence[47] and a domain of immediation, as pointed out before. As soon as we acknowledge its central place in political practices, we see that the latter are, also by definition, ambivalent.[48] This property of politics is largely unrecognized.[49] It is high time that we acknowledged ambivalence as an intrinsic characteristic of politics. The culturalist denies that ambivalence is a constitutive property of the political. But the cultural bases of politics proceed through metaphors, which are by nature ambivalent. There are no strategies of cultural extraversion, of transfer of meaning, of procedures of authentification, of the formation of primordial identities, and no polysemy of the discursive genres of politics without a hefty dose of ambivalence. The latter is, so to speak, the fuel of political annunciation.

Ultimately the political arena is like a theater in which what counts is not merely people's action (and still less their intentions and principles), but the effects produced by their actions, the way in which they are understood, perceived, and interpreted. This is all the more true because of over-

interpretation. This is a recurrent characteristic, for example, of massacres. In their phantasmal sources, contemporary strategies of identity function in the same way. The ethnic descriptions of political and social cleavages now operate as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy', any or each of the groups involved calculating that its adversary has planned its extermination and acting accordingly. These are extreme situations. Nevertheless, they remind us that the phantasm of conspiracy is a strong and universal form of political *imaginaire*.

Conclusion

The lived culture that is performed by the tribes in Northeast India is the same modern material culture embodied in consumption, dress, hair style, politics, economy, education, healthcare, religion etc., but all this without the spirit and ideal of modernity. The ideal culture, which is presented as basis of differentiation, is the invented primordial culture, which is no more in being in performance, but resides as objects in museums and photographs. This disjunction between the lived performative culture and the advocated invented 'official culture' has its effects especially in the arena of education. This disjunction prevents the development of *habitus*, the modern enlightenment habitus, required for modernization, which the modern school, college and universities are attempting to impart. Similarly this kind of disjunction prevents the significance of the parable of good Samaritan sinking into the heart of individuals in spite of adoption of Christianity. It is this disjunction that is propelling the subjectivation towards *mètis* mentality.

It may be said on behalf of the tribes that the impenetrable traditions of the tribes still lives on as it has lost none of its vitality, however misrepresented that tradition may be even in the minds of tribals, and that Christian church and modern material culture are just a superficial superimposition. Be that as it may, one cannot ignore the new solidarity of Christian church, neither can one ignore the new political solidarity manifested in the fanaticism of political demonstrations and organization of state apparatus for the purpose of reaping the benefits of modernity. These new solidarities that project an image – and perhaps not just an image – are competing with or at least exist juxtaposed to the surviving traditional tribal solidarities. Hence, if the tribes in Northeast India want to have an authentic understanding of their lived performative culture they have to (1) come out of the illusion of pure primordial tribal culture and (2) acknowledge both Christianity and modernity sans its ideal as their culture and (3) undertake the theoretical task of conceptual reconciliation

between three things: their tribal conceptual repertoire, Christian faith, and modern conceptual categories. Without this threefold reconciliation a false tribal culture will remain instrumentalized in tribal identity formation by their elite for the goal of creation and consolidation of tribal hegemonistic political territory of various kinds of autonomy to satisfy the hunger of elite for power and economic goods. So far the tribes in the region have set their eyes on the objective culture of modernity, to use Simmel's terminology, but the tribal mind has not yet distanced itself from this material culture for subjective culture, i.e., for cultivating the mind, which develops at a much slower pace. Since modern consumption culture is adopted by them, the value of untrammeled and self-exceeding selfhood, with its excited intensity and mobility of desire, reigns supreme. But this is not balanced by production or ethics of production, requiring self-restraint of desire, as it is not adopted. This situation has the potentiality to produce a culture which is "prodigal, promiscuous, dominated by an anti-rational, anti-intellectual temper in which the self is taken as the touchstone of cultural judgments and the effect on the self is the measure of the aesthetic worth of experience."[50] Of course, the self here has to be the self of the tribal. No one else counts. So the culture here is likely to remain as a curious juxtaposition of borrowed fragments of modernity and the exhausted relics of invented tradition turning itself into agitated stagnancy to stagnant agitation in the present, keeping it equally remote from past as well as from future.

Notes and Referrences

1 Binod Kumar Agarwala, "Performative Culture: A Phenomenological Ontology of Culture," *The NEHU Journal*, 9(2): 25-48.

2 Jean-Francois Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, translated by Steven Rendall, Janet Roitman and Jonathan Derrick, Hurst & Company, London, 2005.

3 This kind of double tendencies are discernible in the news of *The Times of India*, North-East, Saturday, May 8, 2010 on the first page under the heading "Film on Konyaks at Cannes festival": Riding on a short film on one of its fiercest fighters, Konyak Nagas, Northeast India is set to make its mark at the Cannes Film Festival beginning on May 12. Directed by Vikeyeno Zao, an Angami Naga woman, last of the tattooed head hunters, will be screened at the famed festival in the short film category. The 15-minute film is based on the head hunting tradition of Konyaks and the ritualistic details connected with it that continued till the mid-20th century. Head hunting was part of Konyak's

survival strategy in a harsh land where they had to fight for their turf with other equally fearsome warrior tribes. "They (Konyaks) are culturally very rich but economically poor…" said Indrajit Narayan Dev, the film's producer and husband of Zao. "The principal reason for making this film is to present to the world the last tattooed Konyak Nagas before they are gone forever," she [Zao] explained. Modern Konyaks have forgotten their tradition and are marching ahead with rest of the world.

4 This passage is quoted from Paul Bohannan, *We the Alien: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, by Gary B. Palmer and William R. Jankowiak, "Performance and Imagination: Toward an Anthropology of the Spectacular and the Mundane," *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 1996), p.225.

5 "I am afraid that the celebrated cultural identities are being erased by modernization, by Americanisation, by television, by a whole process of making modes of life uniform." Quoted by Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.7 from P. Hassner, *La violence et la paix, Dela bombe atomique au nettoyage ethnique,* Paris: Esprit, 1995, p.309.

6 Cf. Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.8 and F. Braudel, *Grammaire des civilizations*, Paris: Arthaud-Flammarion, 1987, pp. 38-9.

7 J. N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity*, Princeton University Press, 1990, p.143; A. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford University Press, 1991.

8 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.9.

9 "It is doubtful if such marginalities exist in other cultures of India. Take the tribal cultures – at least the ones I know something about. Although for many, a sense of marginality has been created by larger and more powerful cultures so that a merger or an amnesiac identification with the larger cultures becomes easily possible, many of them, miraculously perhaps, have retained a sense of both functional and moral-spiritual autonomy which provides, as it were, the springs of action for them. Such autonomy is, of course, continuously under threat, but the very fact that it has survived shows that they do not assign a marginal status to themselves; and they can have fairly authentic romantic ideas of a 'once flourishing' cultural being." Mrinal Miri, "Community, Culture, Nation" http://www.india-seminar.com/2005/550/550%20mrinal%20miri.htm (accessed on April, 10, 2010, at 5.35 a.m.)

10 All identity movements in Northeast India - Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya etc. - were inspired by such dreams.

11 For example under the impact of modernization the standardization of Khasi language took place superceding multiple dialects of Khasi people. But this

happened through multiple claims of different dialects to represent the standard Khasi language. C. R. Agera writes in his "Cultural Diversity and Bio-Diversity: A study through Language Diversity," *The NEHU Journal,* Vol VII, No. 1, 2009, p.22, "…there are several dialects of the same language, but a particular form may be accepted as the standard version for both speaking, and, more importantly, for the written communication and such other important communicative functions as administration, education, print and audio-visual media. Thus the particular form of language so chosen is often taught formally through the formative institution of education, formalized through administration, and popularized through media. In Meghalaya, for example, Thomas Jones not only chose the Roman script for the Khasi language, but also chose the Sohra dialect to be the standardized one, amidst stiff resistance from the British officials, to say nothing of the non-Sohra natives…One may experience some artificiality in the use of the standardized form of language, if also a detached formality, while there is a rare spontaneity and intimate freshness in the dialect."

12 Jean-Francois Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.33.

13 North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong - 793022, Meghalaya, India.

14 Sanjib Baruah, "Confronting Constructionism: Ending India's Naga War," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (May, 2003), pp. 321- 338, has shown the constructivist nature of Naga identity. The argument applies to all other identities in the region.

15 For example it was the dialect of Khasis in Sohra that was recognized as the Khasi Language.

16 Let me quote a long paragraph from Sanjib Baruah, "Confronting Constructionism," to show how British account of the tribes was accepted by the tribes themselves:

"The expression Naga, wrote John Henry Hutton in his introduction to J. P. Mills's classic ethnographic account of the Lhota Nagas published in 1922, 'is useful as an arbitrary term to denote the tribes living in certain parts of the Assam hills, which may be roughly defined as bounded by the Hokong valley in the northeast, the plain of the Brahmaputra Valley to the northwest, of Cachar to the southwest and of the Chindwin to east. In the south the Manipur Valley roughly marks the point of contact between the "Naga" tribes and the very much more closely interrelated group of Kuki tribes - Thado, Lushei, Chin etc." (Hutton, 1922: xvi). The website of the NSCN-IM (2002) quotes the passage from Hutton to introduce the Naga people and their territories without the qualifications that Hutton had added to his formulation eight decades ago. Rather than calling the expression Naga a 'useful' but 'arbitrary' term, and saying that they lived 'in certain parts of the Assam hills' that Hutton ventured

to describe only 'roughly', the NSCN-IM's website makes Hutton sound very precise about the Nagas 'and their lands'. 'Mr. Hutton defines the land of the Naga people thus', it states, and then goes on to describe 'the area inhabited by the Naga tribes' quoting Hutton. Indeed, the quotation forms part of a paragraph that begins with a precise geographical description of the territory belonging to what the NSCN-IM calls the Naga Nation…" p.322. This is also an example of how the past gets recycled in a new way for identity formation in the present.

17 Naga tribe formation and Zeliangrong formation are such examples.

18 The following news report appeared in *The Times of India*, 26 June 2009, under the title, "I'm a victim of racism in India: Mizoram CM," "…I am a victim of racism", the CM said at a seminar on water in Singapore, leaving his fellow delegates red-faced. …Lalthanhawla said at the meet, 'In India, people ask me if I am an Indian. When I go to south (India), people ask me such questions. They ask me if I am from Nepal or elsewhere. They forget that the Northeast is part of India...I have told many that 'See, I am an Indian like you'." He then proceeded to detail the racial make-up of the country. 'Indians consist of three races — Dravidians, Aryans and we in the Northeast', he said. Though the remarks are likely to strike a chord among people of Northeast India who often face discrimination in other parts of the country, the fact that they were made at an international forum has left the government embarrassed." This remark comes at a time when people from other parts of India, especially from the Hindi speaking areas, are targets of systematic violence in most parts of North-east India. They are subject to discrimination both formal and informal in most states of the region, including Mizoram. When the Inner Line Permit system was in place in many states in the region, including Mizoram, there was no free movement of people from rest of India. How will they then know if it is really a part of India? The remark of the Chief Minister of Mizoram clearly demonstrates that it is the Sartrean demonic double of the self in the region, which is projected as "the other." The Mizoram CM was misreading others by ignoring the real doings of people of his state, i.e., by misreading the self. This kind of misreading arises from the tendency to blame others for what really pertains to oneself.

19 E. Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, London: Bell, 1954; S.J. Tambiah, *World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background*, Cambridge University Press, 1976, Chs. VII and VIII, and *Culture, Thought and Social Action: An Anthropological Perspective*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985, ch. VII; G. Balandier, *Anthropologie Politique*, Paris: PUF, 1967, and *sens et puissance, Les dynamiques sociale*, Paris: PUF, 1971; I. Kopytoff (ed.) *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*,

Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987; J.P. Warnier, *Echanges, development et hierarchies dans le Bamenda précolonial* (Cameroon), Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1985.

20 R. Bendix, "Tradition and Modernity Reconsidered', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, IX/3, April 1967, pp.292-346.

21 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.71.

22 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, pp.72f.

23 H. Srikanth and C.J. Thomas, "Naga Resistance Movement and the Peace Process in Northeast India," *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Issue 2, 2005, p.79.

24 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.77.

25 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.78 and J.P. Warnier (ed.), *Le Paradoxe de la merchandise authentique, Imaginaire et consummation de masse,* Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994.

26 V.K. Nuh (ed.), 2002. p. 364. quoted in H. Srikanth & C.J. Thomas, "Naga Resistance Movement and the Peace Process in Northeast India," *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Volume 1, Issue 2, 2005, p.79.

27 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.83.

28 R. H. Bates, "Modernization, Ethnic competition and the Rationality of Politics in Contemporary Africa" in D. Rothschild and V. A. Olorunshola (eds), *State versus Ethnic Claims: African policy Dilemmas*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983, pp.152 and 165.

29 M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology,* ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, pp.393-5, 389 and 357.

30 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, pp.91f.

31 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.92.

32 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.93.

33 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.95.

34 R. Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993, p182.

35 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, pp.108f.

36 Cf. A. Appadurai, "Disjunction and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy', *Public Culture* 2/2, spring 1990, p. 5; C. Castoriadis, *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris: Seuil, 1975, pp, 204, 451; P. Veyne, *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à*

leurs mythes? Essai sur l'imagination constitutionte, Paris: Seuil, 1983, pp.11, 137, 12; Jean-Francois Bayart, *Illusion of Cultural Identity*, pp.133-232.

37 Hence imagined conspiracies become real conspiracies. Best example is provided by the Nagas. The imagined Naga sovereignty gets posited as the real Naga sovereignty before their subjugation by the British.

38 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.151.

39 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.152 and A. Matheron, "Passions et institutions selon Spinoza" in C. Lazzeri and D. Reynié (eds), *La Raison d'Etat. Politique et rationalité*, Paris: PUF, 1992, pp.141-70.

40 Quoted by Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, pp.152f from G. Deleuze, *Pourparlers 1972-1990*, Paris: Minuit, 1990, p.156.

41 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.153.

42 Quoted by Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.166 from M. Detienne and J. P. Vernant, *Les Ruses de l'intelligence. La mètis des Grecs*, Paris: Flammarion, 1974, p.57.

43 Quoted by Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.166 from Detienne and Vernant, *Les Ruses de l'intelligence*, pp.19-20.

44 In his review of Sanjib Baruah's *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* Udayon Misra writes, "Baruah is rightly exercised about the violations of human rights by the state. But one feels that his account should have been balanced by the violations committed by organisations like the ULFA… The issue of human rights is being viewed from an increasingly restrictive angle, with each ethnic organisation trying to put forward its own version of human rights. Even ethnic cleansing is being sought to be passed off as a struggle for human rights of a particular ethnic community!" in "Sub-National Challenges to Indian State: An Assamese Perspective," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, No. 20 (May 13-19, 2000), p.1730.

45 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.160.

46 Bayart, *The Illusion of Cultural Identity*, p.160. Also cf. D. Chidester, *Shots in the Streets: Violence and Religion in South Africa*, Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp.76ff.; E. Scarry, *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985; L. DuBois, "Torture and the Construction of an Enemy: the Example of Argentina, 1976-1983', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 15, 1990, pp.317-28; and S. Gregory and D. Timermann, "Ritual of the Modern State: the Case of Torture in Argentina', ibid., 11, 1986, pp.63-72.

47 This cultural ambivalence of the tribes in Northeast India is too glaring to be missed: tribes are Christianized and yet the "official identity" of these tribes will not like to include Christianity in the identity kit.

48 The best example is that of P. A. Sangma's National Congress Party (NCP). He is in opposition to Congress-led coalition in the state of Meghalaya, yet his daughter Miss Agatha Sangma who is also an MP of NCP, is a minister in Congress-led coalition government at the centre.

49 The entire people can show this ambivalence: one can see the hate and love relationship of tribes with 'outsiders'. They hate 'outsiders' coming to live in their area yet they love to lobby for more funds from 'outside'.

50 Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, 2nd edn. London:Heinemann, 1979, p.37.

Resonance of Identity in Rajbanshi Poetry

JYOTIRMOY PRODHANI

Abstract

The recent proliferation of poems in Rajbanshi language in Assam and North Bengal has immense significance as it has become one of the most abiding assertions of the recent historico-cultural awareness of the community. The Rajbanshi language, which is not taught in any educational institution, gains significant status as a hermeneutic tool for cultural expressions as well as a means for the manifestation of the community's political aspirations. This article seeks to chronicle the historical development of the Rajbanshi poems and the tangible contours through which they have evolved into a powerful ethnic literary genre. It also makes efforts to contextualise the growth of the Rajbanshi poetic voices against the backdrop of historical, political and cultural contingencies that have shaped the discourse emerging from the growing political and cultural identity consciousness of the Rajbanshis as a nation.

Key words**:** Kamatapur, Pratima Barua Pandey, Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma, Kshatriya movement, Greater Coochbehar.

I

'Poetry addresses the plurality of pain and the awareness of each neighbourly murder forces the poets to burst into songs'[1], remarked Pradip Acharya, an eminent translator and critic from Assam. The statement becomes pertinent when it comes to finding a road to arrive at the narrative landscape of the Rajbanshi poems. The Rajbanshis in Assam and West Bengal are a peculiar entity with the odd historical compulsions to continually justify their own existence in the respective geo-political contexts of the two territories.

The Rajbanshi historiography has an uneasy legacy of being devolved from being a mainstream chronicle to a fringe narrative. The subordination of the Rajbanshi nation and its subsequent disfiguration as a marginal entity has effectively reduced them into a 'culturally disabled' collective being. In

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case of the Rajbanshi articulations, the aspects that we generally define as folk, assume a complicated semantic dimension, i.e., a politically loaded emotive awareness.

Padmashree Pratima Barua Pandey, the legendary singer of Rajbanshi folk songs, is intimately associated with the unarticulated desire of the Rajbanhis to legitimise their cultural self. The songs she resurrected, with the inspiration of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, were not mere components of the folk; they, in fact, turned out to be the most powerful tenors for the spatio-temporal reconfiguration of the Rajbanshi identity.

The folk repository of the Rajbanshis is rich. But against the backdrop of the changed socio-political context, the cultural elements no longer remain neutral manifestations of folk innocence. The myths, the familiar images, the landscapes, the folk gods and goddesses, the banal body of the individuals and myriad other assortment of things transform into chronotopic metaphors. In Debesh Ray's *Teeesta Parer Brittanta,* which narrates the life of the Rajbanshis in North Bengal, the naked body of the Rajbanshi protagonist, Bagaru, is symptomatic of how the cultural other is perceived against the sanctified image of the self of the onlookers. For a mainstream Bengali onlooker it seems natural to conceive the indigenous native as a semi-civilized, near barbaric individual against the perceived superiority of their own self. Against such a situation of forced disfiguration, the 'othered' community gets engaged in an exercise of exploring the possibility of self-retrieval. In the process, from the brink of near oblivion, the myths and other intimate cultural ingredients are resurrected, and through their temporal reconfigurations they emerge as abiding artefacts.

Ernest Renan, the nineteenth century French philosopher in his 1882 lecture at Sorbonne, "What is a Nation", famously said that both the past and the present are the two things that constitute the soul of a nation. One he described as the "possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form." Rajeev Bhargav in his essay, "History, Nation and Community Reflections on Nationalist Historiography of India and Pakistan" interpreted this as nation's dependence both on "the possession of rich remembrances and on the shared amnesia, a collective forgetfulness." (2000: 193).

The *maishal*s (buffalo-herder), the mahouts, the *garial*s (bullock-cart puller), the elephants are part of the rich legacy of the Rajbanshi community.

They are not mere references to a folk landscape but also the abiding symbols through which they access and approximate their self. The Rajbanshi consciousness is perpetually haunted by a historiography that is largely preserved in the realms of community memory. Despite a huge historical legacy, the Rajbanshis are smarting under the uncanny pains of ahistoricity.

The Rajbanshis as a nation have been long engaged in a search for a workable historical address informed by their shared emotional legacies. They betray a deep urge to emerge as a nation across the geopolitical boundaries that has divided their cultural territory. This endeavour, in the words of Benedict Anderson, is a 'historically ordained' enterprise of a nation. Anderson locates three temporal junctures of nation's 'historically ordained' rise. One such juncture is when a particular language gains privileged access to ontological truth and attains an inseparable linkage to this. There is a second juncture when society evolves into a naturally organised body around or under a hierarchically superior power centre like that of a monarch who is supposed to have obtained the authority to rule from a shared cosmological disposition reflecting the essential human loyalties for the hierarchical and the centripetal. There is a third occasion when nations rise, that is, at the time when conception of temporality is achieved and *cosmology and history become indistinguishable* from each other (italics mine), the juncture when the origin of man and the world becomes essentially identical (Anderson 1991: 36).

The Rajbanshi consciousness arrogates itself through an experiential geopolitical contingency that assigns meaning to their everyday 'fatalities of existence'. This consciousness is embedded with a strong awareness of a disembodied cosmology and history that used to govern their universe of meaning and space. The distillation of this uneasy awareness keeps haunting the body of the texts that provide tangible contours to the sounds in the emerging narrative of the Rajbanshi poetry:

King's canopy crumbled
Washing away river's rule
Religion and culture are like flowing rivers
Like the way there was once *sati*
Now gone; reformation in a way

Yet it hardly pleases your heart: old people, old songs
The heart has its own say: the days of the kings were rather good
We could have only *arum* roots as food, yet had the soul to sing *Bhawaiya* songs

Days out, and days in,
This is what Phulti Abo ruefully hums

'Phoolti Abo's Tale' by Phulti Abo. Tr. Jyotirmoy Prodhani

The Rajbanshis, living intimately with their folkways, found adequate expressions in the rich spool of the Rajbanshi folk narrative. But their contingent encounters with the reality beyond their bucolic familiarity and the settled landscape of the memories of their history impel them to invent alternative sites and tools of expressions compatible to organise the anarchic hinterland of their present mind in formal linguistic articulations. Poetry is born out of an imperative to relocate their social self, for they are alert to the processes of a political and a cultural displacement. Or, as Pradip Acharya puts it, 'poetry is born out of the 'plurality of pain':

I beat the drum and it
Blows like glass
In search of diverse claims
The inkpot is veiled
I feel I know it
But I don't

I would rather ask
Who are you
The whole realm is the clamour crows

'It Shocks' by Hiralal Das. Tr. Pradip Acharya

II

Modern Rajbanshi poetry has a long history. It dates back to the early twentieth century with the pioneers like Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma whose collection of poems, 'Dangdhari Mao' (Menacing Mother) can be considered as one of the first published anthologies of, what we may call, 'Modern Rajbanshi Poetry'. The birth of modern Rajbanshi poetry seems to have been a palpable linguistic manifestation of a deep sense of agony in sharp contrast to the dominant mood of romantic ease and mystic melancholy of their folk songs – the songs popularised by Pratima Barua Pandey.

Rajbanshi poems betray a perpetual sense of anger and a helpless nostalgia for a seemingly lost horizon that used to nestle their myths and

lores. They relocate themselves as helpless onlookers to the processes that have mutilated the very references of understanding their self, which they so confidently used to refer to as the repository of their community identity and consciousness in their past. The resignation of a clueless nation to this fate makes the alert members of the community livid. Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma's 'Dangdhari Mao' is an enraged mother, restive at the apparent inertia of the able-bodied male folk when their souls are symbolically molested. In fact Panchanan Burma wrote this poem when Rajbanshi women were frequently subjected to sexual atrocities by the goons in Rongpur district during the later part of 1920s. He wrote the song reflecting his anger and the indomitable urge to effectively take on the perpetrators:

The scream startled my menacing mother
She spies the ways of life, sheer clamour
no doors, no direction
father's homestead or of brother's
the husband's lap, the few women
lecherous ruffians, while the few women
daughters and sisters thrown aside
forcing the walls
the woman holds onto her husband – she is gagged
Yet her heart rending wails pierce beyond her clothes
Her screams clamour from earth to sky
The men-folk just gape and shocked
Menacing my mother shouts her anger
And rages beyond brandishing the pestel

'Menacing Mother' by Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma

Application of a community language in formal forms like poetry is a remarkably formidable project, for the Rajbanshi language had remained a living heritage outside the ambit of any official patronage in post-independent India. This language seemed to have been without any official warrant for its manifestation in solemn formal discourses. Despite the current linguistic protocol, most of the scholastic investigators had ticked it off as a *dialect*. Some called it a sub-dialect of Assamese or Bengali, mostly the scholars of the respective language groups. Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, Sukumar Sen, and Upen Goswami in Bengal and the scholastic icons like Banikanta Kakati in Assam were the major champions to have identified Rajbanshi language as a dialect/subdialect of Bengali and Assamese languages respectively. There is a parallel school belonging to the scholars of relatively less eminent aura

who claimed Rajbanshi as an independent language. This school of thought includes scholars like Khan Choudhury Amanatullah (author of *Coochbeharer Itihas*), Rai Saheb Panchanan Burma, Gauri Nath Shastri, Upendranath Burman, and more recently Girija Shankar Ray, Dwijendra Nath Bhakat, Ramendranath Adhikary, Girindranath Roy, Mathew Toulman, etc. Despite being a language which is yet to obtain constitutional recognition or become a part of curriculum, the speakers of the language opted for urgent articulations in their own idioms rather than train their voices to express in acquired languages.

There was an early instance of this endeavour of locating the self beyond folk narratives in the works of Ratikanta Das of Itakumari village in Rongpur district of present Bangladesh. He had published a collection of Rajbanshi poems way back in the eighteenth century during the reign of Warren Hastings (1773-1785). Nevertheless, there has been a steady growth of Rajbanshi publications from the late 1950s onwards. In the sixties, Pathik had published a collection of Rajbanshi *Bhawaiya* songs; in the sixties Saat Bhaiya (Seven Brothers) had brought out an anthology of poems by seven poets. In the seventies Tushar Bandopadhyay had published an anthology of Rajbanshi poems – *Aloloi Jhololoi Moderer Phool*. Meanwhile, several collections of poems were published by individual poets. Perhaps the first most significant anthology of Rajbanshi poems was *Rajbanshi Kavita Sankalan* (1996), co-edited by Jatin Burma and Vinod Bihari Burma of Toofanganj in Coochbehar District of North Bengal, which included 50 poets writing in Rajbanshi language in Assam and Bengal.

Translation of the Rajbanshi texts is as much a political act as it is so for the writers who write in Rajbanshi language. This literary activism has the aspiration to graduate from the sphere of the folk to the domain of the modern or the mainstream. The proliferation of the Rajbanshi texts in recent times has been critically instrumental in the gradual prominence of the Kamatapur as well as the Greater Coochbehar[2] articulations. The growth of literature and the resurrection of the folk have been effectively turned into an alternative mode of eliciting legitimacy against the apparent absence of institutionally promoted history. Panchanan Burma's poems 'Dangdhari Mao' (Menacing Mother) written in early 1930s literally began the era of Rajbanshi literature motivated by anger and agony.

The Rajbanshi poetry becomes a major site where the myths are revived through their temporal reconfiguration. The mythic figures translocate themselves as vibrant metaphors to recast their history:

The *maishal* keeps on searching for his herd
Amidst the alien crowd
……
……
For he has lost his home
As all his nearer ones have long gone far

'Lost Lyrics' by Kasema Khatun. Tr. J. Prodhani

Sites of history become part of a bucolic nostalgia and memory:

Coochbehar, my proud mother
No one more delicate than her
Lotus, hyacinth, lilies abound
On streams and ponds all around
Plantains and *supari* (areca nut) trees
Homestead, rows of bamboo like bows
……
……
Time to strum the *dotora* strings
Sing nostalgic song in full throated ease
None will shout you down but to you throng
……
……
Like rivers, trees and the earth
Man seeks man be the hearth
Day or whatever hour
You will be fed before you can saunter
Still are Aliens

'Coochbehar' by Upen Ray. Tr. P. Acharya

The Rajbanshis had eminent presence in history following the long dominance of the Koch Kamata kingdom till the sixteenth century. However, in the post independent India the history of the Koch Kamata kingdom vis a vis the Rajbanshis have been reduced to a mere footnote in Assam while in Bengal the history of the Rajbanshis has been entirely deleted from history curriculum. There was politics behind such moves. In Bengal it was strategically effective to displace the Rajbanshis as a nation from their native hearths both culturally and politically. This was perceived necessary by Bengal because, after the forceful annexation of Coochbehar state in 1950 by Bengal, the Rajbanshis were always seen as a potential threat to the political ambitions of Bengal to

have an expanded backyard for its sustenance. The Bengal regime had adopted similar strategies against most other ethnic communities of North Bengal including the Gorkhalis. History is a major tool of contestation between nations. Since the Rajbanshis or the Gorkhalis or other ethnic entities are always seen as Other by the mainstream Bengal, their histories too are systematically erased from the Bengal history text. The Bengal history text, after deleting all 'disjunctive' elements as well as the cultural Other, arrives at a narrative that is unproblematic, unilateral and invincibly majoritarian. Proliferation of new texts in the peripheries therefore becomes a contested narrative. In "National Identity and History Writing in Ukraine", Taras Kuzio writes that when historical writings and interpretations are contested, as they were among the three Eastern Slavic peoples: Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians, writing of history makes a direct influence upon national identities (2006: 407). In Bengal the official and the nationalist history merged as one making the two indistinguishable from each other. Rajeev Bhargava noted that the official histories must be distinguished from other nationalist histories because official history is shaped almost exclusively by collective self-interest (2000: 196).

The historical misfortune of the Rajbanshis to have been fragmented into multiple national identities, particularly because of forceful annexation of Coochbehar by Bengal through the shrewd political moves of the erstwhile Bengal Chief Minister, Bidhan Chandra Ray, who demolished the princely state of Coochbehar, which used to be the centre of the Rajbanshi history and culture. This forms an imperative for the Rajbanshis to engage in the enterprise of social and cultural re-signification. Political commentators like Naren Das, Lalit Chandra Barman and others have pointed out how the acceptance of about 16 lakh Bangladeshi refugees in 1949 by the Bengal government and their accommodation in Bengal was one of the vital factors behind the jealous campaign of both Bidhan Chandra Ray of Congress and Sarat Chandra Bose of the opposition party to annexe Coochbehar with Bengal, thwarting attempts to keep Coochbehar a separate state or its merger with Assam with which Coochbehar had historical and cultural proximity. The annexation of Coochbehar in 1950 was followed by the imposition of the state language of Bengal upon the people and the quick removal of all historical references to the Rajbanshis from the official history texts of the state, besides disfiguration of historical and cultural sites of the people, which were the living testimonies of a past of the community beyond the claims of newly adopted official textbooks. Bengal went for forced confiscation of land

documents and rights of the Rajbanshis by imposing land ceiling as part of the dubious land reform drive in Bengal. The Rajbanshis, who sustained primarily on agriculture on the land they had inherited from their forefathers, found themselves virtually landless in no time and became either labourers in the same plot of land which they once owned or had to earn their livelihood by pulling rickshaws or working as maidservants in the houses of the migrants from south Bengal or Bangladesh.

III

After a phase of economic and cultural devastation the Rajbanshi consciousness is trying to rebuild its identity picking on the severed ends of their history and memory. This process, however, creates a mode of identity category. Paula Moya points out the exposition of the organizing principles of the ethnic, which claims that formulations of identity categories do not necessarily devolve into essentialist programme. It rather "provides modes of articulating and examining significant correlations between lived experiences and social locations" (2001: 4). In the process, they underline the need to prioritize the emotional and psychological features, which might seem to be irrational at times in relation to the reformulation of their social identity. Ethnic studies scholar Lola Romanucci, nevertheless, calls this as a justified response (1996).

In this journey from the oral to the written and from folk songs to poetry, the Rajbanshi consciousness encounters and accommodates alien urban realities and the entire contour of these verses transforms and bears testimony to these changing exigencies. It becomes imperative for them to redeem their collective memory of a lost landscape which was their collective belonging. The poems, therefore, manifest the subdued pain and agonies they are smarting from the turmoil of their inner desperations:

Let the sky crush on the earth
And the earth crush over the sky
I want just this much
……
Let the adamantine Himalaya
Stand up proud
And laugh and clear
….
I want just this much.

'I Want' by Dharma Narayan Burma. Tr. Pradip Acharya

These poems are a body of lyric that inadvertently aim at heralding a change. Change, as an idea, has a threat perception to those who are ensconced in the comfort of certainties. Historically the attempts of dissolving self within the territory of the governing class resulted in further disfiguration and fragmentation of their native identity. The young disjunctives, therefore, to redeem their wounded souls, take up this project of change in earnest. This is the juncture when they embark on the search for their receding address:

No, I don't want anything else
The fecund field of my adolescence
The green expanse of emptiness
……
Give that back to me
I don't want anything else, not me.

'This Land, This People' by Ramakanta Ray. Tr. Pradip Acharya

The poems essentially take recourse to the folk hinterland and are dominantly engaged in the ritual of reconfiguring the past. This mode is an imperative for a Rajbanshi writer for he is a liminal entity, and such entity is necessarily creative because it has to negotiate with the conditions of perpetual challenges to redescribe itself. It encounters the traumatic necessity of constant recovery in a liminal space of identity, which quite often needs collectivisation:

I beat the drum
And it blows as glass
In the search of diverse claims
The ink pot is veiled
I feel I know it
But I don't

I would rather ask:
Who are you
The whole realm is the clamour crows

The postmodern shelves
Glow with volumes of isms
And the mutuality of ads

I know they are protestants
The revolution was there
In clenched fists

The indigence of the rushing floods
Is astounding
Makes even the Dark Panchali
Worry and deliberate

'Atash Nagey' (It Shocks) by Hiralal Das. Tr. P. Acharya

In the exercise of collectivising identity, individuation becomes a mere coincidental contingency, for there is an urgency to define and defend the collective self. Annihilating the history and language of the 'other', acts of disfiguring the sites that could endorse the legitimacy of the micro nations like the Rajbanshis, Gorkhalis, Adivasis, Bodos, and the Rabhas, whose systematic displacement from their geo-cultural spaces and marginalization in the spheres of politics, empowerment and education are part of the strategies that form the discursive feature of the dominant geo-cultural politics in Bengal. Incidentally, the rape of a Rajbangshi woman by the Communist cadres in a small village called Ghoksadanga[3] in Coochbehar district was legitimised by the general secretary of the CPI (M), Anil Biswas, by branding the victim as a 'Nastha Meye' (a girl with immoral character), hence she deserved what the party cadre did to her.

Another example of brutal state terrorism and absolute subjugation of the voices of the marginalised entities was the crushing with brute force the initiative of the Adivasis and the Rajbanshis under the banner of UTJAS[4] (Uttar Banga Tapashili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan) in Alipurduar. Against such challenges posed by the communist regime in Bengal, micro nations like the Rajbanshis find it a huge challenge to formulate the idioms of articulations. Against the backdrop of constant erasure they are impelled to reconstitute the lost politico-cultural constituencies. The Rajbanshis have been subjected to uncanny geo-political fragmentations and perpetually marginalised along the peripheries of the new territories of Assam, Bengal, Bihar, Nepal and Bangladesh. Hence, there is constant urge to reclaim the lost spaces and bequeath them to their progenies, thereby absolve oneself from the menacing scourge of guilt and hopeless inertia:

Hey son, come *kido* (young boy)
Come and hear this, won't you?
The gazing lands gone forlorn
The gardens and the fields the home fronting east

Tied to, attached
The bonny lass with glowing skin

They are all yours, son
And yonder river can you see it?
I am that and no other

Come son, come *kido*
Here massage my chest
Can't you see no one cares
And I die screaming in pain
See if you can
Sprinkle some water
To make the idler waken

And listen close, and remember
All these are yours

'The River of Wishes' by Ramakanta Ray. Tr. P. Acharya

Rajbanshi texts have a task in hand, i.e., to authenticate its own tongue. There have been intellectual resistances primarily to deflate the exaggerated claims of the books like *The Origin and Development of Bengali Language* by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, what the Australian researcher, Mathew Taulman described as a programmatic book. The Rajbanshis are making an effort to rediscover their own script by resurrecting the scripts of the texts written mostly during the 15th century reign of the Koch King, Maharaj Naranarayan. It may be noted that in comparison to the Rajbanshi literature produced in the Rajbanshi dominated districts like Dhubri, Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, and Goalpara in Assam the proliferation of the Rajbanshi texts has been considerably high in the districts like Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri and North Dinajpur in North Bengal. They publish regular periodicals, weekly newspapers, even research journals, creative writings, pamphlets, biographies in Rajbanshi as well as translations of Bengali, Sanskrit and English texts into Rajbanshi language primarily because their sense of liminality, like the most other marginalised indigenous nations, has been the most poignant in the Communist Bengal. As a ritual of purgation they are discarding the Bengali /r/ with a dot and the same is replaced with the original /r/ with a diagonal slash, as used in Assamese script despite the fact that the Rajbanshis in Bengal have been conditioned to use the Bengali /r/ owing to the long processes of forceful imposition of Bengali language upon them. As Samir

Chattopadhyay writes:

We still are aliens
The thought sets my heart ablaze
Stiff are our hands like old bamboos
But they say: "we are king's inheritors"
We sold all our herds and homestead
To beg for alms
Like homeless monks
Mahajans sucked our bones dry
Good old days haunt as we close our eyes
Villages are now empty fields, bald cremating ground

Times, they are a changing,
Times, they are all new
Let a generation sprout in the northern croft.

'We still are Aliens' by Tushar Bandopadhyay. Tr. J. Prodhani

Notes

* Rajbanshis have a dominant presence in West Assam, North Bengal, parts of Eastern Bihar as well as in Southern Nepal and the Rongpur district of present-day Bangladesh. They gained considerable visibility in recent times owing to the variety of emphatic enunciations they have made in connection with their demand for ST status in Assam, movements for their linguistic legitimacy, inclusion of their history in the state education curriculum and more recently owing to their articulation for a separate state in the form of Kamatapur[1]. The Rajbanshi national consciousness evolved through several forms of social movements that eventually graduated into strong political mobilizations seeking more complex set of legitimacies. Their major mobilization as a nation occurred in early 1960s with the onset of Kshatriya movement under the leadership of Panchanan Burma. This was a movement through which they sought to obtain a seemingly respectable social position for themselves in the wake of growing social segregation of the community in West Bengal where the Rajbanhis were looked down upon as the low caste people, the 'untouchables'.

1. Acharya said this at the national seminar held at Dibrugarh University on *Changes and Continuity in the Culture of North East,* on 24-25 March 2006.

2. 'Kamatapur' is a recent political movement of the Rajbanshis in Assam and North Bengal demanding a separate state by this name bifurcating parts of Assam and North Bengal, whereas 'Greater Coochbehar' is a movement spearheaded by the Greater Coochbehar Democratic Party under the firebrand leadership of Bongshi Badan Barman who was jailed by the Communist regime and is toiling as an under trial since 2003.

3. Eight CPI(M) supporters had raped a 34-year-old woman at the village of Unish Bisha Thakur Para on July 10, 2001. The local CPI(M) committee was reportedly "putting pressure on the victim to withdraw the police complaint". Allegedly the party leaders had also approached the victim with Rs 7,000 to withdraw the case, but she had turned them down. The CPI(M) zonal committee secretary Narayan Sarkar refused to comment on the matter. A Ghoksadanga police station officer, too, declined to comment. On the evening of July 10, 2001, the eight men accosted the woman at Jayantir *haat* at the Unish Bisha Thakur Para village and took her to a dark corner. "There she was gagged and tied up. Then all the eight CPM men took turns to rape her. She was left there naked throughout the night," a Trinamul leader said, adding that the woman had "walked home naked in full public view" the next morning. The woman was admitted to Ghoksadanga Hospital the next day. She was later transferred to Mathabhanga Subdivisional Hospital, where a medical examination confirmed the rape. (*The Telegraph*, Kolkata Edition, Wednesday, March 12, 2003)

4. UTJAS (Uttar Banga Tapasili Jati O Adivasi Sangathan or Scheduled Caste and Tribal Association of North Bengal), a non-violent dalit activist group formed in 1980s, demanded greater regional autonomy and social justice but it was virtually finished by the CPI(M) armed cadres in connivance with the state police on 10 January 1987 at Alipurduar by attacking the 50,000 strong supporters of the organisation who had gathered there for a rally. The policemen later arrested the victims and with the help of CPI(M) cadres hounded the UTJAS supporters. (See 'Between Nandigram and a party that swears by human rights and lofty democratic ideals lies vast hypocrisy: Party Games' by Yogendra Yadav published in *The Indian Express*, 21 March 2007, p 11, New Delhi Edition).

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'Dislocated' Individuals and their Desired Escape to their Former 'Locations': A Study of two Indian Novels

Harpreet Kaur Vohra

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to understand the relationship between a 'dislocated personality' and his/her serene and beautiful former environment. This 'trap' in the form of a locale acts as a desired getaway, which however sometimes, as in the novels under discussion, proves to be insidiously disastrous after a visit to the former 'location'. The human mind with its innate ability to adapt to different climes and situations has already set the mind working on the new locale and thus finding in it a solace which was not earlier expected or experienced. Thus when Sophie Das of *Neti Neti* gets back to the fairy land of her childhood and younger days, which is Shillong, she approaches the place with a veneration. However, she is disappointed when she finds that things have changed drastically in that sleepy town and life there has become racy, corrupt and cruel, just as it would be in a metro or a large city. Life in Bangalore was cruel but in Sophie's mind, this was a preconceived fact. On the other hand, Agastya's story in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August*, *an Indian Story*, is similar; a story of denial and confrontation with reality. Agastya is unable to live in Madna as there is a mental superimposition of Calcutta over Madna and the latter pales hopelessly in comparison. The dislocation of Agastya is more painful than that of Sophie; while Ms Das gets disenchanted with the place of her longing soon after landing there, she however makes peace and then decides to leave for her new home Bangalore; Agatsya is hopelessly dislocated and trapped in sexual fantasies and drugs even after his visit to Delhi and Calcutta, until he decides to leave his job and Madna for good.

Key words: Location, dislocation, Anjum Hasan, Upamanyu Chatterjee

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Location

Location may be defined according to the senses in which it is used - as the act or process of locating, a place where something is or could be located and a tract of land that has been surveyed and marked off. Location can further be a place of residence which gives a space to an individual to be able to 'settle'. It may be marked by a fixed place in geographical terms; sometimes with borders and sometimes without, and sometimes with a sense of ownership. In my article there are several locations - Shillong, Bangalore, Calcutta, Darjeeling and Madna. They are places, all existing in time and space with the exception of Madna, which appears real, much like R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi*, with all its laziness and village repartee. These 'locations' endow the characters in the novels with their unique individuality and character and play a significant role in the manner in which they view themselves and also interact with others. It is when they are removed from these locations because of circumstance or choice that they show deviant behaviour and long to get back to their places of origin. It is a trap that they find themselves in even though often they leave their places of origin by choice. This article examines the dilemma of such individuals.

This article will attempt to analyze the role that location plays in the equilibrium of an individual. The effort will also be to specifically locate the 'dislocation' and the reasons for the same of Sophie Das in Anjum Hasan's *Neti Neti, Not This, Not This*. Analyzing the role of location will also involve specifically locating the 'dislocation' and the reasons for the same of Agastya Sen in Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August, an Indian Story*. I will also try and draw a relationship between the dislocations of both characters in the selected novels. Finally, I will try and find out how the dislocation is handled/overcome by the characters in both the novels as both have different responses to their sense of disquiet.

The methodology will involve studying aspects of Shillong and Bangalore as locations and the ethos that they stand for in order to understand the thought processes that go on in the mind of Sophie Das. Since Agastya inhabits Calcutta as the canvas of his mind and Madna in the periphery of his soul, briefly studying Calcutta and Madna as locations to understand the mental make-up of Agastya is essential. Delineation of the characters of Sophie and Agastya is essential in order to get an insight into their unique dislocations. I will also study the contradictory positions of "original location vs new location" in both characters.

Dislocation

Dislocation may be defined as being out of usual place, position, or relationship. My article invokes the definition of dislocation to mean out of proper place. The result of this dislocation from one's place of origin or upbringing is a sense of disorientation with oneself and also with the others around. Dislocation from 'proper place' results in a dislocation of the self - a mental stupefaction. This is the result of the craving for the place that has been left behind and the inability to mould oneself into the new clime and cuisine. Thus there is a going back and forth in time with the result that the dislocation only gets more morbid and interferes with daily life and harmonious relationships. Thus moving from Calcutta to Madna proves disastrous to one character while relocating from Shillong to Bangalore is a staccato experience for another.

Why *Neti Neti* and *English August*

Both the novels under discussion address the problem of location and emphasise how their protagonists reel under the influences of their former positions. There are striking parallels to draw from both the protagonists in the manner in which they feel nostalgic about the places they have left behind. The manner in which their 'old' locations haunt them in leitmotif style are similar - the sounds, the sights and even the smells of the old locations stir up memories that cannot be easily forgotten.

Anjum Hasan's *Neti Neti, Not This, Not This*[1] is a discourse on Sophie Das' efforts at 'cosmopolitanization' of the self and the subsequent inability to face the volley, as the heart is rooted in the 'old' and the 'familiar'. Early in the novel on page 11 there is a mirror image of Sophie in the form of six pots that she had been watering for the past one year. "She watered them as often as she remembered to, picked black ants off the geranium, tore out weeds once in a while, but they refused to respond to her. She'd given up on them, now that they'd been on her balcony for almost a year and shown no signs of improving. A whole year she thought *Neti Neti*". Sophie expects much from the plants but she herself has not been able to yet fit into the Bangalore scaffolding, with its unique *chutney* of urban-rural, traditional-modern and order-chaos melee.

Upamanyu Chatterjee's *English August, an Indian Novel*[2] runs along a similar vein amid the chaos of a disintegrating place called Madna: small, dirty, unhygienic and terribly tropical. The novel is an expose, if not a discourse on Agastya Sen, the new IAS officer at Madna. He is trying hard to become

'ruralized' and 'fossilized' in this new *avatar* which his latest appointment offers him. He however does not have to look very far to know that he 'fits' elsewhere - a 'location' which reminds him of the 'old' and the 'familiar'. Like Sophie, Agastya's train has been derailed onto a track that leads to an unfamiliar station. "Agastya was only Half-Bengali. His mother had been Goanese, a Catholic. He hardly remembered her; she had died of meningitis when he had been less than three. He was athletic thin and bearded. He had no devouring interests and until he came to Madna, very little ambition" (p. 4). Both Agastya and Sophie begin on similar premises in that they do not fit into their new milieus. Their dislocated selves are however not due to their inability to 'fit' into new clime and cuisine, but their unique ability to float into the memories of their previous lives and thus their old 'location'. Upamanyu Chatterjee in *English August* continually uses the word 'stoned' to show the lifeless state that the protagonist is living. As he goes to Madna he is 'stoned' by the shabbiness of the scenes around him. "To him these places had been, at best names of newspapers, where flood and caste wars occurred, and entire Harijan families were murdered, where some Prime Minister took his helicopter just after a calamity, or just before the election. Now he looked at this remote world and felt a little unsure, he was going to spend months in a dot in this hinterland."(p. 5)

Sophie is very much like Agastya. But her shift is a move from the quieter, serener environs of Shillong to the 'steely, shiny' glass buildings of Bangalore. The city has 'everything' but Sophie has a dislocated sense of self. She had once been like Ribor (her love) "hidden in a small town, never seen the inside of a train or known what it meant to watch a plane land, never seen city lights, just watched TV, imagined the world through MTV and Discovery channel, listened to Rock Music, set store by lines in songs."(p.33)

The politics of location interplays with 'mental states' in *Neti Neti*. Shillong is not merely a place; it is an experience of a lifetime. "When people talked about hill towns, they imagined them as holiday destinations. They imagined them as places that offered a brief respite from reality and were for that reason adorable" (p. 35). However, for Sophie Shillong is the essence of her being; her thoughts and attitudes emanated from a lifetime spent in this sleepy town.

Bangalore, on the other hand, "possessed a great zest for ugliness". Everyone just wanted to obscure the view, blot out the sky, erase the gaps. The city not just proliferated but kept reproducing itself. And so you never

arrived anywhere in Bangalore (p. 36). The theme of location forms a central idea in both the novels and the struggle towards adopting the features of the new location is significant. Calcutta is a leitmotif in *English August* and Shillong the leit motif in *Neti Neti*. Even the mosquitoes of Calcutta are more holy as "they never touched the face'. Similarly, Sophie sits outside in the Bangalore sun but it is a "throwback to all the winter mornings she has spent turning brown in the 'gentler' sun of her hometown Shillong" (p. 10). There is a constant juxtaposition of Shillong and Bangalore, and Calcutta and Madna - a comparison between the old and the new, the fresh and the stale and the material and the spiritual. There is an unvarying sense of confrontation in Sophie's mind and her attempt at 'cosmopolitanization'. This frequent juxtaposition of locations results in an unwanted dislocation of the senses.

There is a unique relationship of the mind to a place. Location is not merely a 'positioning' of an individual in a geographical space. It goes way beyond that. Sophie is connected to Shillong not like any other tourist who visits a hill station. The imbibing of the ethos of Shillong is how best describes Sophie's relationship to this far-away town. There however exists a strange dichotomy in Sophie's attitude towards Shillong. As long as she lived there she wanted to run away. Small town sights and sounds and small time expectations made her desperately want to flee it. Like Maya, her friend who wished to 'fly away' to America, Sophie too wanted to explore new grounds. Maya gave a matter-of-fact answer to Sophie on being asked what would happen if she felt horribly out of place there (in America): "I can feel at home wherever there are supermarkets and people have manners" (p. 49).

Location and the Individual

A discourse on the individual and the role that his/her location plays naturally meanders into various aspects of clime and cuisine. However another essential element that we can take into our ambit is the biological aspect that a location presents. Location is not merely a reference to a place with geographical features and topography. It is a factor that shapes a personality in many ways. It is an in-depth relationship that the individual bears to the manner in which he/she thinks and behaves. A change in location can bring about a standard shift in the manner of thought and courses of action otherwise unseen in the individual earlier. It is somewhat like exotic flora that grows somewhere other than its original location. There are four options that exist for this kind of flora:

a. Perish due to foreign circumstances,

b. Adapt to new circumstances with the development of new features,

c. Destroy the domestic species to be vociferous in growth, and

d. Survive as ill and blighted.

The condition of a human being is somewhat different from plant and animal species which invade foreign locales and often dominate the indigenous species. Peter Vitousek, in his article 'Introduced Species',[3] says that human beings 'move species beyond their native ranges both deliberately and inadvertently'. In the process many of these species become established and spread in their new habitat. He further says that the list of introduced species grows annually, as does the number of them that cause significant economic and ecological effects. In the case of human beings who move from native to non-native places, the adaptability required is greater and the rate of success is much lower. Those who can grow new adventitious roots are able to survive while those who depend on their old mental, social and cultural make up either fall along the way or become increasingly maladjusted in their new environments.

India's Northeast is a 'mosaic in the making' in the words of Kumana Bihari. This part of the country is inhabited by people who are 'racially' distinct and different from the other populations in the country.[4] It is interesting to note that this part of India shares 98% of its boundaries with foreign countries and only 2% with the Indian subcontinent. The people of the region consider it an 'accident of history that their fates should inextricably be linked with a country whose people share no common likes of language, customs, race and world view with them'. Hence the idea of being Indian has taken time to sink in. The usual Northeasterner begins with the premise of being an outsider right at the start and all the other problems follow from this sense of alienation.

The problem that Sophie faces is even more complex as she is an outsider in Shillong because she is not a local inhabitant and she is a greater outsider when she goes to live in Bangalore. Thus when Sophie Das and Agastya Sen are removed from their original locations by need or circumstances, they develop in themselves 'dislocations' that lead them to mentally sever themselves from their present locations. The dislocation that they develop is severe as it is juxtaposed by the earlier location which comes in the form of a get-a-way. The desire to escape and get into the cocoon of neo-natal comfort becomes the cause of the dislocation. Even though Sophie

holds Shillong as the dream land of her fantasies and Agastya thinks of Calcutta as the Piccadilly of his adventures, these happy memories cause the dislocation and, in turn, the desire to escape. This going back in the mind to the places of longing is like a patient recovering from a painful operation while the effect of the anesthetic still lingers with its bitter remnants. Similarly Anu, one of Sophie's friends in *Neti Neti* dreams of going to Australia and 'settling down' in the vast continent. There is a nagging desire to change places and that is evident when "eventually she'd make it to that antiseptic place untouched by India's messiness" (pp. 108-09).

Shillong and its Sense of Longing

There are some places that exist and there are others that linger. Shillong would probably fall under the second category as it has an old world charm with the colonial hangover and a uniquely matrilineal set up that puts a premium on the rights of women, even though many changes are taking place, and at times the old order is questioned by new generation males. Shillong, the home of the Khasi-Pnar tribe has its origin rooted in myths. The more common legend traces the name of Shillong to a mythical youth, U Shillong, a supernatural youth, born out of immaculate conception of a virgin mother, named Lir U Shillong or the one who grows naturally and who is the presiding deity of the city. The phrase "Khot Shillong" (call Shillong) is a prayer mantra in times of distress. Another legend involves the Shillong deity, a supernatural being and his beautiful daughter who went on to become the 'Pahsyntiew' (lured by flower) queen mother of the Shillong kingdom following her marriage with a local youth Kongor Nongiri.[5] Myths are predominant here and many old practices are still followed in this ancient land, which makes it uniquely traditional and modern at the same time.

Parbina Rashid[6] says that people from Northeast India are definitely different from the people in North India. They look different and speak a different language but the problem of assimilation is uniquely their own. They find themselves in alien environments and sometimes try hard to assimilate and at other times try equally hard to get into dangerously insulated ghettos. She insists that the problem is real and widespread and has increased greatly in 1990s when young people were looking far more inclined to travel to North India in order to encash on the BPO, beauty and the food beverage business. In fact there is also a positive sign as girls and boys from the Northeast India are preferred over their North Indian counterparts by employers as they are sincere, honest and speak good English. However the

pangs of assimilation are great and the sense of insecurity is greater.

Apart from the enthralling myths that revolve around the origins of Shillong there is also a deep political and cultural discourse that exists in this magical city, like the other Northeastern states of India. Sukalpa Bhattacharjee in her paper "Dilemma of Culture: A Polycontextual Discourse" says that whenever one tries to contextualize the Northeastern experience one finds that "situated at the periphery of the mainstream, the North East is a marginalized other of India, which is the post colonial "other" of its Imperialist counterpart".[7] She goes on to say that this part of the world is caught in a geographical, a political and a cultural ambiguity with the result that these people speak a language which is not recognized by the mainstream and not even promoted within the state in which one lives. So Sophie is a result of this fractured discourse and the confused identity of being a Bengali in a westernized Shillong society. Even while in Shillong she is aware of the second layered narrative of belonging and yet not belonging at the same time. But the attraction of the city is what causes her all the pain.

Sophie is aware of how Shillong nostalgia exists in Bangalore. She comes across 'scores of Shillong nostalgics'- girls and boys whose parents send them with Bangalore-bound youths lots of local delicacies like *tungrymbai* or fermented soyabean *chutney* and lots of *kwai* leaves (betel leaves) which would alleviate that feeling of nostalgia for home. Even online, Sophie was enveloped with Shillong memorabilia like old school boys remembering Shillong, bloggers going over their top about this beautiful hill station and blurry snaps of Shillong and tacky hill station memoirs of bungalows, frisky dogs and picnics at Ward Lake. For Sophie, all this memory of Shillong was like a part of the collective conscience of a people away from home, like exiles in your own country (p. 92).

The second novel under discussion also has a unique character, though similar to Sophie in his 'dislocation' because of the previous 'location'. Agastya is thrown into the throes of Madna and he literally goes mad there. When the New Delhi-bred, directionless 24-year-old Agastya Sen joins the elite Indian Administrative Service he is posted to Madna, "the hottest place in India". To Agastya - known to his friends as August, or sometimes English - he has been sentenced to the back of beyond. He is done with because of the heat and the story then weaves itself languidly around Madna's petty officials, "the pretensions and daydreams of its citizens, endless governmental meetings, hilarious dinner parties, much drunkenness and boredom and bureaucracy".

Agastya is bored and 'stoned' and he meets the locals and makes up stories about his past: He confides to the District Inspector of Land Records that his (nonexistent) wife is a Norwegian Muslim and that his "parents were in Antarctica, members of the first Indian expedition. Yes, even his mother, she had a Ph.D. in Oceanography from the Sorbonne." To the superintendent of police he casually lets slip that last summer that he had climbed Mount Everest.[7] Like Agastya, Sophie takes drugs and she tries hard to run away from something she hardly knows herself. "She was a year into weed but it still surprised her how life slowed down, how the things that were near came vividly near but those that were far seemed to belong to another lifetime" (p. 105).

When Anjum Hasan moved to Bangalore at the age of 26, she had a degree in philosophy from North-Eastern Hill University, two suitcases and a desire to experience the world beyond Shillong. But the journey came with its own baggage – a sense of dislocation. She writes, "I felt doomed for a little while because after the excitement of the city, you can no longer go back and re-enter the boredom of the small town, and yet you miss it in a completely irrational way." Sophie's sense of disillusionment starts to grow when she goes back to Shillong, only to discover that her hometown is becoming like Bangalore, "It wants the same things." "They're building call centres and bringing in the international brands. People are talking the language of money." Northeasterners have, according to her, an "increasing sense of familiarity with the rest of the country, but at the same time, there is the awareness of, and I'd say, even need to establish distance from, mainland India." This "push and pull leads to curious results", such as when Sophie returns to Shillong driven by her love for Ribor and his remoteness from her new world, only to discover that he, too, is looking for a job in Bangalore**[8].** Living in two worlds and yet belonging to none is the dilemma of Sophie Das who lives out of noodle cups and fizzy cans. The novel or a large part reads actually like a lament against the pot-holed, uncouth city of Bangalore with its backdrop of glass reflectors and shop-till-you-drop malls.

Nisha Susan says that Hasan's characters are usually dreamers escaping boredom, non-careers and awkwardness, all through a fully formed fantasy life. They imagine their awkwardness comes from being outsiders: a north Indian in Shillong or Shillong girl in Bengalore. Hasan is deeply respectful of place and its evocation and envies Kiran Desai's capture of Kalimpong. *Lunatic in My Head*, her first novel, is able to conjure Shillong's rainy streets with Flaubertian attention. *Neti Neti* is just as conspicuous in its absent Bengalore landscape[9].

Agastya, on the other hand, is a high career flier who ends up in one of the most covetous jobs in India- the civil service. The thoughts of his school in Darjeeling and his days spent in Calcutta are a scourge while he lives in dilapidated Madna where the only constant companion he has is a stubborn frog. The feelings that the previous locations that he 'inhabited' bring him, though blissful and satisfying become the scourge of the present and they are a 'mental getaway' from which escape is inevitable. Agastya then begins to inhabit an alternate reality where he visits his past and twists his present in a manner that he wants to live in a make believe world. He begins to tell lies about himself to his senior officers and he is in for a free meal anywhere he can. He becomes lethargic and malicious at the same time while he fantasizes his officer's wives sometimes and at other times ridicules them in the canvas of his mental stretches.

S. Robert Gnanamony is of the view that Agastya is not at all ambitious. He has no big dreams or desires. He does not want 'heaven' or 'ephemerals' or 'power and glory'. He just wants to sit in his uncle's house in Delhi or in his house in Calcutta "in the mild sun and try not to think, try to escape the iniquity of the restlessness of my mind". [10]

In *Neti Neti* Anjum Hasan frequently refers to the character of Madam Bovary and how she as a young girl was very keen to read the novel due to its impelling subject. In her novel one can actually see Sophie emerge as Madame Bovary with dissatisfaction in the station while she yearns for the exciting and the unknown. While Sophie lived in Shillong, she endlessly felt restricted by the smallness of the place, the meanness of small-town mentality, the lack of opportunities and the emptiness of Ribor's CD shop. Like most 'outsiders' who live in Shillong this big city bug hits her hard and she wants to flee the town at the slightest opportunity. The dreams of shiny roads and pots of money goad her to look beyond the narrow lanes and the sunny winter comforting mornings. She even lies to her parents that she has landed in a plush job in a publishing house (much to the happiness of her Hamlet-loving father) but actually lands up as an unimaginative English film transcriber for the hearing impaired. Bangalore hits her hard and then the thoughts of Shillong in the form of Ribor sometimes and a washed, post-rain sky at other times makes her hate the city of Bangalore everyday. It is then that she looks at the town of Shillong with all its forgetfulness, its sleepiness and its colonial hangover as a perfect getaway from an arid, cold and booming city. It is strange that the desire to leave and the desire to come back are so tightly packed that Sophie is forced to take the journey home. She expects

an epiphany, an awakening, a rush of love from Ribor - but all is lost in a maze of circumstances that she never could dream of even in the wildest of her imagination. When Sophie reached Shillong and "when, finally, they were at the bejeweled lake that had once marked the outer limit of Sophie's world, she recalled what Emma Bovary thought when 'it seemed to her that certain places on earth must bring forth happiness, as a plant peculiar to the soil, that cannot thrive elsewhere"(p. 186).

Calcutta's Sense of the Urbane

Agastya on the other hand has not been driven by progressive, life changing dreams. He likes it easy and he feels stuck in the job that he is in. His dreams are more of fellow officers' wives and marijuana. He has been trapped in a time warp and the personality that he possesses is completely alien to the dusty, quiet (yet dissonant) milieu of Madna. A place can never be considered merely a place in time as it has many more dimensions to it. His father Dhrubo had prophesied that the experience at Madna would be 'educative'. However he feels only a sense of 'impotence and restlessness'. He was now occupied with all kinds of thoughts, thoughts that 'scurried in his mind uncontrollably, like rats in a damp cavern, though without action' (p. 165). He is constantly reminded of the life that he had been leading - a life full of movement, stylish friends and a bustling city. It is strange that when he goes to Calcutta, the city of his dreams, he is weighed down by the remembrances of the dull and dusty place he once abhorred. Notice how the thoughts of Madna created a sense of complete appall in his mind. "And Madna had tainted his old world here in the city, the crowds at the Puja reminded him of the Madna Club, Durga had recalled Jagdamba (p. 165). It was too much to endure the load of more than one world in the head. So here one comes back to this tug of war between 'new place, new images' and 'old place, old images' which dangerously juxtapose with each other and by the time one realizes this, one has already developed an affinity to the new place of being. It is like school - one loves to think about it but one never wants to go back.

The Anglicized Calcutta that Agastya dreams of is so unlike the Madna of his present and near future. For an individual caught in this time warp, every second becomes an ensnaring noose, which forces him into weed and masturbating. The dreams of Calcutta haunt him and the hellish contrast between Madna and Calcutta causes him to lose his connections with the place where he has to 'serve the nation'. Debjani Sengupta[11] opines that

Calcutta has a unique history which exposes its inhabitants to distinctive experiences. Its geographical position was largely favourable to a brisk trade in cotton, silk and sugar. The growth of English businesses, educational institutions and offices brought along mechanisations that drastically altered the "structure and organisation of occupations" in its traditional economy. By 1880s, Bengal had been industrialised to a large extent and over 20 percent of its workforce was engaged in making and selling industrial goods. Calcutta, by virtue of being at the centre of this 'informal empire', saw the fruits of industrialisations – the first printing press, the first steamer, and the first motorcar were important cultural markers of the age. The nineteenth-century Calcutta was also marked to a large extent by the industrialisation of cultural expressions. Books, handwritten and illustrated on palm leaves, now gave way to print ones. *Palki*s and horse-drawn carriages were no longer in use; bicycles, trams and steam engines changed the face of transportation.

Thus Agastya is accustomed to a modern living with all the expressions of liberal and at times thoroughly unconventional living. Calcutta is thus constantly on his mind. He loved Paris in the summer while he felt an upsurge of affection for Calcutta, vociferously insisting that it had soul. He constantly remembers the city with its babble in crowded streets and bustle of everyday life. His story reminds us of Rabindranath Tagore's story where the postmaster is scourged by the life that he has to lead without any entertainment and without *bhadralok* (decent, educated folk). He is barely able to develop a friendship with Ratan, a girl who works for him. She is heartbroken when he applies for a transfer to Calcutta and leaves to turn his back to the old world full of rotting scum on the pond and a dull bourgeoisie. The postmaster cannot leave behind Calcutta and the sights and sounds of the place constantly haunt him until he makes a return even though he has to leave his job.[12]

The letter that Renu writes to Dhrubo, Agastya's best friend, is also highly suggestive of this clime/cuisine/ discussion and the fact that it is really hard to leave home and 'settle' in an alien land comes vividly through. Renu says that she shares her room with a Mexican girl. She is quite amazed at how people leave their home and their people when they know that they have to go out into a harsh world where no one is yours. She echoes the feelings in her letter when she says "At times I hysterically wonder why people ever leave their countries and go abroad. Why don't we ever learn that all changes of place are for the worse. It's not love for a place; it's the familiarity, like old winter clothes" (pp. 156-57). The feeling is so alien and yet there are generations of people who become arrivals in new lands. Renu

found it amazing how she started getting close to candy floss 'Bollywood' culture while she watched movies like *Barood* and *Deewar*. The feeling of being close to home is felt by identifying with the sights and sounds of Hindi cinema, which, truly speaking, is far removed from reality. However, even the remote closeness that it bears is a solace to a soul far away from home.

What Becomes of Sophie?

It is unsettling to find that Sophie, towards the end of the novel, goes to Shillong on a pilgrimage. She is sure that the visit will turn out to be a panacea for all her ills. She is not just bored of her life in Bangalore, she is terribly afraid after the Rukhshana murder case. She is entangled in the meshes of a metal and concrete city that sees no end in its constructions. She takes a week off from her boring transcription job and visits Shillong. She is excited to think of the scenes and the sounds of Shillong; that little Anglicized town that moves at its own pace, oblivious of surrounding events. Her feelings are like that of Uncle Rock who proudly announces of Shillong that there is no place like it. One can travel around the world but home is where your heart will always be. He says that in the end he just wanted to "go back to my [his] own little place and shut the door" (note the insularity when he says 'shut the door'). The ghettos do not go away ever. He also sounds philosophical when he quotes Dylan and says that "time is an ocean but it ends at the shore. We all need to find our own shores, *moh"* (*moh* in Khasi language is roughly equivalent of isn't it or you know?).

When Sophie reaches the outskirts of Shillong and sees the Umiam Lake, she is filled with a sense of nostalgia and imagines that everyone who lived in high up magical places must come down into the world to mingle 'but all the while there's something calling you back'(p. 186). However there are a series of events and a number of people whom she knew that make her change her mind. She realizes that Shillong has changed with time. She realizes that there is no place so insular that could not be affected by caprice, cunning and manipulation. Shillong no longer remains her pedestal of honour and goodness from the ramparts of which she could shout out that she once belonged to this beautiful place.

She discovers that her parents are about to divorce; her sister Mukulika gets pregnant and has an abortion; Ribor, the love of her life who seemed the epitome of smugness wants to leave Shillong for greener pastures; politicians bribe voters to blow the wind their way and lakhs of rupees are collected from unsuspecting fans of Bob Dylan who was never supposed to come to

Shillong at all. She feels that all the loveliness that she associated with Shillong with its varied ethnicities and simple people are all gone. It then dawns on her that she was occupying a realm of virtual reality where things were the same in Bangalore and Shillong; it just appeared to look good in the latter. It is then that she realizes the falseness of her journey and the reality of situations as they are. She then longs for Swamy and his serpentine car.

Sophie's journey to Shillong takes us to the title of the novel- *Neti, Neti*, which is the Sanskrit translation of 'Not This, Not This'. Both the worlds she inhabits are unacceptable in their own way and yet they are the real worlds that she has to inevitably inherit.

What Becomes of Agastya?

So what really happens to Agastya in the end (so to speak)? Does he lack the resilience that the green frog which occupies his bathroom amid salubrious climate has? Or is he just not 'tailored' for Madna? Can he walk away without the memories of Madna in his head or is he able to be the new age man changing jobs and houses and may be even nations? What can we really expect from Agastya? Aditya Bhatacharjee studies Agastya's stoniness and says that towards the second half of *English August*, Agastya Sen just smokes more marijuana. In fact by the end he is almost permanently stoned. This daze "is the main link between himself and other 'aliens' in Madna and Delhi (Bhatia, Gandhi, Sathe and the policemen in west Delhi with whom he shares a joint)". He is stuck in a world of dark secrets. The story connects the disparate parts of his life. He also listens to Keith Jarret and walks naked in his room.[13]

Like Sophie, Agastya leaves Madna and stays in Delhi for a while. He confesses that he 'never disliked Delhi' and so he just whiles his time there. It is interesting to see Dhrubo, Agastya's friend also caught in this warp that Agastya finds himself in. He is 'well settled' in his Citi Bank job but he wants something more from life. So he prepares for the IAS Exam. It is ironical when Dhrubo's mother tells Agastya to give him some tips for the examination. Agastya is naturally bewildered and it is as if there is a clear attempt at exchange of places.

When Agastya is in Calcutta, he is frequently reminded of drab scenes of Madna and he finds it excruciating to 'endure the load of more than one world in the head' (p. 165). He merely passes time in Calcutta too and he wishes that he were someone's mistress, with a flat, money, a video…nice

underwear' (p. 176). He goes back to Madna after the week's leave and he seems to enjoy the sounds and sights of Madna. However he decides to leave for good and he compares himself to Marcus Aurilius, a sad Roman who looked for happiness in 'living more than one life', who lied but lied so well and he failed but with great grace (p. 288). Agastya does not know if he will even half as much succeed.

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Prevalence of Diabetes amongst the Khasi and Jaintia Population of Meghalaya

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Abstract

The number of people with diabetes worldwide has risen and is expected to reach epidemic proportion. With increasing prevalence predicted globally, a local study was felt necessary to assess the prevalence of diabetes. The study was conducted among selected subgroups of the Khasi and Jaintia in the State of Meghalaya. Data from hospital records, household surveys and diabetic camps of selected urban centres and district headquarters of the State were screened and analysed. The results from the random survey indicate that the average prevalence amongst the urban tribal Khasi and Jaintia population of the State was 9.89% and 12.5% respectively. Further, the prevalence was found to be higher for the age group above 40 years, constituting more than 80% of the total diabetic population. In the absence of any other epidemiological studies on diabetes in the State, this report serves to draw attention to the prevalence of diabetes in Meghalaya and the need for a wider population study.

Keywords: Diabetic, Meghalaya, Northeast, Prevalence, Tribal.

Introduction

Many of the patho-physiological conditions affecting the health status and lifespan of individuals have been ascribed to factors like food habits, lifestyle, and available health care including socio-economic parameters and environment. This is true for most tribal communities residing in Northeast India where changes are evident especially in urban centres. It has been generally observed that besides malaria, cancer, rickets, and complicated lifestyle diseases such as obesity and diabetes and their associated complications are on the rise in Meghalaya. Unfortunately, health studies conducted in the state[1-2] have been limited to certain priority diseases while statistics are not available on other health conditions including diabetes.

During the last 20 years, the total number of people with diabetes worldwide has risen and is projected to touch 366 million by 2030 from 171 million in 2000[3]. The diabetic population in India is also projected to increase from 32 to 80 million, earning the dubious distinction of being the diabetic capital of the world. The prevalence of diabetes for all age-groups worldwide was estimated to be 2.8% in 2000 and projected to be 4.4% by 2030[3]. In 1970s, the prevalence of diabetes among urban Indians was reported to be 1.2% and this has now risen to 12.1%[4,5]. Moreover, there is an equally large pool of individuals with impaired glucose tolerance (IGT), many of whom will develop Type 2 diabetes mellitus in the future.

As per King[6,7], diabetes causes more cases of blindness and visual impairments in adults than any other illness in the developed world. One million amputations each year are caused by diabetes. A diabetes sufferer is up to 40 times more likely to need a lower-limb amputation when compared to a person who does not have diabetes. Diabetes raises the sufferer's risk of developing cardiovascular diseases by two to four times and accounts for 5% to 10% of most nations' health budgets[8]. Cardiovascular diseases are predicted to be the number one cause of death globally. Diabetes mellitus leads to abnormalities in carbohydrate, protein and lipid metabolism and increases the risk of developing atherosclerotic arterial disease by 2 to 6 fold. Diabetes is now the fourth biggest cause of death worldwide. Half of all diabetes sufferers around the globe do not know they have it, while in some parts of the world as high as 80% of sufferers are ignorant[8].

Diabetes can affect nearly every organ system in the body. Good control of blood glucose levels significantly reduces the diabetes patients' risk of developing complications. Managing hypertension and elevated blood lipids is also crucial[3,9]. Early detection of diabetes and diabetes prevention is therefore strongly urged. The economic impact of diabetes is also considerable[4]. It affects health services, national productivity and more importantly individuals and families. Hospital in-patient costs for the treatment of complications are the largest single contributor to direct healthcare costs. In many countries, including India, a substantial proportion of healthcare costs are borne by the individual and the family[4-5]. One quarter of all the countries

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in the world have not made any specific provision for diabetes care in their health plans. Diabetes mellitus is one of the main threats to human health in the 21st century.

In the context of the region in general and Meghalaya in particular, the problem is multidimensional. Some of the realities are poor health and communication infrastructure especially in the rural areas, inadequate number of healthcare professionals which include doctors, health workers, trained medical and supporting staff, poor economic conditions and in the context of diabetes, lack of awareness that diabetes mellitus leads to severe complications like blindness, kidney failure, cardio-vascular and neurological impairments and mortality. Modern life-saving drugs (including insulin) are beyond the reach of most rural population. Compounding the situation is the lack of statistical data. There is so far no organized epidemiological study done in the State on non-communicable diseases like diabetes. In the absence of statistical data, it becomes difficult to gauge the extent of the health status of the local community in terms of these afflictions and necessary preventive strategies cannot be formulated. Hence, this pilot study was undertaken to provide some indications of the prevalence of diabetes amongst two tribal populations of the State of Meghalaya. Hospital records from the Civil and KJP Mission hospitals of the three district headquarters of the State, i.e., Shillong, Jowai and Tura were collected and used. In addition, random household surveys and a one-day free medical camp for screening of diabetes in selected hospitals were carried out.

Methodology

Data was compiled and collated using (a) hospital records (b) Diabetes screening camps, and (c) door to door surveys. Hospital records spread over a period of four years (2003 to 2007) were scrutinised for diabetic cases as noted in the patients' record sheet. Relevant information such as age and sex where available were noted. Diabetes screening camps were conducted within the hospital premises with the assistance of hospital staff (nurses and medical examiners) for routine fasting blood sugar (FBS) and random blood sugar test and other symptoms associated with diabetes mellitus and its complications. Blood sugar test was done using a glucometer. All the biochemical parameters were recorded in the diabetes assessment sheet. Further, random household surveys in selected localities using questionnaires were carried out and the information recorded in separate record sheets. Parameters such as ailments/disease (common/chronic) including diabetes

mellitus (Type I and II) family history, age of onset of diabetes, history of polyuria, polydipsia, polyphagia, weight loss and wound healings were included. Doubtful patients were asked to attend scheduled screening camps for blood test.

Results

Results for each of the different approaches used (a, b and c mentioned above) are presented in Tables 1-4. Prevalence was calculated using the data generated from the random survey alone. Diabetic cases of hospital records and screening camps were indicated as apparent prevalence, as complete information were not available.

Table1. Hospital Records: 2003 – 2007

1	Dr. Norman Tunnel Hospital, Jowai	Category	Nos. of Diabetic Cases			Diabetes cases (%)
	Total records screened	Tribal	Total	Male	Female	
	3445	3100	179	69	110	5.7%
2	Dr. H. Gordon Robert Hospital, Shillong	Category	No of Diabetic Cases			Diabetes cases (%)
	Total records screened	Tribal	Total	Male	Female	
	30,083	29,106	2370	1041	1329	8.14 %
3	Civil Hospital Tura	Category	No of Diabetic Cases			Diabetes cases (%)
	Total records screened	Tribal	Total	Male	Female	
	5119	3583	134	57	77	3.73%

Table 2. Screening Camps

Table 3. Surveys

	Shillong						Total average prevalence
1	Nos. Of respondents	Category	Diabetic Cases			Diabetes Prevalence (%)	
	Total records screened	Tribal	Total	Male	Female	9.89%	
	570	566	56	27	29		
2	Jowai	Category	Diabetic Cases			Diabetes Prevalence (%)	11.2%
	Total records screened	Tribal	Total	Male	Female		
	140	120	15	5	10	12.5%	

Table 4. Diabetes Prevalence (%) among different age-groups (data from random survey)

(A) Shillong

Age in years→	<20	20-40	40 - 60	>60
Male	-	7.4%	44%	44%
Female	-	10.3%	44.8%	44.8%

(B) Jowai

Age in years→	<20	20-40	40 - 60	>60
Male	-	20%	80%	-
Female	-	60%	40%	-

Discussion

Although the data from hospital records (Table1) indicate that the percentage of diabetes is less than 9, it should be pointed out that information documented in hospital records were scanty and many details were not available such as age, sex, symptoms, name of the patient's community etc. It was largely through surnames that the identity of the community to which a patient belonged was established. It was also apparent that diabetes prevalence varied from town to town (Tables 1 and 3). Screening camps yielded a higher percentage of diabetics, but this was expected, as patients suspected of having the disease were asked to attend the screening camps. The percentage of such people diagnosed with diabetes in the screening camps was 24, which is rather high. Although the figure is biased, it helps us to know the upper

ceiling of diabetes prevalence. The prevalence of diabetes among the Khasi and Jaintia tribal inhabitants in the urban areas of Meghalaya calculated on the basis of the data generated through the random household survey was 11.2%. The results from the random survey also indicated that the average prevalence amongst the urban tribal Khasi and Jaintia population of the State was 9.89% and 12.5% respectively (Table 3). Further, the prevalence was found to be higher for the age group above 40 years, constituting more than 80% of the total diabetic population.

Seemingly, the prevalence was relatively higher in female population (12.8%) compared to the male population (11.9%) although the study was not sex matched for all the study methods used. According to King *et al.*[6], in the year 1995, there were more women than men with diabetes for the world as a whole (73 vs 62 million) with a male/female ratio of 0.8. This phenomenon is pronounced in developed countries (31 million female vs 20 million male; male/female ratio of 0.6), but in the developing countries, there are equal number of men and women with diabetes (42 million in each case). In India, however, this trend was reversed with 8 million female vs 11 million male diabetics, putting the male/female ratio at 1.3[10,11]. Some authors have suggested greater female longevity and different lifestyle as plausible explanations for the higher number of female diabetics. However, with the present survey conducted in Meghalaya being only a pilot study, unambiguous conclusions cannot be drawn regarding the prevalence of diabetes in the male and female tribal populations. In developing countries, the largest number of people with diabetes is within the 45 to 64 year old age-group[6]. On the other hand, reports show that Indians develop diabetes at a very young age, at least 10-15 years earlier than the white population[11]. The higher number of people within the age group of 40-60 years (Table 4) suffering from diabetes in Meghalaya may be largely attributed to changes in lifestyle and food habits which were evident from the data recorded. In the review by Gupta[12], many cities and some states in India have a high prevalence of diabetes (Chennai 15.5%, Trivandrum 16.3%, Delhi 10.3%, Kerala 12.4%) [10,13-15]. The national prevalence was estimated to be 12.1%[16]. Although the prevalence of diabetes in the tribal populations of Meghalaya was seemingly lower, a more accurate picture may require a comprehensive population study. Further, it may be pointed out that a majority of the people does not attend hospitals or primary health centres regularly till complications arise. Many of the health centres are not well equipped to carry out routine analysis and cost of such tests is another deterrent factor. Thus it emerges that more awareness programmes

on diabetes and its complications are required as a preventive measure and also to ensure glycemic control for established cases. Awareness will also minimize incidence which can be expected to rise. The recorded complications amongst diabetics were wide ranging, the most common being hypertension, retinopathy, nephropathy, neuropathy, pancreatitis, myalgia, dysentery and slow healing of wounds. Serious attempts should be made to create awareness as many of the respondents are not aware that diabetes leads to complications of micro and macro vascular nature. This can translate into a huge economic burden for any state/country and the diabetic individuals unless preventive steps are taken.

Given the changing lifestyle, diabetes in the state of Meghalaya can assume proportions that will affect the quality of life for a sizeable population of the state. The survey results serve to underscore and highlight the need for a comprehensive population and epidemiological study covering nutritional and non-communicable diseases.

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Landuse Pattern, House Design and Health in Imphal Valley

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Abstract

In the present study it is observed that Imphal city is undergoing high urban sprawl similar to many cities elsewhere. The new settlements are restricted to low lying plains areas because of mountainous terrain to north of the city and due to this they are vulnerable to water-borne and communicable diseases. Commissioning of the reservoir for hydel-power generation has resulted in the increase of surface-water area of the Loktak lake in the valley. The increase in the surface-water area is causing environmental disturbances to the local ecosystem. The study of relationship between human health and land use/ house design indicated that the communicable diseases have direct relationship with concentration of water bodies in wetland dominated areas. However in hilly areas, the high prevalence of tuberculosis is related to the design of the housing unit.

Keywords: Imphal Valley, Manipur, landuse pattern, house design, health.

Introduction

Altering ecosystem leads to large-scale land degradation and change in the ecology, and influences human health making it more vulnerable to infections (Collins 2001). Such changes determine the vulnerability of human-environment systems to climatic, economic or socio-political perturbations (Ezzati et al. 2002, Turner et al. 2003). Hence, landuse decisions are human health decisions (Xu et al. 2007). Understanding landuse transition is crucial for understanding its impact on human health (Mustard et al. 2007). Apart from landuse, human health is also related to indoor environmental quality. The indoor environment is related to pollutant sources (*chulha*s for cooking, smoking, volatile organic carbon, Pb based paints etc.), ventilation (dilution

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effect for air pollutant or germs), humidity, sun light exposure and congestion. Hence, house design plays an important role in controlling the indoor air pollutant and germ concentration and subsequently human health. The present paper looks at the critical linkage between landuse, house design and human health in Imphal Valley.

Area of Study

Manipur, a Northeastern state of India, is surrounded by Myanmar in the east and south-east, Assam in the west, Nagaland in the north, and Mizoram in the south-west. The study area is mainly confined to the Imphal valley, also known as Manipur valley, which lies in the central part of the state. The study area lies between 24°16'N and 25°02'N latitudes and 93°41'E and 95°09'E longitudes and covers an area of about 1300 sq.kms (Fig.1). This valley is an elongated, oval shaped, intermontane valley with elevation ranging from 746 m to 850 m above the mean sea level (MSL) with an average elevation of about 780 m above the MSL and has a southward gradient.

The Imphal valley is traversed by important rivers of Manipur namely Imphal River, Iril River, Thoubal River, Wangjing River, etc. The Imphal River flows from north to south and is joined by its tributaries namely Iril River, Thoubal River, Sekmai River at different places. These rivers along with private and community ponds of varying sizes dotting the valley landscape provide important sources of surface water for use in domestic and municipal purposes.

The Imphal valley, lying within the Dishang-Barail Flysch Basin, was originated as a result of the tectonic and structural evolution of the Indo-Myanmar Range (Ibotombi 1993). The valley does not contain any lithounit except the Quarternary Alluvium deposits of 40-50 m thick and are of fluviolacustrine origin (Ibid). The sediments are derived from the surrounding Dishang and Barail hills and mainly contain dark-grey to black clay, silt and sandy deposits. Clay, sand, gravel, pebble and boulder deposits are also found in the foothills of the old river terraces.

The climate of Imphal valley is sub-tropical to temperate but there is appreciable spatial variation with contrasting weather conditions in various seasons. High temperature of about 30°C-35°C is recorded during south-west monsoon and minimum average temperature of about 4°C is recorded during winter (December-January). The average annual precipitation varies from 150 cm to175.8 cm with maximum intensity in July-August. But, since rainfall is associated with monsoon, there is irregularity in seasonal rainfall.

Materials and Method

Change in landuse pattern has been studied by using various temporal Landsat images. Satellite imageries of multiple scenes and demographic details were obtained from various secondary sources and subsequent field checks, which form the main sources of data for this study. The geo-referenced satellite imageries of Landsat series were used for detecting the urban expansion and areal variation of the open water surface of Loktak and its surrounding marshy areas during last three decades using Landsat-MSS image acquired in 1977, Landsat-TM image acquired in 1990 and Lansat-ETM+ images acquired in 2000. These Landsat data are made available under the NASA Space sponsored GLCF acquirable from website. The Landsat data and Geoeye data are used in this study because of free and easy access to the temporal images of Manipur in October, which is the clearest month in the season. The image acquired in October 1977 (MSS, 1977) has 78 meter resolution, whereas 1990 Landsat TM October image and 2000 Lansat-ETM+ October Image have 30 meter resolution. The latest (GEOEYE) image acquired in October 2010 has 1.5 meter resolution. The 2010 Geoeye 2010 image is acquired from Google Earth and afterwards the image is geo-referenced using geo-coordinate of prominent place and road cross sections. The satellite imageries were studied in the GIS environment using Geomatica V.9.1.0 as well as visually interpreted for delineation of the urban sprawl and the changes in the open water body of Loktak and the surrounding swamps.

The demographic details were obtained from different census records. The health condition data of the Imphal valley was collected from the Medical Directorate, Government of Manipur. Microsoft Excel Program was used to execute the various statistical analyses.

Results and Discussion

The Imphal valley is more densely populated than the hilly region. So, change in landuse dynamics is more pronounced in the valley. Changes are noticed in the built-up area of Imphal city, change in the area of the open water body of Loktak, landuse/ habitat design and relationship with disease pattern. The aerial changes can be seen from the Landsat imageries for urban built-up areas and open water body of Loktak taken during different time periods. The present study is aimed at the first two aspects of the landuse dynamics because these two aspects have important bearings on the environment and health conditions of the people in the valley.

Change in the Built-up Area of Imphal City

For the present study, series of remote sensing satellite data obtained through Landsat and Geoeye imageries of 1977, 1990, 2000 and 2010 were accessed. The imageries were visually observed for evaluating the built-up areas in the valley especially around Imphal city. This increase in city area is due to the ever increasing population growth including migration from surrounding areas for economic and socio-political reasons. The data on urban sprawl were obtained through Landsat imageries for 1977, 1990 and 2000, which gave the aerial extent of the area of Imphal city as 4.29 km^2 in 1977, 19.02 km^2 in 1990, 27.04 km^2 in 2000 and 34.2 km^2 in 2010 (Fig. 2) and the corresponding population of the same area was 431,773 in 1971, 711,261 in 1991, 833,312 in 2001 and 967,344 in 2011 (Table1). The northward extension of the settlement in Imphal valley is restricted due to the presence of hills. So built-up areas expand mainly to the south and south-western parts of the valley, but the 2010 imagery shows expansion of the urban areas towards southeast direction as well.

Change in the Aerial Extent of the Open Water Body of Loktak Lake

There is also significant change in aerial extent of the open water body of the Loktak Lake (Fig. 3). The data for this was obtained through Landsat imageries, which showed that in 1977 the extent was 51.29 km^2. The aerial extent of water body increased to 65.57 km^2 in 1990, 71.73 km^2 in 2000 and 73.42 km^2 in 2010 (Table 2)**.** The increase in the aerial extent of the open water body of Loktak is due to the transformation of the lake into a permanent reservoir since the commissioning of Loktak Hydro Electric Power Project (LHPP) in the year 1983. For proper functioning of the LHPP, maintaining the water level of 768.5m above the mean sea level is necessary. The working water level of the lake is maintained largely by routing the water of the two rivers, Imphal River and Khuga River into lake through the Khordak channel by constructing the Ithai barrage in the downstream direction of the confluence of these two rivers, in the south of Keibul Lamjao. Thus, the commissioning of LHPP in 1983 made the lake into a permanent reservoir. The Keibul Lamjao is an important national park which houses the world renowned, very rare and endangered deer species, locally known as Sangai (*cervus eldii eldii*).

The impoundment of water in the lake resulted in spread of water cover over a large area in the vicinity of the lake and inundated a large area of cultivable agricultural land amounting to about 20,000-80,000 hectares

(Ibotombi 1993) mainly on its eastern side. The lake area used to fluctuate from 55 km^2 during the dry season to 300 Km^2 during rainy season (Singh 1992), but the construction of Ithai barrage and the commissioning of the LHPP in 1983 has affected the sinking and floating cycle of the wild vegetation mat, locally called *phoomdis*. The phoomdis sank during dry season and came in contact with the soil. This process facilitated the fresh growth of vegetation including Kambong, *zizania caduciflora*, the natural plant-feed of the Sangais. But now the phoomdis are a permanently floating vegetation mat except near the shallow shore, hindering the growth of the wild vegetation. The lack of the growth of kambong affects the population of the already endangered Sangais, which feed on it. The Sangais started straying into populated areas in search of their food and are exposed to hunting leading to gradual dwindling of number and slow extinction.

Influence of Landuse Pattern and House Design on Human Health

Changes in landuse patterns are having impact on environment and health conditions of the people. The expansion of settlement and related activities in the formerly marshy areas and swamps through reclamation and without proper plan for sanitation and infrastructure development has created ecological imbalance and unleashed a slew of health related problems. Common health problems in the areas are diarrhoea, cholera, and respiratory infections like tuberculosis and influenza. Table 3 gives district-wise prevalence of some common diseases in Manipur based on 2001 figures. The most common diseases prevalent in the state are Acute Diarrhoea Diseases (ADD), Acute Respiratory Infections (ARI), Pneumonia, and Enteric Fever. The infection percentage is 3.682 for ADD, 3.950 for ARI, 0.169 for Pneumonia, 0.855 for Enteric Fever, 0.086 for Viral Hepatitis and 0.006 for Tuberculosis (TB) in Thoubal district. In Imphal district the infection percentage is 0.797 for ADD, 0.583 for ARI, 0.032 for Pneumonia, 0.071 for Enteric Fever, 0.012 for Viral Hepatitis and 0.025 for TB. For Bishenpur district, the infection percentage is 1.711 for ADD, 1.648 for ARI, 0.105 for Pneumonia, 0.036 for Enteric Fever, 0.025 for Viral Hepatitis and 0.022 for TB.

Based on the above results, it is found that the prevalence of communicable diseases is most acute in Thoubal, followed by Bishenpur and Imphal districts. The reason for difference in prevalence rate is the difference in the landuse pattern among these three districts. Thoubal district with the highest population density has the highest number of scattered lakes, marshes and swamps covering about 17,216 hectares of the district. Bishenpur district

has 24,139 hectares of its total area under lakes and marshes, major chunk of the area being covered by Loktak. Imphal district has only 957 hectares of its total area as wetlands. Most of the people in Thoubal and Bishenpur districts are engaged in agriculture, fishing and handloom cottage industry. The people in these two districts are concentrated around scattered marshes and swamps which form repository of the vectors which cause water- and air-borne communicable diseases like malaria, diarrhoea, influenza and tuberculosis. Thus, Thoubal and Bishenpur districts of the Imphal valley have greater prevalence rate of communicable and other diseases.

The spatial variation shows that the hill districts of Ukhrul, Churachandpur and Chandel have comparatively high prevalence of tuberculosis. It is directly related to house design which, in the hills, prevents free air circulation from outside. This causes less dilution of the indoor pollutants generated by fire burning for cooking and warming of the houses. Smaller size of the house also compels the residents to live in close proximity of one another and thus the transfer of the pathogenic bacteria and virus are facilitated. Thus, poor housing design also affects the condition of human health. The density of population helps in spreading the virus and bacterial infection in human habitation.

A comparative picture of the population growth rate in Delhi and Aligarh situated in semi-arid environment and town and villages around the lake in humid region is given in Table 4. The data shows an average growth of 1.86 %/yr in ecologically sensitive area in the semi-arid region of Loktak. A comparative GIS analysis of the growth of the towns and villages around Loktak region is given in Figure 2. The habitat facility factors are limited in these areas because of the dependence over the lake and other wetland resources, but still the area is growing and population density is increasing in those villages and towns. The high density and close proximity to open water in the region may serve the epidemics in the future. The higher density at certain locations along the lake also causes sewage contamination and high siltation in the lake.

Conclusion

The above study reveals that the urban area of Imphal is increasing at the same rate as in the Gangetic plains. It is also evident that the wetland area is also increasing in and around the city due to artificial reservoir for electricity generation, water supply, etc. The study also indicates that there is high occurrence of communicable diseases in the areas located near the wetlands.

Apart from the relationship of diseases with landuse the housing design is also important factor in the hilly areas. The inefficient air circulation causes indoor pollution in such small houses and close proximity of the residents facilitates easy spreading of diseases in such areas.

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Table1: Built-up area against population, 1977-2011

Year	Built-up area (Km^2)	Population (in Census years) of the Imphal Districts
1977	4.29	431773
1990	19.02	711261
2000	27.04	839258
2010	34.2	967344

Table 2: Open water body area, 1977-2000

Year	Open water area of Loktak (Km^2)
1977	51.29
1990	65.57
2001	71.73
2010	73.42

Table 3: Normalized district-wise prevalence of diseases in 8 districts (2001) of Manipur State and their relationship with land-cover.

Name of the District	Diseases						Total	Population	Population density	Physiography	Water bodies
	ADD	ARI	Pneu	EF	TB	VH					
Thoubal	3.659	3.926	0.168	0.850	0.006	0.086	8.695	366341	713	valley,plain	many
Imphal	0.802	0.588	0.033	0.072	0.025	0.012	1.532	833312	679	valley,plain	many
Bishenpur	1.166	1.123	0.072	0.025	0.015	0.017	2.417	305907	415	valley,plain	many
Ukhrul	0.652	0.616	0.114	0.045	0.033	0.008	1.469	140946	31	hilly area	few
Chandel	0.486	0.520	0.022	0.091	0.054	0.022	1.195	122714	37	hilly area	few
Churachpur	0.399	0.514	0.027	0.019	0.049	0.065	1.073	228707	50	hilly area	few
Senapati	0.218	0.102	0.011	0.017	0.008	0.020	0.376	279214	116	hilly area	few
Tameng long	0.307	0.290	0.000	0.088	0.011	0.012	0.707	111496	25	hilly area	few

ADD Acute Diarrhoea Diseases including Gastro-enteritis and Cholera
ARI Acute Respiratory infection including Influenza
Pneu Pneumonia
EF Enteric Fever
TB Tuberculosis
VH Viral Hepatitis

Table 4: Density and population growth rate around Loktak Lake

City Name	Growth %/year	Density inh./km²
Aligarh	2.08	1007.1
Delhi	1.93	11296
Habitats Near Loktak Region		
Kumbi	1.87	1909
Kwakta	2.55	2493
Moran	1.07	2606
Bishnupur	2.54	1660
Nithong	1.47	2309
Nambol	1.6	2006

(Based on data available at www.citypopulation.de)

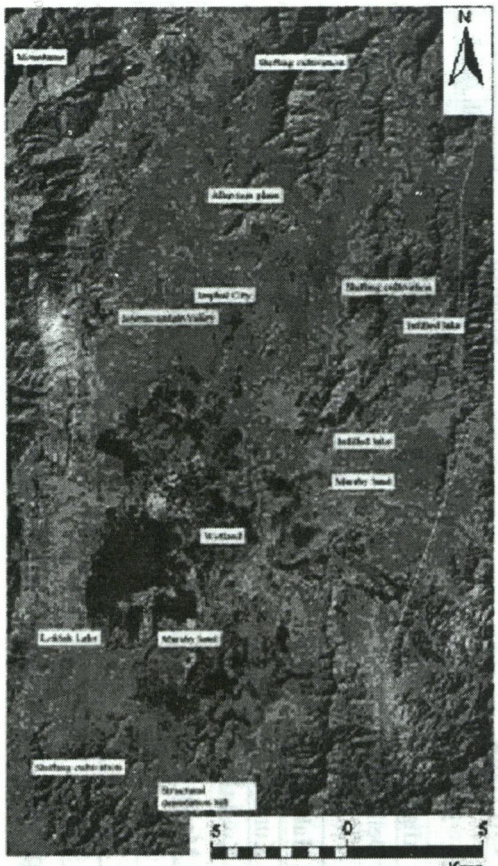

Figure. 1: Location map and general geomorphological features of Imphal valley (www.googleearth.com)

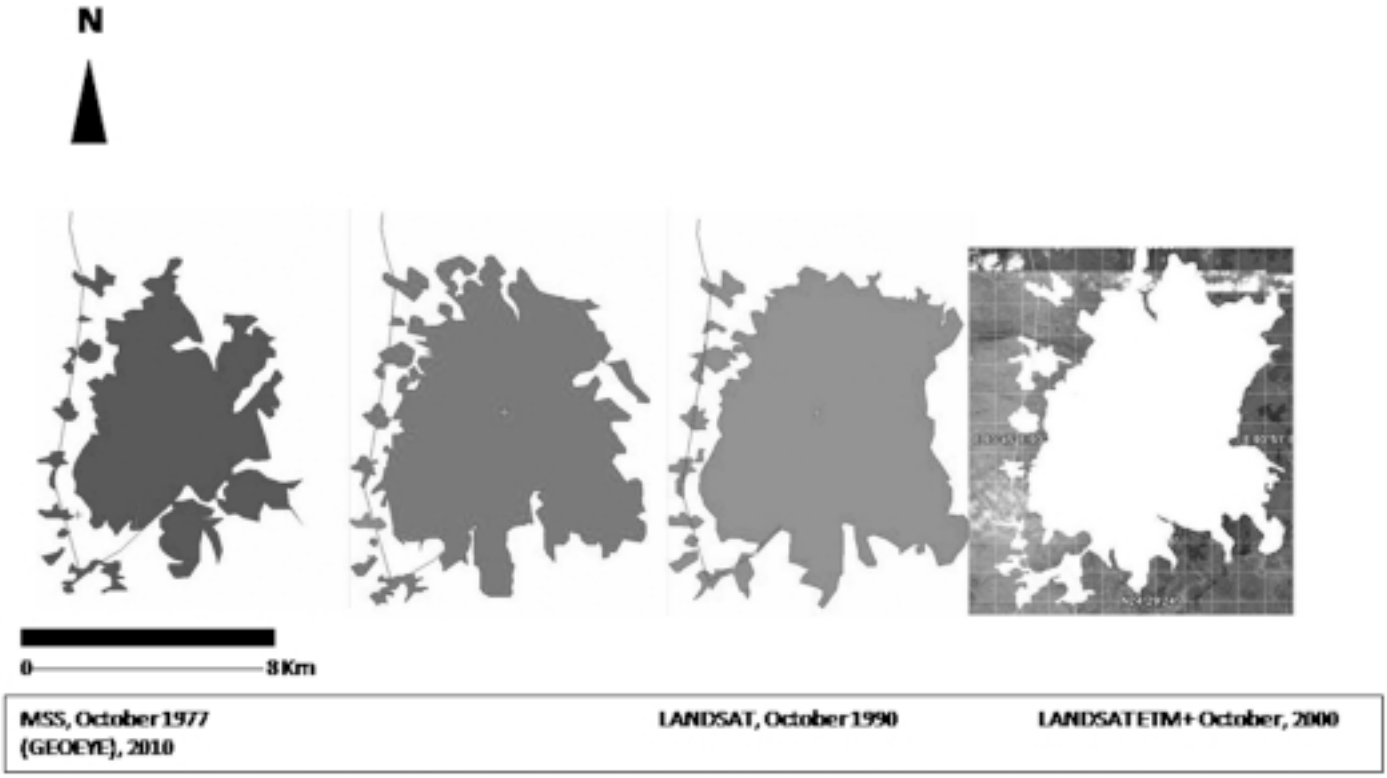

Figure 2: Growth of human habitats in Loktak lake area in Imphal valley, 1977-2010

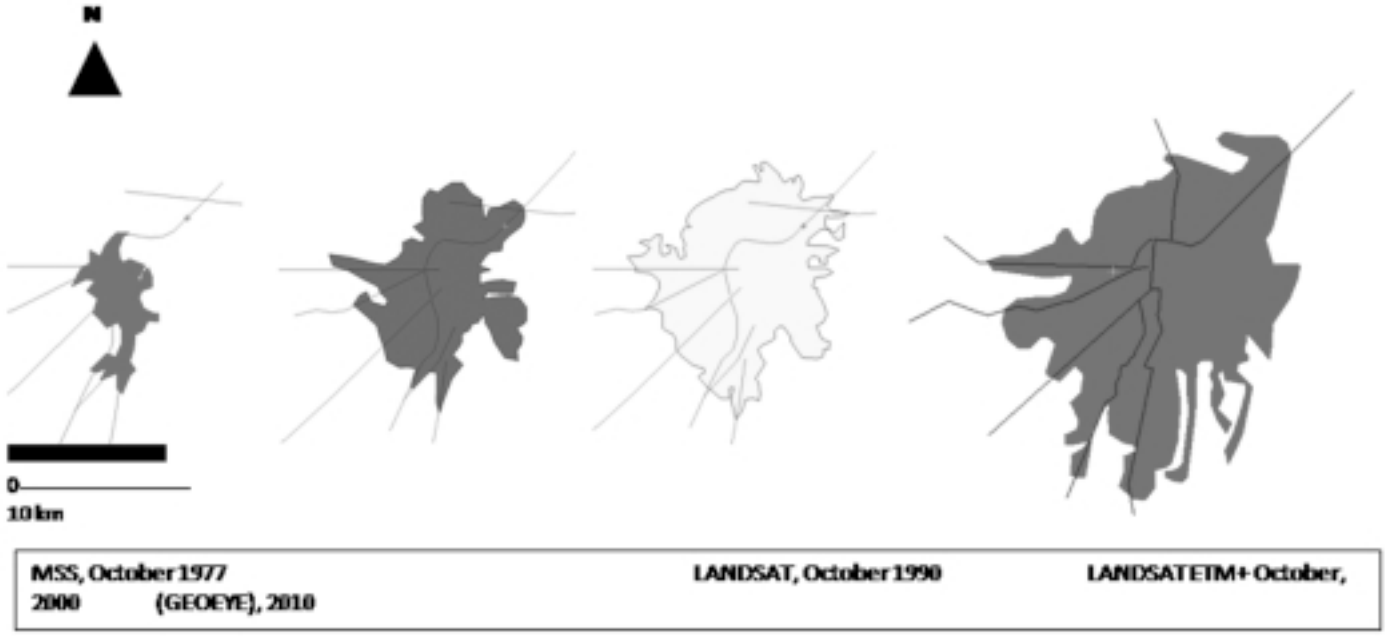

Figure 3: Temporal Change in Built-up area of the Imphal city

Post-Reform Tea Industry in Sikkim: A Study of Growth and Challenges

Manjushree Mishra and Sapna Poti

Abstract

Sikkim is marked by a series of steep hills, high peaks, rippling rivers, and a variety of flora and fauna. It has the potential for economic growth which needs to be backed by sound strategic planning for industrial development. The current paper focuses on the growth and challenges of state's tea industry. This particular industry is known to have a huge potential. The paper attempts to showcase the existing tea plantation growth, challenges faced and the government's facilitation towards this growth. It also recommends a trajectory to increase the industrial growth in this sector in a steady and sustainable manner by the government. The methodology used here is mainly through case studies by use of both primary and secondary data, personal interaction and interview surveys to substantiate the cases.

Key words: Tea Industry, Sikkim, Industrial Potential, Economic Reforms

Sikkim is a former Himalayan mountain kingdom that was annexed to the Indian union in May 1975. It is one of the most peaceful states in the country with multiple increases in many socio-economic parameters bringing in robust economic vibrancy and socio-cultural sustainability (Jha et al 2007). The progress in democratic process and planned development has generated ample social and economic security for the masses. The journey so far has been rewarding and the development efforts are satisfactory. However, no development orientation can remain the same forever. Development is a continuous process and it has to undergo constant transformation. This depends on the changing aspirations of the people, broadening nature of development instruments, new dimensions of social problems, increasing resource crunch, sustainability imperatives of the state

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and the growing complexity in the functioning of both national and international systems (Lama 2007). Hence there is a need to look at the economic growth trend especially in the industrial sector and analyze development in right perspective and suggest any value additions that may be desirable. It is imperative to study the dynamics of development so as to meet changing societal needs.

Economic Reform Scenario in Sikkim

Economic parameters of a state are usually considered as indicators of development. People of Sikkim engage in different economic activities, prominent among which are tourism, industries, trade, horticulture, agriculture, and minor forest products. The state enjoys a salubrious physical climate, a dust-free environment and peaceful industrial atmosphere. In regard to industrial development, a number of small and medium units have been promoted in the state. Some of them are as follows:

i. Agro-based industries
ii. Floriculture
iii. Animal husbandry and dairy products
iv. Minor forest based industries
v. Handlooms, handicrafts and village industries
vi. Hydel power
vii. Pharmaceutical industries
viii. Tea

There is not a single Public Sector Undertaking of the Centre in Sikkim. There are over 1500 units which have been granted provisional registration from 1976 onwards. Over 70 percent of these units are located in the East district, thereby showing disproportionately high concentration of industrial units in certain geographical locations (Lama 2007).

Horticulture is one of the major economic activities of the people of Sikkim. Large cardamom, ginger, and turmeric are the principal crops, while Mandarin orange, guava, mango, banana are the principal fruits grown in the state. The state is also a paradise of flowers. Gladioli, anthurium, lilliums, primulas, rhododendrons, orchids, and many other floral species thrive here. There is immense potential for developing floriculture on a commercial basis and the Department of Horticulture is making concerted efforts to turn this sector into an export-oriented industry. Agriculture is the major economic

activity and is practised on terraced field that has been labouriously created out of steep hillsides. Sikkim is the largest producer of cardamom and also boasts of having the largest area in India under its cultivation. Tea is exported to Russia and Germany. A coffee plantation has also been started at Majitar. However, progress of agriculture has remained limited due to difficult topography and other natural barriers. Sikkim also sees a potential growth of tea industry (Lama 2008).

Historical Background of Industrial Growth

The existence of craftsmanship-based cottage industries dates back to several centuries. The dexterity and skill the craftsmen showed in bamboo-craft, woodcraft, spinning of loom and weaving traditional textures, carpet and rug weaving with muted shades and brilliant colours of pure vegetable dyes, metal work, silverware and woodwork are appreciable. Many of these products are very exclusive, as a result of which they cannot be easily brought to the market place. Governmental patronage has helped to sustain these traditional practices in a very important way. To begin with the carpets were woven in the Maharaja's factory and two weaving schools at Lachung and Lachen were set up subsequently to support it. The Palden Thondup Institute of Cottage Industries was set up at Gangtok in 1957. This institute trained a large number of Sikkimese boys and girls in local handicrafts including carpentry, handmade paper, carpet, doll making, handloom and weaving. For a village craftsman, who is essentially a cultivator, this traditional activity is undertaken during the lean season for earning an additional income. But for the town-based craftsmen, these activities were not profitable because they could not produce quality products and hence they could not get good price for their products. The most crucial handicap was the very limited market in Sikkim for their products, adversely affecting the growth of the industry (Lama 2001).

The industrial sector was at its infancy in Sikkim before 1975. Distillation of wines and liquors was one of the first modern industries established at Singtam in 1955, providing employment to 30 managers and 150 labourers. This distillery was equipped with the state-of-the-art equipment and served both domestic and overseas markets. The other undertaking was the Government Fruit Preservation Factory, which was set up at Singtam a year later. This factory utilized the ample orange production in the state, cutting down on wastage in transit and eliminating middlemen. It also added value by providing incentives to farmers to bring additional acreage under horticulture.

Immediately after 1975, all the four districts were declared as

industrially backward. The Directorate of Industries, which was established in 1976, attempted to create a conducive environment for industrial development in the state. Largely based on a Techno-Economic Survey by the Union Ministry of Industry (1974), this Directorate undertook significant measures such as the promotion of a viable system of incentives and subsidies, financial and technical support and industrial training (Lama 2001).

To attract investment in industries, more liberalized incentives were enunciated in 1991. Under these initiatives, subsidies were available for captive power generating set, cost of transformer and power line, consultancy services, power, interest on working capital, registration fee of promotion councils, Bureau of Indian Standards, Commodity Boards, Chambers of Commerce, publicity and advertisement, study tour and in-plant training, price preference, concession on sales tax, deferment of excise duty, special incentives for high value low volume production units and units utilizing local raw materials. The Industrial Policy (1996) further provided several concessions and incentives designed to attract investors (Government of Sikkim 1996). Incentives provided by the state were:

a) Subsidized interest on working capital. This was provided for five years for interest in excess of 14 percent of the interest payable by industrial units on the working capital loan obtained from banks. Depending on the scale of operation, the amount varied from Rs.15,000 to Rs.1,10,000 or actual difference in interest whichever is less in thrust areas and Rs.10,000 to Rs.100,000 in non-thrust areas.

b) Exemptions from State and Central sales tax. This was provided for 7 years from the date of actual commercial production.

c) Price preference. This was 10-15 percent over the rates quoted on same quality of product from outside Sikkim to industrial undertakings established in Sikkim on the purchase made by various State government departments and organizations.

d) Subsidy on captive power generating sets. This was provided to the thrust area industries to the extent of 30-32 percent (maximum Rs 1,25,000) and 25 percent (maximum Rs 1,00,000) to non-thrust area industries.

e) Subsidy on power consumption. This was provided to the extent of total reimbursement of the first Rs 50,000 power consumption per annum of the unit and then on pro rata basis. The thrust area industries received a subsidy of 30 percent in power tariff.

Besides the above incentives, there were well laid out subsidies, consultancy services, study tours and in-plant training, registration fees of promotion councils, and some services provided by the Bureau of Indian Standards, Commodity Boards and Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Lama 2001). Looking at the constraints of the Industrial Policy of 1996 regarding incentives and sales tax concessions, the government is moving towards a pro-investor approach for encouraging the private sector into industry, by formulating clear and simple guidelines for the thrust areas. Procedures for setting up enterprises are also being streamlined. The focus is expected to be on promoting industries, which are essentially eco-friendly, utilization of raw materials and focus on value-added products. According to the data provided by the Central Statistical Organization, the contribution of the manufacturing sector to the Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) in Sikkim has shown a drop from 5.7 percent in 1980-81 to 2.2 percent in 1995-96, even though in absolute terms, it increased from Rs. 27.9 million to Rs 100.03 million during the same period. The share of industry has declined partly because the NSDP has recorded over 9-fold increase in absolute terms as against 3.5 fold increase of the manufacturing sector during the same period. In other words, the growth rate in industry has been significantly lower than the growth rate in other sectors (Lama 2001).

In addition, the contribution of tea manufacturing has been limited to only one state enterprise. 95% of the industries controlled by the government are not sustainable. There are 1683 provisionally registered and 313 permanently registered private sector industrial units, most of which are in the tiny or small sector and promoted by first generation entrepreneurs. There are 14 state public sector enterprises but no central government public sector unit exists in the state. Of the registered industrial units, only 225 units are functioning while most of the units are sick. The persistence of investors' disinterest despite favourable social and political climate shows that perceptions play a big role in dictating investment inflows. It would be necessary to undertake systematic efforts to correct these perceptions in order to create a favourable environment for industrial investment in Sikkim. Regional development of industrialization is not balanced. Most of the existing development is restricted to the East district. The scope of industrialization is also very limited in the state. Though the small scale and cottage industries are doing reasonably well, large-scale industries are ruled out. Dearth of locally available raw materials, lack of proper transport and communication systems, distance to markets, etc. are some of the basic locational

disadvantages. Nor is sufficient land available for the construction of large work sheds. Though the climate of the hill state favours the location of certain precision industries, infrastructure handicaps and lack of entrepreneurship deter industrial development.

Stagnation in agriculture and manufacturing sectors has resulted in an increase of marginal workers and those employed in unorganized informal activities without any social protection. Agricultural resources are yet to be exploited. The rapid deterioration of mountain environment due to numerous hydel projects poses immediate problems for the well-being and survival of both mountain and adjacent lowland populations (Karan 1989). The soil resources of the state are limited. The thickness and quality of the soil vary according to the gradient of the hillside slopes and ground cover. Steeper the gradient, poorer is quality of the soil. Surface run-off during monsoon carries away unprotected topsoil and diminishes this invaluable resource every year. In valley areas, the soil layer is thicker but the texture is coarse. The sandy and porous nature of soils along river courses renders them unfit for cultivation. Under such circumstances, there is limited scope of agricultural expansion in this mountainous state and at the moment, only 11.5% of the total area is devoted to cultivation. The actual area available for cultivation is shrinking due to continuous pressure from the secondary and tertiary sectors, such as establishments of new industries, expansion of the built up area of urban centres, extension of roads, construction of power plants, etc. Small size of land holdings, over-dependence of seasonal rain, inadequacy of suitable farm machinery, problems of marketing, etc. render the growth of agriculture slow and stunted. Besides, natural calamities, such as landslides, rock-slips, flash floods, etc. wreak havoc from time to time (Choudhury 2001).

Tea Industry in Sikkim

Temi Tea

Located in South district touching the bottom of the renowned Tendong hill in West district, Temi Tea is run by the industry department of the state. The quality of the tea is often comparable to Darjeeling tea. The garden was established in 1969 with an estimated area of 437 acres. It employs a total number of 406 workers and 43 staff members. It produces about 100 mt of tea annually. During 1997-98 the production figure of Temi Tea garden reached 1,16,000 kg, which is the highest record ever achieved till date. During the year total revenue of Rs. 2.18 crores was credited to the State exchequer. The garden received All India Quality Award from the Tea

Board of India for two consecutive years, i.e., 1994 and 1995.

The single orthodox variety of black tea of this garden is very rich in flavour and has high export potential, which is only partially tapped so far. To its credit, Temi Tea fetches one of the highest prices at the Kolkata Tea Auction.

Unlike the tea gardens in other states of India where they are controlled by the Tea Board of India, which also provides subsidized loans for new plants, replantation, and construction of factory, Temi is a state enterprise. Hence, the state government funds all activities of the tea plantation, salaries and wages as per the rates fixed by the state. The following additional benefits are provided to Temi tea garden staff and labourers:

(a) Wage is double of what exists for other tea growing areas.

(b) Free housing

(c) Free medical benefits

(d) Bonus

(e) Provident Fund

There are hardly any administrative issues in this garden. There is no labour unrest, as the concerns of the labourers are taken care of by the management. Their pay consists of basic pay, house rent allowance of 15% of basic pay, dearness allowance of 27% of basic pay, and hill compensatory allowance of 10% of basic pay.

Sang-Martam Small Tea Growers

To increase Sikkim's tea production capabilities Sang-Martam Tea Growers' Cooperative Society was established in 1998 under the assistance of Temi Tea Board. This is a society which encourages small farmers to merge their landholdings to start tea plantation. The total area of land under the cultivation of this society is around 75 acres. The society has a total of 140 members. Since the gestation period is long, tea plucking has started only recently. They are sending green leaves to Temi Tea factory for processing. The tea produced is single orthodox black tea. The society was facilitated by the state government, which provided them with the saplings. After some time the government's facilitation reduced drastically and farmers started withdrawing from the tea business. For 7 to 8 years the tea gardens remained unattended which resulted in wild growth of tea bushes that were already planted. In 2006, some of them took individual loans from Axis Bank and

started reviving the farming. In 2007 four hectares of land were brought under cultivation and the pruning of the bushes and processing of tea started in their own processing unit. In July 2010, they started getting free labour under the scheme of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). Yet, the number of tea growers has drastically reduced to about 20 at present.

Conclusion

There is enough evidence to conclude that Sikkim has a huge potential for tea industry in view of the weather, quality of soil, and the temperature, which are ideal for growing tea. The quality of tea can be better than Darjeeling tea as the plantations are much younger compared to those in Darjeeling. Further, growing tea is an easier process compared to other agricultural crops. One just needs some saplings and land to begin with. If pruning and maintenance are done regularly, the tea bushes give returns for more than 100 years. If the state government provides regular facilitation and financial help, tea can be grown in Sikkim in large scale and can be exported as well. Private farmers have lands for tea plantation, which need to be tapped and managed to be benefit of all without which the full potential of the state for tea plantation cannot be achieved.

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Book Reviews

Kumari Jayawardena, *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Colonial Rule,* Routledge: New York & London, 1995, ISBN 0-415-91104-4 (cloth), ISBN 0-415-91105-2 (pbk.).

> Take up the White Man's burden –
> Send forth the best ye breed –
> Go, bind your sons in exile
> To serve your captive's need;
> To wait in heavy harness
> On fluttered folk and wild –
> Your new-caught, sullen peoples,
> Half-devil and half-child.
>
> (Quoted in Preface to Jayawardena's *The White Woman's Other Burden: Western Women and South Asia during British Colonial Rule.*)

Whether the above verse from Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden* (1899) forms the most apt preface to Jayawardena's *The White Woman's Other Burden* may, indeed, be a matter of debate. For, the woman's question in the history of colonialism has always been an issue of contention. Imperialism, in its own way, has practically remained a male domain. History has credited the white men with all major feats associated with colonialism – acquisition of colonies, perpetuation of military and political dominance, imposition of a utilitarian mode of governance, and so on. White women, on other hand, have often been depicted as helpmates, assistants of the authoritative men in their 'masculine' burden of ruling the Empire. Colonial metanarratives have held up 'dubious' images of the 'memsahib' – proud, disdainful, fragile, arrogant, inaccessible, enticing, headers of an educated and modern era in the 'dark' colonies, or potent evils who ultimately lost

the white men their empire. Varied indeed were the notions regarding the white women of the colonial era, stuck within the conflicting parameters of gender, class and race. All the same, disregarded by historians, and neglected greatly in social and political documents, white women basically remained obscured in colonial history, and have, till date, remained one of the most ambiguous and disputed entities of the 'Raj'.

Contemporary trends in feminism and gender studies have, however, raised objections against all such kinds of colonial accounts which, under the covers of 'gendered' images, have sought to keep back ideas regarding women's true stature in the colonies, their agency, power and role in the imperial and patriarchal power-matrix, and have depicted them as failures and subverted entities in the Empire. Shifts in gender perspectives since the 1970s and 1980s have occasioned a thorough re-viewing and re-visioning of the roles and positioning of white women within the colonial regime, so as to discover women's actual place in the history of colonialism. Jayawardena's *The White Woman's Other Burden* has been a novel attempt in this task of re-envisioning the lives and experiences of colonizing women from an innovative angle, and viewing them not as passive agents of the Empire but as competent agencies in their own right. Although written way back in 1995, the book still remains highly relevant and worth perusing in the contemporary decade, by virtue of its quality of looking at the lives and activities of the historically neglected British women in South Asia from a new, feminist perspective, and trying to judge white women's varied responses to colonialism as well the reactions of colonized men and women to the activities of the foreign ladies. While some of the white women were singularly supportive of the Empire, there were many others who harboured a rather ambivalent attitude with regard to colonial politics as well as their own status in the hierarchical set-up. There were women actively involved in movements of nationalism, social reform, political independence and women's rights in the colonies, much of these having close connections with numerous religious, liberal, revolutionary and feminist movements lodged in their own nations. They were mostly dissenters who challenged the social ideologies and orthodox political establishments they lived under, and duly sympathized with the colonized – victims of oppression like themselves. They were attracted by the culture, religion and customs of the natives. While mainstream colonial history has primarily recorded the power-politics of the Empire and of the potential of the white men in holding up the banner of imperialism, the significant roles played by the

women of the Empire have practically remained unofficial and unknown, forming a huge bulk of 'underground' colonial history. Jayawardena makes a serious attempt to discover these lesser-known links between Western women and South Asia, as they strive to bind together two worlds – the Western socialist and feminist agencies with the Indian nationalist and reformist organizations. The book offers glimpses into how foreign women influenced the local movements on women's issues and rights by bringing forth such ideas of independence and commitment to changes as prevalent in their own country, and sincerely calls upon historians to go back to history and delve out critical, unexplored aspects from the lives of these lesser-known women so as to re-vision colonialism once again from a new perspective.

Beginning with a stray reference to Katherine Mayo and Margaret Noble (more popularly known as Sister Nivedita, Swami Vivekananda's Irish disciple), Jayawardena reflects upon the highly contrasting attitudes of the Western women towards Indians. While there were, on one side, women like Mayo who launched pungent criticisms on Indian social life and mores, its oppression of women and decadent sexual culture, there were also, on the other side, women like Noble who celebrated Indian family life and the empowering aspects of women in Indian culture. The difference was one of perspective. South Asians branded the critic as the 'bad' western women, and the empathizer as the 'good'. To them, the 'good' women included those white women who worked for national and social liberation even at the stake of fighting against the mighty British Empire. These were the 'goddesses' who had streets and schools named after them, and were long remembered with fondness. However, Jayawardena's motive has not been just to analyse such categorizations on the basis of polarities. What she actually tries is to reconsider the whole issue of colonialism in terms of race, gender and feminism, to examine the roles of western women who dared to speak 'differently', and evaluate the varied reactions they had to encounter from native men and women as well as the men of their own race as they came forth with their revolutionary views on women's issues and the woman's question in India.

The coming of white women to the colonies was very closely related to the decisions of the colonial office in England to employ the white women for the purpose of lending company to the white men so as to prevent their liaisons with native women, and guard the 'purity' of their race. As an obvious consequence, women who socialized with local men were accused

of racial betrayal, and were even classed as sexually perverted. Mainstream colonial history curtly denounced such women who married or had associations with local men, but what has hardly been spoken of in these discourses is the crucial reality of the 'double alienation' of the colonial wife – isolated as a woman bonded within the four walls, and also as a foreigner in the public arena in the colonies. By pointing her finger at such vital spheres still largely enveloped in obscurity and darkness, Jayawardena aptly highlights problem areas and gaps in colonial history which actually demand critical investigation.

Structured into five parts, Jayawardena's book emphasizes fundamental areas of white women's life and activities in colonial South Asia. The first part – 'Saving the Sisters from the Sacred Cows' – is devoted to those foreign missionaries who spearheaded movements for Christianizing and modernizing in the colonies. Through these reformative activities, the foreign women tried to discover that space for opportunities in the public domain which had been denied to them in the home country. However, their motives were met with a variety of responses in the colonies. If the imperial masters viewed such activities as threatening indications of an imminent uprising by the newly educated and enlightened natives, the local people often saw such initiatives as supportive of imperialism, subverting local religion and traditional culture revered for ages. The propagation of such ideas by most of the missionaries that they were bringing salvation and the light of true faith to a people steeped in the darkness arose the indignation of those Indians who felt rebellious at the thought that their ways of life were looked down upon by the foreigners as 'barbaric' and 'savage'. Missionary activities became largely identified with colonial rule, which led to a practical denouncing of these missionary nuns in most of the nationalist discourses. The missionaries' ideas about women's reform created the widespread belief that they were trying to divert the docile South Asian women from their conventional roles of 'good wives and mothers' and were instilling in them such ideas which would tear apart the established norms of the society. *Zenana* education was looked upon as a devil's workshop. Thus, in many cases, these first women professionals of the colonies found themselves combating dual assaults – the male chauvinism of their own society and the ridicule of the colonized natives.

The second part - 'Mothering India'- concerns itself with those professional women and social workers who had strong beliefs in the 'civilizing mission', but did not tread upon the missionaries' method of

classing the natives and their ways of life as heathen. Their work was primarily reformative, and they worked towards the establishment of hospitals, schools, *ashram*s with the purpose of alleviating social evils. Josephine Butler, Mary Carpenter, Annette Ackroyd, Clara Swain, Edith Pechey, Mary Rutnam were few of the numerous women reformers who strolled the South Asian colonies, launching campaigns against evident social maladies. While their task, in one way, was to hold up the image of a righteous British empire where social justice prevailed and thereby legitimize imperial authority, their activities were, more often than not, viewed with a more sympathetic and admiring vision than those of the missionaries by even the natives.

Part three – 'Consolation in an Alien Society' – concerns those Western women who had a slightly different attitude from both the categories dealt with in the previous two sections. Considering themselves to be the products of a rapacious and materialistic West, these independent-minded women travelled abroad for a cause, but in the process left no stone unturned to assert themselves even in opposition to Christian patriarchy and colonial authority which they feared would engulf them too. Rejection of orthodox Christianity made them desirous to strive for conservation and regeneration of Eastern ideals. These were the Orientalists who studied Hindu, Islam and Buddhist scriptures and summarily denied the exclusive claim of Christianity of finding the truth. Annie Besant, Helena Blavatcky, Florence Farr were eminent among these women who found consolation and light in Hindu occultism and theosophy. Considering themselves to be genuinely ardent spiritualists who advocated not only the cause of women's rights but also stood for such social issues as abolition of slavery, reform of marriage, health and dress reform and so on, they earned permanent remembrance, but were also equally labeled as ingenious and interesting imposters by the imperialists on one side, and by those nationalists on the other who could not associate them with their own struggles for freedom.

South Asians, as already seen, were often wary of the foreign 'women devils' who seemed to them to be using education and reforms as means of targeting the beliefs and customs of the people, but many of them harboured a special affection for those women who readily and openly identified themselves with Asiatic religion and philosophy, and turned into holy mothers and cult figures. Part four of the book, entitled, 'White Women in Search of Black Gods' offers glimpses into the sentiments of those women

who attained more prominence than any of their western sisters and even Indian counterparts by virtue of their spiritual images and supports to the nationalist movements. They undertook reformist movements no doubt, but in the very novel manner of idolizing the Vedic society and attributing all social evils to be aberrations from the ancient golden ideals. This undoubtedly had an impact on the Indian minds like never before, and female 'saints' like Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita), Mirra Richard (the Mother) and Madeleine Slade (Mira Behn) were instantaneously the role models for Indian women. They were at the forefront of propagating the 'brotherhood' of all, holding that truth was not exclusive to Christianity, making India and Indian culture their home, introducing Western concepts of liberalization to the colonies, and thereby posing a severe threat to the invulnerable Empire.

Finally, the last section, 'Comrades in Arms', brings out the case of those Western socialist women who indeed came out with the batons to fight imperialism. Missionaries who claimed their rights as women to travel and lead missions, theosophists who reflected the 'feminist breakthrough' by their rejection of the orthodox church and appropriation of alternative cultures, Orientalists and Holy Mothers who adored the Asiatic traditions, were no doubt viewed dubiously by imperialists, but nowhere was female audacity more visible to them than in case of the socialists who took female liberation to the extent of actively opposing colonialism and patriarchal structures, taking part in anti-colonial and nationalistic movements, thus posing a clear and subversive challenge to the greatest institution of the West – imperialism. Their stories have, more acutely than any of the others, been left out in imperialistic discourses by the imperial masters who felt abused and embarrassed by their existence.

Jayawardena's attempts to venture into un-intruded mazes of colonial history raise many crucial questions like: What were the reactions of the local women to the raging questions of global sisterhood? Could they accord themselves with Western ideas of feminism in the heydays of nationalistic struggles when commitment to the nation was considered paramount and superior to everything else? Could the Western women be successful in creating a universalistic sentiment or discourse on the rights of women, irrespective of race, ethnicity, class, cultural differences and political agendas? Jayawardena writes that the *ghar* and *bahir* polemics as established in the Eastern cultures could not make the colonized women relish the idea of 'publicizing' of women's roles so spontaneously. For most

of them, a trespassing into the public domain was a threat to their identity as wives, daughters and mothers. Those who embraced Western feminism and became 'local feminists' were castigated by the native men as subverted bourgeois women, inspired by foreign ideology, and bribed with foreign money to promote chaos in the family and bring about cultural degeneracy. Similarly, opinions by the Western women of South Asians being backward and in need of 'experts' from the West to teach them how to improve made the local women adopt a defensive position, and justify the oppressive features of their own cultures. No wonder, in most of the nationalistic discourses, western feminism which launched critiques on Asian societies was branded as 'neocolonialism' – a notion to be done away with. Perhaps such a situation can, to a fair extent, be also attributed to the myopic visions of those Western feminists who failed to appreciate the critical intricacies of multiculturalism while trying to homogenize on the basis of gender. What the author actually emphasizes is the distortion that is liable to sprout out of a type of universalism that only takes gender into account, disregarding ethnic, class and political variations.

On the whole, Jayawardena's book has been a laudable endeavour to show what was often ignored in any study of colonialism – that is, how colonialism itself was gendered. Colonialism was not just a matter of domination of the non-whites by the whites; it was equally a domination by colonial men of women – both colonizing and colonized. If colonized women were the 'Other' to the colonizing men in terms of race and class, even the colonizing women were 'Other' to the men of their own race with respect to gender. White women socializing with local women were branded as 'undesirable Europeans', fanatics, anarchists, but hardly have historians taken into account the considerations of that gender consciousness which actually provoked the white women to develop a feminist perception and strive for 'global sisterhood' which defied any form of patriarchal and capitalist oppression across boundaries of class and race. By calling attention to such neglected aspects of colonial history, Jayawardena's book necessitates the urgency to unearth these critical facts by recovering women's mute voices in colonialism, which is one of the most burning areas of modern historiography in the 21st century.

Adopting the Asian feminist gaze, Jayawardena has endeavoured in her book to evaluate the varied perspectives of the 'Mothers of feminism' who shouldered the burden of creating 'the New Woman'. The author's style is lucid, and the representation of conflicting views from opposite

spectrums has been remarkably unprejudiced, making the book a comfortable reading. However, among all the categories of white women dealt with in this book, none can afford to forget those disputed 'memsahibs' – wives of the planters, the bureaucrats, largely depicted in literature and pictures as brave, long-suffering, or racist, stupid, who ensnared the natives with their coquetry, and lost the British their Empire. Jayawardena's book does not deal with them.

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