

ISSN.0972-8406

THE NEHU JOURNAL

*Vol III No 1,
January 2005*

The NEHU Journal

Vol. III, No. 1, January 2005

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Printed at : Sanyal Press
L. Sanyal and Sons, Shillong, Meghalaya

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Production Assistant : Surajit Dutta

Layout and Design: Shongdor Diengdoh

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NEHU

EDITORIAL

As you might perhaps have noticed, *The NEHU Journal* has started coming out regularly and with the current issue it celebrates its third birthday. I would also like to inform you that the journal is now refereed internationally the joy and pain of which I have put in my editorial of volume 2, number 2. I am positive that the journal will receive quality submissions in future not only from humanities and social sciences but also from the life and physical sciences that have so far remained outside the purview of the journal, not the least due to any policy but perhaps due to the hangover of its earlier *avatar* as the *North-Eastern Hill University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, which the present journal continues to be called.

We at the editorial office of the journal are grateful that many of our colleagues have enrolled themselves as subscribers, but the number of subscribers it has today is still not enough to make it self-sustaining. This situation is certainly not desirable.

I therefore take this opportunity to request you all to send in your subscription amount at least for three years and those of you who are subscribers continue to support the journal till it becomes self-sustaining. On our part, I shall continue to try and improve the quality and reach of the journal with each issue.

T. B. Subba

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Cultural Identity and Nationalism in Multi-National Context: The Indian Experience

S. K. NANDA

It is widely believed that nationalism, as a sentiment or as a movement, is necessarily linked with the concept of sovereignty. To this perception, nationalism as principle of self-determination invariably tends to achieve a sovereign state. But empirical evidences in many culturally plural and/or multi-national countries reveal that the goal of nationalism varies from different levels of autonomy to outright political sovereignty. In several cases, especially in South Asia, it is seen that nationalistic sentiment was and continues to be invoked by people to protect their distinct cultural identity within the provisions of provincial political autonomy under a common sovereign state. This variety of nationalism, for analytical purposes, may be termed as cultural nationalism seeking provincial statehood. This paper attempts to bring into focus this phenomenon of cultural nationalism in the context of multi-national countries in general and India in particular.

I

A multi-national country consists of people belonging to diverse nationality groups. Such countries, the world over, experience different levels of identity which in turn create competing claims upon the loyalty of their people. Normally in these countries people's loyalty to their overarching state competes with the loyalty to their respective nationalities. To put differently, people in such cases wish to cling to their civil-political identity without shedding or tampering their specific cultural identity and the notions of ancestral 'homeland'. Shils (1957) quite aptly observed that people in such states display both civil-political and cultural-primordial ties. If the framework is disturbed in any form, there would be predictable conflict because one or another nationality may feel deprived objectively or subjectively.

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Incidentally, quite a large number of multi-national states are located in the Third World, i.e., Asia, Africa and Latin America. For a good part of their history, most of these states remained under the rule of European colonial powers. European colonialism, however, could not obliterate the multi-cultural set up of these countries. On the other hand, it provided effective grounds for the growth of nationalism in these countries.

As a political doctrine, nationalism originated in modern Europe and was exported to the Third World countries during the colonial period. But what is interesting to note is that while in Europe emergence of nationalism aimed at establishing modern sovereign states along national lines following the one-nation-one-state dictum, in the multi-cultural colonial countries nationalism was conceived differently at different contexts. At the macro-level nationalism was seen as an anti-colonial political consciousness striving to liberate the country from foreign rule and establish sovereign state. But at the micro-level, it was perceived as a form of cultural consciousness seeking to protect distinct cultural communities in their traditional homelands. Needless to say, the former represents political nationalism and the latter encapsulates the cultural expression of nationalism.

It goes without saying that the concept of nation—real or imaginary—is central to all forms of nationalism. While in some cases national consciousness arises from a pre-existent nation in some it may lead to construction of a distinct national identity. By and large, in typical European sense nation meant a cultural-congruent sovereign political entity. But given the dual interpretation of nationalism, in the multi-cultural colonial world nation acquired a double connotation. At the macro-level nation acquired a political form based on shared colonial experience and geo-political unity; and at the micro-level nation assumed a cultural form based on cultural-linguistic-territorial identity. This dual notion of nation and nationalism persists in these countries even after independence. In the independent period the macro-political unit is referred to as nation in the political sense and the constituent micro unit is viewed as nation in the cultural sense. In other words, in the case of multi-national states nation emerged as a political entity at the common political level and as a cultural entity at the specific cultural level. The former is based on the political variables such as sovereignty, common citizenship and common legal-administrative system. The latter is based on the socio-cultural criteria such as cultural homogeneity, shared history and distinct language; territory being common to both the understanding of nation.

As mentioned earlier, in the ex-colonial countries nationalism emerged as a response to colonialism. But what is often overlooked is that in these countries the colonial ruler created provincial administrative boundaries, which did not correspond to the cultural boundaries of different nationalities. This provincial arrangement not only gave rise to disjuncture between culture and territory but also eventually led to domination of one nationality over another in a given provincial unit. The dominated nationalities responded by asserting their distinct national identity in separatist terms. The political manifestation of such assertion varied from the demand for a culture-congruent provincial unit to a separate sovereign state.

The situation exploded after independence. The arrival of freedom, introduction of self-governments and establishment of democratic institutions provided the requisite platforms for arousal of national consciousness among the hitherto subdued and neglected nationalities. Considering the enormity of the problem, some ex-colonial multi-national countries undertook provincial reorganisation on primordial basis. But the primordial basis differed from one country to another. For example, region was the basis of reorganisation in Indonesia, tribe-cum-kinship in Nigeria, sect and religion in Lebanon, race in Malaysia, language and tribe in Pakistan, etc. (Geertz, 1971).

Reorganisation was undertaken keeping the following goals in view : (a) establishing co-terminality between politico-administrative unit and cultural unit; (b) maintaining the unity and integrity of the state; accommodating the diverse population under a common civil-political authority; (c) promoting a 'terminal' civil loyalty to the state in place of multiple primordial loyalties; and above all (d) introducing large-scale state-sponsored modernisation so that all types of disaffection resulting from the ties of race, colour, language, religion, etc. would be displaced eventually.

Unfortunately, in many ex-colonial states neither the desired co-terminality between administrative unit and cultural identity has been fully met, nor have the highly expected "displacement syndrome" and the much hoped-for singular loyalty to the state emerged. What is emerging, on the contrary, is a set of multiple cultural nations co-existing under common sovereign political unit thereby allowing two notions of identity, a dual level of loyalty, a dual conception of nationality and finally double interpretation of nationalism. Given this scenario, it is quite likely that those nationalities whose language and territory are not protected will surely indulge in nationalistic mobilisation demanding recognition of identity and autonomy.

It is widely believed that nationality problems grip the multi-national states of the ex-colonial world; the older and well-integrated western states remain free from this malaise. But the fact of the matter is that even these states receive stiff resistance from their people belonging to cultural backgrounds different from the mainstream nationality. Available empirical studies indicate that in contemporary times national movements, latent or avowed, exist among the Scots, Welsh and Irish in the UK: French-Quebecois in Canada; German Swiss in Switzerland; Basques and Catalans in Spain; Burgundies and Britons in France, etc. (Satyamurthy, 1983; Nairn, 1977; Seton-Watson, 1977). In fact, both 'state-aspiring' and 'state-renouncing' nationalisms are found in the contemporary western world (Oommen, 1997). It follows that both the old and new multinational states experience nationality problems. In such states, barring a few exceptions, people want to survive through home-rule within a common sovereign state. Commenting on multinational states A.D. Smith (1973) rightly observes two polar perspectives: statist and ethnicist. The statist perceive and define nationalism from the viewpoint of mainstream culture and the unity and integrity of the state. The ethnicists being desirous of maintaining cultural distinctiveness insist on recognising specific cultural nation and nationalism in the multi-national set up. The statist advocate for assimilation of cultural nationalities into the mainstream mould; but the ethnicists incessantly resist assimilation with a view to retaining multiple identities (*ibid*).

Moreover, for the ethnicists subordination of specific cultural identity in favour of the overarching state identity and an alien cultural mainstream would mean many things: (a) it may run the risk of loss of identity and hence autonomy; (b) it may lead to unfettered hegemony of the mainstream nation; and (c) it may amount to loss of instrumental benefits and of equal opportunity.

II

So far as India is concerned, the magnitude of nationality problems is stupendous. Being a new state and the largest multi-national country, India faces the uphill task of reconciling national integration efforts with accommodation of multiple nationalities within the framework of a single polity. The task becomes all the more difficult as free India has adopted a secular democratic political system.

It is well-known that India is a veritable labyrinth of cultural pluralism/diversity. Since time immemorial India is home to numerous languages,

religions, tribes, races, castes and sub-castes. Of these elements of cultural pluralism in India, language, tribe and to some extent religion happen to be most crucial because they not only serve as important markers of group identity but also provide viable bases of nationality formation. The fact that linguistic and tribal identities in India are linked to a definite territory, i.e., a concept of 'homeland' or *desh* further reinforces their salience. Oommen (1988:334), for example, argues that in Indian context *desh* implies not merely a territory but also a people, language, style of life, pattern of culture; in fact a nation in the European sense of the term. Deshpande (1983) observes that the concept of 'homeland' is variously expressed in Indian vocabulary as *desh*, *nadu*, *rashtra*, etc. In addition, several linguistic and tribal groups in India possess distinct history, culture, myths, symbols and values. All these elements go into the making of territorially rooted cultural nationalities in Indian soil that give India her multi-national character. Given such a complex socio-cultural reality, any attempt to disturb the natural linkage between language, culture and homeland would surely cause disturbance among the affected people. As a matter of fact, this natural linkage between territory, language and culture was disturbed for the first time in India during the colonial period.

India emerged as single political unit under British rule. British colonialism, however, systematically divided Indian territory into 'British India' and 'Indian India'. While administrative provinces were created to rule British India directly, Indian India comprising 555 princely states was ruled by native princes under British paramountcy. This colonial policy of keeping Indian states separate from British India was perhaps designed to thwart the development of nationalism at all-India level. It did not, however, take long for nationalism to grow in India. But unlike Europe, Indian nationalism did not emerge from industrialisation or bourgeois revolution to capture state power. It resulted primarily from the inevitable political framework of colonialism and the cultural framework of multi-national situation. Obviously, Indian nationalism assumed a liberal-political content and it evolved from a sense of pan-Indian geo-political unity and an anti-colonial perception shared by people belonging to diverse cultural backgrounds. Needless to say, the all India national consciousness was mainly articulated by nationalist elite comprising various cross sections of the Indian middle class.

As mentioned earlier, in multi-national situation nationalism emerged both at macro and micro levels. India is no exception in this regard. Apart from the all-India level, nationalism in India was also seen at the regional-

cultural level. But unlike the pan-Indian national consciousness, the regional national consciousness emerged as a form of cultural nationalism seeking to preserve identity and protect 'homeland' vis-à-vis other nationalities in India. It is in this sense that the regional cultural nationalism differed from the pan-Indian political nationalism which aimed at India's independence. Moreover, the regional national consciousness emanated from a cultural sense of 'pre-existent nation' defined in terms of a distinct culture, shared history, specific language and common territory. It follows that the origins of cultural nationalism in India date back to the colonial times. The rise of such cultural nationalism was mainly attributed to the existence of artificial provincial units in colonial India.

Like colonial experience elsewhere, in India too, British colonialism carved out administrative provinces which did not match the physical distribution of nationalities and their socio-cultural affiliation. In some cases several nationalities were juxtaposed in one provincial unit. For example, the Bengal Presidency contained different nationalities like Bengali, Oriya, Assamese, Maithili, Bhojpuri and a host of tribal communities; Madras Presidency included Tamils, Telugus, Malayalees and Kannadigas; while Bombay comprised the Marathis, Gujaratis, Kannadigas, Konkani, etc. In some other instances a particular nationality (e.g. Oriyas, Kannadigas, etc.) was apportioned to two or more provincial units.

Juxtaposition reduced the smaller nationalities into a minority position; while apportionment led to cultural fragmentation and territorial dismemberment of some nationalities. The fragmentation of culture and territory created disjuncture among language, culture and territory as noted earlier. Thus tension and conflict resulted in both the cases. In the case of juxtaposition conflict resulted from domination of one nationality over another; while in the case of apportionment tension resulted from a fear of loss of 'homeland' and hence identity.

The mainstream nationalities, whose culture and territory were not fragmented and who happened to be in majority, emerged as dominant nationality under favourable colonial conditions. While their culture and language flourished under colonial patronage, the language and culture of the dominated and peripheral nationalities faced serious threats. Further, the deprived nationalities perceived the subordination of their cultural identity to the mainstream as the root-cause of their socio-economic and political deprivation. Thus the fear of 'culturocide' and a sense of material deprivation

motivated several neglected and dismembered nationalities to assert their national identity by invoking a sense of indigenous cultural defence and by demanding a separate province anchored to homeland. This very consciousness of protecting and preserving one's cultural identity within a culture-congruent provincial unit gave rise to several cultural nationalisms in colonial India. The rise of national consciousness among the Oriyas, Sindhis, Assamese, Telugus, Malayalees and the assertion of tribal identity by the Jharkhand tribes are some cases in point. As mentioned earlier, these cultural nationalisms were pursued simultaneously along with the anti-colonial national movement for liberation of India.

Several studies have mentioned about this dual character of nationalism in the Indian context. Desai (1966: 368), for example, noted that from the standpoint of the united national movement for political independence, the movement of the nationalities for self-determination assumed decisive significance. Chandra (1982:1282) observed that "development in Assamese, Oriya and Gujarati literature during the 19th century suggests that regional national consciousness was beginning to emerge contemporaneously with the all-India national consciousness". Guha succinctly remarked:

"Ever since its beginning nationalism has been developing at two levels – one at all-India on the basis of pan-Indian cultural homogeneity and an anti-imperialism shared in common; and another regional (Bengali, Oriya, Marathi, etc.) on the basis of regional cultural homogeneity, from the very outset the two nationalisms are found intertwined and dovetailed. Traditionally an average Indian identified with both nationalisms except in some peripheral areas" (1983:1701)

Some recent articulations of national identity in India reiterated this thesis quite unequivocally. Karna (2000: 94), for example, observes that both language and region have shaped regional national identity in India and that pan-Indianness objectively co-exists with the regional national consciousness. Aloysius (1997) argues that both political and cultural nationalisms have contributed to the making of India.

Of the cultural nationalisms that flared up in colonial India, the Oriya national movement happens to be the most noteworthy for a variety of reasons. First, the Oriyas were among the few nationalities in India whose culture and territory were fragmented in colonial times. Second, Oriya language and culture faced serious threats on account of territorial dismemberment. Third, the Oriya movement was the first cultural nationalism in British India

which demanded separate province. Finally, the formation of separate Orissa province was the first linguistic province in British India.

In colonial times Oriya nationality was divided between British Orissa and Princely Orissa. Further, British Orissa was apportioned to different administrative units. The southern part was placed in Madras Presidency, the coastal tract and the adjoining areas in Bengal Presidency and the western part comprising the Sambalpur region was first placed in Chhotanagpur and then under the Central Provinces (CP). Princely Orissa comprised as many as 26 smaller principalities. The territorial dismemberment of Oriya land fragmented the Oriyas culturally and turned them into insignificant cultural minorities vis-à-vis the dominant Bengalis, Telugus and Hindi speakers in Bengal, Madras and C.P respectively. Because of their longer association with the British, the Bengalis in Bengal Presidency enjoyed a pre-eminent position in matters of education, employment and administration. Obviously, therefore, the officials posted to the Orissa division of Bengal Presidency turned out to be Bengali migrants who in turn occupied all important positions in administration, law, teaching and clerical services (Bailey, 1959). In the same way, in Madras and CP the Oriyas were economically dominated by the Telugus and Hindi-speakers respectively. Initially, the Oriyas reacted to their inferior socio-economic position in every province they were appended to. But finally when the outsiders posed serious threats to Oriya language and culture, signs of nationalistic unity began to appear among the Oriyas. The cultural threat largely came from the Bengali chauvinists who tried hard to suppress Oriya language by denying its independent status and by urging the government to introduce Bangla as the medium of instruction and administration in the part of Orissa placed under Bengal. This was followed by replacement of Oriya by Hindi language in CP. Similar plans were also made to replace Oriya by Telugu in Madras. Under the British thus the Oriyas faced both material and cultural deprivation.

To save their language from extinction and to preserve Oriya identity in British India, the articulate Oriya leadership launched a language agitation in the form of "save Oriya campaign" which eventually crystallised into a well-organised national movement under the banner of Utkal Union Conference (UUC), the first Oriya national organisation (Mohanty, 1982). The UUC vigorously pressed for a united Orissa. At first UUC leadership favoured unification of Oriya areas under a single administration. But the perceived danger involved in maintaining cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis any 'alien' nationality goaded them to call for constitution of separate Oriya province. The culmination of this aspiration came in 1936 when a separate

Orissa province comprising six British-administered Oriya districts was formed on linguistic basis. The province, however, did not comprise princely Orissa. This part of Oriya homeland was integrated with Orissa province following the spread of national consciousness to the princely areas. There was no apparent external threat to Oriya language and culture in Princely Orissa. Here nationalism resulted because of extreme economic exploitation and political oppression caused by the feudal rulers. Nonetheless, there was an anticipated fear of losing Oriya identity had these princely areas been integrated with any non-Oriya province. Subsequently, 24 Oriya princely states were merged with Orissa province in 1947-48 following the principles of linguistic unity, geographical contiguity and cultural homogeneity (Patra 1979). The Oriya experience brings out some serious sociological implications of nationalism in multi-national context. It points out that when a nation/nationality is artificially divided and assigned to different administrative units, the national sentiment may crystallise into nationalism. This will aggravate if the administrative arrangement leads to economic exploitation and cultural stigmatisation of the victim-nationals.

From the Oriya point of view both the British and the Bengalis were perceived as enemies. But in this perception while the British were a common enemy at the all-India level, cooperation with the rest of the Indian nationalities was called for giving birth to political nationalism. On the other hand, the Bengalis were viewed as the internal colonisers sapping the vitality of Oriya nationalism. In this context cultural nationalism crystallised in the Oriya-speaking land. In the case of Orissa, the two nationalisms proceeded simultaneously calling for selective cooperation with British in the context of Oriya nationalism and necessary cooperation with Bengalis in the context of Indian nationalism. The Oriya example further clarified that the disjuncture between the cultural boundary of nationality and administrative boundary may lead to nationalistic mobilisation by a deprived nationality. Admittedly this mismatch persisted in India after independence and it continues to exist even today. Little wonder, then, that regional movements demanding provincial states continue to emerge in India.

After independence the biggest challenge before the Indian government was integration of princely states with the Union of India. Sardar Patel with his astute statesmanship made this task possible. But after integration the political map of India retained several bigger multi-lingual units such as the provinces of Bombay, Madras, Punjab, Assam and a few bigger princely states such as Hyderabad, Mysore, PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab States

Union) etc. It may be noted that the British through various constitutional measures had visualised India as a union of autonomous provinces. Independent India inherited the same political vision and hence cultural nationalism seeking provincial units proliferated in the post-independent period.

With arrival of freedom the political climate in India has changed. The establishment of a federal polity, introduction of parliamentary democracy and the thrust on constitutionalism not only laid the foundations of a new political era but also contributed immensely to strengthening the forces of cultural pluralism. The Indian constitution in fact legitimised cultural pluralism by enlisting 14 major languages in the Eighth schedule under Article 344 (1) and 351. Subsequently, Sindhi in 1967, Manipuri, Konkani and Nepali in 1992 and Maithili, Bodo, Santhali and Dogri in 2003 were added to the schedule thereby increasing the number of languages to 22. In the changed atmosphere thus people increasingly became conscious of their primordial-cultural identity.

The struggle for a separate Telugu province was the first leading example of cultural nationalism in independent India. Telugu nationalism had its origin in the colonial period. The Telugus mainly protested against the economic and political domination by the Tamils in the erstwhile composite Madras province. Finally the Telugu national struggle culminated in the formation of Andhra state in 1953 (Rao 1973). The formation of Andhra state, however, opened the floodgates of regional nationalist aspirations. The situation went to such an alarming height that the liberal-democratic leadership of India had to accept linguistic-cultural homogeneity as the basis of restructuring the provincial map of the Indian Union (Ambedkar 1955). The Indian leadership accommodated people's demand primarily within the framework of Indian constitution. The significant step in this direction was taken by setting up the States Reorganisation Commission (SRC) in 1953. The SRC in its report of 1955 recommended the central government for 16 states and 3 union territories (SRC 1955). With regard to reorganisation, the SRC broadly followed four major principles: (a) preservation and strengthening the unity and integrity of India; (b) linguistic and cultural homogeneity; (c) financial, administrative and economic considerations; and (d) successful working of the national plan (*ibid*). But finally India was reorganised into 14 states and 6 union territories on the basis of the States Reorganisation Act of 1956.

The reorganisation of 1956 was popularly referred to as linguistic reorganisation. It is true that the SRC largely followed the linguistic principle

for states reorganisation and did not recommend for creation of any state on the basis of tribe and religion. But on a closer look one finds that the 1956 reorganisation created only some linguistic provinces such as Kerala, Karnataka and Tamilnadu, while some states like Orissa, Bihar, Bengal etc. preceded reorganisation; and in some other instances the princely states having linguistic affinity and geographical contiguity were merged with an erstwhile province such as Andhra. It may further be noted that the major Hindi-speaking North Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan were created following historical and geopolitical considerations.

Again, going by the linguistic principle the entire Hindi-speaking region should have been constituted into either a single state or split up into many smaller states based on the distribution pattern of speech communities such as Maithili, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Bundelkhandi etc. in the Hindi belt. Even, the administrative viability principle was not met in case of the bigger states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Madhya Pradesh. The retention of the two major bilingual states of Bombay and Punjab and the multilingual state of Assam further nullified the linguistic principle. Hence, the goal of ensuring co-terminality between administrative unit and linguistic group was not satisfactorily met.

Further, the 1956 reorganisation was carried out on the basis of some constitutionally recognised major languages. In the multi-lingual set-up of India as many as 1652 languages/mother tongues are spoken. Out of these 1549 are native to India. But that does not mean as many states should be created for as many languages spoken in India. Nevertheless, the people with a distinct language, sizeable strength and a specific homeland stand a better chance for having a separate province.

Besides, the identification of a constitutionally recognised language with a particular state has converted many languages into unimportant languages. Also numerous tribal languages are left outside the scope of the constitution even though they are spoken by a fairly large number of people. Hence, the race for inclusion of one's language in the Eighth Schedule to the Indian constitution escalated after reorganisation. In a sense, the scheme of reorganisation mainly benefited the bigger and/or mainstream nationalities; the smaller and peripheral nationalities by and large continued to remain in a state of domination-deprivation within a multi-cultural administrative unit. Thus the States Reorganisation Act of 1956 has created as many problems

as it probably solved.

As noted above, at the time of reorganisation, Bombay and Punjab were kept as bilingual provinces regardless of people's demand to bifurcate them. The discontented Marathi people launched the Samyukta Maharashtra movement in protest against the decision (Despande, 1983). Consequently, as popular unrest rose to soaring heights Bombay was bifurcated in 1960 and the provinces of Maharashtra and Gujarat were established to accommodate both Marathi and Gujarati national sentiments.

It follows that the reorganisation of 1956 and later the creation of Maharashtra and Gujarat in 1960 have brought into focus a crucial dimension of Indian polity, that is, legitimisation of cultural nationalism and the role of language in creation of provinces. However, with passage of time the central government has accepted some other bases of provincial reorganisation such as tribe, region and to some extent religion (e.g. religious-cum-linguistic identity, religious-cum-tribal identity).

As noted earlier, tribal identity provides a viable basis of nationality formation in India. Tribal people constitute nearly 8% of India's population and as far as spatial distribution is concerned they form overwhelming majority in some pockets. The greatest concentration of tribal people is seen in Central and Northeast India. It is generally assumed that language-based cultural nationalism is absent among Indian tribes. Not only a large number of tribes in India are too small to constitute self-sustaining units, but some of them are multi-lingual too. Probably, this is the reason why the SRC did not recommend for creation of any state on the basis of tribal language. For example, the SRC rejected the Jharkhand demand on the ground that the region lacked common culture and language.

But in some instances in India several tribes have been able to define their nationality both in terms of their language and tribal identity. For example, the Santhalis in central India, more often than not, define their nationality in terms of a distinct Santhali language in addition to their tribal identity. The Santhali language is not only spoken by more than 3 million people, but also possesses its own script called 'Ol chiki' (Mohapatra 1986). Like the Santhalis, the Mizos, Khasis, Garos etc. have defined their nationality in terms of distinct language and tribal identity. Importantly, Khasi, Garo and Mizo languages are used as mediums of instruction in school in their respective regions.

But, by and large, articulation of tribal nationalism in India is based on common tribal identity, common culture and common territorial bonds (Singh 1984). Jharkhand nationalism, for example, has developed on the basis of a common tribal identity comprising a group of disparate tribes such as Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Ho, etc. Ghose and Sengupta (1982) observed that a nascent *lingua-franca*, common cultural traits and common tribal identity serve as the basis of Jharkhandi nationalism. Although, several languages such as Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Kurukh etc. are spoken in Jharkhand region, yet 'Sadri' is considered as the *lingua-franca* by both tribal and non-tribal people inhabiting the region (Keshari 1982). In the case of the diverse Naga tribes, nationalism is articulated not on the basis of a distinct language, but on the basis of a common Naga identity, a Naga 'home land' and a spoken link language called Nagamese (Mishra 1978). In Arunachal Pradesh, tribal nationalism is expressed in terms of common territory, tribal identity and of course the link language (i.e., Hindi or Assamese). In the Chhattisgarh region cultural nationalism developed in terms of tribal identity, economic backwardness, dialectal variation and common historical experience.

In the North-East India, cultural nationalism among the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia tribes emerged in protest against the language policy of Assam and the imminent danger of Assamese cultural domination. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference, which was formed to protect the interest of the hill tribes, opposed the introduction of Assam State Language Bill of 1960 and demanded to form a separate hill province comprising Khasi, Garo and Jaintia tribes.

In fact, demands for creating provinces based on tribal identity were made in India ever since independence. Consequently, Manipur, Meghalaya, Himachal, Mizoram, Arunachal have been formed between 1960 and 1986 to accommodate tribal national sentiments. Recently, in 2000, three more states, viz., Uttaranchal, Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand, which were carved out by reorganising the former states of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. In formation of these three states the official Hindi language has served as the factor of unity.

Tribal nationalism in India, barring a few, tends to accept the idea of self rule within the provisions of provincial autonomy. But the Nagas, Mizos and some Manipur tribes have developed secessionist orientation. The Mizo National Front under Laldenga's leadership clamoured for an independent Mizo State. But later the trajectory of Mizo nationalism changed from

secessionism to autonomy as Mizo leadership accepted the Indian constitution and preferred to exist as a cultural nationality in India. Subsequently Mizoram was granted statehood in 1986. But the Nagas so far have not been able to reconcile with the Indian identity and the Indian nation-state. The Naga national consciousness still persists with the concept of an independent Naga nation and state.

In addition, some communities such as the Gorkhas, Bodos, Garos, Karbis, Rabhas, Kukis and Reangs still persist with their quest for regional-national identity and homeland. Ever since 1980s the Gorkha National Liberation Front is struggling for a separate province for the Gorkha-Nepali nationality located in the northern hill district (especially in Darjeeling) of West Bengal (Subba, 1992). Similarly, the militant Bodos and the Karbis are fighting with the mainstream Assamese nationality for carving out a provincial homeland for their respective tribes. The demand for a separate Garo state in Meghalaya and the Reang separatism in Mizoram are some other instances of tribal nationalism for preservation of regional-national identity.

The case of Assamese cultural nationalism needs special mention here. In Assam nationalism emerged in the context of anti-Bengali and anti-foreigner struggle. In fact, the Assamese national consciousness was not directed at achieving any separate province; it was rather aimed at protecting Assamese nationality from the imminent danger posed by the Bengali migrants in the initial stages and the illegal foreign infiltrators in the later period. In the initial stage Assamese nationalism was more cultural in orientation, but in later days it turned more economic in orientation.

After the formation of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Arunachal Pradesh, the boundaries of Assam shrunk to the Assamese-dominated Brahmaputra valley and the Bengali-dominated Surma or Barak valley. Like the Oriyas, the Assamese too faced both cultural and material deprivation because of Bengali domination. Anti-Bengali agitation broke out in Assam because the Bengalis, particularly in the Barak valley, offered stiff resistance when Assamese was declared as the official language in 1960 and as medium of instruction in 1972. The Assamese perceived the Bengali resistance as a threat to Assamiya national identity and culture. In the 1980s Assamese nationalism largely centred on nativism, i.e., economic deprivation of the native Assamese by the outsiders, particularly the illegal Bengali infiltrators (Guha 1982; Das 1983). Interestingly, Assamese nationalism turned

secessionist with the rise of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA). The ULFA raised the slogan "Assam for Assamese" and thinks in terms of a sovereign Assam state.

Like language, religion also plays an important role in the growth of nationalism. Some scholars, however, dismiss religion as a basis of nationality formation because there is no necessary linkage between religion and territory (Oommen 1986). Moreover, a particular religion may comprise people belonging to diverse linguistic affiliations. Also, a particular speech community may include people professing different faiths. Even, people having both religious and linguistic unities may differ on the grounds of geography, history, culture and political ideologies.

There is no denying the fact that secularism is the hallmark of India's polity and society. Given the secular fabric, the central leadership in India does not entertain regional nationalistic aspiration based on religion. Nevertheless, instances of cultural nationalism using religious elements are available in India. For example, the Sikh-Punjabi nationalism, which led to the formation of Punjab state in 1966, very gingerly used religious symbols in defining the identity of Punjabi nationality. Pre-partition Punjab was a multi-lingual and multi-religious province. After partition, the Indian part of Punjab comprised two major linguistic groups; the Punjabis and the Hindi-speaking people. Along religious line, the Punjabis are further divided into Sikhs and Hindus. The Sikh-Punjabis who largely concentrated in the north-west part of erstwhile Punjab province differentiated themselves from the Hindus and on that basis demanded a Sikh state. The Akali Dal, which spearheaded the movement, exclusively used three prominent symbols to define Sikh national identity: (a) historical symbols drawn from the glorious Sikh kingdom; (b) religious symbols, i.e., the 'five ks' (*Kesh*, *Kachha*, *Kangi*, *Karha* and *Kirpan*); and (c) linguistic symbols, i.e., Gurumukhi-Punjabi language (Brass 1974). But as the central government did not consider the demand purely on religious basis, the Sikh leadership changed their stand and demanded a Punjabi Suba on the secular basis of Punjabi language (Nayyar 1969). In granting Punjabi Suba, however, linguistic-cum-religious identity was acknowledged to some extent. The supporters of the Khalistan movement did not accept this limited version of Sikh homeland; they strongly clamoured for a sovereign Sikh state.

Religious element was present in Tamil nationalism also. The pro-Dravidian Tamil nationalism emerged by contrasting itself with Aryan

(Brahminical) brand of Hinduism and the non-Dravidian Hindi language and culture. The Tamil leaders systematically used these religious, cultural and linguistic symbols to define Tamil national boundary as against the North (Hardgrave 1965; Barnett 1976). The national movements of various North-East states were also laced with religious overtones. They define their national identity in both tribal and Christian terms. The movement for independent Kashmir is yet another notable example of religion-based nationalism. Despite the fact that Jammu and Kashmir comprises the Muslim dominated Kashmir valley, the Hindu majority Jammu region and the Buddhist dominated Ladakh region, the Muslim separatists identify the whole state with the Muslims only. In recent times the trifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir has been raised by several quarters. As per this argument the state should be reorganised to form three separate provinces: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. But if this scheme is implemented the proposed new states will surely be based on the factors of language, religion and ethnicity.

The recent demand for a separate Koshal state in western Orissa brings into limelight another variety of cultural nationalism. In this case, despite the linguistic unity, nationalism crystallises due to tensions and conflict resulting from regional developmental disparities. As previously mentioned, the state of Orissa came into being following the rise of Oriya nationalism. But the state that emerged finally contains two distinct regional units, viz., coastal belt and western region, which experienced differential rate of socio-economic development and political mobility. These two regions also differ in terms of geographical, historical and socio-cultural features. Basically, the western region, which previously formed a part of princely Orissa, experienced relatively low level of development and continues to lag behind the coastal districts in matters of education, employment and occupation, irrigation, agricultural development, transport and communication, rate of urbanisation, etc. In political sphere also the western region lags behind the coastal belt. Given these wide-range disparities and political inequality, regional discontent and disaffection began to grow in the relatively backward western region of Orissa in spite of the overarching Oriya identity.

This regional tension in recent times not only weakened the integrative forces of Oriya nationalism but also caused to dissipate the extent of Oriya feeling among a section of people in the western region. This section now sees regional separatism in clear nationalistic terms. It emphasises that the

people of western Orissa belong to a separate Koshali nationality, which is different from the mainstream Oriya nationality. The lead role in articulating this concept of Koshali nationality is played by the Khosal party and "Khoshal Sammilani" formed by this section. They used selective historical, linguistic and cultural symbols to define the Koshali national boundary. It is maintained that western Orissa constituted the great Koshal kingdom in ancient and medieval times; and the people of the region speak Koshali (Sambalpuri) language which can be distinguished from the standard Oriya speech. Also, leading cultural organizations like "Sambalpur Lekhak Sangh" and "Koshal Bhasa Sahitya Parisad" made serious efforts to develop literary tradition in Koshali language. Besides, the Koshali culture, which reflects a synthesis of tribal and Aryan elements, is highlighted to differentiate the western region from the rest of Orissa. Going by this logic, the protagonists of "Koshali nationalism" claim that the existence of a separate Koshali nationality implies the right to self-determination in cultural and political terms within the framework of the Indian union. Hence, they urged the central government to create a new Koshal state on the basis of the distinct Koshali language and culture (Koshal Samilani Memorandum 1993). The projection of regional articulation as a national movement under the banner of "Koshali nationalism" seemed to have come for two reasons: (a) practical advantages involved in defining collective identity in linguistic-cultural terms; and (b) linguistic identity and homeland are the chief bases of formation of provinces in India.

The articulation of Koshali nationalism shows that within a linguistically homogenous province developmental disparities between regions may lead to crystallisation of nationalism in the less developed region. The other two glaring examples in this variety of nationalism are the demand for separate statehood for the backward regions of Telangana and Vidarbha in Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra respectively. The people of a deprived region in such a situation attempt to reconstruct their identity in more objective cultural-linguistic terms. Once that happens a regional consciousness turns into a national consciousness. In India cultural nationalism of the mainstream Hindus also operates overtly or covertly. The ideology of "Hindutva" and the concept of "Hindu Rastra" are articulations of Hindu cultural nationalism.

The appraisal of the Indian situation thus clearly reveals that language, culture, tribe and somewhat religion have been institutionalised as the crucial bases of cultural nationalism and hence granting of statehood. Given this socio-political reality, the drive to maintain cultural boundary within a provincial unit anchored to homeland is but natural. It may be recalled that in 1956 the

political map of India comprised only 14 states and 6 union territories. But by the end of 2000 the number of states went up to 28. Thus between 1956 and 2000 the number of states has doubled and in the process as many as 14 states, apart from the seven union territories, are created within a little over five decades of independence. Again, looking at the present day mobilisations it seems that restructuring the provincial map of the Indian Union is far from over. The demands for creation of such provincial states as Bodoland, Gorkhaland, Garoland, Rabhaland, Vindhyaachal, Bundelkhand, Harit Pradesh, Vidarbha, Telangana etc. and the recent demand for trifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir bear testimony to this fact.

Most of these demands continue to persist because of the following reasons: (a) existence of the dissonance between administrative unit and cultural community; (b) urge to become recognisable entity; and above all (c) the socio-economic advantages involved in retaining identity and autonomy. The analysis of Indian situation further shows that cultural nationalism may assume a variety of forms such as irrendist, autonomist, separatist and secessionist. The irrendist type aims at unifying the vivisected territories of a nationality under a provincial roof. The autonomist and separatist types also desire to protect cultural nationality in a provincial framework. But the secessionist type seeks to obtain a sovereign state and in that case it turns into a political nationalism.

III

In this paper it is basically argued that people in multi-national countries invariably seek to express their national identity at two levels: political/civil and cultural. The former is meant for their state/country as a whole and the latter is reserved for their respective regional national identity. Given this different contextualisation of national identity, the interpretation of nationalism as a state-seeking political movement or a form of loyalty to the nation-state (as in the case of most part of Europe) does not hold good in multi-national situation such as India. In this context, nationalism, besides being viewed in nation-state sense, also implies a consciousness for preservation of regional national identity within a denoted homeland.

As a matter of fact, three key variables such as: a) the concept of national identity; b) the potentiality for self-rule and; c) the co-terminality between culture and polity are important in the understanding of nationalism. Significantly, the concept of national identity, which embodies a collective identity, can be expressed either in sovereign political or in specific cultural

terms. The consolidation of several multi-national states substantiates this point beyond doubt. The potentiality for self-rule can also be realised in independent or autonomous terms. Similarly, coterminality between culture and polity can be obtained in independent or autonomous terms. In other words, nationalism may be directed at a culture-congruent sovereign state or culture-congruent provincial state. Hence, the bottom line is two varieties of nationalism can be distinguished in multi-national context: political nationalism and cultural nationalism. While political nationalism is invariably associated with sovereignty, cultural nationalisms mostly seek to survive within the framework of autonomy inside a common sovereign polity. It follows that nationalism can be understood without sovereignty, inasmuch as cultural nation can exist without being state endowed.

In India nationalism acquired a sovereign-political connotation at the macro-national level and a primordial-cultural form at the regional national level. Unlike Europe, in India many distinct nationalities did not tend to acquire their own states but preferred to retain their distinct cultural identity under a sovereign federal polity. It is this natural urge to retain cultural identity which gives rise to cultural nationalism in India. Importantly, cultural nationalism in India operates mostly within the cultural framework of national identity and political framework of autonomy anchored to homeland.

In India the subjection of people to a common sovereign democratic state has not destroyed their cultural boundaries altogether. Because, adherence to the broader Indian identity is not welcomed by the people at the cost of dismantling their own cultural identities and their motivation for self-rule. Undoubtedly, modernisation left an indelible impact on the pre-modern ascriptive values and institutions in India, but the anticipated "displacement syndrome" did not occur as was visualised. The pace of modernisation does not even curtail the tempo of "quest for identity" calling for separate politico-administrative unit. Further, instead of being completely neutralised the cultural ties are getting revitalised and legitimised on a wider scale under the influence of modernisation, secularism and democracy. For one thing, in modern times people all over India are increasingly getting conscious of the instrumental advantages involved in making language, tribe, region, religion etc. as viable bases of collective self-definition. The burgeoning influence of globalisation in all its ramifications—economic, political and cultural—fails to undermine this consciousness of the people.

In the multi-national countries such as India democracy is just not seen as an institution of voting or a form of government. It is more associated

with the systems of power sharing, decentralisation, and of course the right to self-determination. In fact democracy in countries like India plays a crucial role in shaping the politics of identity and autonomy. Democracy sustains rather than weakens regional national identity. In these countries democracy, culture and power are intertwined as far as identity politics and dynamics of socio-political mobilisations for autonomy are concerned.

By and large, in India all forms of cultural nationalisms emerge in the context of equality and identity. In some cases equality is demanded on the basis of a pre-existing cultural identity; while in some other cases a search for cultural identity is made for equality. But in either case, cultural nationalism results from a sense of cultural deprivation and domination of one nationality by another. As noted earlier, cultural nationalism in India basically uses the autonomy card and hence they do not pose any serious threat to the overarching civil-political nationhood of India. The civil-political Indian national identity can harmoniously co-exist with multiple regional cultural-national identities.

It can therefore be argued that regional cultural nationalism in India is an empirical reality and it cannot be wished away at the altar of the all-India political nationalism. Hence there is enough reason for promoting regional cultural identities in India rather than curbing them.

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Book Reviews

Agrarian Structures and Land Reforms in Assam by M. N. Karna, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong and Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2004, 103p, Rs. 250/-.

A brief review of peasant movements in India from 1860 to 1950 clearly reflects the changing trend of agrarian structures and land tenure/land reforms in the country. It identifies the changing features of Indian agrarian societies, which show more of discontinuity than continuity.

Initially, the East India Company's trade with India was insignificant. The decisive moment came in 1765, when the financial sovereignty over Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar went to the hands of the Company with the concession for levying taxes in exchange for a sum of Rs. 2.6 million per annum. In 1793, Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement brought a final regulation on the procedure for levying taxes, which led to decisive changes in land tenure. The British did all this as if the land belonged to the state and was thus at their disposal.

The objective of the British was to establish their commercial interests firmly in India. Since the textile industry played an important role in the beginning of industrialization in England, very large amounts of cheap products manufactured by mechanical looms were exported to India and this soon led to a collapse of her home textile industry. A large number of weavers became unemployed. In order to secure a basis for existence, they migrated to rural areas and tried to lease land for cultivation. The monopoly over the means of livelihood soon shifted to the hands of *zamindars* who were able to extort more and more taxes as the demand for land increased. This led to peasant indebtedness and even loss of their occupancy and usufructory rights. This was compounded by rise in prices of agricultural produce between 1860 and 1950. The landlords asserted their proprietary rights by evicting tenants while the latter claimed, and were occasionally granted occupancy rights. Over the century, the peasants' ability to resist landlords increased and landlordism stood considerably weakened by the end of British rule.

Consequences of the changes in the land tenure brought about by the Permanent Settlement undermined the rural stability. More and more cultivators became indebted, lost their occupancy rights, and dropped in status

to tenants-at-will or agricultural labourers. On the other hand, the wealth of *zamindars* increased on account of the income they earned from the difference between the amount of taxes and the rentals, increase in cultivated areas, money lending, and expropriation of debtors. In the course of time, the *zamindari* areas were characterized by marked difference in wealth, power, and prospects in life between the two distinct rural classes.

More liberal *ryotwari* system was introduced in Madras, Bombay, and Assam. Under this system, the government claimed property rights to all of the land and allotted the same to cultivators with the proviso that they paid taxes. They could use, sell, mortgage, bequeath, and lease the land as long as they paid taxes. Otherwise, they were evicted. This direct tax relation between the government and the cultivators was meant to prevent sub tax collectors. It sought to increase purchasing power, and, widen the market for British products in rural India. Taxes were pre-determined and fixed in a temporary settlement for a period of thirty years. It was revised and the tenure was extended.

Communal rights to land were common in North and North-West India. This system ideally fitted with the *Mahalwari* system. Tax was imposed on the village community, which distributed the same among the cultivators. Everyone was liable for the others' arrears. A village inhabitant - the *lambardar* - collected the tax and remitted it to the state. Tax assessment was also revised at intervals.

Over a period of time the *ryotwari* region was no longer a self-cultivator area. More than one third of the land was leased and in many districts more than two thirds. Indeed, it was not possible to transfer land to the people who were not from the locality, but the result was that landed property became concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy people, whereas the others lost their rights. A constantly increasing number of people became landless. While in the middle of the nineteenth century there were no landless persons, in 1931 and 1945, respectively 33 and 70 million landless labourers were registered. Others succeeded in renting some land, but on less favourable terms. Share tenancy increased greatly.

After Independence, economic situation in rural India changed very differently. A large part of the population remained poor and landless. A complicated relationship between landlords, cultivators, and landless emerged based on mutual rights and obligations.

Assam is a miniature replica of the Indian subcontinent. It has noticeable

diversities and variations in demographic and economic characteristics. It has a wide range of human responses to natural-ecological settings and historical compulsions. Within the confines of this region, a variety of people with diverse ethnic origins, representing different racial strands, speaking different languages and professing diverse religions have migrated and settled. The modes of living of the people, their lifestyles, and material basis of culture and consumption behaviours are diverse.

There are communities in the valleys whose agricultural calendar keeps them busy most of the year while those in the hills and mountains raise a single *jhum* crop. Then there are communities who are partly agrarian and partly dependent on forest produce. In the river valleys of the region, particularly the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, the peasant communities live in a state of dynamic equilibrium with nature and are surrounded on all sides by tribal groups. The varied ecological-environmental settings in the region encourage a variety of agricultural practices and cropping patterns to emerge. The natural factors also influence the human choices in two crucial areas—land and its quality and water and its availability. These greatly influenced their responses and settlements.

A littoral and East Indian model of the Asiatic monsoon regime with dominant wet conditions prevail over a longer duration in the year, and demand prolonged spell of work in the fields in North-East India. In this wet region paddy has emerged as the most dominant crop. The diversities in the crop ecology and the resultant cropping pattern engendered differences in the social division of labour, the absorption of women in the agricultural labour force, in the quantum of agricultural work and leisure available to the agrarian communities. Female labour force participation rates varied strikingly between the hill-mountain and plains-valley communities.

In an area like Assam, with a variegated politico-administrative set-up, there are significant inter-regional differences in the landownership patterns and tenurial relations. In fact, the British policy, like in the rest of the country, was so designed as to accommodate multiple forms of landownership in the hills, mountains and plains regions, depending on agro-climatology, social custom and local tradition. These types of landownership evolved in the course of social history of the various peoples within the niches provided by their respective ecology.

It is in this background that the book under review assumes significance. This book is an outcome of a series of three lectures by Professor Karna

delivered as Professor H.K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures at Dibrugarh University, Assam. It is an attempt to study agrarian structure and land reforms on all India level. Karna raises the issues of peasant mobilisation, policy decisions and their implementation in a broad temporal framework. He has also traced the peasant uprisings such as Phulaguri uprising and No-Rent agitation. He has been successful in providing wider canvas on which land reforms in India can be better understood.

He provides a broad assessment of the land reforms adopted since Independence. With the abolition of intermediary interests the ownership of land is broader based and the erstwhile superior tenants acquired a higher social status.

Karna argues that while abolition of intermediaries brought about a measure of uniformity in the agrarian system of Assam, tenancy reforms provided a new confidence to the disgruntled tenants. He states that a preponderance of tenants with virtually no ownership rights on land characterises the Assamese agrarian structure. He adds that this has been further complicated by the religio-feudal establishments like *Satras* and *Maths*.

Under the prevailing socio-economic condition in the country no tangible progress can be expected in the field of land reforms. Wherever effective mobilisation of beneficiaries has taken place the result has been positive. The beneficiaries of land reforms, especially sharecroppers and landless labourers, are crippled by social and economic disadvantages. By tradition they are inarticulate, passive and unorganised. They do not constitute a homogenous social and economic category. Hence, a deliberate attempt at mobilisation is needed to generate an appropriate political and administrative climate for implementation of land reform measures. Such a change leads to better implementation of agrarian laws.

Those who believe in a liberal market-oriented path of development may come to accept the necessity of enforcing any package of land reform measures to foster sustainable agricultural growth, a pre-condition for rapid industrialisation and steady economic development. Undoubtedly an outmoded agrarian structure characterised by absentee ownership, widespread tenancies, persisting religio-feudal land control, and scattered holdings is a grave impediment to the optimum utilisation of land and water and to the adoption of improved technology and modern farming practices in the otherwise agriculturally well-endowed plains districts of Assam. Thus, the

need of the hour is to complete the unfinished task of reforms, which should include abolition of absentee landownership, identification and protection of *adhiars* (sharecroppers) effective and efficient enforcement of ceiling laws, speedy distribution of acquired surplus land, and consolidation of holdings and provision of supporting facilities to enforce minimum standards of cultivation. If these steps are integrated with development programmes related to surface irrigation and ground water, soil conservation, social forestry and such other activities, Assam should be able to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty and backwardness.

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The Great Earthquake of 1897 in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills translated by Basil Moris, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong, 2003, pp.40 + xiii, Price : Rs. 95.00 (SB), US\$3.

Like any other eyewitness account of an event of importance, this one by the Reverend Robert Evans, who was a missionary to the Mission Field in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills between 1878 and 1901, makes interesting and fascinating reading, as indeed anything about the Great Earthquake of 1897 is. With the epicentre in the Shillong Plateau, and with a magnitude of 8.5, a report of the Meteorological Department says: "It is one of the major earthquakes in the seismic history of the world. Lasted about 2.5 minutes and completely ruined an area of 150,000 square miles and was felt over an area of one and three quarter of a million square miles. Caused landslides, fissures, vents and disrupted normal communication line. It was followed by a large number of after-shocks. The epicentre tract was within a cot-shaped area covering the entire Shillong Plateau". The severest shock might not have lasted for less than one minute but the devastation was complete.

To the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, originally named the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, the event was of particular significance as the areas most severely affected were those within the Sohra (Cherrapunji) area, where the Mission had established the first church and schools. One may understand the concern that the 'Mother Church' must have felt when news of the devastation reached England. The Reverend Dr. John Roberts,

whose name will always be linked with the development of Khasi literature, was in his country at that time. He had, in fact, just been nominated Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Mission of Wales. The scene of devastation that they saw on their return, with most familiar landmarks beyond recognition, and roads and paths on which they had often travelled drastically altered, was almost beyond belief. The Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills at that time, Mr. J. C. Arbuthnot, whose report to the Government of India was perhaps the most detailed and graphic of the reports submitted, bears out the fact that no comparable natural disaster has ever taken place, perhaps for centuries! This is what he had to say: "In my tour of the district, I have been much struck by the way in which the ancient Khasi monoliths, often of immense size, the antiquity of which unknown, have been levelled with the ground and in many cases snapped off two, three and four feet from the base."

Eyewitness accounts agree that during the two minutes or so when the full force of the earthquake was felt it was impossible for anyone to remain standing. It was said that two women cyclists who were riding past the old All Saint's Cathedral fell down and from where they lay, they saw the church building collapse. The Chief Commissioner of Assam and his wife, who were preparing to go for a ride, had a narrow escape when their residence, the Government House, met a similar fate within minutes of their leaving the porch!

Although Shillong was well within the area most affected, it got off comparatively lightly, with only 23 deaths including Mr. McCabe, the Inspector General of Police, who was buried under the debris of his bungalow on the near side of the Umkhrah River opposite the Polo Ground. It is worth mentioning that the memorial that was erected on the spot has unfortunately been built over by unauthorised constructions during the past few years, which is a stark reminder to the state government to take more interest in what happens in the city than what it has been doing, in order that historical sites are not obliterated as has been done in this and other cases.

By contrast, it was the area closer to Sohra that was more grievously affected, the reason being in the nature of the topography, with steep slopes and cliffs everywhere. The village of Laitiam in the deep valley below the Mawsmat falls accounted for 86 deaths, all lost when the overhanging cliff broke off to overwhelm the habitations below. With these casualties, the Sohra Syiemship lost a total of 237 lives. The Khyrim Syiemship lost 146 lives mainly in the villages on its southern slopes.

Literally, earth shaking events such as this one do arouse strong reaction, and impressions upon those who experienced them. All of them suggest that the earthquake was a form of devil. Retribution for the wickedness of men, which at this point of time may conflict with the belief held by many, in a merciful, forgiving God. Who would extend His compassion not only to His noblest creation, Man, but even to animals, as may be seen in the Book of the Prophet Jonah (Ch.4:13).

Over the next few decades, however, there would be many eyewitness accounts left to various people in the form of newspaper articles, or even in poems published by individual authors, as by the Reverend Morkha Joseph, many of which bring to mind the destruction that overwhelmed places like Shella, the wealthiest village in the Khasi Hills at the time, but today reduced to a shadow of its original self. The once prosperous village of Shella Circle lost a total of 217 lives of which 117 were from the Shella village itself. This village, which was perhaps the most prosperous in the district at that time, with a population in 3658 in the Census of 1891 never recovered from this disaster having been reduced within minutes to a shadow of its former condition.

As one goes through Reverend Evans' account, one will appreciate that primarily, Robert Evans prepared this account for the Mission Board which would want to know how the earthquake affected the new church in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and more especially upon the believers. This account would appear to have been a vindication of the faith that God would not abandon His own in times of crises, but give them strength and ever greater faith, as one can see from the short personal experiences of local pastors and their flocks. What will impress the reader even more is the effect upon the young, who never lost their faith but carried on in the belief that was the time when they would declare how their faith had sustained them even at the worst moments of their young lives.

The account left by the Reverend Robert Evans will therefore be better appreciated if also read against the background as provided by official records.

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DECLARATION

Form IV Rule 8

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|----|--|---|--|
| 1. | Place of Publication | : | Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003 |
| 2. | Periodicity | : | Biannual |
| 3. | Printer's Name | : | Deputy Director, NEHU Publications |
| | Address | : | Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003 |
| 4. | Publisher's Name | : | Deputy Director, NEHU Publications |
| | Nationality | : | Indian |
| | Address | : | Bijni Complex, Shillong - 793003 |
| 5. | Editor's name | : | T. B. Subba |
| | Nationality | : | Indian |
| | Address | : | NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex,
Shillong 793003 |
| 6. | Name and Address
of individuals who own the
journal and partners or
share-holders holding more than
one percent of the total capital | : | North-Eastern Hill University,
Permanent Campus, Umshing,
Shillong- 793022 |

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T. B. Subba

Indexed in the Guide to Indian Periodical Literature

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