

# THE NEHU JOURNAL

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# *The NEHU Journal*

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## EDITORIAL

This volume contains six articles, one report on an environmental movement in North Sikkim, and four book reviews. Of the four book reviews, the one by Dr. Prasenjit Biswas can actually be called a review article rather than a book review. The report on North Sikkim written in the form of a travelogue by a Lepcha postgraduate student of the university is worth appreciating because it not only brings out the different voices from within her community which is engaged in the movement but also distances itself from all of them to the extent it is humanly possible to do so for a young student.

Of the six articles included in this volume the first is by Prof. C. R. Agera, who teaches philosophy at NEHU. His discourse on culture and religion, on Clifford Geertz, and on what the narratives can do is something anthropologists would be much jealous about. But I am glad that two anthropologists, Prof. P. K. Misra and Angela Rangad, have very ably demonstrated in their article the power of narratives in the context of Khasi society. These two articles complement each other and I am glad that the two could be published together.

From the two complementary discourses the journal moves on to performance of public sector banks which are expected to play a new role in the era of globalization and liberalization. Jaynal Uddin Ahmed, the author, brings out certain dichotomies in this sector on the basis of his study in Barak Valley of Assam covering the three districts of Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. In the next article, the journal moves to an issue that is important from the human rights point of view. Arun Kumar Singh, who teaches law at NEHU, deals in particular with the problems of protection of witnesses under criminal justice administration in India. He deals with various cases, constitutional provisions, special statutes like TADA and POTA in the country and compares the situation here with situations in Australia, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

The fifth and sixth articles are focussed on Meghalaya. The fifth article draws our attention to the unused potentials of tourism development in Meghalaya. The author Benjamin F. Lyngdoh also brings out the direct and indirect opportunities related to tourism sector and

the problems that this sector is facing now. In the sixth article two PhD students of Geography Department of NEHU, Shembhalang Kharmawlang and Saveyna Dkhar, bring out the legal position of various kinds of forests in West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya and the impact of the ban on tree felling imposed by the Supreme Court of India on the people of the district.

I wish all our readers a very happy reading.

**T B Subba**  
**Editor**

## Impact of Supreme Court Order on Forestry in West Khasi Hills District, Meghalaya

SHEMBHALANG KHARWANLANG AND SAVEYNA DKHAR

### Introduction

Forest is a renewable resource if properly husbanded, but it becomes a depleting non-renewable resource once the process of deforestation brings the stock and the variety below a threshold. Deforestation does not take long, while a forest takes a very long time to develop into a self contained viable ecosystem. Today there is a great awareness of problem of forests. North-east India has less forest cover than it had earlier. During the last one decade the forest cover of the region got depleted at an alarming rate. A satellite imagery survey in 1993 reported a disappearance of 635 sq. kms. of forest cover in Northeast India and the process is still continuing. Deforestation and general degradation of forests, encroachment of valuable forest land, illicit felling, interstate boundary disputes and their effect on deforestation, timber trade in the District Council areas, shifting cultivation and forest fire are some of the reasons for the continuous loss of forest cover in the region.

The increased pressure on forest by wood-based industries and unplanned and indiscriminate felling of trees for various purposes are primarily held responsible for the phenomenon. Shifting cultivation and denudation are also responsible for the destruction of forest cover. Without forest, agriculture will die as forest acts as a reservoir and pumping station. Without forest cover, there would be nothing to resist soil erosion during monsoon. Forest is necessary to maintain the balance in the agricultural system and to increase agricultural productivity.

Earth was covered with diverse natural vegetation prior to human domestication of plant species and invention of agriculture. At that time, perhaps 6 billion hectares of forest covered the earth. The development of

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agriculture and later on of industries and urbanization led to the loss of about 2 billion hectares of forest. Forest provides two kinds of products and services, which benefit human beings:

- (a) Forests supply harvestable products, which have direct use value - timber, fuelwood, fodder, etc.
- (b) Forest provides the non-market ecological services – local and global, which are crucial in giving life support to the biosphere, e.g., soil conservation, provision of habitat for bio-diversity etc.

In addition, forest has a major and vital role in enhancing the quality of environment by influencing the life support system and also is intricately interwoven with human cultures.

In recent years, there is a growing awareness of environmental problems in our country especially about the depletion of our forest resources. All segments of Indian society - peasants, tribals, pastoralists, slum-dwellers etc - have a heavy dependence on the produce of forests as sources of fuel, fodder, construction materials, timber, or raw materials for processing. Therefore, India has a biomass-based economy. The country's forest lands are today almost completely under government control, are managed by the state and governed by the rules and stipulation of the Forest Conservation Act (1980) and National Forest Policy.

### **Profile of the Study Area**

The West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya lies in the central part of the State and is situated approximately between 25°10' and 25°51'N latitude, and between 90°44' and 91°49' E longitude. The district is bounded on the North by Assam, on the East by East Khasi Hills District, on the South by Bangladesh and on the West by East Garo Hills District. It comprises an area of 5,247 sq. kms, which is 23.40 percent of the total area of the state.

The present West Khasi Hills district was created in 1976 vide Notification No. HPL.49/76/171 dated 12<sup>th</sup> October, 1976 and came into being on 28<sup>th</sup> of October 1976. Before being upgraded as a district, the area constituted a part and parcel of Khasi Hills District. In West Khasi Hills District, Mairang Subdivision was created with headquarters at Mairang vide Notification No. HPL 49/76/193 dated 8<sup>th</sup> November 1976. Nongstoin is the present capital of West Khasi Hills covering an area of about 76.00 sq. kms. The district comprises three sub-divisions, Mairang, Mawkyrwat and Sadar, and

five community and rural development blocks, Nongstoin, Mawkyrwat, Mairang, Mawshynrut, and Ranikor. There are altogether 779 inhabited villages and 20 uninhabited villages in the West Khasi Hills district. Nongstoin is the only town of the district (Census of India, 2001). The district is the biggest of the seven districts of Meghalaya. It has an area of about 5249 sq. kms. This is one of the districts where the cutting of timber for commercial purposes is prevalent. A large number of people there are working in forest related activities. Thousand of cubic metres of timber, firewood, charcoal and broomsticks are exported from the district.

With the Supreme Court's order banning the felling of trees on December 12, 1996, the District Council is losing its grip over the control and management as many forests are illegally destroyed for timber and charcoal, which is a minor forest product which is not banned but equally destructive on the forest cover.

The main concern of the article is to show the extent of forest cover in the district and to understand the impact of the 'forest ban' on unemployment and underemployment in the district and thus, the livelihood of the people. Moreover, it is interesting to discuss the alternatives provided after the timber ban. It will also be important to see if there is any loss of livelihood leading to out-migration of people from the village to the town in search of jobs. Degradation of forests will be taken into consideration in this article.

### **Database and Methodology**

Data used in this article has been collected mostly from the secondary sources, particularly from various departments of the Government of Meghalaya, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, and other government and non-governmental sources. In the district, it may be noted that the State Government had no forest land earlier and only 31 hectares of the Reserved Forests have been acquired by the State Forests Department recently. Most of the data are collected from the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council that owns and exercises jurisdiction over many forests of West Khasi Hills District. The State Directorate of Economics and Statistics was also consulted. Finally, information from various reports and journals have been collected.

Since there is a want of information regarding the forests in West Khasi Hills District, the most important data have been collected from the primary sources, which include personal field observations and interview

with people involved in forestry related activities in some selected villages and locations. After collection of data, tables and statistical calculations have been prepared for better understanding of the forest activity and its impact on the economy of the people.

### **System of Forest Management and Its Implications**

The forest in West Khasi Hills District is dominated by *Pinus kesiya*, *Betula alnoides*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Shorea robusta*, *Duabanga*, *Toona ciliate*, *Lagerstroemia parviflora*, *Tetrameles nudiflora*, *tectona grandis*, etc., but the forest management system there has a lot of anomalies. There is no scientific management of forest or proper silviculture techniques to counteract artificial regeneration programmes undertaken by the Forest Department, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council and there is maximum exploitation of the valuable forest species for commercial purpose. The set of guidelines laid down by the National Forest Policy, 1952 and 1986, form the basis and general objective for the future management of forest in West Khasi Hills. There is traditional categorization of land use pattern and with regard to the legal position the locals have access to the forest produce, excepting endangered and threatened species, under the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council's working scheme governed by Act 1958 and Rules 1960. The utilization of forest produce ranges from domestic to commercial purpose and the produce is wide and varied and includes a list of non-timber and timber species.

### **General Objectives of Forest Management in West Khasi Hill District**

Taking into consideration the basic objectives of the National Forest Policy of 1952 and also of 1988, the general objects of the management for the forests of West Khasi Hill District are as follows:

- i) To maintain the forest in a scientific manner as prescribed, so as to restore ecological balance and obtain maximum sustainable yield per unit area;
- ii) To increase substantially the forest cover in the tract through afforestation works of barren abandoned *Jhum* areas and other degraded waste land;
- iii) To protect and conserve the vegetal cover on all slopes and ranges with special emphasis on the prevention of siltation in the river beds, to check the flash floods that commonly occur on the border area;

- iv) Increasing productivity of the existing forest to meet essential needs in respect of all kind of forest produce by intensification of management and tapping of non-utilized and under-utilized potential;
- v) Meeting the requirement of fuel-wood, fodder, non-wood forest produce, small timber for rural people; and
- vi) To generate employment for the local people thereby, weaning them away from the destructive practice of *Jhum* cultivation.

**Table 1: Landuse/ Landcover in West Khasi Hills District**

Land cover/Land use	Area ( Sq. Km.)
Dense Forest	568.48
Open Forest	2239.67
Grassland	246.72
Degraded Land	852.22
Agricultural land	1301.43
Sandy Area	18.24
Water body	20.19
<b>Total</b>	<b>5247.00</b>

Source: Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Meghalaya, 2003.

From Table 1 it is clear that out of the total area in West Khasi Hills District, major portion is under the "open forest". This shows that most of the dense forests have been cleared for various forest activities, both commercial and domestic purposes, during the pre-ban period. Consequently most of the land cover has been transformed into open forest, grass land and degraded land. Large proportion of land is also under agriculture, which indicates that people are highly dependent on agriculture both for subsistence and commercial purposes. Shifting cultivation is the main agricultural practice along the hill slopes and permanent cultivation in the plains and valleys. Hence there has been encroachment on the forest at a large scale to fulfil the basic requirements of the people.

**Fig.1. Landuse/Landcover in West Khasi Hills District**

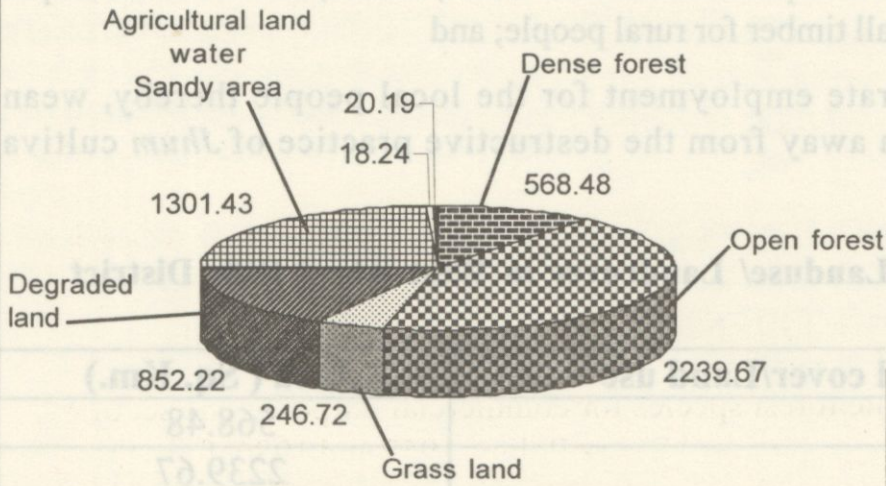
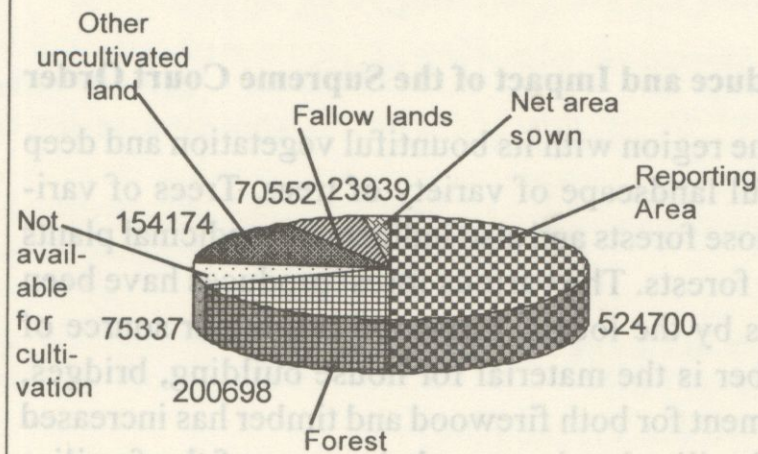


Table 2 indicates that land utilization is uneven. Out of the total reported area, forests are classified as comprising the largest area followed by other uncultivated land, land not available for cultivation and lands which have been left fallow to regain the fertility. Out of the total cropped area only half of it is under the net sown area, which shows that people in the pre-ban period were mainly engaged in forest and related activities. Hence the decline in agricultural land use.

**Fig.2. Land Utilization in West Khasi Hills District**

### Legal Position

The areas formulated under the working scheme within the jurisdiction of Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council are governed by the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forest) Act 1958 and Rules 1960 and its subsequent amendments. Within this working scheme there are various categories of forest as per the said Act, viz.,

- a) Private Forest
- b) *Law-Ri sumar*
- c) *Law Lyngdoh, Lawniam, Law Kyntang*
- d) *Law Adong and Law Shnong*
- e) Protected Forests
- f) Green Block

- g) *Raid* Forests
- h) District Council Reserved Forests
- i) Un-classed Forests

### **Utilization of Forest Produce and Impact of the Supreme Court Order**

The hilly topography of the region with its bountiful vegetation and deep terrain presents a beautiful landscape of variety of trees. Trees of various species are found in those forests and also indigenous medicinal plants are growing wild in some forests. The various forest produces have been used for various purposes by the locals. Firewood is a major source of fuel for cooking and timber is the material for house building, bridges, furniture etc. The requirement for both firewood and timber has increased today, as the number of families has increased. As more of the families living in and around the forest area are very poor and uneducated, it is difficult for them to give up their age-old practices for there are no other viable and sustainable options available. Apart from firewood collection and timber cutting, burning of timber for charcoal production has emerged as the alternative after the post ban period (12<sup>th</sup> December 1996) to earn their livelihoods.

- a) The important NTFP (Non Timber Forest Produces) in the District are thatch grass, broomstick, bamboos, timber, charcoal, firewood etc.
- b) Other Non Timber Forest produces of the district are bark, honey, mushroom, medicinal plants etc.

The area under forest is 3742 sq. kms. (State Forest Report 2003) out of the total forest area of the district (5247 sq. Km). The presence of such forest has become a wealth which the nature has bestowed graciously upon the region. The wanton destruction of forest and unscrupulous motives for commercial purposes in respect of forest products has not only depleted the forest area but also disturbed the ecological balance and the existence of flora and fauna is very much threatened. However, the ban imposed by the Supreme Court of India on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1996 has come as a boon for those hills and hillocks which had become more or less barren. They may again grow new green covers in the years to come.

The land tenure system of the district is different from others. Therefore major portion of the forest area is under the ownership and control of

the community, local bodies and private parties or individuals. As such, Forest Department has acquired only 10 percent of the total forest area of the district. This is hampering regeneration programmes because majority of the affected forests falls under private or traditional jurisdiction.

**Table 3: Statistical Statement on Forest Produces of West Khasi Hill District (Production in Quintals in the respective years)**

Beat/Range	Sal		Pine		Broomstick		Firewood		Charcoal	
	1995	2005	1995	2005	1995	2005	1995	2005	1995	2005
Aragdonga	49	21	135	67	225	181	2160	3451	214	1680
Riangdo	22	19	377	121	300	219	708	853	438	29671
Nongstoin	36	9	43581	204	9367	N.A	912	1438	265	945
Mairang	58	23	14011	127	1285	976	54733	759	180	1743
Rambrai	47	36	579	326	28	6	3872	3951	317	21456

Source: Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, 2006.

The above beats and ranges of West Khasi Hill District are the main areas where most of the forest activities are taking place. The important forest products in this region are Sal, pine, broomsticks, firewood, charcoal etc. Most of the forest products are used both for domestic and commercial purposes and traded outside the state as source of raw materials, for supporting various forest based industries, construction works etc. To fulfil this large supply of forest products most of the virgin forests in the district are subjected to large scale exploitation gradually affecting the biodiversity.

From Table 3 one can understand that the production of various forest products decreased after 1996-97 due to the imposition of the ban by Supreme Court of India in 1996. But the stock of forest products like timbers, round logs, etc was gradually disposed subsequently. The burning of charcoal, which is the main activity of the people after the timber ban, is not banned, which results in large scale deforestation. The production of charcoal is increased rapidly in 2005 in various beats or ranges such as Riangdo and Rambrai, where the production is 29,671 quintals and 21,456 quintals respectively.

**Table 4: Total Revenue Collection from West Khasi Hill District**

Year	Forest Produce (in Rupees)	Miscellaneous (in Rupees)	Total (in Rupees)
1994	72,56,250	1,05,350	73,61,500
1995	58,46,666	8,22,991	66,69,657
1996	94,83,563	4,56,234	99,39,697

Source: Land Utilisation Statistics, Khasi Hills District Council, Shillong.

Table 4 indicates that, during the three consecutive years, the revenue collection from forest produce is very high. However, during 1995, the revenue collection was slightly lower compared to the other two years because traders were blocking their stocks for profit in case rumours about the ban on timber cutting were true they could release their stocks at a higher rate. In 1996, revenue collected from forest produce was very high because at this stage of time the Supreme Court relaxed the ban thereby permitting those involved in forest allied activities to release all their stocks. Moreover, ban on timber saw the emergence of charcoal burning activities. Hence additional revenue was collected from this source.

### The Supreme Court Order

The Supreme Court's blanket ban on cutting, processing and movement of timber in the State has started hitting hard on the state's economy. Due to sudden drying up of one of the principal sources of money supply, the market has been showing increasingly sluggish trends. According to traders and merchants, the buying capacity of the people has considerably fallen as the money circulation has dipped significantly.

Wholesale traders in Shillong say that the traders from rural areas who buy merchandise from the local market are increasingly feeling the pinch. The rural *mahajans* are compelled to take huge credit from the wholesalers, who are now contemplating to deal only in cash.

In the press conference held at the Press Club, Shillong on Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> July 1997, H. S. Lyngdoh, a local member of legislative assembly from West Khasi Hill District, while appreciating the stand of Supreme Court stated that the problem was becoming acute because of the difficulties in disposal of the trees felled before the ban was imposed. His own estimate was that some million cubic feet of timber was rotting in the forests for the past six months. He said the timber trade having come to a complete stand-

still had adversely affected not only the forest owners but also the ancillary and tertiary sectors like sawmills, furniture makers, truckers, labourers and the rest of the down-stream activities. The buying capacity of the people dwindled and many were living a 'hand to mouth' condition since there was no other alternative source of livelihood and income in the rural areas of the district.

The December 1996 ban said there would be no timber felling unless the forest department made a working plan for the forested region for logging. However, it was acknowledged that charcoal was a minor forest product. The Supreme Court in its order issued on March 1997 clarified that there was no ban on charcoal production. The biggest employer in West Khasi Hill District today is not the government but a trader. More than 85 percent rural population of the district now depend on firewood or charcoal for their livelihood.

The 1996 Supreme Court Order restricting timber felling may have stopped logging but it has only created an alternative for the people to use the forest as their last resort. Studies show that the charcoal business has increased manifold ever since the said Order came into force. As compared to the pre-ban period the production of charcoal increased to a whopping 144 times than what was extracted before the ban was put in place. The effect on forests because of this extraction may be more worsening than that of timber felling. Moreover, replacement of charcoal trade to timber lumbering is highly wasteful and exploitative for a villager is able to earn just a meagre Rs. 75-100 for a bag of (35 Kg) charcoal, but this process involves burning of huge numbers of trees, irrespective of size whereas the same bag of charcoal would fetch him between 150 and 200 rupees in Shillong.

For the last ten years since the ban was enforced, people tried to find alternative means of survival. One of the few options left before the people was to return to the agricultural fields. Land was, and still is, the only resource that majority of the people could fall back on. Many view the ban as a blessing in disguise for there was hardly any people, especially the men in the fields, as they found easy job with the *malik dieng* (timber merchant) and moreover the money was good. With the implementation of the ban many young men are seen ploughing and working in the field. Besides the 'back to the land' option, many families have migrated to coal belts and lime quarries in search of alternative avenues of employment and earning. In the village Thungmarwei, located between Nongstoin and Rambrai, people have

now shifted to surface coal digging, an activity that had come up previously during the last five years. In Mawthoh and Umpiang villages, local people collect barks of trees, dry them on the open ground, pack them in jute bags and await middlemen to pick them up in bulk in trucks. The villagers are given lump sum money for each bagful of barks. They said that there was a high demand for the barks which had medicinal value as well as being used as spices. In the local market in Riangdo areas, women sell various jungle products such as leaves, roots, seeds, variety of wild fruits, besides vegetables and mushroom etc.

Twenty years ago, when Sor Lyngkhoi set up the first saw mill at Nongstoin in the West Khasi Hills, one B. Jyrwa opened a small *jadoh* stall (local restaurant) alongside the saw-mill to cater to the timber workers. Within a few months, she expanded her shop and employed four girls to run her thriving business. Looking at Jyrwa's tremendous success, others also opened up food and tea stalls. With the passage of time garages, a small medical store, a petrol pump etc started doing brisk business. The whole area turned out to be a hub of timber activities. "At least, 200 truck loads of timber used to ply Nongstoin everyday," said Lyngkhoi, who made money from the thriving logging business and learnt the trick to trade. Suddenly with the Supreme Court Order (ban), the entire chain of activities collapsed. She recollects, "There was no work in the saw mills, garages, shops etc. Hundreds of young people went out of jobs. Many people closed down the shops and left the place". She too had to trim down her business and run the shop alone to look after her family of five. Hers was among 20,000 families in the West Khasi Hills District who were completely immobilized by the ban.

According to K.K. Singh Phanbuh, President of the Meghalaya Land and Forest Owners' Association, the ban has affected and crippled all spheres of life. People have migrated from various villages to the towns, mainly to Shillong for earning their livelihood by doing petty business like selling *Kwai* (areca nut) and newspapers, carpentry, working as maid servants etc. and many youths from the district have joined underground militant groups due to dearth of job. Moreover, the students studying in distant places had to come back, mainly due to financial crunch in the family. Both the forest owners and *malik dieng* had to resort to other alternatives and sell off all the buffaloes, trucks and close down the saw mills.

The attempt by the West Khasi Hills District administration and the forest department to close down 18 (13 at Nongstoin and 5 at Rambrai)

illegal saw mills in the district amid protests by the people turned violent following the 1996 Supreme Court ban.

Herein lies the crux of the problem. The restriction on timber felling did affect the forest owners and contractors who have a lucrative stake in the business but the burden of earning a livelihood has more seriously affected thousands of farmers, workers and woodcutters for whom the forest has always been the primary source of livelihood. In such a context, charcoal burning and selling have become a viable livelihood option for the poor and marginalized people living in West Khasi Hills District forests. Thus, this one sees emergence of an ecological crisis.

**Table 5. Forest Coverage in West Khasi Hill District**

Year	Dense Forest	Open Forest	Total Forest	Percentage
1999	1,397	2,345	3,742	71.30
2001	1,098	1,869	2,967	56.55
2003	1,555	2,302	3,857	73.50

Source: State Forest Report, Govt. of Meghalaya, Shillong, 2004.

From Table 5, one can see that after the ban the forest coverage in the district has increased manifold. In the year 2003, the total forest coverage increased from 56.55 percent to 73.50 percent in 2001. The year from 1999 to 2001 saw a dip in forest coverage due to charcoal trade and shifting cultivation. This transition of activity was also responsible for a lot of destruction in the forest cover of the district and ecological imbalance in the environment.

### Conclusion

The Supreme Court had actually, through this ban, reminded the Government of India to implement its own rules (Forest Conservation Act 1980) and stop all 'non-forest activities' in designated forest areas. It also put in place a mechanism to oversee the process of implementation, assuming that the government has erred in not implementing its own rules.

However, like a natural calamity, it immobilized thousands of families, in areas where legal or illegal forest-based activities were the main engine of livelihood system, especially in the backward district of the West Khasi Hills. The situation worsened with the concerned State Government failing

to respond to the dislocation of families and human sufferings caused by the logging ban. The government initiative was half-hearted and grossly inadequate. People were looking for any alternative livelihood, which the district administration failed to provide in the absence of any "policy" or "a package" from the State Government.

There were hardly any government schemes which helped the villagers. Except for occasional grants to a few villages for a play ground here and a community hall there or a footpath or small *kuccha* road elsewhere, nothing came from the local legislator's fund. The poor and the marginalized people were left to fend for themselves.

Interestingly, the Meghalaya Farmers' Union took up the position that the trading of timbers affects the environment and ecology. It also pointed out that the decision of the Court was somewhat out-of-tune with the ground realities. The importance of the environment could not be ignored, but the core issue of joblessness also needed to be looked into. Also, the order should not have included the use of minor forest products, which are the main stay of the employment for the people in interior areas of the State.

The need of the hour is to give up all non-essential use of forest produce. The natural forests should be totally protected and clear felling banned. Only selective felling should be permitted in exceptional cases. This is necessary because a stage has come where any further degradation of the forests would be disastrous to the entire society.

### Problems

- i) The State Government has limited area under its control, as large part of the forest in the state fall under Khasi Autonomous District Council or private ownership making enforcement of rules and regulations difficult.
- ii) Absence of local enterprises (industries) to process the forest resources is also a hindrance to development.
- iii) Agricultural system practised is still primitive or based on shifting cultivation.
- iv) Land tenure system which is community or clan or village based is another setback. Therefore, no proper scientific and systematic management is possible.
- v) Awareness of environmental aspects like conservation and utilization is far from expectation.

## Suggestions

Under the typical socio-economic conditions of the study area, where the people rely heavily on forest utilization for their livelihood, a comprehensive approach should be planned so that there is a perpetuating stock of forest resources even after meeting the essential food, fodder, fuel and timber extraction requirements of the people. Some concrete suggestions for reviving the economy affected by the ban have been listed below:

- i) Development of alternatives like agro-forestry models in shifting agriculture and establishment of cottage industries.
- ii) Joint forest management through people's participation because success of any work is ensured if people toil and share the responsibility.
- iii) Publicity through mass media, trainings, etc is of importance to increase awareness of environmental values and conservation.
- iv) Harness community institutions to ensure greater coordination between the government machinery, people and voluntary organization to enhance productivity of forest and forestland under protective care and supervision.
- v) Emphasis on economic diversification and value added products. Increase of non timber demands like tourism, handicrafts, and herbal medicines.
- vi) Alternatives to fuelwood by propagation of more efficient *chullhas*, solar cookers and biogas.
- vii) Synthetic alternative to timber like plastics, steel, and other metals, fibre glass, concrete and agricultural residue should be encouraged to help reduce the pressure on the remaining natural forest.

The Supreme Court Order on timber ban naturally saw the increase of forest cover from 56.55% in 2001 to 73.50% in 2003 in the West Khasi Hills district. A systematic study is required to understand the value and importance of forest. Vast forest resources remain to be tapped, but proper sustainable utilization is required to enhance potentials for further socio-economic development. With the intervention of the Supreme Court, exploitation has been contained to a large extent and there is hope that the resource will be wisely utilized and recovered in future.

With the approval of the Working Scheme on Forest in West Khasi

Hills District by the Ministry of Environment and Forest, India with reference to the Letter No 12-4-48/2004/RONE/2794-98 w.e.f. 25<sup>th</sup> October 2005 the cutting of timber and other forest activities were allowed to undertake for the period of five years, i.e., from 25<sup>th</sup> October 2005 to October, 2010. The relaxation by the Central Government has brought back the life in the district as a whole, where the people started to re-open the saw-mills, varieties of shops and allied activities, as well as the sell of various forest products to other districts and to the nearby states.

The logging ban has an after effect on people's livelihood in the region but the loss of livelihood and human sufferings that followed the ban actually stemmed from a deeper issue of development problems, rather than the collapse of booming trade (in forest produce) in Meghalaya.

The issues are (a) economic under-development, (b) poor agricultural practices and acute rural poverty, and (c) rural unemployment in the district. With governmental apathy in all the above fronts, it is obvious that people in the district generally are left to fend for themselves. Under the circumstances, the ban on forestry activities came as a bolt from the blue. Had there been other economic activities or cushions for unemployed or under employed or opportunities for wage work, perhaps the sufferings of the people of the district could have been minimized.

**LIST OF PLATES**



**Plate No 1: Forest cleared for timber**



**Plate No 2: Degraded Forest**



**Plate No 3: Forest cleared for Charcoal**



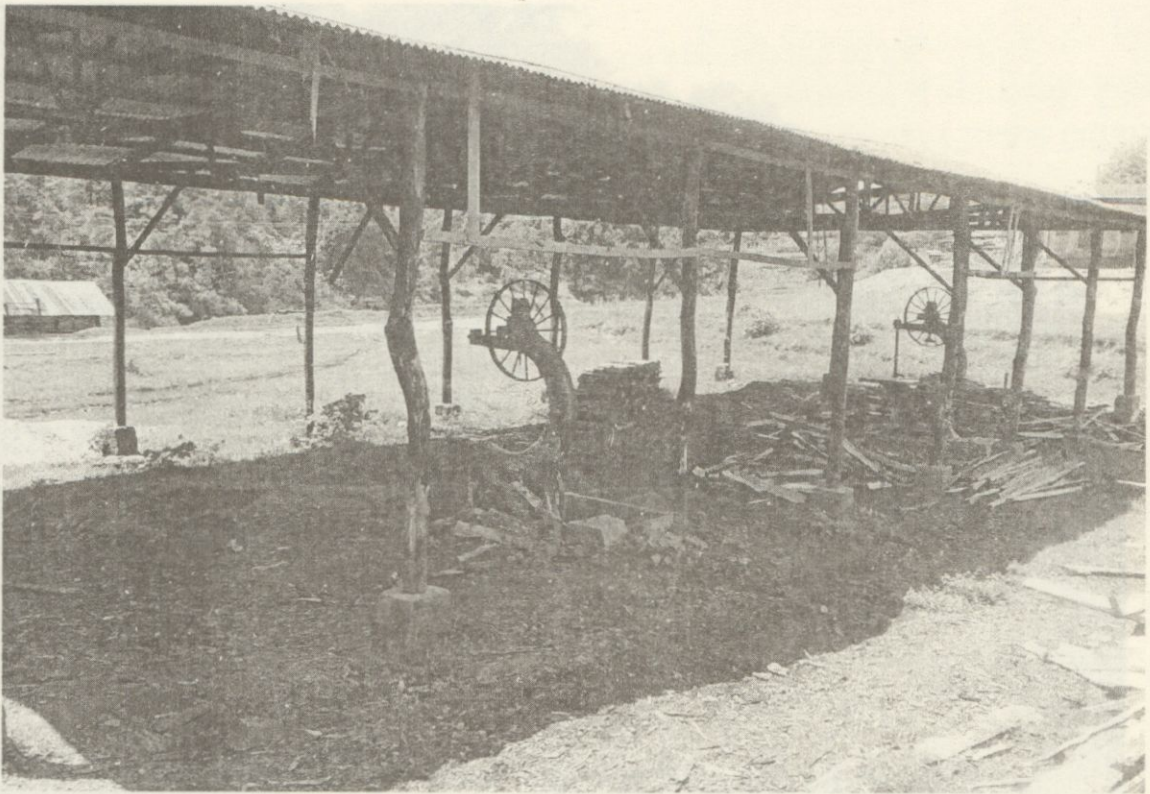
**Plate No 4: Mixed Forest**



Plate No 5: Truck carrying Timber



Plate No 6: Licensed Sawmill



**Plate No 7: Abandoned Sawmill**



**Plate No 8: Closed down Tea Stalls**

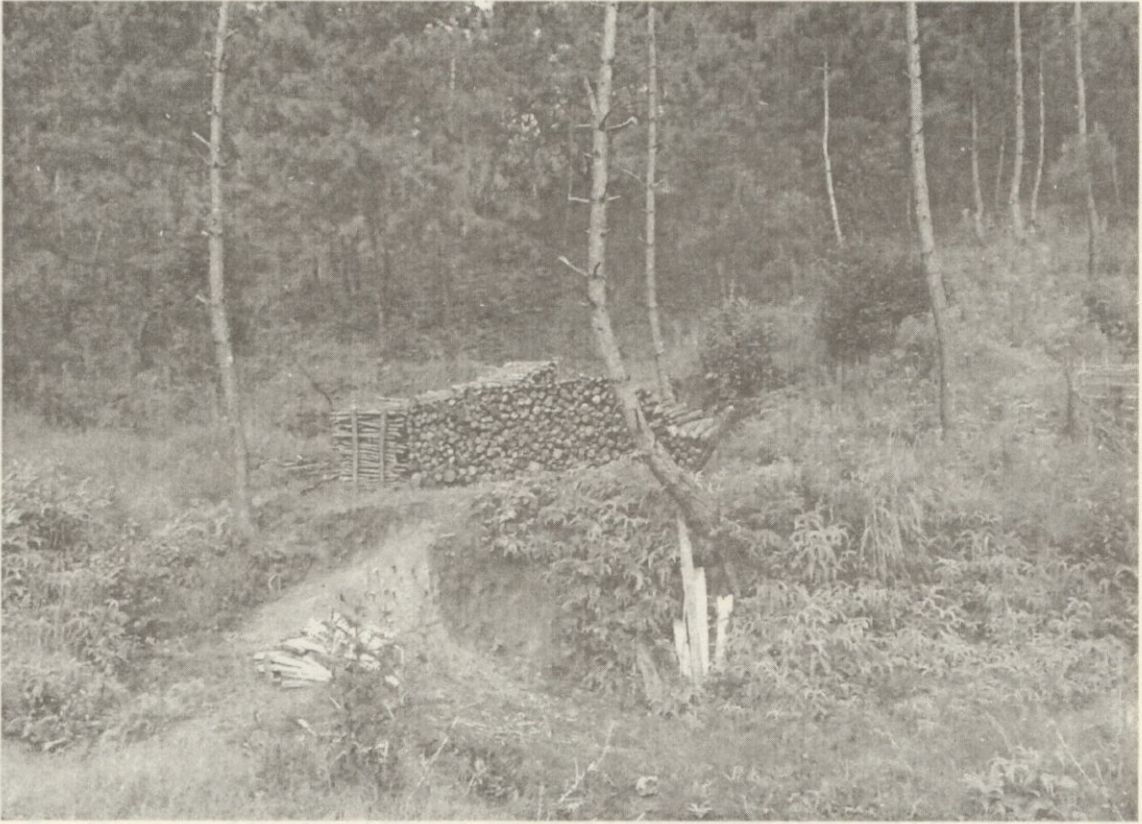


Plate No 9: Firewood



Plate No 10: Stock of Charcoal



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## Book Reviews

**Durba Ghosh and Dane Kennedy(eds), *Decentring Empire: Britain, India and the Transcolonial World*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2006.**

The British Empire administratively withdrew from Southasia in 1947 and that marked the beginning of shrinking of the colonial rule from all over the world. The empire left a lot of its old baggage behind in its former colonies, invariably in ways of services, institutions, and associations, which continue to be relevant to the ex-colonies like India. With a view to dissecting and uncovering the mute dimensions of the empire, a conference was held in April, 2003 at the University of California, Berkeley in honour of Thomas Metcalf, a historian of the British Empire and South Asia. The above anthology of over a dozen presentations made in the conference informs the readers on the current debates among the historians of the empire. First of all, the book under review demonstrates that there were abiding connections between the histories of the empire such as the British and the process of globalization in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Secondly, modernity and its various dimensions were equally attractive to the colonizers and the colonized. Thirdly, the volume demonstrates that “the British Empire as a superstructure was sustained and contested by the cultures of the empire”. Finally, the presentations in the collection argue that the forces and practices unleashed by the colonial rule were never entirely in the control of the colonial authorities. It goes without saying that the British rule was an important factor in generating forces of modernity, which have also used the colonized subjects in their favour.

No doubt, India looms large in the volume, but the presentations in the volume demonstrate how uneven were its effects and how the Empire was plagued by inefficiency, confusion, contradiction and challenges. It was noted that the Suez trauma in 1956 marked the effective end of Britain as a super power. From these emerged in Britain a historiography of empire, shaped by mixed feelings of loss, nostalgia and regret verging on anger at its displacement by the United States of America. John Richards demonstrates how colonial rules were bent upon creating a usable revenue surplus each year with a view to investment and paying dividend to the Company’s shareholders. In the process, there was a negligible revenue left for education, health,

**David R. Syiemlieh, Anuradha Dutta and Srinath Baruah (eds), *Challenges of Development in North-East India*, Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2006, xii + 508, Rs. 1150 (US\$75)**

*Challenges of Development in North-East India* is the updated version of 23 well-researched papers by eminent writers. The origin of the papers goes back to a seminar organized by the Indian Council of Social Science Research – North-East Regional Centre (ICSSR-NERC) in October 2003. The new publication contains precious material on a wide range of subjects connected with development in North-East India. The papers are grouped under Polity (2 papers), Society (4), Economy (9), Tourism (3), Education (3) and Health (2 papers).

The inaugural address by the then Governor of Meghalaya, His Excellency Dr. M.M. Jacob provides an excellent overview of the challenges of development in the Northeast. Being in the periphery of India, observes Jacob, the development too is peripheral. He proposes practical solutions for the region's greater progress, and suggests better trade relations with countries that surround the region.

In the section on polity, Udayon Misra arguing forcefully for the economic development of the region, highlights the decades-long indifference of the Centre to the region's economic potential which resulted in a vicious circle of insurgency and underdevelopment. Added to this is also insufficient devolution of power. The "economics of 'colonial' exploitation" and the politics of alienation made the vicious circle still more vicious. By and large this was the situation till 1976. A change in the Centre's policy is noticed after this year. More devolution of power to the Northeastern states started from 1970s due to greater awareness of the fact that the challenges to development in the Northeast are inseparably linked to issues related to ethnicity, autonomy and territoriality. True development calls for the abandonment of "exclusionist stances" and acceptance of mutual interdependence and cooperation among the states. This will ensure speedy development.

"Government, Local Self-Government and the Role of the Civil Society" is the paper by Anuradha Dutta. In this well informed write-up the author by means of a long "introduction" (18 pages) explains the different aspects and workings of a democratic set-up. "Democracy and good governance are loyal allies", affirms Dutta. But good governance, warns the author, would depend on both formal and informal participation by people at the grassroots level, and effective roles by NGOs. Thinking globally and acting

locally would be effective only when good thinking takes place at the local level, and both men and women are given equal opportunities.

Under the section 'Society' dedicated mostly to "migrants and migration," Samir Kumar analyses the concept of "rights," and affirms that development cannot any longer be viewed independently of the question of rights. Runumi D. Baruah in his turn does a detailed study of migration patterns in Assam and offers a practical conclusion. "...Rural development," he writes, "coupled with measures to promote the growth of small and intermediate urban centres should be the core of any well meaning policy aimed at population distribution." A.C. Sinha in his "Marwari Collaborators and Nepali Subalterns: Two integrative social forces in North-East India" analyses the integrative elements in the Marwari and Nepali communities of the region. Sajal Nag considers the phenomenon of "migrants" an enduring, live issue of the region, and a major source of tension in all Northeastern states. The paper offers a detailed study of it especially from the aspects of displacement, right to land, influx of Muslim population, political power and anti-national feelings and accompanying spurt of violence. The paper is more a statement of facts than a strategy proposal.

The section under economy has the maximum number of papers. A.K. Agarwal focusses on the flow of Central funds to the Northeast. In spite of the availability of huge sums from the Centre for the region's development, the Northeastern states still remain underdeveloped. The reasons are many. The paper factually and competently x-rays the situation, and affirms that, "the time has come to evaluate the lapses and to look at the remedial measures for best use of Central funds" in the region. The future could be bright, if the region opens up for trade with neighbouring countries.

Ranjan Singh's paper highlighting the problems and prospects of Manipur suggests measures for a sustainable development programme for that state. B.G. Verghese in a minutely and competently documented account, shows the immense water and bio-diversity resources of the Northeast, and writes, "the potential is huge, utilization small!" He shows how Bhutan doubled its per capita income in a few years and reached the top of the SAARC league! The author concludes his convincing analysis of hydro power and bio-resources available in the Northeast by saying, "An exciting opportunity beckons!"

The other papers in this section are by Prasenjit Biswas on development as complementarity. Kalyan Das writes on issues about livelihood. In

particular he addresses the problems of poverty and unemployment. He looks into the existing resource base and livelihood opportunities in Northeast India. Employment generation possibilities to reduce poverty in the context of globalization “onslaught” too are discussed. The paper, “Levels of Human Poverty across Districts and Population Groups in Assam,” moves away from the traditional concept of economic poverty in terms of calories. The authors understand human poverty as a three-fold “deprivation.” They are first, the deprivation of the choice of leading a long and healthy life; second, lack of facilities to acquire knowledge; and third, the absence of a decent standard of living. Policy implications for the removal of poverty are also dealt with in the paper.

Susmita Das and Sutapa Sengupta in their paper assess the level of “basic amenities” in the state of Meghalaya. Basic amenities include food, water, clothing, proper sanitation, and medical care at low cost. To speak of amenities such as presence of educational institutions, means of transport and communication and banking would call for a still “higher” level of living. And availability of television, car, telephone, etc. is beyond the reach of the great majority of people in the region. The present situation is such that only the more affluent sections of society can afford to have something more than the very basic amenities of life. The ever widening disparity will only hamper the development process. A way out of this impasse is urgently needed. The last two papers in the section are on border trade. Gurudas Das writes on the theory and practice of border trade, whereas K.C. Kabra and R.K.P.G. Singha reflect on border trade and its future prospects with reference to Mizoram.

The three papers under tourism contain M.P. Bezharuah’s paper on “Sustainable Tourism and Economic Development of the North-East”. The paper is a detailed study of the theme. “Tourism in Assam: Need for a Paradigm Shift” is the title of Abu Nazar Saied Ahmed’s paper. The possibilities are so many, that only a political will can transform tourism in Assam into a major developmental agency in the state. This calls for a paradigm shift in tourism governance. Amitava Mitra’s paper “A Sustainable Environment-Friendly Approach to Tourism Development in Arunachal Pradesh” shows the vast tourism potential of Arunachal’s forest resources and biodiversity. The author also spells out policies and action plans for ensuring sustainable tourism in the state.

Moving on to the section on education the book presents three papers: N.B. Biswas’ “Development of School Education among the Tribes of North-East India: A

Complementary Approach”; Anjan Saikia and K.C. Kapoor’s “Wastage in Elementary Education: A Comparative Study of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh”; and Meghali Baruah’s “Challenges of Higher Education in the North-East.”

N.B. Biswas, citing from the report of “The Friends of Tribal Society” that had appeared in *The Asian Age* (June, 1997), writes that tribes in India are still in the periphery of progress, and that “Eighty four per cent of the male and ninety five per cent of the female tribal are illiterate. Ninety five per cent of the tribal population has no access to medical facilities, and ninety per cent have never known what electric light is ...” (p. 443). The paper, therefore, offers very practical suggestions by way of concluding remarks to improve the educational lot of tribal population in Northeast India. It emphasizes in particular the importance of knowing one’s cultural richness, since “cultural variables affect education, teaching, learning and the growth and development of all learners” (p. 455).

Angan Saikia and K.C. Kapoor, in their paper, present a comparative study of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh from the point of view of “wastage” by which they mean school drop-outs. Meghali Baruah’s paper on the “Challenges of Higher Education in the North-East” presents an overview of the situation in the country.

Finally, the section on health offers two papers: Substance Abuse and HIV / AIDS in North-East India by Hallelohim Ghonglah and “Women’s Vulnerability to HIV / AIDS in Manipur by Jubita Hajarimayum. The former presents an overview of the problem in Northeast India and suggests possible ways to overcome it. The problem is not only a medical one, but also a social and a spiritual one. The paper on “Women’s Vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in Manipur” is a study carried out among the Meithei women in the reproductive age group of 14-45 years in the Imphal West district of Manipur. Gender inequality, lack of autonomy, absence of decision-making power, and ignorance about health and their own rights make women more vulnerable to infection.

The references at the end of every paper and cross references provided in the index further make *Challenges of Development in North-East India* a very valuable and handy companion for everyone interested in the development of North-East India.

### Reviewed by

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**Rafiq Dossani and Henry S. Rowen, *Prospects for Peace in South Asia*, Orient Longman Private Ltd., Hyderabad, 2006, 424p, Spl. Indian price Rs.500/- (org. US \$24.95).**

The idea of peace in the context of Southasia assumes a complex political, military and economic make-up. Especially the increase in nuclearization of military arsenals as a competitive assertion of strategic superiority between India and Pakistan compounded with internal instability of fragile political systems produce a grave threat to security. The metaphor 'South Asia on a short fuse' still remains the central conceptual problematique amidst the angst of being 'vulnerable' to a possible arms race that extends to what the US under George Bush called the 'axis of evil'. The book seemingly highlights a US-centric perspective to glean through the political processes like Islamization and the rise of Hindu Right in Pakistan and India respectively to scour through the strategic doctrine of 'status quo' in Southasia that promotes the economic interests of the US in the best possible way. Such a gnarly reading of Southasia hardly gets at the many-layered cultural and historical convergences between articulations of national interests that often overlap by signaling possibilities of engagement across the daggers drawn. In portraying 'Kashmir' as a flashpoint of nuclear warfare sustained by equally militant regimes of religious right in both India and Pakistan, the book grossly undermines the possibilities of minimized conflicts that merely require a stable political will and not stability *per se*. The way the book defines the US interest in Southasian region (Introduction, p.16 and Chs.10 &13) gives it the place of cynosure for both India and Pakistan seeking strategic partnership with the US, who can tilt the balance of power to any of the side. The US, on its own terms, sees both India and Pakistan as allies for very different purposes, the former as a permanent ally in its geo-political games and the latter as a counterweight to China. If all these fragments of strategic alliances come with an inherently weak and shortsighted plan of peace and stability, it serves the US interest of arm twisting in the region by way of consolidating economic and security gains derived from the dependence of Southasian nations on the US. The dependence is deep throated, starting from purchase of military hardware down to analysis of strategic relations. It is the US that predicts the ebbs and flows of the tides in the Indian Ocean both literally and metaphorically. The book only understates the rising dependence on the US for the whole of the Southeast Asia and downplays the role of non-aligned diplomacy in the context of increasing weaponization. In a strong sense, much of the voluminous spaces within the book are devoted to descriptive

truisms of US foreign policy that got its ideological and operational support from an entirely negative characterization of regime types in India and Pakistan. The book also prescribes a robust economic determinism for Southasia as a *fait accompli* as it is for any contemporary neoliberal state system in assessing the problems and prospects of its foreign, military and economic policies. The weight of a perceived world order dominated by the US caters to the idiom of Morgenthau's realism that reduces the structures of rivalry to an already intervened and mediated entity by a hegemon or by a superpower, a syndrome that very recently also wears the hat of 'strategic analysis' in the canons of international relations. The book stands out for its thrust on hegemonic stability without any possibility of transition that turns out to be a symptomatic description of Pakistan's anarchic role in sharp contrast to India's neoliberal shift towards multi-partner strategic relations in Southasia.

The first four essays in the section entitled "Pakistan: Politics and Kashmir are: "Islamic Extremism and Regional Conflict in South Asia" by Vali Nasr, "Constitutional and Political Change in Pakistan: The Military-Governance Paradigm" by Charles H. Kennedy, "The Practice of Islam in Pakistan and the Influence of Islam in Pakistani Politics" by C. Christine Fair and Karthik Vaidyanathan, and "Pakistan's Relations with Azad Kashmir and the Impact on Indo-Pakistani Relations" by Rifaat Hussain. All the four essays portray Pakistan as a case of 'failed democracy' that always balanced its internal instabilities with war games at the frontier and by reconstructing its relationships with the US and the West. To be specific, Vali Nasr's analysis of Pakistan's military regime harps on a socially constructed Islamist politics that falls in line with the neoliberal doctrine of economic dependence on international institutions without much ado about Islamism. Nasr significantly highlights the role of Mutahhidah Majlis Amal (MMA) in creating an environment of peace in Indo-Pak relationship and consequently, argued that the MMA acted as a countervailing force to greater Islamist parties within Pakistan's domestic politics. This limited understanding of the internal political contest between a conglomerate MMA and larger parties like Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League (PML) during the regime of Army unwittingly endorses the role of MMA in sustaining the Army rule of General Musharraf. The next essay by Charles H. Kennedy reads repetitive of issues pertaining to Islamism, looked albeit through a different point of view, like the evolving patterns of political legitimacy at the provincial level and constitutional stalemates. But the essay goes strong on chronicling the political mess in Pakistan without clearly figuring out which of the forces played roles upholding the sanctity of a constitutional state. In

fact the singular importance of a Constitutional State is not properly emphasized by Kennedy in his narration of political exigencies. Next essay by Christine Fair and Karthik Vaidyanathan makes an attempt to understand the state-society relationship from the perspective of examining the roots of Islamic practices in Pakistan's politics. Instead of developing a normative model of analysis, the central part of this essay adopts a perceived Islamist response to the West and apparently gets it supplemented from the responses to the questionnaire that dishes out statements such as West "care about poorer nations", "fair stance on Palestine situation" etc. (p.87) that obviously make the respondents express negative responses to the West at the practical, psychological and emotional levels. This is an attempted projection of Islamist reaction to the West, which is later supplanted by respondent's support towards banning the secessionist and sectarian political outfits, apparently a secular-rational response to Islamism. Further, the Pakistani response towards the US as portrayed show poorly the moral indictment that Pakistani opinion makers have towards US stance. The authors finally accept the invalidity of their method, data and analysis, when they pass the buck of failure to the respondents for giving what they call 'contradictory': "Pakistani respondents claim that they would like to see a decreased involvement of religious parties within politics, while still upholding that Pakistani law should be based upon Q'uran and Sunnah" (p.108). What the authors suppress is their pre-mediated style of eliciting responses that do not cohere in a neat framework of what they call 'policy community'. Post 9/11, Pakistani response to the presence of Taliban in Pakistan vis-à-vis American 'war on terror' forms the context of this essay that try to present Pakistani opinion as 'contradictory' from the vantage of US policy framework.

Rifaat Hussain cultivates an internalist realism of sort in suggesting ways and means of giving Azad Kashmir a due place within Indo-Pak relations. His narrative reconstruction of events that led to internecine border conflicts between India and Pakistan along with the US interest of keeping Pakistan to its side in its sojourn to Afghanistan often displaces Azad Kashmir in the meta-narrative of nuclear rivalry. This merely portrays the incompleteness of any Pakistani initiative to politically handle the Kashmir issue, as the state of Pakistan is yet to discover the stable basis of bringing peace and development to Azad Kashmir. The author leaves out the implications of Pakistan's weak-willed response to the problems of Azad Kashmir, which in itself constitutes a major drawback for Pakistan's domestic policy.

This entire section assumes a few things, notably the rise of an uncontrollable Islamism and its concomitant support to terrorist radicals that supplement Indo-Pak arms race in building up nuclear arsenals. This is a rather

straightjacket realism that merely supports a US-centric strategic perspective on the region.

The four essays in the next section entitled "India: Politics and Kashmir" are: "Who Speaks for India? The Role of Civil Society in Defining Indian Nationalism" by Ainslie T. Embrie, "Hindu Nationalism and the BJP: Transforming Religion and Politics in India" by Robert L. Hardgrave Jr., "Hindu Fundamentalism, Muslim Jihad and Secularism: Muslims in the Political Life of the Republic of India" by Barbara D. Metcalf and "Jammu and Kashmir in the Indian Union: Politics of Autonomy" by Chandrashekhar Dasgupta. These essays overcome the limited view of strained Indo-Pak relations by analyzing the socially constituted structures of State that enter into conflicting national interests. Embrie's essay revisits some of the well-established arguments about Hindutva-led hawkish positions against Pakistan with a smattering of discussions on an 'aggressive civil society' of contemporary times as well as centrist responses to secessionism in Kashmir and Nagaland. The essay is long on centrist perception of the health of Indian polity during the decade of seventies, while it is short on how Indian society practises politics of recognition. In his grand notion of civil society, Embrie minces words in thinking of a consensual politics, while he misrecognizes many facets of 'unity in diversity' that binds India to a state of chaos and difference without breaking its fragile sovereign existence. Hargrave's essay blows up the possibility of a permanent transformation of Indian State and society in the hands of Hindu chauvinists and its various outfits that presents a superficial account of how these forces attempt to drive India to a place of communal hatred and sacrilege, while the essay does not address the interstitial emergence of different forms of power-relations in the sphere of political economy. The punchline of the essay, "It may be a 'grave miscalculation' to suggest that Hindu extremism does not have international ramifications" (p.238) sounds extremely telescopic as the connection between India's foreign policy and activities of Hindu group abroad is tenuous except the fact that Hindutva leaders, during the time of being in the government never missed a chance to visit VHP headquarters abroad. Barbara Metcalf's essay on Hindu Ethnonationalism is an original work of analysis that does not reproduce the polarities of conflict. It rather emphasizes on the ideological orientation of RSS-VHP-BJP on the one hand and Jammāt on the other. She succeeds in showing that Islam as a religion does not influence the fundamentalist forces. She clarifies that the rise of fundamentalist Islamist forces stem from sources very different from doctrines embedded in faith. They arise from an ideological othering of the Muslims or the Hindus, which is a kind of 'psycho-drama' (p.231). Dasgupta's essay on

'Politics of Autonomy' is probably the best essay in reviewing historical and political developments in Jammu and Kashmir. The essay stays as close as possible to developments in the field, while it concludes splendidly by stating, "A measure of vagueness about the final outcome is probably an essential element of a constructive approach to resolve differences between Indian and Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir." (p.258)

The third section entitled "India's and Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrines and US Concerns" brings out the real concerns of the volume, namely the US concern about balance of power in South Asia as part of its long-standing strategic necessity of keeping China at large. The anti-Communist cold war slant of US foreign policy gets its backroom support from the kind of arms race that India and Pakistan indulge in. The US interest lies in having the last word in case there is a flashpoint between the two. Diplomatically speaking, both India and Pakistan attempt to win over the US support to pursue their own agenda by avoiding any confrontation with US interests. This gives the US the enviable position of a superpower that decides and dictates terms and deliberates about the internal and external compulsions of its subordinate allies in Southasia. The whole volume is geared to contribute to this US standpoint. The very first essay by Michael Krepon on the theme of de-escalation presents the Indian and Pakistani calculations of military strategy during ten month long mobilization in 2002 as a paradoxical measure of stability-instability, a mutually assured game of destruction. The point is to understand how such war-games of escalation/de-escalation strengthen the US presence in the Southasian geopolitics. What Krepon ventures in his elaborate discussion on strategies of deterrence are largely borrowed from cold war continental ballistic missiles competition and the imagery of star wars, which he applies in the context of Indian subcontinent. This takes into account the crucial input of mutually damaging strategies that the other side can adopt such as 'economic strangling'. By turning a fig that is yet to come in the subcontinent, the analysis presents the US (read NATO) line of strategic thinking in a manner manifest before it really comes. The lever for his analysis springs from the vulnerability of both India and Pakistan from each other having similar striking capability. Ironically it is this vulnerability of parties engaged in arms race that does the groundwork for a pro-US stance in foreign policies of both India and Pakistan. Krepon's analysis builds up this possibility of 'third party' intervention in the relations between India and Pakistan. Although Krepon suggested substantive political engagement between India and Pakistan centring the Kashmir issue, he seems to predict the possibility of third party intervention in any guise (p.280). Peter Levoy's essay on "Pakistan's Nuclear Doctrine" mostly authenticated the popularly held fears about irresponsible uses of nuclear weapons that are articulated

by Pakistan's civilian and military officials. Thereby, the essay completely ignores Pakistani concerns about de-nuclearization and its attendant demystification of India's evil intentions. The essay goes to the extent of airing an unsubstantiated fear of western powers about the possibility of transfer of nuclear technologies from Pakistani sources to some 'terrorist' groups, which is a re-affirmation of USA's CTBT stance. The essay is superbly written in a backroom boys' 'democratic war game' style that exports nuclear war as the *summum bonnum* of nation-building politics by various actors. While doing so, the essay selectively privileges some of these actors of the domestic scene to determine the course of Indo-Pak relations. Rajesh Basrur's essay on 'coercive diplomacy' practised by both Pakistan and India strikes a significantly different chord in the whole volume. For the first time, when the reader is tired of grasping the monotonous war game tome, Basrur talks of a situation of compellence between India, Pakistan and the US, all engaged in a mutual game of containment. But Basrur brings out the salience of each of the sides very accurately. For India, the US, with its presence in Afghanistan, is a softer target of compellence. Given the disadvantage of Pakistan in terms of strategic strength, the US appears to its radar only as an interceder. These two different assignments of the same referee (the US) confined in the hotspot of Indo-Pak theatre, for Basrur, also gives it the advantage of refusing to the referee the Indo-Pak conflict (p.315). Probably, this superpower option of the United States also acts as a deterrent for both India and Pakistan not to strike first and begin the fare. Basrur characterizes such deterrence as 'non-traditional' with a 'hair-trigger status'. He substantiates his argument by citing the very real warning from the US about detection of release of energy equivalent to Hiroshima bomb in the outer space by an asteroid at the same time when India and Pakistan were nearing the brink in 2002. The warning made everybody aware of the cosmic event so that no one mistakes it to be nuclear detonations. What he projects in the essay is about the lessons learnt by both the Indian and Pakistani states soon after December 13 attack on Indian parliament that set in motion a chain reaction of military strategies and weighing of each other's nuclear options by both the parties. But he hypostatizes the situation when he says, "Compellence through a third party is inherently problematic because the interests of the third party tend to be its own, and these may be a drag on the compelling power. Concessions extracted from the target state are reversible, and the investment in ejecting a coercive threat can be brought to nought whenever the state chooses." (p.324) This weakens Basrur's progressive analysis of the trilateral compellence. That compellence and deterrence are parts of the strategy of overcoming a security threat and a diplomatic difficulty gets blurred in this turning of 'factors' into 'actors'. One

instance of such a transformation is available in Indian media's construction of 9/11 kind of attack on December 13 by some terrorists from across the border. Basrur's nuanced analysis could have derived strengths from the inherent social formations and mobilizations that shape the opinions in India and Pakistan's post-colonial societies, which cannot be entirely subjected to 'deterrence' and 'compellence' kind of orientation. As he pontificates both India and Pakistan's search for strategic spaces, the internal divergences and heteronomies of both the societies present a different picture of shared historical memory and identity. Especially how India, being a democratic state, frames a few individuals for the episode of parliament attack. Similar things are also available with Pakistan, where the judiciary is often penalized for being against the national interest. The last essay of the volume expresses the overarching thematic of the volume in its title, "U.S. Interests in South Asia". The author of this essay Howars B. Schaffer takes a regressive view of India's foreign policy by blaming it as anti-American, when he seems to suggest that New Delhi should not have antagonized America. He goes on to say, "For many Americans, India seemed to make a practice of biting the hand that might have fed it." (p.329) Such a statement reminds one of PL-480 aid and very recently, the impassioned defense of Indo-US nuclear deal that subjects India long term defense and multilateral subordination through legal measures such as Hyde Act and Patent regimes. That India had bitten such an American clasp is inadvertently admitted and so the desire to make India see itself as an indebted and grateful nation that should pay heed to America's embrace as a 'quasi-ally' against Chinese Communism is so blatantly proposed. Apart from such hard-nosed power interests of America, the essay euphemizes the US interest in India's growing economy. In all, the essay fails to understand India's track record of an independent foreign and economic policy that seems to dominate India's national interest. Although India has given in to some extent to US military kowtowing, it still refuses to agree to a permanent stature of a sub-ordinate ally who must remain faithful to US skullduggery in policy matters. The essay lacks a balanced understanding of perspectival and positional differences between the US and India and it fails to properly explore unimpeachable grounds of mutual cooperation, if there exists any, that would benefit both the sides. The US-centric slant in India's foreign policy operates only at a discursive level to make the nation-state of India realize its own strength that never allows it to abandon the singularity and tenacity of national interest.

The tenor of most of the essays see the US as the most sought after ally for both India and Pakistan on which both the Southasian states evince close competition. This renders the US simultaneously present and absent in

Indo-Pak affairs. This also makes the US vulnerable to quandaries of bilateral relations, of which the US apparently has only a disciplining interest. The volume re-iterates US interest in most of its essays, while a few essays written by Southasian scholars present an objective and authentic analysis of the role of US. One can clearly read two distinct approaches in this volume: One, a US-centric transvaluation of domestic politics in India and Pakistan without assessing the possible ways of redemption and another, the overwhelming diktats of the US foreign policies to tailor independent policies of India and Pakistan so that their relations are sufficiently mediated by the US. Both these approaches lack the support and substance that are otherwise so amply available in analyses of internal politics of the respective states. Rather the volume reproduces a part of the available material for no new inferences in most of its pages. Descriptive truisms that follow from chronicling of events without anchorage to the domain of everyday politics dominate the tenor of holding onto a constituency for Uncle Sam. Hence the volume fails to inspire any hope in sustained peace in Southasia. Most of its essays are second rate observations on swings in foreign policy circles that can hardly describe the increasingly complex and subtle ways in which India and Pakistan work in the domain of international politics. Essays that add to new knowledge are in a sense by the 'native informants' who would otherwise represent their countries in any intellectual exercise. The editorial discretions too are in-expansive as they hardly fulfill the role of being the links in the fragmented and ruptured narratives of US led peace and stability in the region. This is the Orwellian predicament of Southasia.

#### Reviewed by

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**Gail Omvedt, *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity* (revised edition), Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 2006 (1995), pp.ix+108, price Rs.130/-**

The book under review is one of the founding texts of understanding the emerging contours of Dalit identity and ideology. The book that originally had seen the light of the day in 1995 is now republished. The text has not changed much, only the context has become more embedded and rooted.

The author revised her book of late, possibly with a reaffirmation of her faith in the relevance of Dalit struggles that demanded a greater clarity. Omvedt presents the Dalit emergence with a remarkable political and cultural correctness of a critique of Hindu ideological superiority. The book in its ten chapters presents the case of Dalit emergence in the form of counter-hegemonic struggles, while it underscores the process of Dalit identity formation as a constitutive element of democracy and modernity.

The first chapter entitled, "Introduction" discusses the social base of Dalit movement that combines the ex-untouchables with non-Brahmin castes. Dalit identity and Dalit consciousness take the form of a discursive resistance to reformist Hinduism by moving a step beyond. This step beyond is conceptualized by Omvedt in the following terms,

In contemporary times they (Dalits) draw on such leaders as Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar; they appeal to heroes of revolt such as Birsa Munda and Veer Narayan Singh; they claim the traditions of Buddha and Carvak, Mahavir, Kabir and Guru Nanak and Basavappa; they claim heroes like Shivaji but contests the Hinduist interpretation of him; they claim the glories of Mohenjo-daro and the heritage of pre-state tribals as opposed to that of plundering Aryan tribes. In contrast to the secularist opposition to Hindutva they proclaim a politics of identity, an in contrast to reformist Hindu identities *they define 'Hinduism' itself as an oppressive class/caste/patriarchal force.* (p.5)

One can note here several references to a historical past of location and cultural distinctness that are 'claimed' by the Dalits. Such claims are also based on a politics of difference that relativizes the validity of such claims. The crucial question is, *does the politics of Dalit identity need an articulation of specific claims in positioning the identity of the Dalits over and against a Hindu mainstream?* Omvedt can be said to have veered between a pull toward redistribution and recognition and a push toward an articulated authenticity. She presented her dilemma in terms of caste-class dichotomy, when she says, referring to Phule's notion of 'ideology', "This one did not recognize community/caste as a node of exploitation ... *The formation of a class ideology of this type created a caste ideology of a specific type in reaction, one which set up caste in opposition to class as a cultural/social factor, a non-economic factor.*" (p.41) Indeed Omvedt attempts to see 'caste' as a category that arises out of a process of social, economic and cultural exclusion, so much so that social movements by untouchables

and lower castes were looked down upon and even delegitimized by the nationalists and Marxists. Omvedt portrays the common ideological grounds of nationalist-Leftist-Marxist-Gandhian strands of social and political movements having an antagonism toward any movement that voiced caste oppression as an issue and all of them shared an ideological subscription to mainstream Hindu nationalism. But this kind of a hegemonic construction of Hinduism and an idea of centralized India creates many folds of historical and political exclusion. At one level, it paved the way of partition as a measure to avoid giving too many concessions to Muslims and also stave off the possibility of making India into a decentralized and federal province. All these were done just in order to have a 'centralized state structure' (p.64) that reproduced Manchester under state ownership. At another level, the ideological hegemony of Hindu political and cultural formations resulted into an 'anti-caste' movement that had an anti-northern and anti-brahmin identification. Such movements had a regional framework and it grew to an 'emotive slogan' against Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan. Positively speaking, anti-caste movements took a reflexive anti-Aryan, non-Hindi and anti-'brahman-baniya' turn, which she described thus: "Anti-Hinduism was taking on a rather complex, anti-northern, anti-centralist character." (p.54) Periyar inspired "self-respect" movement of 1930s and Ambedkar's attempts at liberating untouchables throughout 1920 to 1940 and beyond come into focus in the book at lengths. Notable punchlines include Ambedkar's pronouncement that he was "born a hindu but would not die a Hindu". A song published in Ambedkar's weekly *Janata* is cited by Omvedt that establishes a Shudra-proletariat equation (p.45) in the political outfit called Independent Labour Party (ILP) floated by Ambedkar that became the largest opposition in Bombay Legislative Council in 1936 elections. Such fireworks by social movements of the lower castes substantially exposed the upper caste-bourgeois orientation of emerging post-colonial polity in 1930s.

Omvedt followed an argumentative strategy of exposing the caste-class alliance in the domain of political economy to the extent that it constitutes an ideological hegemony. As opposed to this, she highlights the role played by alliances of lower castes and various movements that aimed at redeeming the oppressed castes from the subjection by dominant Hindu political elites. This strategy of unfolding the emergence of lower-caste struggles against Hindu dominance produces a convergence in terms of Dalit-bahujan and other movements from the margins of mainstream Hindu nation-space. Omvedt's emphasis on regional identities such as Dravidian movement,

Kashmiriyat and tribo-national movements of Northeast India mobilizes ideas of de-brahminization, de-saffronization and de-territorialization of anti-caste formations in its multitude. All these put together constitute, for Omvedt, a single moment of 'visions' that de-institute the Brahminical forms of power from the domain of law, public discourse and resistance. Omvedt characterized this moment by citing veteran Marxist leader A.K. Roy's pamphlet called, "The New Dalit Revolution" (p.79). Omvedt is in full agreement with Roy, when Roy wrote,

The culture of the people, struggle of the oppressed like that of Birsa Munda of Chotanagpur and Veer Narayan Singh of Chattisgarh would be highlighted which is now obscured and would be restored to its rightful place above the wars and conspiracies of feudal kings and colonial rulers which now crowd the pages of history. From Buddha to Lenin it would be a unique journey, a new search for a spirit of emancipating millions, a new religion not only a new party, out to make a new history for mankind without exploitation, subjugation and with justice. (p.80)

This position taken by Omvedt through the politically correct synthesis between Marxism and Dalit ideology as proposed by A.K. Roy is a radical deconstruction of Hegelian residue of a critique of an emancipatory project that synthesizes the agency of emancipation into an abstract universalizable identity. So also Omvedt's position undercuts Kantian notion of civic-liberal individualism that merely reconstructs the domain of politics from what is 'sensible' and 'meaningful' by taking them as things-in-themselves. Beyond political and social theory, Omvedt also characterizes the unspeakable Dalit experience in terms of its creative rendering of self-consciousness, when she affirms in relation to Sita, the banished heroine of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, "In a folk poem of Uttar Pradesh for instance, Sita refuses to go back even when Laxman has been sent to bring her, and instead raises her sons on her own and gives them her father's name, in a half-way return to matriliney".(p.99) This portrayal of Sita as the mother who refuses to follow the norms of patriarchal-brahminical society also becomes a figure of emancipation in a counter depiction to *Ramayana*. This is also a Dalit enterprise of self-definition that renders brahminical claims to history as repressive. Omvedt elaborates this creative discourse of liberation in following words,

(...) *Ramayana*: not as a story of Rama's triumph and the ideal family. But a story of his conquest over Dravidian and tribal native inhabitants, of the triumph of patriarchy over matriarchy, of the suppression of women

connected with the establishment of a stable agricultural society. (Sita is after all *bhumikanya*, she was found below a furrow.) It is ultimately a story that has many renditions in a long era of class/caste/gender struggle, of a conquest over long time span, but also of the resistance and uniting of the conquered, a reversal, a forecasting of the liberation of peasants, dalits, women and tribals. (p.100)

At the same time she cautions against 'desperate beatings of an imagined upper-caste past'(p.101) in order to give her analysis an Ambedkarian 'moral import'. Just as historicity of liberation struggles is neither a mere remembrance nor forgetting of the past, Omvedt's Ambedkarian strategy of speaking against 'caste' as the "monster that would always cross their path" (p.52) form an essential condition for forging Dalit identity, while it discounts the idea of a unified national identity. Omvedt does not merely give an agent-centred moral argument, she expands the space of morality from protean notion of identity and alterity to a space beyond the existing social hierarchy. In her reading of Dalit Panthers (chap.9), she categorically states, "If the proletarianism of dalit identity was a new universalism, a new claim to being a kind of vanguard it was also an effort to define the entire Indian revolution in terms of the upsurge of the low castes ..."(p.78). This is a reconstruction of moral spaces lost within caste system by way of responding to emergent forms of class hierarchies that situate moral agency not merely on a Dalit-centric discourse, but in a new discourse of justice and liberty. Omvedt produces a knowledge of the 'sensible' by mediating between the polarities of Dalit struggle: Brahminism and Dalitisation. She goes along with the strategy of posing the latter against the former as advocated in Dalit movements, but departs from this usual strategy by suggesting the possibility of a creative synthesis between proletarian class identity and concrete forms of oppression.

Re-publication of this founding text of understanding Dalit movement re-configures significant questions of our time, such as, affirmative action, protective discrimination and questions of representation. Without falling into some of Omvedt's anthropological search for authenticity, these questions can be addressed more rigorously by taking into account situations and events. The recent claims of inclusion of the Dalits by replacing the ascriptional paradigm of evaluation of merit in the national context and the claim of Adivasis of Assam to be recognized as 'scheduled tribe' finds its right echoes in the inner recesses of Dalit consciousness that is depicted in the book. That the question of recognition is not merely a question of recognition of an

identity and their empowerment is brought out in the pages of the book by a *re-iteration of justice and its denial*. The book immensely succeeds in raising our sensibility against any distortion in the lived experience of un-emancipated Dalits. It is, therefore, a radical affirmation of a vision that goes beyond the apparent.

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