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Editorial

2006 has been a year of struggle at the office of the journal. Struggle to keep it going without compromising on its quality. Struggle to cultivate the culture of peer-review among those who cared to submit their articles for consideration of publication in our journal. And struggle to pay more attention to the journal by the editors themselves, which has been an increasingly challenging task, what with their growing engagements in other academic activities.

We have been finally successful to present to our subscribers and readers a volume of the journal that combines two issues, but not necessarily the size of two issues. The articles in this volume are still rather discrete, but looked positively, it is a mixed basket where there is something for everyone – be s/he a person of history, anthropology, sociology, literature, feminism, environment, philosophy, linguistics, or simply a Northeastian.

We start with an article on Percival Spear, an illustrious historian of modern India by Professor David Syiemlieh, whose research on the history of Northeast India in general and church history in particular is well known. This semi-biographical article has many lessons for young historians to learn of which the methodological rigour in historiography may be mentioned as one of the most important one. This is followed by a critique of historiography of the formation of Assamese identity. Although this review article has no reference to Percival Spear it is commendable in the way it shows the cracks and creeks that a lay reader may not notice in some of the most scholarly historical works on Northeast India. From this critique we move on to the historiography and sociology of Kirat identity very well attempted by a well known sociologist of the eastern Himalayas. Although de-sanskritisation of the Sikkimese communities subsumed in the article by the ancient word "Kirat" is a rather recent phenomenon that came to the limelight in the 90s of the previous century, the author brings out the context as well as background of this phenomenon very capably.

After these three articles the present volume turns its attention towards some central issues of feminism, as revealed in the article by Ms. Daphinda War, and towards the 'hoax' of conservation, as brought out effectively by Professor P. K. Misra.

We are happy to have a substantial number of book reviews in this volume and hope to have even more of them in our future issues. We are also contemplating a Hindi issue of the journal under the guest editorship of Dr. D. K. Choubey in near future. We do not see it as invasion of Hindi, as some of our friends might like to see, but see it as its obeisance to the languages and cultures of Northeast India. Let us welcome the proposal.

T B Subba
Editor

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Historiography of the Formation of Assamese Identity: A Review

MADHUMITA SENGUPTA

A thematic review of *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947* by A. Guha; *Assam: A Burning Question* by H. Gohain; *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Questions in North East India* by S. Nag; *Social Tensions in Assam Middle Class Politics* by A.K. Baruah; and *India Against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Identity* by S. Baruah.

Introduction

Assam, tucked away in the Northeast corner of India is a state that has been locked for the last few years in a bloody struggle between 'insurgents' and the state as the architect of counter-insurgency operations. This may not come as a surprise, for Assam is not the only insurgency-ridden state in this country. But what makes Assam special and at the same time vulnerable is its geographical location in a region that is surrounded by international borders on three sides. It makes sense therefore, to trace the roots of this 'ethnic' turmoil by taking a look at how an Assamese identity came to be imagined here in the nineteenth century.

The history of Assamese identity is a rather interesting one for the very reason that it is at once a story of the formation and transformation of the community. It has been remarked by one author (Misra 2001) that what has been happening in Assam over the past few decades in the matter of the widening of the parameters of the Assamese nationality as a result of swift demographic change, may be said to be unique not only in relation to the other states or regions of India but also in relation to most other regions of the world where cross border migration is a problem. This article takes a closer look, with the aim of reviewing some of the existing literature on the

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formation and evolution of Assamese identity. The article has three sections. The first deals with the contents of the five books reviewed while the second section contains reviews of the latter. The last section, while summing up criticisms of these books also raises certain queries that have been left unanswered by the authors. Finally, in view of the inadequacy of the current arguments, an alternative approach has been held out for a proper understanding of the process of creation and evolution of Assamese identity.

Current Historiographical Approach

Any survey of Assam's colonial past must include the pioneering work of Amalendu Guha (1977). He presents colonial Assam as a case of contending hegemonies owing to the co-existence of pan-Indian nationalism and regionalism, the latter manifesting itself in the form of a struggle to drive out the Bengali immigrants from Assam.

According to Guha, it was the colonial state that provided the initial stimuli for the growth of community consciousness among the Assamese by first encouraging immigration into Assam from neighbouring Bengal and then by imposing Bengali as the official language of the province. The need to induct outsiders into Assam first arose apparently owing to the acute manpower shortage in Assam, the problem being magnified by the demand for labour coming from the tea plantations. The easy availability of educated personnel from Bengal and the consequent redundancy of building an expensive educational infrastructure in Assam encouraged the employment of Bengalis in government offices. The inclusion of the Bengali speaking district of Sylhet in 1874 for colonial administrative reasons further increased the number of Bengalis in Assam. In the 20th century the government encouraged immigration from overpopulated East Bengal to work the cultivable wasteland with an eye to increasing the revenue yielding capacity of the province. Having first settled in the jungle infested riverine belt, the Mymensinghias, as the immigrants were popularly called, gradually spread out to claim areas held by the autochthones. Being better cultivators they could offer higher prices to induce Assamese peasants to sell off portions of their land holdings.

The author states that the outsider agitation in Assam stemmed from the apprehension that the Assamese would be turned into a minority in their own province. In several ways the British also encouraged such sentiments. While presenting the census report of 1931, C.S. Mullan, a European civil

servant, prophesied that Sibsagar would ultimately remain the only district where the Assamese would find a home of his or her own. Such statements were definitely provocative.

Amalendu Guha's chief contribution lay in his identification of the primarily economic nature of the agitation against the outsiders. He classifies the immigrants in Assam into four groups: (1) tea garden labourers (2) migrants from East Bengal prior to independence (3) Hindus who came as a result of migration, and (4) Nepalis who came in search of livelihood. Guha points out that of these the Nepalis and the tea garden labourers did not compete with the natives for jobs, a factor, which rendered them more acceptable to the local people. The case of the Bengali immigrant was, however, different. According to Guha the immigrant Bengali Hindus were disliked because they competed with the dominant Assamese middle class for land, jobs and local power.

Like Guha, Hiren Gohain (1985) also attributes the beginning of community consciousness in Assam to colonial decisions that generated among the Assamese a fear that they would be eventually marginalised in their own homeland. At the same time, he also agrees with the former on the economic impulse behind the agitation. However, the similarity ends here for Gohain feels that yet another factor played a crucial role in 'ethnic' mobilisation in Assam. This he describes as the chauvinistic attitude of a section of the Bengali community in Assam. According to him, well-placed Bengalis often appeared to endorse the colonial rulers' line of neglecting Assam. By way of example, he cites the Bengalis's lack of support for proposals to establish a separate university or railway zone for Assam. Gohain explains that since the common man, whether Assamese or tribal, often confronted the government in the person of the petty Bengali official, he often felt a blind resentment against Bengalis in general.

Gohain is not the only author who blames the Bengali settlers in Assam. Many authors have prioritised 'Bengali chauvinism' as the key factor that antagonised the Assamese and contributed to the growth of community consciousness among them. Sajal Nag (1990), for instance, refers to the ruthless attitude of the Bengali functionaries of the imperial administration as well as to their supercilious outlook in considering the Assamese as a subordinate and inferior people. In 1836, when Bengali was introduced as the official language, Bengali subordinates apparently helped Henry Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, argue that Assamese was a mere variant of the Bengali language.

Apurba Baruah, in his book (Baruah 1991) on middle class politics in Assam, has also blamed the 'elite of the Bengali society and their patrons in Bengal' not only for the imposition of the Bengali language on Assam but also for the growth of anti-Bengali sentiments among the local people. Apurba Baruah rejects the role of economic factors as stimuli. Referring to Guha's statement that the migration of tea-garden labourers and Nepalis did not create any problem because they did not compete with the Assamese for jobs, Apurba Baruah writes (1991: 37-38):

> While the tea garden labourers did not add to the pressure on land in rural Assam because they more or less confined themselves to the tea plantations, the Nepalis settled down in villages and thus there was every possibility of their coming into conflict with the Assamese peasants. But what saved the situation was that the Nepalis slowly got assimilated with the Assamese. So did the tea garden labourers so much so that a new dimension was added to the Assamese culture by the tea garden labourers ...The conflict that exists between the indigenous Assamese population and the immigrant Bengali in Assam is generated because of the resistance of the latter to the process of assimilation.

In *India against Itself*, on the other hand, Sanjib Baruah suggests that more than any other factor, 'colonial geography' shaped 'the projects of people hood in Assam- the Assamese sub-national narrative and the counter-narratives as well as the political agendas that followed from these narratives'. According to Sanjib Baruah, throughout the entire colonial period the British treated Assam as a land frontier for Bengal. This is evident both in the decision to introduce Bengali as the state language and in the inclusion of Sylhet in Assam. He states that their policy of encouraging large-scale immigration from Bengal to Assam, as well as the way the boundaries of Assam were drawn up, produced a demographic balance that kept Assam's language question a highly controversial one throughout the entire colonial period and beyond.

An interesting aspect of Sanjib Baruah's account is his views regarding language standardisation in Assam. He points out that the form language standardization takes in an area depends on many factors. In the case of Assam, there apparently was never a chance that Assamese could have emerged as the standard language of the whole of colonial Assam. First, Bengali identity around the Bengali language had predated language standardization in Assam, and many of the literate sections of the Bengali population in Assam, especially Hindus, had begun identifying with the Bengali

language and culture. Moreover it was not known how the tribal population would react to prioritisation of Assamese. In fact, even the hill peoples who were historically close to the Assamese and some of the plains tribals who had historically adopted the Assamese language and culture eventually rejected Assamese.

Finally, Sanjib Baruah says that the concern with the question of 'developing' the Assamese language stemmed from the belief that a 'developed' language is a sign of a 'developed' people; so the development of the language could be the road to the development of the people speaking that language. It seems to him that this formulation was shaped by the new ideas about modernity and progress.

Review

Both Amalendu Guha and Hiren Gohain highlight the role of the colonial state not only in replacing Assamese by Bengali but also in opening up the region to immigration. At the same time, these authors draw attention to the economic aspect of the movement in Assam. The reader must also agree with Gohain that the high-handed attitude of a section of the Bengali population in Assam possibly added fuel to the smouldering fire of Assamese outrage. It also makes sense to exonerate the greater part of the community from the rather common charge of chauvinism. However the growth of an ethnic movement is a much more complex issue than the way it has been portrayed. That Guha and Gohain fail to see its layered structure has been shown in the concluding section of this review.

So far as the notions of Bengali-clerk conspiracy and Bengali chauvinism referred to by Sajal Nag and Apurba Baruah are concerned, Rajen Saikia (2001) has decisively dismissed these as myths. As far as alienation resulting from a Bengali sense of superiority was concerned, it must not be forgotten that the latter was widely acknowledged by the people at that time and hence this does not convincingly account for the Bengali emerging as the 'other' in Assam. Apurba Baruah, on the other hand, must remember that at a time when the Assamese language was in the process of being standardised, it was not unusual for ordinary Bengalis to deny it the status of an independent language. However, such beliefs were not strong enough to influence the British who had their own reasons in formulating their policies - a fact emphasized by Hiren Gohain. After all, it is clear enough by now that the colonial state selectively accepted ideas and judiciously

interpreted them to suit their imperial interests. Apurba Baruah also does not substantiate what kind of a role the Bengali elite and their patrons in Calcutta played in influencing the official opinion.

A well-written book, *India against itself* provides insights into yet another aspect of colonial administration in India - colonial geography. Its account of Assam being regarded as an extension of Bengal in the colonial imagination, adds to our knowledge of colonialism. All things said however, the book, while drawing attention to certain developments, fails to ask certain pertinent questions which follow logically therefrom and which I have mentioned in the concluding section. The author correctly regards the pre-1873 outrage of the Assamese as both cultural and economic. In that year Assamese was reinstated as the official language of Assam. One naturally expects language to move lower down in the hierarchy of issues in the subsequent stages of the ongoing 'ethnic' struggle now that it had received official sanction and its status was no longer at stake. Language, however, continued to occupy center-stage.

Sanjib Baruah says that the language question was kept alive by the inclusion of Sylhet in 1874. The English educated Sylhetis were apparently monopolizing government jobs to the annoyance of the newly emerging Assamese middle class. While it is not difficult to understand both the cultural and economic implications of this decision, one cannot help noting that the grievance here is more likely to be an economic one especially in the light of the removal of Bengali as the official language. However the book's exposition of the subsequent stages of the identity movement in Assam indicates that this was primarily language centric. While one can appreciate attempts to develop a rich literature in Assamese, it is not easy to explain the rather militant tone of this effort. Instances of vilification of the Assamese language in the Bengali media were too few to explain the phenomenon adequately. One cannot help noting that fighting for the language would not have safeguarded the economic interests of the community, which ought to have been the chief concern. It is true that fighting for the recognition of one's language is also integral to a community's economic interests. However, post 1873, the nature of the 'threat' had shifted out of the ambit of the language which now need not have been invoked to solve the demographic transformation. Thus the cause and effect relationship between the inclusion of Sylhet and the growth of linguistic nationalism is not clear. In one place the author refers to the influence of notions of modernity and progress behind the conviction that language needed to be developed but this is not elaborated.

In course of the narrative the author points out that no one expected Assamese to be the primary language of Assam, but he does not ask why despite this a single language was sought to be imposed on the province.

Coming to the 20th century, the author refers to the considerable opposition to immigration. At the same time, he shows that men like Ambikagiri Roychoudhury, one of the most vocal spokesmen of the Assamese community, were willing to co-opt all those who agreed to accept the Assamese culture. The Assam Sanrakshini Sabha, i.e., the Assam Preservation Society founded by the former, apparently had a policy of welcoming as members immigrants who chose to identify with Assamese culture (Baruah 2001: 82). According to the organization's rules, those who came to Assam before 1926 and were permanently settled in Assam, could be members of the organization if they signed a statement saying that they accepted Assamese as their language and declared themselves members of the Assamese nationality. It may be noted that major Assamese literary, cultural and political figures, many of who were Congress party activists were involved in the Roychaudhury-led Sanrakshini Sabha. Sanjib Baruah fails to ask whether under the circumstances, the war against immigration was a full-fledged one, to the extent that the war on language was. If it was not, then can we say that the Assamese intellectuals were really concerned about the occupation of their territory by the immigrants? In fact, a likely conclusion under the circumstances would be that the Assamese community consciousness of those days did not reflect the concerns of all sections of the population especially those of the peasants who were likely to be most affected by immigration. In fact, Krishak and Ryot Sabhas were already voicing the protests of the peasants. Can we say then that the base of the Assamese community was narrow and that it echoed the views of the urban middle class only? In fact, the Assamese also displayed a large degree of indifference towards tribal fears of being outnumbered and of being dispossessed of their land by immigrants.

An interesting feature of identity politics in colonial Assam was that the willingness to accept immigrants as part of the Assamese community was leading to the transformation of this very community whose cultural determinants were largely Hindu. Recent research indicates that hidden beneath all the 19th century rhetoric about a multi-cultural identity was the firm belief that the Assamese identity was not an inclusive one, i.e., certain cultural parameters defined the contours of the community. Those not conforming to these markers were not accepted as true Assamiyas. While one parameter was definitely the Assamese language the second was the

Vaishnava Hindu religion. The reader thus gains the impression that there existed even in the second half of the 19th century a core group of true or legitimate Assamiyas within the bigger composite community. The Hindu religious underpinnings of the Assamese community are, in fact, impossible to overlook. Udayon Misra (2001: 14) writes, "An influential section of the Assamese intelligentsia who stressed the polyethnic nature of Assamese society, at the same time felt that it was the Hindu, and particularly the Vaishnavite faith, which served as the main cementing force of Assamese society."

If Vaishnava Hinduism was so important to the people, why was this ignored in the 19th century as a marker of Assamese identity? One cannot help wondering whether a composite identity was being consciously forged at that time. Finally, why were the Hindu Bengalis the prime targets and not the Bengali Muslims, although Sanjib Baruah in one place acknowledges clearly that the former like the latter were not averse to becoming part of the Assamese cultural mainstream?

Clearly, what we have here is a case of evolution of identities and Sanjib Baruah fails to highlight it. It is not possible to take this point of the evolution of identities as usual and therefore not worthy of being mentioned for the simple reason that it was too serious to have happened naturally. Why was there a widening of the parameters of the Assamese identity in the 19th century? The nature of the shift was serious enough to justify the claim that what took place was an attempt to forge a new identity on the basis of certain selected markers. It is evident that there was a conscious process of selection and choice in deciding the markers of the Assamese identity in the second half of the 19th century. After all, language appears to have been relatively less important in comparison to religious beliefs. Once again, Udayon Misra (2001: 25) may be quoted in this context:

> There seemed to have been a shift or movement from a position where the defining marks of Assamese tradition and culture made up of a mix of several ethnic streams were considered more important than the language itself, to a position where the Assamese language came to be seen as the primary and perhaps the sole cementing force of the different cultural streams which make up the Assamese community. Could we say that the idea of Assamese identity was gradually shifting from a position of 'multilingual uniculture' to one of 'unilingual multiculture'?

One is tempted to ask whether language was projected because the

different sections of the people were more familiar with it than with the religion. If the answer lies in familiarity, then the question arises as to why the creation of a composite identity was so essential at that stage.

Conclusion: Reflections on the Formation of Assamese Identity

At the outset, I would like to mention that my proposed critique of the existing literature notwithstanding, the aforementioned works have made a significant contribution to this area of historical research. Apart from drawing academic attention to this rather neglected region of the Indian sub-continent, the works of Amalendu Guha, Hiren Gohain and Sanjib Baruah in particular have been responsible for shifting the focus away from the so called supercilious attitude of the immigrant Bengalis, which remains unverified, to the economic content of the grievances of the Assamese middle class. The role of colonial administrative policies in encouraging immigration and hence in the emergence of an Assamese identity has also been highlighted which is a far cry from the way immigration has been picturised in official accounts as being totally spontaneous. Nonetheless, the literature surveyed so far throw up certain obvious questions that merit a closer look. Firstly, how far was the earliest attempt to locate the self, the outcome of perceived wrongs of the kind referred to earlier? For a people to be antagonised by an assault on their language, prior existence of community consciousness (in this case, the sense of belonging to a linguistic community) is essential. However, if we presume that this did exist, then the arguments of these authors do not stand and we cannot trace the formation of the Assamese community to the event in 1836, i.e., the introduction of Bengali as the official language. We cannot however argue in favour of the existence of this kind of a community consciousness in Assam prior to 1836 because this would make it difficult for us to explain the lack of protests till 1853. Differences of opinion in Assamese society regarding the markers of identity would also be difficult to explain. Rajen Saikia points out that from 1836 when Bengali was introduced to 1853 there was no perceptible reaction against the decision. The protest came up loud and clear only in 1853 when A.J.M. Mills, Judge of the Sadar Dewani Adalat, visited Assam on an official inspection tour. After all, the language itself was being standardised all this while. In fact, what needs further exploration is the role of the missionaries in emphasizing the distinctness of the Assamese language. But the question remains as to whether we can regard even language standardisation as sufficient explanation for the formation of community consciousness in Assam. Should we not take into account the impact of

Renascent Bengal on the earliest ideologues, considering the fact that most of them had spent some time in Calcutta - the hub of Bengal? It may be noted that Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, one of the earliest exponents of the Assamese language, was himself patronised by Major Jenkins for receiving higher education in Calcutta. He became a regular contributor of *Orunodoy*, the paper which played a pioneering role in instituting Assamese as the official language, only on his return from Calcutta. Although a sound case can be prepared only on the basis of more evidence, *prima facie*, it seems that the final verdict on the creation of Assamese identity cannot be pronounced without reference to the impact of Calcutta in particular and Bengal in general on young Assamese minds. The researcher must also consider the impact of the growing anti-colonial consciousness throughout the country on the people. There were bound to be several 'others' in the story of the self-definition of the Assamese.

In other words, the introduction of Bengali and the employment of Bengalis to government offices surely contributed to the growth of community consciousness among a section of the Assamese speaking population, but the latter cannot claim sole credit for the phenomenon, perhaps not even the credit for being the initiator. Such a perspective becomes obvious especially in the light of selection of markers of identity in the 19th century. In fact, this very selection itself is suspect for a variety of reasons. How was this selection carried out and what prompted such a selection? In other words, how did language become so important to the people? What happened to the other markers? Why was language so important even after 1873? It has already been shown that the inclusion of Sylhet cannot explain this adequately. In fact, why did language continue to retain its importance even when the demographic structure was changing in the 20th century owing to immigration? After all, the insistence on language was tampering with the very composition of the community and also alienating the tribal elements that were acknowledged as integral to the Assamese community. Was the projection of language as the only marker of identity not proving to be self-destructive? Why did the intellectuals not realise this? What was blurring their vision?

Finally, did the movement of the Assamese in the 19th and 20th centuries reflect the concerns of the urban middle class alone? Fresh research that offers answers to these questions is needed in order to provide us with a comprehensive picture of the nature and genesis of the movement for an Assamese identity, filling, in the process, gaps left by existing studies on the subject. For the moment, it can only be said that the selection of markers of

identity by Assamese intellectuals in the 19th and 20th centuries led to a complete transformation and, subsequently, disintegration of the previous identity markers. In other words, what I am proposing is that a new community emerged in Assam in the 19th century with a predominantly, although not yet exclusively, linguistic identity. I do not regard this community as a so-called ethnic group, for if such a thing existed, then this could only have been prior to the 19th century, and with a character quite distinct from the way it is perceived by available literature. It is, however, my conjecture from the foregoing literature survey that the emergence of a linguistic community in the 19th century was something entirely novel and that it synchronised with the politicisation and disintegration of specific ethnic boundaries in colonial Assam.

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Book Reviews

Barnes L. Mawrie SDB, *Introduction to Khasi Ethics*, Shillong: DBCIC, 2005, pp.xii+101, Rs120/-.

The book under review is a brief description of the moral code and norms of the Khasis, an ethnic community living in the Khasi-Jaintia hills of Meghalaya in the north-eastern region of India. The author places an ethical concept of "earning righteousness" (*Kamai ia ka Hok)* at the heart of Khasi ethics in explicating all its great ethical commandments. How the ethical commandments find their application in the individual and collective life, as reflected in the society, polity and judicial system, language and literature, and even in the natural environment, forms the theme of the chapters. The book is laid out in eight chapters. Seemingly the nucleus of the book is crystallized between chapters three and seven: personal and social ethics (chs. 3 & 4); ethics reflected in the mythical narratives, literary idioms, and in Khasi attitude to nature (chs. 5, 6 & 7). The last chapter (ch. 8) is on the evolution of Khasi morality, as the community confronts such extraneous phenomena as the new forms of administration, advent of Christianity and, along with it, the exposure to western civilization and so on. While chapter one is a general discussion on the nature and extent of ethics, chapter two is an explication of the religious moorings of the Khasi ethics. The book has also an introduction and a conclusion.

The book however generally suffers from a great deal of conceptual muddle. To give but a few examples: It is contended that Khasi ethics is founded on a religious tradition (ch.2) and, again, on nature (ch.7). One would now be constrained to construe that Khasi ethics has its source in a naturalistic religion. This, indeed, is the observation of such early ethnologists as Gurdon. But, in recent times, both Christian and revivalist Khasi writers themselves generally tend to differ from Gurdon and other western ethnologists. They go to establish at some length the monotheistic character of Khasi religion, in virtue of the concept of a supreme personal God (*U Blei*), the righteous law-giver. Christian scholars, including the present writer, have gone so far as to suggest that transition from the traditional Khasi religion to Christian monotheism has been relatively smooth, precisely in virtue of the concept of a supreme being, conceived as both father and mother. The implication that

the Khasi religion and ethics are purely naturalistic perhaps cannot be the intention of the writer.

Secondly, the author claims his writing to be both analytic and hermeneutic. The two methods however cannot be judiciously combined. The hermeneutic method has established itself as a scientific method in recent times in total disillusionment of the analytic method. For the kind of study undertaken, a combination of the phenomenological and the hermeneutic methods would however be ideal. Yet, what one encounters in the book is purely a descriptive method that most early ethnologists largely employ. In the application of the descriptive method, Gurdon is perhaps yet to be surpassed. However, the author's contention that Khasi ethics is a "narrative ethics" is remarkably on the mark. Comparative mythologists like Eliade and Campbell have probed into the ethico-religious significance of the narratives against the backdrop of a philosophy of symbols, myth and rituals. The author's attempt to derive the ethical significance of myths, in a similar spirit, is praiseworthy (ch.5). Moreover, the extension of the attempt to Khasi idioms (ch.6) is quite innovative, although the entire discussion on the narrative ethics (of myths and idioms) ought to have been projected against a philosophy of ethico-religious language. In its absence, the whole exercise appears sadly superficial.

Thirdly, the author's distinction between the 'personal' and 'social' ethics, encompassing 'the conjugal-familial' and the 'politico-juridical' arena respectively, is somewhat baffling to any moral philosopher or theologian. The philosophical basis of the distinction is anything but conceptually sound. It may however be conceded that the realm of ethics need not be exclusively social, in as much as ethics is a science of human action in one's relation, not only to 'the other', empirical or transcendental, but also to oneself. Is not the ethical action, directed to the other or oneself, to conduce for the excellence of the moral agent primarily? The distinction then between the personal and social ethics will have to be made with reference to the direction of the will to oneself or the other, rather than such extraneous institutional categories as marriage, family, polity and law.

One of the serious drawbacks of the book is the reticence of the author to enter at crucial junctures into the theoretical issues of Khasi ethics. Let us give an example. Khasi ethics is said to be predominantly an ethics of the clan (*Kur*). Indeed, loyalty to the clan (*Tipkur-Tipkha)* is one of the great commandments of the Khasi way of life, the other two being "loving God and

loving man" (*Tipbriew-Tipblei)* and 'the earning of righteousness" (*Kamai ia ka Hok)*. Respect to the elders, especially the acceptance of the authority of the eldest maternal uncle (*Kni*), the custodian and the manager of the family property, the teacher of moral instructions to the younger members, the adjudicator of disputes within and between clans, and the constitution of the assembly/council (*Durbar)*, the penal restitutions, the determinations of the taboos (*ka Sang),* especially associated with the institution of marriage, all stem from the concept of clan. The author is right in contending that Khasi ethics is the 'ethics of the clan'. Now, the important question that we face inevitably is: Does this make Khasi ethics clannish? The author cannot afford to ignore the question. The more so because political scientists everywhere are increasingly becoming aware, today, that, in the context of the resurgence and assertion of the tribal and ethnic identities all over the world, in particular, Africa and Asia, communitarianism, as distinct from a mere 'communalism' (adj. of community), is posing a serious threat to the peaceful coexistence of the members in the larger society, if also, often, to the national integration itself by offsetting the law and order in the nation states. Here are genuine problems of the legitimate aspirations and the assertions of identities of the people at the periphery of a society, coming into conflict with the centrist and the majoritarian ethos. Such problems have often projected a negative picture of communitarianism as being constrictive of its interaction with the other.

Further, in viewing the Khasi ethics as clan ethics, there is an additional danger of abdicating an individualistic or personal ethics, but this suggestion could not be possibly the intention of the author. The author cannot however afford to ignore the danger, even if the concept of the Khasi personal ethics is different from its western counterpart (p. 42). Personal ethics need not come into conflict with the social and the universal ethics. The point may have to be illustrated. Thus, there may be complete equality among the members of the clan. But how about equality to a member of a different clan within the Khasi society, or a member of a different ethnic group (p. 43)? How exclusive or inclusive is the Khasi concept of the other? If the concept of the clan is exclusive, the charge of Khasi ethics being clannish is a serious one. For the members of the clan themselves, it may have a negative implication, too. Being unable to exist outside his clan would at once be suggestive of a Freudian intra-uterine existence of 'an oceanic feeling', or a 'union with the breast'. This may be construed as a refusal to grow into maturity, and face a hostile world out there, from a secured social childhood.

If however the concept of the clan is inclusive, how far can the Khasi ethics accommodate the other to merit the title of universal ethics as well? Would it at that stage of universalism cease to be the ethics of the clan? The inner tension between the clan ethics and the universal ethics is more than palpable in the author's fear of the 'corrosion' of the Khasi ethics, when confronted by such modern catalysts of change in Khasi society as the new forms of administration, western civilization, English education and, above all, the advent of Christianity in the Khasi-Jaintia hills (ch.8). Is Nietzsche, then, finally right in thinking that our ethical values herald 'a twilight of the gods'? If he is right, do our 'gods' have then only the feet of clay, and nothing stable in them? We may not overlook the fact that whatever has been happening to Khasi ethics today is also happening to Indian ethics at a much larger level, confronted as it is with the same or similar global agents of change.

On the contrary, it is imperative for us to note that, in an age characterized by communication and media miracle, free markets and globalization, change in every domain of life, let alone ethics, is inevitable, however we may resist it. The fear of 'the other' (alien, foreign, unfamiliar, strange) is only natural to us all, Khasi or non-Khasi, because the encounter with the other tends to relativize our own sacrosanct and secured cultural universes. It makes an inroad into our own 'impregnable' and absolute fortress of beliefs and ethos. Nevertheless, the encounter need not be seen as only destructive; it can be fruitfully and creatively used for cross fertilization for the mature growth of the self and the other alike. A mature culture may be expected to evaluate both its own and other's resources rationally, to weed out judiciously the dead-wood in its own tradition and the deleterious in other's tradition, to retain whatever is of intrinsic worth, but to shun the pernicious influences, and thus finally to incorporate whatever is good, irrespective of its source, in the alien culture to cross fertilize and enrich its own resources. Tradition should be treated as a seed, which should, when the time arrives, sprout and grow into a tree of knowledge and life. There is no point in keeping the seed as seed for eternity. This should apply to all cultural elements, including religion and ethics. If this were not to be done, our hallowed ancient traditions get 'fossilized'. The alarm bells that a traditionalist often rings, with the grim statement that his tradition is wearing out, must not be taken as an apology for retaining what is ancient but as the signal to change the gear. The author has failed to enter into this all too important debate on the theoretical issues that will have a direct bearing on the praxis of Khasi ethics. Hopefully, someone will take this work, as it truly claims, to be an introduction, and

develop it at a greater length.

The question of Khasi ethics therefore may have to be taken outside the clan ethics. No human being is a mere member of his family and clan alone, but also of a larger society. Can a Khasi, or anyone for that matter, be ethical outside his clan? The relative social equality in the Khasi society is a matter of rightful pride for the Khasis. That there is no beggary in the Khasi society is borne out by our observation. Nonetheless, a study of those orphans rescued and brought up by the society, under whichever institutional modalities adopted, is yet to be carried out. How do these orphans and destitutes finally get integrated into the society? Or do they end up as merely domestic help and rural farmhands for a morsel of food, and thus continue to live on the fringes of the society? We do not have any statistics. To go a step further, would the social equality be extended to the people outside the clan, in the larger Khasi society, and indeed, even to the non-Khasi society? The great Khasi value of eating strictly of the fruit of one's own labour, and of thus shunning beggary and thievery at all levels for one's livelihood, is worthy of emulation for others. Gandhi's concept of 'bread labour' echoes a similar principle. The ethical dimension of the great principle however has to be further extended to the practice of gambling, lottery and drunkenness as being inconsonant with the Khasi ethics. Even in the stage play by Gatphoh (p. 19), cited to exemplify the virtue of eating off one's own labour, it is the two Khasis who depict the two attitudes towards what is not earned by righteousness, although only one of them is authenticated as characteristically Khasi. Indeed, such attitudes are found in every society.

In the ethical evolution of man, we may note, there is a gradual expansion of the ethical sphere from the individual to the social, from the in-group to the out-group, from the particular to the universal. The ethical is the universal, as Kierkegaard rightly observes. When there is a conflict between the two universals, the ethical resolution consists in opting for the more universal. It is a higher ethics, if I am able to move from the self to the other, from the family to the clan, from the clan to the larger society. There are ethicists who take this argument even outside the realm of the human species and extend it to the animal kingdom and, at times, even to the natural environment. Should we treat our nest as the world, or the whole world as one great nest? Ethical redemption is in the universal, and not in the particular.

Further, the author fails to convey the ethical position in respect of

marriage in Khasi society. He generally argues that the pre-arranged marriages are the normal practice, but he also goes on to state that 'living together publicly' has also the social sanction as a marriage. He, however, thinks that the practice of living together for the couple became prevalent only under the western influence. Yet, elsewhere (p. 37) he argues that, procreation being the primary function of marriage, living together and begetting a child became an acceptable custom to ward off a future divorce on the ground of infertility. The shifting stand of the author on marriage is baffling. Perhaps, there is a need for an in-depth discussion and debate on the nature of the institution of marriage, the constitution of family, the primacy of procreation, against the backdrop of the ethics of responsible parenthood in the evolution of Khasi morals. For closely associated with this are the other social problems of teenage pregnancy, unsustainable parenthood, broken families, all of which have serious and unwanted consequences for the physical, psychological and social health of the population.

Likewise, the author's conception of taboo (*ka Sang*) is not marked by clarity. Taboos are said to be prohibitions imposed by the society, having nothing to do with morality, on account of their being superstitions. Building the 'queen's house' (*Ingsad*) with nails and iron is a taboo; so, too, killing an animal without throwing a few grains of rice over it is a taboo (p. 39). To dismiss such taboos as mere superstitions is one thing, but to evaluate them as symbols of eminently significant human actions is another thing. Firstly, the author misses out on the rich symbolism of these taboos. In the former instance, the contrast between the nature and culture, 'the raw and the cooked', 'the bear and the barber', that the anthropologists, in particular, of the structuralist persuasions, have highlighted, is placed before us insightfully. The author, despite his anthropological training, has missed it altogether. The fertility of the 'queen' is equated with that of the mother nature herself (*ka pyrthei*), unsullied by any product of human hands, undefiled by any such items as a nail, iron etc. of human culture. This symbolism is much stronger in the primal mind than any modern microbiological concerns of childbirth and parturition. Likewise, in the second instance, the symbolism of the helplessness of man in taking a life to sustain one's own life is dramatized in a symbolic action. The action itself is neither magical nor superstitious, but an eminently significant response of man, compelled as he is in procuring food for his own sustenance that may involve taking the life of an animal. Living much more symbiotically with nature, the tribal community is much more sensitive to the violence inbuilt in the food-chain.

Going a step further, in the act of construing meaning in the Khasi taboos, would the author suggest the taboo of incest, too, the most abominable act for the Khasi, to be a superstition? Perhaps he cannot. It does not need a great scientific knowledge of genetics for a clan to observe that the progeny resultant upon the incestuous relation is malformed and defective. This is clear from the extreme fear of the Khasis that an eternal curse, in the form of deformed children with incurable diseases, would befall not only those indulging in incest, but also the entire clan itself. Modern genetics attests to the fact that, due to the depletion of the diversity of the gene pool, as it has happened with the endogamous tribes, the entire population may be wiped off. We are now in a better position to appreciate the extreme fear of, and the severe strictures imposed by, the Khasis against incestuous relations. The eugenic considerations are then dominant in the abhorrence of incest. Such taboos as incest therefore may be prohibitions imposed by the society, but they are, to be sure, rooted often in our biology. E.O.Wilson, the Harvard socio-biologist, thinks that human biology will unfailingly dictate morality in the evolution of human ethics. Moreover, the fear of the moral sin associated with the infractions of taboos in a tribal community is not merely psychological, it is deeply metaphysical, in as much as it is inseparable from their perception of human existence itself (p. 41, 61, 62). Hence, the infractions were severely punished. Nonetheless, the observation of the author, that, with the British administration, an alternate system of punishment came into vogue, but that the religious and psychological castigations still hold their ground, is on the mark (p. 53).

Precisely because of the grounding of Khasi ethics in metaphysics, the contention of the author that "the sets of moral norms remain always conventional" (p. 47) is somewhat problematic. Khasi ethics is neither relativistic nor constructionistic, despite its cultural moorings. Let no one make the mistake of identifying it with the post-modernistic ethics determined by the contingent cultural settings. The elements of universal and objective norms are too strong to be denied. Thus even when a *syiem* is chosen by the elders and the representative of families, he is regarded as a representative of God. Post-modernist ethics simply does not provide for any divine right theory of authority, but the Khasi ethics still may. Again, the author indulges in a contradiction in respect of penal institutions (p. 51). He claims that Khasis do not have the capital punishment. At the same time, he goes on to state that the criminal would be beaten to death with clubs or hurled down the precipice.

The author's contention that "Christianity has done great good to the

Khasis" (p. 89), may not be universally accepted even within the Khasi society. If this were not true how could we explain such revivalist religious movements as the *Seng-Khasi*? Moreover, the author himself admits that some of the changes that have occurred in the Khasi society, after the advent of Christianity, have contributed to the "rapid decay of the society" (p. 90). A (secular) historian may readily concede to the fact that the Christian missionaries did a yeoman service to the Khasi society in spreading the liberal education, establishing health-care systems, improving sanitation and hygiene and, above all giving it a sense of an identity as an ethnic community. Yet, it is imperative for the author to make a clear distinction between western civilization, culture and Christianity. Western civilization has spread all over the urban India for a host of reasons that are there for anyone to see. Western culture is selectively, if also superficially, (it has not seeped into the values), adopted by the urban Khasis. This is not borne in mind by the author, when he, in a facile manner, generalizes that the Khasis are westernized. As far as Christianity is concerned, it has no culture of its own, as the German historian Troeltsch would say. It has grown in the north-eastern region of India, striking its root in whichever cultural soil it happened to find itself. It has been the same story for the history of Christianity from its inception. The author would be in a better position to evaluate the impact of Christianity on the Khasi society, if only he had consulted Frederick Downs' excellent volume titled *Christian Impact on the Status of Women in North-East* (NEHU, 1996).

Referring to O. L. Snaitang's work, the author speaks in a footnote (p. 93) of the permissibility of an 'associate' or 'stolen' wife (*tnga tuh*) in ancient tradition. These women were generally captured from the plains by Khasi warriors, it is argued, not for lust, but to increase the strength of the Khasi clan. Such arguments, I am afraid, carry little conviction. In war and love, everywhere, the distinction between fair and foul tends to blur largely. History of mankind everywhere bears witness to the fact of victors, more often plunderers, carrying away goods, cattle (in a cattle economy) and also women. Khasi warriors were no exception to the general rule, despite the clan-defined ethics. Likewise the observation of the author that the inter-marriages with the 'outsiders' is posing a greater threat to Khasi culture and ethics than Christianity in the past is a needless apprehension. As the urbanization of the Khasi society grows, such inter-marriages become inevitable. Indeed, inter-marriages need not necessarily contribute to the corrosion of the Khasi ethics. Khasi ethics is possibly stronger than the author imagines. Earning righteousness (*kamai ia ka Hok*), like the Hindu concept of *dharma*, is such

an over-arching regulative principle of Khasi ethics that it has an inner dynamism of its own to sustain the Khasi ethics throughout its evolutionary phases.

In the Khasi legal system, the retributive justice often seems to depend solely on the judgment of one who is wronged. This can be problematic, in as much as one can use this primacy of the subjective judgment to get rid of one's enemies purely on personal ground. For example, what prevents one to get rid of one's enemy (*Nongshohnoh*) on the mere accusation that one was carried away to be sacrificed to the *thlen*? The easiest way of killing a dog is by way of tying around its neck a written warning, 'Mad'! Moreover, it comes as a shock and surprise that, in matters pertaining to sexual morality, generally a heavier penalty is imposed on the women, in a society that takes pride in being a matrilineal society, where women supposedly enjoy a greater autonomy and property rights. We may not forget that property rights can often tie women to the land to enslave rather than empower them.

The chapter (ch.1) titled "What is Ethics?" is intended to provide a broad canvas for his study in elaborating the nature and extent of ethics. The author rightly observes that ethics is a normative science, which has an implicit reference to the classification of science, in its most general sense of a systematic study of a given subject matter. But the author apparently has no grasp of either the Aristotelian/Thomistic or Kantian classification of science. Hence, the statements, "...the study of ethics does not necessarily perfect a person" and "the Kantian universalistic ethics is based on the golden rule of Christ" are shocking to a student of ethics, familiar with the Kantian *Groundwork of Metaphysic of Morals* and *Religion within the Limits of Reason alone*. The chapter is written without an adequate grounding in philosophy.

Finally, a word on the methodological and stylistic concerns may be added. Two editions of Gurdon's work, both of Cosmo Publications, are referred, making it difficult for the reader to determine which text is meant (p. 54, 55). Again, Stanley Hauerwas is cited, but S. Pallonil is referred in the end-notes (p. 56, 58). The author exhibits an overdose of gender sensitivity in his expressions 'he/she' and 'his/her' throughout his writing. The expression somehow jars in the flow of the narrative. He could instead use the traditional 'he' or 'she' and 'his' or 'her'. The use of 'she' and 'her' is politically correct, in as much as it is a sequel to the accepted 'political' movement of feminism. Nonetheless, he could selectively use his expression, if the occasion specially

demands. Although the language of the text jars at times, the meaning itself is not difficult to grasp. A glossary of Khasi terms used in the text is an additional help. The author's bibliography is fairly exhaustive. The cover design in a blend of white and light green is aesthetically pleasing, and the print is reader-friendly. But the price for a text of roughly 100 pages is slightly on the higher side

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B. P. Maithani, *Shifting Cultivation in North-East India,* Mittal Publications, New Delhi, pp. xvi+, 163+16 Illustrations, Rs.395.

Any discussion on North East Indian agriculture, animal husbandry, environment, forest, food production, health and nutrition, poverty alleviation, rural development, soil conservation is bound to veer around *jhum* or shifting cultivation. There is a long tradition among anthropologists to view shifting cultivation as an inseparable part of the tribal life, which was rather difficult to alter over-night. On the other hand, administrators, economists, environmentalists and foresters, have always liked to do away the *jhum* in favour of the settled economy. It goes without saying that the various tribes of the North-East India are located on relatively difficult mountainous terrain and are naturally not accustomed to an alternate mode of cultivation. Thus, irrespective of the debates among the academics, development experts and policy planners, the tribesmen are busy practising their dwindling *jhum*.

The book under review was sponsored by the International Centre for Integrated Mountain development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, where the author worked for some time and it runs into nearly 200 pages. However, the text of the book covers only 85 pages and the rest is devoted to foreword, preface,

contents, appendices (i-viii), references, index and illustrations. There are as many as two maps and 13 pages of statistical tables in the book. The book is organized in five chapters. The first chapter attempts an overview of the shifting cultivation scenario as it prevails in the region. This is followed in the second chapter by a discussion on different strategies adopted in the past for controlling shifting cultivation. The third chapter highlights the factors behind the continuation of the shifting cultivation in a large scale in the region even now. The fourth chapter tries to look into state-wise variation in the status and strategies for dealing with shifting cultivation. The last and fifth chapter discusses the policy issues and options available for controlling the extent of shifting cultivation in the region.

The North East Indian region constitutes 7.7 percent of the area, 3.73 percent of the population but more than 25 percent of the country's forest cover. The land and forest cover in the region is largely under clan or community control free from land tenure. The total area under shifting cultivation is estimated to be 5.3 percent of the total geographical area of the region, on which as many as 443, 300 families are dependent. The tribes and their shifting cultivation were left to themselves in the past. We first come across Nicholson, the Conservator of Forests, Orissa, who desired to permanently settle the shifting cultivating tribes such as Khond and Juang in 1940s, in which Verrier Elwin was involved. Soon after Indian independence, with a view to increase the food crops and settled cultivation, shifting cultivation attracted attention and it began to be viewed as a wasteful farming practice, which desired to be discouraged. As shifting cultivation is practised in the areas that came under the constitutionally guaranteed tribal lands under customary laws, the age old tribal usages were abused by a number of agencies bringing distortions in their lives. Among them, the author has rightly identified the following: (i) exposure to outside world, (ii) introduction of the reserve forests, (iii) population growth, (iv) institutional changes, and (v) commercialization of the crops within the shifting cultivated areas (pp.7-9). Very soon, social workers and agricultural scientists were engaged in the rehabilitation of shifting cultivators. However, the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, after identifying that "the shifting cultivation as is now prevalent is wasteful and also destructive to some extent", sounded a caution, "the fact of the matter is that only 10 percent of tribal population (in the context of the whole country) depended on shifting cultivation and they cannot be deprived of their land, their livelihood and their way of life for a theoretical opinion on which not all experts agree" (p 11).

The author examines various strategies evolved at the level of the Union Government and implemented at the level of the region in chapter two and notes "an increasing trend in the extent of shifting cultivation (in the region) despite several control projects" (p 25). Moreover, it is difficult to disagree with the author's considered opinion that "so long the tenure reforms are not introduced and enforced, shifting cultivation will continue unabated including those by absentee tribal landlords" (p 36). It becomes from the book that the shifting cultivators and the state governments did not put their heart and soul in shifting cultivation control schemes in the region because the schemes did not emerge from experience and felt needs.

The author mentions various proposals to control the ill-effects of shifting cultivation in chapter five and enumerates land use policy introduced by the government of Mizoram in 1984. One would have expected him to deliberate on the significant ramification of this far reaching piece of legislation. This policy, if sincerely implemented, will alter the image of the regional agrarian scenario because of the fact that shifting cultivation has been legally banned and permanent cultivation, horticulture, animal husbandry and pisci-culture are being encouraged with the help of institutional cash incentives. Naturally, it will create social inequality, as village community land is being privatized with the help of cash flow controlled by the newly emerged tribal middle class political elite. In course of time, land will pass in the hands of the absentee owners, which will be cultivated by landless labourers, leading to agrarian unrest yet unknown in the region.

The book is an analytical presentation of shifting cultivation. The author's data are old, as he depends on the 1991 Census in a book published in 2005. However, his mature handling of the theme is clearly noticeable. The reviewer enjoyed reading the book and recommends it to the policy makers of the region.

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A. S. Shimray, 2005, *Let Freedom Ring: Story of Naga Nationalism*, Promilla & Co. in association with Bibliophile South Asia, New Delhi & Chicago, pp 354, Rs. 650.

The term 'Naga' immediately evokes imageries of defiance, valour, chivalry, romance and exotic habits. The Nagas claim to be a distinct nation different at least from the Indians, if not the Myanmarese, and others. They declared their independence on August 14, 1947, which was not recognized by any sovereign state of the world, but that did not deter their resolve to continue with 'their struggle for sovereignty'. When the British empire withdrew from India, they had left the then Naga Hills District as part of the composite province of Assam in India. But prior to that, way back in 1929, the Naga Club, a body of the petty government officials under the patronage of the all powerful Deputy Commissioner, had submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission pleading for excluding the Nagas from the prospective political reforms in Indian provinces, as they were backward and lacked leadership representing numerous tribes among them. The Naga Hills District along with Lushai Hills and Balipara and Lakhimpur Frontier Divisions were termed by the British as "Excluded" districts, different from the other British administered districts of the province. In mid 1940s the Naga Hills District faced utter confusion. The British functionaries as well as Christian Missionaries were guiding the Nagas on political issues. First, it was suggested that the Naga Hills District along with other tribal areas of the region should form a Crown Colony within the British Empire but after the British withdrawal from India. The Second World War conspired against the above move and the British were forced to drop the idea unceremoniously. By then the Naga Hills District Council was turned into Naga National Council (NNC) and it began passing political resolutions relating to the Nagas' future dispensation at the bidding of the Deputy Commissioner of the district, Charles Powsey. No doubt, the NNC was the only available representative and politically conscious body available in the Naga Hills then. In most Naga villages, the American Baptist Christian Church sponsored schools were imparting theologically flavoured education in which non-Christian societies in general and Hindus in particular were painted in poor shade. It was not a mere coincidence that the British colonial rulers maintained that the Indian National Congress was a political party of the Hindus, which was destined to rule Assam on behalf of the Indians. The NNC took the stand that since it was the British who had vanquished and subjugated the Nagas, they were morally bound to set them free, as they were withdrawing from the Naga

Hills. Thus, the dye was cast and the Nagas were made to oppose any proposal to treat them as a part of the composite province of Assam. And the rest is history.

The book under review is a posthumous publication of the author. It is not clear what the title of the Ph.D thesis submitted to North-Eastern Hill University was on which the present book is based. Again, it is not known in what ways is the book different from the original thesis. But one thing is clear: the title of the book would not have made the title of a thesis. There is no 'introduction' to the book, so a reader gets confused about its contents and intent. However, Nandita Haksar's foreword informs the readers that the author desired her to write an introduction to the publication, but she too could not know its contents from him. The foreword informs that the 'book could be a meaningful intervention in the Indo-Naga peace process, as it could tell the Indians the story of Naga nationalism and explain the justness of the demands of the movement'. Furthermore, one learns that one of its intentions was to document the events leading to the signing of the Shillong (Peace) Accord, which did not lead to a resolution of the Indo-Naga conflict. The book under review 'is the story about how the so-called peace accord led to the formation of an organization (National Socialist Council of Nagaland) that would seriously challenge the authority of the Indian State'. The legal luminary Haksar believes that the story that the book tells has valuable lessons for all those involved in the present Indo-Naga peace process. The alleged Naga homeland is divided by the international boundary between Myanmar and India and within India the claimed Naga territory consists of Nagaland state, four districts of Manipur, and two districts each of Arunachal and Assam, an area spread within 120,000 square kilometres. The NSCN factor is certainly crucial in all these areas and the author devotes a chapter to analyse its role in the politics of Nagaland, but not elsewhere. The book shows that 'till the time peace talks are treated as a part of counter-insurgency maneuvers instead of a political process to right past injustices and wrongs, the Indo-Naga conflict will continue'. So the book under review is an advocacy for the cause of the Nagas in general and NSCN in particular.

The first chapter, 'Who are the Nagas?' makes a feeble attempt to trace an ancient history of the Nagas in Naga Hills, the origin of the term Nagas, a description of the claimed Naga territory, listing of 40 tribes as Nagas, the British colonial context, and introduction of Christianity among them. The chapter concludes thus: "Christianity indeed has been the single most dynamic factor in modernising the Naga society. It opened the door for

the Nagas to think in global context and brought them into the fold of a world family. The spirit of change invaded every Naga village life. The Christian missionaries and the British Indian administration proved themselves to be the vehicle of change in the Naga context" (p 44). And that lets out the secret of Naga solidarity. There is nothing clear about its past, its nomenclature, the grouping of various tribes into Naga family of tribes and fratricidal efforts to settle scores with each other. The next chapter on Naga nationalism makes a plea for Naga nationalism on the basis of an imagined past, Christian religion, Mongoloid race and tribal socio-cultural practices. It informs the readers how the British ICS officers guided the Naga petty officials, mainly their interpreters (*Dobhashis*), to petition to the Simon Commision, to form the NNC and declare their independence' a day before India became independent and under what circumstances the state of Nagaland was created within the Indian Union. It reports on Jawaharlal Nehru's effort to jointly come together with the Burmese premier to Kohima in the heart of Naga Hills to display to the Nagas his sincerity to reach and honour them and how his grand gesture was abused because of some misunderstanding. Then it shows how a section of NNC came out to call a series of 'conventions' leading to the formation of state of Nagaland and forming a democratically elected government in Kohima and how the great Naga leader, A. Z. Phizo, slipped away to Pakistan and then to London. No doubt, Shimary calls these developments Indian sponsored intelligence operations.

Chapter three on 'Naga Nation Betrayed' delineates the events leading to signing of the Shillong Accord in 1975, its response among the Nagas, NNC's efforts to secure Phizo's endorsement and latter's enigmatic ambivalence. It also records the confusion among the Nagas after signing of the Accord, total collapse of the so-called Federal Government and inability of the state government of Nagaland to turn the event to its advantage. Further it reports how in those confusing days, Eastern Naga National Council (ENNC) led by K. K. Khaplang and Isak and Muivah faction of the NNC merged together to form the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) on January 31, 1980 on the intriguing planks of Marxism and Christianity. The aggressive denunciation of the Accord on the part of the NSCN stupefied common Nagas and the void created by Phizo's ambivalence to the Accord and inactions of his followers were taken over by the NSCN within no time. But in spite of the vehemence of the author on the perfidy of the Indian state, it is pertinent to read the following lines from him: "The heart of the matter was that as majority of the Nagas are Christians, the domination of

the Church was almost absolute a fact which the Naga nationalists could not ignore for long. The Government of India was apparently winning over the hearts and minds of the Nagas through the church... thus, the final outcome of the peace talks was the Shillong Accord, which the church meticulously compaigned for" (p 93).

The author chose to concentrate only on NSCN under Muivah in the next chapter and makes unfounded statement that 'the Nagas by tradition did not experience tribalism' (p 152). In fact, there has never been Naga solidarity before the advent of the British colonialists. They were distinct ethnic groups speaking different languages and dialects, and without a script. Verrier Elwin mentions a saying about the Nagas in his famous book on Nagaland, which does find place in the author's bibliography. It so happened once that seven Naga elders were travelling by the same route to a particular destination. They decided to have lunch by the side of a stream. They asked among themselves what items of food had they got and the individual replies were unintelligible to each other. Being unable to understand one another, they opened their respective bags out of desperation to see what each of them had brought - green chilies and parched rice in their respective bags. The moral of the story is that there had never been a Naga society in the past as it is claimed today. Yes, they had Angami, Sema, Mon, and so on, but not Nagas, who are a creation of the non-Nagas such as Ahoms, Meiteis, Myanmarese and Bengalis. The NSCN under Muivah imposed a moral code of conduct, declared socialism and Christianity as the twin planks of their future nation, evolved a strict military command structure, appointed a civil administration and imposed a monetary tax on the residents of the claimed Naga areas. They also undertook three critical issues in their hands in their areas of operation: literacy programme, primary health and religious conversion of the Animist Nagas to Christianity. And the NSCN proposed an ideology for the Nagas, 'described as a mixture of evangelical Christianity and revolutionary socialism'. They extended their operation outside the Naga-inhabited areas among the restive communities to rebel against the Indian State by training and arming them in lieu of the tax paid to them. They even have established a hitherto unheard forum called Self Defence United Front of the South East Himalayan Region (SDUFSEHR), an alleged body for military and political coordination for combating Indian forces. They have tried their best to debunk A. Z. Phizo's heritage by terming his contributions as a 'personality cult' and 'aristocratic outlook based on loyalties to family and relatives of the leader'. The author does not hide his unquestioned

admiration for the leadership of Muivah and condemns K.K. Khaplang. In his belief, 'NSCN is the most widely supported and representative national organisation of the Nagas at present' (p 207).

The fifth chapter surveys the symbiotic relationship between the state's politicians and the NSCN and other rebel outfits. He finds it to be a truism in Nagaland that every Naga household has a share in contributing at least one or two members to the Naga political movement (p 225). The extortion, intimidation and armed ambush are the weapons through which NSCN runs its writ in Nagaland and the state administration itself is highly vulnerable. Though there is enough presence of armed forces in the camps, the state is unable to match the sophisticated arms of the NSCN. Furthermore, being an open civil society has its own vagaries; there are a number of NGOs such as Naga Students' Federation, Nagaland Human Rights Watch, Mothers' Association, etc. which invariably raise the issues of the civil society, which are exploited by the rebels who do not themselves subscribe to the ethos of the open society. The last chapter on NSCN and International Politics enumerates the alleged success of the NSCN in internationalizing the Naga issue through UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation), UNWGIP (United Nations Working Group on Indigeneous Peoples), and WBA (World Baptist Alliance). The author has made an extensive study of the secondary sources and there is an elaborate bibliography at the end.

Now coming to the text provided by the author, it is an advocacy work with limited academic value. It almost borders on propaganda literature. The author has every right to hold his views, but when he decides to go public with a book, it should be fair to all segments of his society. One also wishes that the author had given more attention to the term 'Naga', various tribal entities, NNC, A. Z. Phizo, the state administration of Nagaland and elaborate alliance carved by NSCN with various rebel groups of the region. Similarly, there is no treatment in the book of the significant role of the Christian missionaries in the peace process, Nagaland Peace Commission and working of the on-going ceasefire in Nagaland. There are two other problems in the book. One, the author provides a sketch of an imagined Nagaland, but fails to substantiate that the territories belong to the Nagas. He conveniently forgets the counter claims of others, especially on the Assam-Nagaland borders. The disputed territories are equally claimed by a number of communities from Assam for centuries. Secondly, the bulk of his presentation is addressed to the interface between NSCN and Indian Union, but he is entirely silent on the ethos and aspirations of the Nagas of 'Eastern Nagaland' and its functioning

within Myanmar. All said and done, the reviewer, who had once upon a time administered the thesis as the Dean of the concerned School of NEHU for the award of the degree to the author, appreciates his diligence in marshalling the arguments on the basis of the information he could collect. One wishes he had lived longer to turn the thesis into a better book.

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U.V. Joseph and Robbins Burling, *The Comparative Phonology of the Boro Garo Languages*, Central Institute of Indian Languages Publication No.530, Mysore, 2006, pp. 151, Rs. 120.

The collaboration of a well-known anthropologist-linguist and a linguist cum polyglot, who is well-versed in his own mother tongue, English, Rabha, Boro, Tiwa and a number of languages, has resulted in an extremely useful and timely contribution to Tibeto-Burman studies. Both have been in the field, so the data are expected to be authentic. As stated in the Preface, much of the Garo, Boro and Rabha data are from Joseph's dissertation on Rabha; Tiwa data also have been collected by Joseph in Umswai in Karbi Anglong District in Assam. Burling has contributed much of the Garo data since he first worked on this language fifty years ago, with subsequent visits in the late 1990s which continues till date whenever he comes to North-East India.

The book is an important work on some aspects of the phonology of the little described languages of the Bodo-Garo group in the Tibeto-Burman family. Chapter 2 gives some insights into the phonological processes: compounding, prefixation, assimilation, lexicalization, etc. What the authors call 'consonant migration', and 'diphthong reduction' in Garo, diphthong formation in Tiwa and 'cluster simplification' and 'consonant loss' in the four languages are very interesting processes which Tibeto-Burmanists

can well look into when describing other Tibeto-Burman languages. Chapter 3 titled 'The Correspondences' provides the similarities between Tiwa, Boro, Garo and Rabha, helpfully in the form of tables, regarding initial stops, initial nasals, sibilants, liquids, and other types of phones; clusters include r-, l-, s-, -n as well other types of clusters. There seems to be remarkable correspondences between the four languages in their syllable initial and final consonants, vowels and tones. The summary of correspondences in Tables 3.41 in this chapter, and the more exhaustive data in 'The Evidences' (Appendix) are a great help not only for comparison of the four languages but are also useful data for historical linguists because they provide reconstructed Proto-forms from the existing Tiwa, Boro, Garo and Rabha cognates. Certainly we will be using this data when teaching Historical Linguistics to the MA students, with due acknowledgement to Joseph and Burling.

Chapter 1 on the sounds and phones, and the phonological inventories of the four languages described, could have been more elaborate, especially detailed description of each phone in each language and as compared across languages. This would be very useful, especially to students. Contrasting phonetically similar sounds like /i/, /e/, /ω/ and examining phones in minimal and contrastive pairs (tedious, but necessary) has also been left out by the authors. Future Generative Phonologists perhaps can take up where the authors have left and try to fill in the gaps, including formulation of phonological rules for the different phonological processes in the Boro–Garo group of Tibeto-Burman languages.

Tones in Chapter 3 (p.99) and in the 'correspondences' (p.110) have been dealt with, and the conclusion is that Tiwa, Boro and Rabha have a two-way tone contrast. Since there is no evidence used by the authors for showing distinction in tones, this can also be checked by future researchers. They have also not specified whether the tones are analyzed in terms of Register or Contour Tones. There are some anomalies—the authors have acknowledged that a non-high tone in Tiwa has been designated as 'falling', but as 'low' in Boro and Rabha (p.100) and that there are 'contradictory' or 'insufficient' evidence (p.110). Tones anyway are a major problem area - even natives speakers themselves do not know how many tones there are, nor what tones they are using, unless they are highly trained phoneticians or have access to specialized computer softwares.

On the whole the book is a major contribution to the study of Tibeto-Burman languages especially in Phonology. The main findings are worth noting:

(i) Syllable is an important phonological unit, especially those that occur initially or finally and which are different from each other.

(ii) Syllable initial consonants are more numerous than the final ones.

(iii) At the initial position, syllables consist of stops (6-9 in the 4 languages), nasals (2), affricates (3-4), and spirants like phr-.

(iv) The four languages have around 5-6 simple vowels and a few diphthongs.

(v) Productive suffixes (eg., causative prefixes) and those that have become lexicalized when the clusters have been simplified.

The book is a 'must have' for students of Linguistics of Northeast India.

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These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone **by Temsula Ao, Zubaan Penguin, New Delhi, 2006, pp.147, Rs.195/-.**

These Hills Called Home is a collection of ten short stories written by Temsula Ao and published by Zubaan Penguin Books. It reveals a world of tragic complexity peopled by those who would have been lost to history had it not been for the vision and insight of Temsula Ao: a chronicler of events with a participatory sense of her people's history. A sense of history she has sought to redefine and to reconstruct; which, according to her, may be "measured only in human terms", where there are "no winners, only victims" (p. x). Her stories depict the trauma of change. The story-tellers, omniscient, humane but above all apolitical, speak of a Keatsian ability to identify with the characters and their situations. Hence, the infinite sense of compassion that surrounds the stories shaping one's responses to them.

The first story, *The Jungle Major,* opens with "the pre-dawn warmth of togetherness" (p.1) of a couple making love. This is an apt opening for an anthology that emphasises the vulnerability of personal relationships in a world governed by the politics of survival. Punaba and Khatila, ugly husband and beautiful wife, an unlikely pair in the eyes of all, stand on the threshold of many changes, adapting themselves to the pressures of a shifting environment. The underground army provides meaning for Punaba's life as he chooses a life of rebellion. The story encapsulates the history of the Naga Movement and ends with Punaba's rehabilitation into society. It dramatises the intervening years of strife and intrigue that dominate the lives of the couple. The story sets the tone for the others, where they take up the motif of struggle and subterfuge at the psychological and metaphysical levels.

Another story, *The Last Song,* is riddled with the poignancy of Apenyo's concerted attempt to continue singing at the dedication ceremony of her church, despite the threat of the invading soldiers. True to her poetic instincts Temsula Ao casts the story in a metaphor of pain and transcendence, through the song that reverberates throughout the story. It enters the lives of the youngsters who have still much to learn from their predecessors, "of that Black Sunday when a young and beautiful singer sang her last song even as one more Naga village began weeping for her ravaged and ruined children"(p.33). The old woman who relates the events to them, transmits Apenyo's courage through an uncanny ability to capture the vibrations of Apenyo's song through the "voice of the earth and the wind" (p.32) on the

anniversary of that fateful carnage. Beauty and brutality, sensitivity and insensitivity are juxtaposed together in a story that is fraught with personal and extra personal dilemmas. This is the texture of life in the Naga context. Temsula Ao has been able to give equal emphasis to the pain of shattered lives and to the miracles that still exist notwithstanding the onslaught of continual violence. Apenyo lives by virtue of her commitment to herself as a singer. She is the heroine *per se*. She stands up as a symbol of courage and determination, her humanity undestroyed by the marauding power of the Indian Army.

Though *An Old Man Remembers* speaks of lost youth, lost dreams and lost identities, it also dramatises the unshakeable bonds of friendship. These are the ties that keep a tribal society bound together. The death of his lifelong friend Imlikokba finds old man Sashi ("his name was Imtisashi", p.88) in a contemplative state of mind. It opens up the channels of communication that were once locked behind him, with his grandson Maolemba. He retells the story of his troubled past: "because only then will young people like you understand what has wounded our souls. We, too, were young and carefree like you once, but all of a sudden our youth was snatched away from us, and instead of schoolbooks we were carrying guns and other weapons of destruction and living in the jungle like wild creatures"(p.98). Temsula Ao has succeeded in revealing the travails of a race that is caught in the throes of a conflict that it does not quite understand, a conflict that has shattered the uncomplicated world of the Nagas and splintered it into patches of unyielding "darkness"(p.112). Through the lives of the old men in *An Old man Remembers* she dramatises the tragic sense of loss, "we did kill many people but the truth is that till today I cannot say how I feel about that, which sometimes makes me wonder if I have turned into a monster" that consumes them even in their old age. His only legacy to his grandson is his past: the story of two lives that were swept away by an upheaval so violent that nothing would erase it from their memories. Old man Sashi, however, is not an embittered veteran who remembers only the brutality that used to be part of his daily fare. There is something else that he can never tell his grandson. This was the surreptitious sight that he and his friend had of a naked woman walking freely, "that filled him with awe and wonder because it took him back to his innocent boyhood". Instead, he finds himself explaining to him about "that area of darkness in his life, which he had tried so hard to wish away." Darkness in the story facilitates the dawning of the day, in terms of history and identity. The search for, or the tormented

perceptions of, this identity forms the epicentre of all the stories.

In the introduction to her anthology Temsula Ao speaks of the responsibilities of the "inheritors" of such a history, "to sift through the collective experience and make sense of the impact left by the struggle on their lives" (pp. x, xi). The stories represent just such an attempt; a consequence of which has been an altered vision of a life that will initiate change at a personal and a human level. This has resulted in the portrayal of the multi-faceted layers of the Naga psyche ranging from Soaba the idiot whose humanity defies the degenerate Boss, to Sentila the pot maker and her mother, and Nungsang, a type of the new breed of government contractors who live off the land. Underlying every story is the threat to progress and to life. This is reflected in alien presences and alien values. They seem to have crept into the very lives of the villagers who shun any such conflicts but who are unable to stop the fateful turn of events. What comes through in Temsula Ao's stories is a deep sensitivity to the suffering that has come to stay.

The writer demonstrates the immense power of the oral narration in conveying the anguish of a community by using familiar images, familiar sights, familiar sounds and the familiar inflections of vernacular speech. Although this has been done in a language that is not spoken by her people, yet there is a sense of having captured the idiom of Naga speech. If anything at all, the short stories have made audible the voices of whose have hitherto remained unheard. They reflect upon the sensibilities of a writer who is essentially a poet but whose aptitude shows an undiluted ability to tell a story. One could never, therefore, categorise these stories as being overtly political. They move beyond such confining boundaries into the aesthetics of the short story; to examine relationships in *The Journey*, to delve into the mystiques of folk art in *The Pot Maker*, to throw up issues of social significance in *The Night* even as they bring to light the contradictions that rule the human heart in *Soaba*. One might go so far as to call the collection a requiem for the unsung dead but, they do not, however, end only with death.

Death, in the rationale of the stories, is a multidimensional reality that also leads to life. Sentila's mystical gift as a pot maker may be indirectly responsible for the death of her mother, yet the experience of death is a cathartic one that looks forward to a process of regeneration and re-birth. Although the ubiquitous Indian Army has been associated with death and destruction, it has never been able to erase the many miracles of love that the stories portray and that life itself has yielded to the people of this ravaged

community. Temsula Ao never loses sight of this fact. This is the reason why her stories abound with the simple heroism of people such as "pumpkin Merenla" who are able once again, to merge "into the rhythm of age-old village life, far away from the political permutations and combinations forming and re-forming elsewhere in the land" (p.147) after their encounter with, but not their defeat by, the ruling powers that be.

Temsula Ao has four collections of poetry to her credit and a number of research papers. She has published books on her subject and has also authored a book on the Ao Naga oral tradition, a work that reveals the ongoing interest that she has always had with her Naga identity.

Her stories have objectivity and distance, a pre-requisite for any successful work of art. They reflect upon the capabilities of a writer who has been able to navigate between the pressures of the political, the social, the psychological and the chronological. The stories leave themselves open to many readings and touch upon current issues like gender discrimination and the marginalisation of the so called 'tribal'. This is a book that has emerged out of the uncontaminated sensibilities of a writer who documents the growth of her own kind, who have also preserved themselves from self-destruction. It is not about war. It is about the heroism of simple villagers. Though fictitious, its roots are deeply sunk into Naga soil. It opens up perspectives on people from whom the rest of the world could learn much. It is a collection that deserves a place in one's heart.

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***Tribes: Education and Gender Question*, by Sanjoy K. Roy, 2005, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, pp.165, Rs.500, ISBN 81-7211-197-5.**

Over the past few decades, there has been an explosion in what can be termed as gender studies in social science research in India. Starting with a general concern with the continuously falling sex ratio as an indicator of gender discrimination as revealed by the 1971 Census enumeration, social scientists have studied the gender question in all its forms and manifestations. The issue has been examined in all possible dimensions ranging from economic discrimination of women to their historical, social, cultural, political marginalization. Following their western feminist counterparts, Indian social scientists generally ascribe a lower social status to women and consequent discrimination suffered by them to an overarching, all pervasive patriarchal norm that characterizes the Indian social system. Strengthening of patriarchal values has received some empirical verification in recently published 2001 Census data on child sex ratio which reveals increasing deficit of women in child age group in certain parts of India. Evidences of female foeticide have been found to be the chief reasons for such a deficit. It has also been argued that the kind of social change and modernization experienced in India since Independence has largely failed to weaken patriarchal values; on the contrary there have been instances of strengthening of such values through cultural revivalism and political mobilization at all levels.

The book under review deserves to be understood in the context of patriarchal values that govern Indian social system. An important consequence of gender discrimination in India has been reflected in a significantly low level of literacy and educational attainment by women. The fact of lower educational attainment by women and gender disparity in literacy is true for all sections of people and for all regions of India, though in varying degrees. The book deals with the gender question among the tribes of North Bengal and particularly among the tribes of some tea gardens located in this region. Though debatable, the study finds patriarchal values operating among the tribal population and denying tribal women their basic right to literacy and education.

The issue is debatable as most studies on the tribes of India concede to the fact that the patriarchal values are much less manifest among the tribal population. Historically, the tribal societies have not nurtured inequity in the name of age, sex, status or material wellbeing. Whatever inequity is seen in the tribal society is not *in situ*, but introduced from outside. The tribes lived away from Hindus for so long that they could not contract social

stratification based on caste hierarchy. The institutionalized framework of social deprivation or discrimination so peculiar to the caste based social order and the model of socially evolved deprivation perhaps cannot be uncritically applied to tribal society.

This is not to deny that the tribal social order as is seen today does not contain any form of inequity or gender disparity. Male-female inequity in literacy and education among contemporary Indian tribes is indeed quite significant. However, the explanation of the growing disparity in literacy and education in these segments of people need to be viewed in the context of the specifics of tribal formation. Though the vast world of the tribes lies much away from the caste society, they were brought face to face with peasant communities through a gradual process of spillover from the thickly populated riverine zones. On the fringe started the process of assimilation of the tribes into the stratified order of the Hindu caste society. It is important therefore that the tribes were first exposed to stratification and later to formal education. In fact the caste society treated them outside the *varna* system and thus disqualified them from formal education.

The author however 'easily notices' educational backwardness and large scale gender discrimination and even the overall backwardness in the tribal communities "reflected perpetuation of the patriarchy, which declines to offer any free space to the subjugated women in the social field" (p 2). In case of the tribes, the author goes on to argue that "there are strong areas of patriarchic domination, neglect, humiliation, exploitation and hidden cruelties in the treatment of tribal women which undoubtedly have a say in creating a gender gap in the field of education, as well as in other social fields" (p 3). Such a conclusion appears to be unrelated to specifics of the genesis of gender inequity in education among the tribal communities going by the history of diffusion of literacy among the general as well as tribal segment of population. It may be pertinent to note that Indian tribes have not been uniformly exposed to caste-based social stratification and patriarchal norms and hence display diverse patterns with regard to gender discrimination in their societies.

Nevertheless, the book is an important contribution on a very important facet of Indian population 'living on the fringe'. Equally important are questions pertaining to spread and diffusion of literacy within these communities. The book makes a serious effort at probing the problems of tribal education against the 'backdrop of the dialectics of dominant society-subordinate relationship between the state and the dominant society on the one hand and the marginalized tribes on the other.' The book is a byproduct of a major ongoing project on the "Gender Profile of Tribes of North Bengal" with which the

author is associated.

The book consists of just three chapters apart from an introductory chapter that elucidates the context, essence of education, conceptual frame and selection of field for the purpose collecting vital information on education among the tea garden tribes. With a skillful handling of the Census data on trends and patterns in the levels of literacy and education, the first chapter provides a macro understanding of how the tribal segment has been marginalized in terms of educational attainment. Moving from an all India aggregate picture the book provides brilliant insights into the state of literacy among the tribal people for the state of West Bengal and then narrowing down to the tribe living in North Bengal. Inter-district comparisons in literacy level for the tribes in North Bengal and male-female differential in literacy levels constitute an important part of discussion in this chapter. Keeping in line with the chapter title "Tribes in India: Living on the Fringe", the author goes beyond literacy patterns to examine several parameters of tribal deprivation in India and in west Bengal by a reference to their employment, access to land, incidence of poverty and political participation. Using official data, the chapter convincingly argues how the tribal segment continues to be marginalized in spite of efforts in promoting their welfare through extra-ordinary provision of positive discrimination by the state.

The next chapter addresses the issue of gender disparity in education among the tribes of India. With the help of Census data and freely using other studies and surveys on literacy situation among Indian tribes the chapter succinctly brings out the increasing gender gap in literacy attainment. The problems of drop out has been identified as the major cause of lower literacy levels among the Indian tribes and even more importantly among the female segment of the population. The chapter also reviews the impact of reservation policy on tribal education which appears to have only accentuated inequalities within the tribes while generally improving their educational status. The spread effects are less visible among the tribal communities as far as educational benefits through reservation are concerned.

The last chapter deals with the gender question in tribal education at a micro level study of Matelli block in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal. A single tea garden – Engo - was selected for an intensive field investigation to answer questions on gender relations existing at a 'local' level. Statistics revealed substantial gender gaps in the field of education among the tribal groups living in the tea garden for ages. The study includes as many as twenty seven interesting case studies enumerating the tea garden women's perception of education. Most of them feel the importance of education which

they could hardly acquire due to a multiplicity of problems, most important being abject poverty that afflicts the tea garden labourers ever since they were brought as indentured labour to work in the gardens. The author very aptly remarks that there is little scope or motivation for higher education.

The book clearly enlightens one to the pitiable conditions prevailing in the tea garden(s) that has been a stifling force in the field of education. That the female segment is less literate under such conditions is to state the obvious. How much of the gender gap is due to unequal gender relation within the tea tribe is an open question. Problems of female education both among the general population and specifically among the tribal population of India is a much researched theme and the book lists many such problems quoting other research works. Gender discrimination on account of patriarchal relations is only one of these manifold problems. But to assume tribal communities as 'male chauvinists' not treating their women 'with deserving dignity' may be an oversimplification of the complexity of patriarchal relations allegedly manifest among the tribes of India or even among the tea garden tribes of West Bengal. The author for example notes that "unlike general population, the gender discrimination in the tribal communities...does not find much reflection in the demographic features" (p 24).

There are difficulties in integrating the macro level analysis with micro or "local" understanding. Understanding at local level can be at variance with the understanding reached at the aggregate level. This is indeed the case when a very specific case of the tribes in the tea garden is undertaken for study. The conclusions arrived at this local study can hardly be generalized for all tribes. The tea garden labourers present a unique case of the tribal situation in India largely due to their displacement and confinement for centuries.

The book provides the reader with an excellent opportunity to understand the problems of education in the tea gardens. The wealth of data and analytical insights drawn are commendable. The book is an important contribution to the growing literature on women's education.

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