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NEHU

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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Search for Kirat Identity: Trends of De-sanskritization among the *Nepamul* Sikkimese

A C SINHA

Introduction

Will the multi-ethnic societies such as 'Nepali' necessarily emerge more cohesive, uniform and modern? One would like to celebrate Harka Gurung's (1997) optimism about multi-ethnic societies of Sikkim and Darjeeling, but recent events in Sikkim do not encourage one to do so. One must hasten that Gurung is in good company of Michael Hutt, who approvingly quotes Lhotshampa technocrat Bhim Subba: "We have Rais, Magars, Tamangs, Chhetris, Bahuns, Kamis, Damais, Sarkis - all in one village. And we do not have a system of segregation, or on the other hand, suppression by supposed higher castes" (Hutt, 2003: 99). The present author found similar situation in Sikkim as well. The Sikkimese *Nepamul* appear to have bothered little about their social composition as long as they were struggling against the feudal oppression. As soon as they realized that economically they were relatively secured in a democratic set-up, which they controlled as per law of the land, they addressed themselves to larger issues such as citizenship, recognition of Nepali language and political representation in the state. Once the resolution to the above issues was within the reach, attention began to shift to the fate of the individual ethnic groups. It was realized that the time was ripe for advocating distinctive ethnic markers within the *Nepamul* social commonwealth and there came the ancient Kirat identity handy. This process is still on and indications are there for any body to see that multi-ethnic Sikkimese *Nepamul* society is passing through a serious phase of transition. So much so that some members of higher castes formed a 'Chhetri-Bahun-Newar Association' in 1995 to safeguard their interests. These three relatively

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developed castes were also subsequently accorded the status of OBC in Sikkim. In this paper, we have tried to map out the travails of the Sikkimese *Nepamul* since their arrival in Sikkim through the phase of social reforms, the anti-feudal movement, the merger of Sikkim with India, and at the end, highlight the on-going process of a larger Kirat identity formation. Many of our comments are tentative, as evidence is limited.

Construction of the 'Paharia' Image

Limbus, an inseparable part of Kirat identity, are counted among the earliest settlers of Sikkim. Even the term 'Sikkim' is of Limbu origin. It is claimed that a newly wedded Limbu lady, when welcomed by the groom's party in a newly constructed house, exclaimed: *Sukhim* (new house). Limbu and Magar have old roots in Sikkim. Limbus were appropriated by the Namgyal rulers within Lamaist scheme of things in the form of 'Lhomentsongsum' a 'commonwealth of Bhotias, Lepchas and Tsongs' (Sinha, 1975). Magars along with Limbus figured in the history of Sikkim as victims of Bhotia court intrigues in which they were forced to emigrate to Nepal. However, the remnants of their settlements can be identified in the form of 'Magarkots' or 'Magardzongs' in West District (Sinha, 2005). J W Edgar has reported them to be cultivating cardamom and oilseeds at Daramden in West District in his visit to Pemayangtse in 1874 (Edgar, 1969:74). Some years earlier, in 1867, two Newar brothers, Laxmidas and Chandrabir Maskey, were invited by a section of the Namgyal courtiers from Darjeeling to mine copper ore and mint coins for the state at an annual fee of Rs. 1200. Though their mining and minting enterprise did not last for more than a decade, they were responsible for bringing in Magar labourers for mining, introducing forest conservation, building of roads and bridges in the East District and establishing the lessee system of land tenure in Sikkim.

John C White, who was appointed in Gangtok as the Political Officer in 1889, found Sikkimese scenario in bleak and pathetic condition: "Chaos reigned everywhere, there was no revenue system, the Maharaja taking what he required as he wanted from the people…no court of justice, no police, no public works, no education for the younger generation. The task before me was a difficult one, but very fascinating; the country was new one and every thing was in my hands". Furthermore, he noted that: "The coffers were empty, and the first thing to be done was to devise some means by which we could raise a revenue… a basis for taxation and revenue was

established. At the same time the forests were placed under control, excise was introduced, and by these means in about ten years the revenue was raised from Rs. 8,000 to Rs. 2,200,000. But the country was sparsely populated, and in order to bring more land under cultivation, it was necessary to encourage immigration, and this was done by giving land on favourable terms to Nepalese, who, as soon as they knew it was to be had, came in. Earlier in my service I had spent over a year in Nepal on special duty and had learnt some thing of the people and their ways, which proved now to be useful in dealing with them" (White, 1971: 26-27). In his memorial book on his exploits in and around Sikkim, White used the word 'Paharias' to refer to the Sikkimese *Nepamul*.

By then the British had invented the 'warrior gentlemen Gurkhas' (Caplan, 1995) as a solid custodian of the frontier defence. This was also the phase in the British perception, when a positive twist was given to what is known as 'forward policy to the Himalayas', in which Tibetans were one of the prime targets. Herbert Risley wrote on the utilitarian aspect of the Nepalese factor in the defence scheme of the Eastern Himalayan frontiers: "Most of all our position be strengthened by the change which is insensibly but steadily taking place in the composition of the population of Sikkim. The Lepchas as has been stated, are rapidly dying out; while from the west, the industrious Newars and the Goorkhas of Nepal are pressing forward to clear and cultivate large areas of unoccupied land on which European tea planters of Darjeeling have already cast longing eyes. The influx of these hereditary enemies of Tibet is our surest guaranty against a revival of Tibetan influence. Here also religion will play a leading part. In Sikkim, as in India, Hinduism will assuredly cast out Budhhism and the praying wheel of the lama will give place to the sacrificial implements of the Brahman. The land will follow the creed; the Tibetan proprietors will be gradually dispossessed, and will take themselves to the petty trade for which they have an undeniable aptitude. Thus, race and religion, the prime movers of the Asiatic world, will settle the Sikkim difficulty for us, in their own way. We have only to look on and see the operation of these causes is not artificially hindered by the interference of Tibet or Nepal" (Risley, 1972).

This was the heritage left behind by the British in terms of putting one community against another. Half a dozen British Political Officers between 1908 and 1947 maintained the same façade. The king was happy with his religious paintings and the 'almighty' Political Officer ruled the principality as he liked. The democratic movement against the British colonial rule in

India disturbed the placid Sikkimese situation and the nervous king sent a delegation consisting of his son and private secretary to represent his case before the 'Cabinet Mission' in New Delhi in May 1946. The Sikkim delegation failed to meet the Cabinet Mission and they were advised to return to Gangtok and wait for the decision. And for that the Political & Foreign Department, Government of India sent a 'Note' to the Political Officer in Gangtok on August 10, 1946, which states: "In practice, it may well prove difficult to secure a tidy solution of the future of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan and even the eastern marches of Kashmir. This will largely depend on the future policy and fate of China and hence of Tibet. The Government of the (Indian) Union must be prepared for complications on North East Frontier and evolve a policy to meet them. This may well have to be that of maintaining all the principalities in virtual independence of India, but as buffer, as far as possible, (as) client states. There may be greater advantages in according Sikkim a more independent status than in seeking to absorb Bhutan as well as Sikkim in the Indian Union, adding the communal problem of Buddhism to those of Islam and Hinduism…The Government will be well advised to avoid entering into fresh commitments with any one of those frontier states or seeking to redefine their status. Their importance is strategic in direct relation to Tibet and China and indirectly to Russia. Such adjustment of relations with the (Indian) Union can fully be affected by those political and strategic considerations … account of which, it is hoped the treaty will take, rather than by constitutional niceties, which do not help defence policy" (see Sinha, 1998).

By the second decade of the twentieth century, the entire cultivable hill slopes of southern and western Sikkim were apportioned into revenue *elaka*s (blocks), which were to be leased on fixed revenue returns. The land lease was granted first in 1915 and last in 1935. There were 104 revenue blocks, of which the *Nepamul* Sikkimese held 13 of them. A number of them went for western education invariably to the Christian mission-run institutions in adjoining district of Darjeeling and occupied salaried positions in various departments of the government. By the year 1891, *Nepamul* population had already reached more than 50 percent and when the British left India in 1947, more than 2/3rd population of the Himalayan principality belonged to them, a process that could not be reversed even by a die-hard Palden Thondup Namgyal, the last ruler of Sikkim. Sikkim also had the institution of Kazi aristocracy, but they did not have much to show in terms of either social status or material wealth in comparison to their Nepalese counterpart, the

Ranas.

By the middle of the 20th century, a situation emerged in Sikkim in which broadly speaking two ethnic blocks emerged. One such block comprised the Bhotias, Lepchas and Limbus and the other block consisted of about a dozen and half communities belonging to the Sikkimese *Nepamul*. With the exception of Lepcha, Limbu and Bhotia, all other ethnic groups of Sikkim had forgotten their mother tongues, if they ever spoke them, and Nepali developed as their mother tongue, besides being the *lingua franca* of the principality. While most ethnic groups solicited the services of their sacred specialists during *rite de passage*, they often invited Brahmin priests for marriage and death rituals. Ethnic barriers in terms of social intercourse had largely disappeared, as most of the communities were numerically so small that individual caste/ethnic boundaries were not feasible to maintain. By tradition, land belonged either to Bhotia, Lepcha, Limbu or Newar, and most of the *Nepamul* in Sikkim were service castes such as Bahun, Chhetri, Damai, Kami, Sarki or were marginal farmers.

Building New Ethnic Blocks: Bhotia-Lepcha versus *Nepamul*

Soon after the British withdrawal from India, Sikkim State Congress was organized on December 7, 1947 to petition to the ruler on its three point demands:(i) abolition of the land lease holdings; (ii) formation of a popular government, and (iii) merger with India. Egged up by its fraternal support from elsewhere, the Congress launched an agitation in support of its charter of demands. The crown prince got a group of Bhotia landlords and his courtiers to establish the Sikkim National Party on April 30, 1948 as 'an anti-thesis of Sikkim State Congress' with a view to protecting special privileges of the feudal elements and Bhotia dominance in the affairs of the state. The State Congress with its popular demands went on agitation for over a year. Thousands of Congress suporters cordoned off the palace on May1, 1949 and demanded formation of a popular government. The king was forced to form a five member popular government with Tashi Tshering, the President of the State Congress, on May 9, 1949 without spelling out limits of authority and rules of operation. The expectations of the masses from this new government were very high but the crown prince was determined to sabotage this first experiment of democracy in Sikkim. The Congress leaders themselves did not help much in the matter. Once it was realized that

differences between the two sides could not be resolved and the administration was at standstill, the Political Officer dismissed the government in the name of the Government of India and took over the administration. Very soon, New Delhi sent a senior bureaucrat as the Dewan to head the adminstration on its behalf.

The Government of India became a party to the democratic fraud through its Dewan, when the ruler issued the State Council and Executive Council Proclamation, 1953 with a view "to associating people more and more closely with the governance of the state". The Proclamation stipulated an intricate arrangement of electoral process with a limited, complex, controversial and purposive political representation, which came to be known as the "Parity System". First of all, it created an artificial parity between two ethnic groups, Lepcha-Bhutias on one side and the *Nepamul* on the other, turning the entire politico-administrative structure communal. Secondly, a deliberately complicated voting and counting procedure was introduced, which could be manipulated in favour or against somebody, if and when required. Thirdly, the ruler and his adminstration did try to display that State Congress represented 'Nepalese' only and his own creation, National Party, represented Lepcha- Bhutias combine. The first general election for the State Council was held in 1953 for an 18-member house in which six seats were reserved for Lepcha-Bhutias, six for the Nepalese and another six were nominated by the ruler. Needless to say that the administration saw to it that Nepalese were elected on seat meant for the community only as the candidates of the State Congress and Lepcha-Bhutias did the same as the candidates of the National Party.

The above situation continued for the next two decades. By the end of 1960s the last ruler of Namgyal dynasty, Palden Thondup Namgyal, began to nurse an ambition of membership to the United Nations Organization (UNO) for Sikkim and this made him desperate to identify more and more with the vanishing Bhutia practices as the Sikkimese practices. This design was not appreciated by bulk of the Sikkimese masses, who were discriminated by the ruler in favour of the arrogant Bhutia aristocracy and buraucracy. The situation was so explosive that a small controversy with reference to counting of the votes at Gangtok after 1973 election was good enough to ignite frayed patience of the political activists for cancellation of the election and launching a movement for political reforms. The ruler ignored the demands and went ahead with the preparation of his golden jubilee celebration as the national day on April 4, 1973. Within no time the agitation spread to the

interrior and agitators established people's regime at places after chasing away the state functionaries from their posts. The newly formed political outfit, Sikkim Janata Congress, spear-heading the agitation, articulated the popular aspirations by demanding: full-fledged democracy, a written Constitution, fundamental rights, one man one vote principle based on adult franchise, and abolition of the notorious 'parity system'. The agitation turned violent and the ruler lost all his control on the state. In the circumstances, for the second time after 1949, the ruler of Sikkim had to request the Government of India to take over the administration of the state.

The next two years were a period of uncertainty, turmoil, demonstration for and against the regime, dramatic decline in ruler's support base and demise of his domesticated political factotem, Sikkim National Party, in the body politics of Sikkim. It also marked the emergence of Kazi Lhendup Dorji as the most significant political player in the state with Nar Bahadur Khatiwada, Ram Chandra Poudyal and Krishna Chandra Pradhan as his trouble shooters. In the confused and uncertain environment, 'there were charges that Indian armed forces were instrumental in support of agitators, while poor Maharaja was reported to store arms and ammunitions for a posssible resistance (Dutta Ray, 1983). What resulted in was a very fast change of the events: ruler's refusal to compromise with the agitating politicians, invalidation of 1973 election, fresh election to the State Council in 1974, demand for associating Sikkim with India, ruler's visit to Kathmandu against the advice of the government of India, State Council's resolution to abolish the office of the Chogyal, referendum to decide Sikkim's future and its merger with India in May 1975. As an interim arrangement, the existing State Council was treated as the State Assembly for a period of five years from its election in 1974.

Once the Tripartite Agreement was signed between the ruler, the representative of the government of India and leaders of the political parties in Sikkim, a 32-member State Council was envisaged in which there would be 15 seats each for Lepcha-Bhutias and *Nepamul* of Sikkim, one seat for the Scheduled Castes and one seat for the Buddhist monasteries. The 1974 election was fought on that basis and once the state was merged with India in 1975, the State Council was deemed to be the State Legislative Assembly for a term of five years from its inception in 1974. It is equally important to recall what the Government of Sikkim Act, 1974, Clause 7, Section II stipulated: "The Government of Sikkim may make rules for the purpose of providing that the Assembly adequately represents the various sections of the population, that is to say while fully protecting the legitimate rights and

interests of Sikkimese of Lepcha or Bhutia origin and Sikkimese of Nepali origin and other Sikkimese, including Tsongs, Scheduled Castes, no single section of population is allowed to acquire a dominating position in the affairs of Sikkim mainly by its ethnic origin".

We have mentioned above that the *Nepamul* Sikkimese have been demanding restoration of reserved seats to them in the State Assembly since 1979, the year it was undone. But it has not been done and there appears to be little chance of its being restored in the near future. Meanwhile, Sikkim has joined the North Eastern Council (NEC) for the purpose development administration. There are a number of states within NEC, which are known as "tribal states" because they have more than half of their population recognized by the Union Government as Scheduled Tribes. Taking a cue from the above practice, the government of Sikkim decided to approach the Union Government to accord the status of Scheduled Tribe to the communities listed in the State as the MBCs or Most Backward Communities. There are already 38 percent population of Sikkim recognized as Scheduled Tribes and another 5.93 percent of them as Scheduled Castes. The present ruling party - Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) - is committed to bring all the *Nepamul* Sikkimese under special constitutional categories like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and MBCs. They do not hide their efforts and their desire to see that the communities listed among the MBCs in the state are accorded the status of the Scheduled Tribes. Once it is achieved, apart from the social engineering of uplifting the 'educationally and economically backward communities', another 22.4 percent population will be added to the total, staking a genuine claim of being a tribal state, which will have its own advantages in terms of liberal allotment of the fund.

In this way the demographically dominant *Nepamul* Sikkimese ethnic commonwealth spent four decades between 1953 and 1994 towards consolidation of their 'Nepali' identity vis-a-vis the Lepcha-Bhutia combine in the politics of Sikkim. However, several intellectuals among them, specially among the Kiratas, began to realize that their continued emphasis on 'Nepali' identity had led to further consolidation of Bahun-Chhetri-Newar dominance, more sanskritization of their rituals and customs along the classical Hindu practices and further marginalization of their languages and cultures in favour of the Indo-Aryan Nepali language and culture. This realization came rather late, but it did. Although the process of "looking back" seemed irreversible the same swept both Nepal and Nepali diaspora in India since early 1990s, which further strengthened their resolve to regain their subjugated identities

and use them for new economic and political opportunities (Sinha, 2005: 23).

T. B. Subba conducted fieldwork on three locations in Eastern Nepal in 1992-93 and tried to see the issue of Kirata identity in much deeper and extensive way across Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim (Subba, 1999). In case of Sikkim, Limbus have already won their battle for recognition as a Scheduled Tribe and now they appear to be more concerned with their 'reserved' representation in the State Assembly than fighting a common battle for the Kirat cause. In fact, there appears a race for getting recognition of individual community as a 'Scheduled Tribe' than that of a concerted move for Kirat entity. However, Subba's observations have profound bearing on Kirat identity. On the basis of three socio-economic parametres - education, occupation and landholding - he found no significant differences between Kirats and other Nepali groups like Tagadharis (referring to Nepali high castes), other Mongoloid communities and the so-called 'Untouchables'. He even writes, 'the objective differences in culture between the Tagadhari and Kirata categories have been bridged to a large extent in the last couple of centuries' (p 71).

Emergence of Nar Bahadur Bhandari and Consolidation of *Nepamul* Sikkimese

About a month before conducting the first general election to the State Assembly, the government of India issued Ordinance No. 7, 1979 by which the notorious 'parity system' was abolished; 12 seats were reserved for Lepcha and Bhutia; one seat was allotted to the *Sangha* (the monk body); two seats were ascribed to the Scheduled Castes and the remaining 17 seats in the Assembly of 32 were declared 'General', which meant that any *bona fide* Indian voter was entitled to contest on those seats. These stipulations stirred the *Nepamul* Sikkimese a great deal, as they had not anticipated this when they fought for democracy. They had presumed that once the 'parity system' was abolished, all the unreserved seats in the State Assembly would automatically be allotted to them. *Nepamul* leaders like R C Poudyal and B B Gurung termed it 'black ordinance' and decided to challenge it in the court of law. They also accused the Kazi for being hand in glove with the Central Government to deny the majority *Nepamul* their natural rights and active, dynamic and popular *Nepamul* leaders parted company with the Kazi before the first election to State Assembly in October 1979.

Kazi, although born and brought up in feudal and theocratic fold, was quick to change. This most active politician in Sikkim for over three decades and the only effective face of democratic opposition to the ruler was after all a state level leader, who was not cut for hurley-burley of the Indian national political scene. Thus, he kept on changing his political affiliation as per change of power in New Delhi ignoring the organizational base of his political party and willy-nilly created an impression among the Sikkimese at large that it were the bureaucrats on deputation sent by New Delhi who were running the show in his name. While effective mass *Nepamul* leaders had switched off their loyalty to him, the feudal elements were looking for a viable set-up to teach him a lesson or two. They discovered Nar Bahadur Bhandari, a former school teacher, who had opposed the merger of Sikkim to India for which he was allegedlly tortured and jailed. Bhandari had formed his own political party, Sikkim Janata Parishad, with a marked anti-merger and pro-Chogyal stance. He could dare to term the 32 members of the disolved State Assembly as 'Thirty-two Thieves, who had sold the Country' ('*battise chor*' and '*des bechwa*') from public platform and there was no body to oppose him. The results of the general election were a forgone conclusion; every body knew that Kazi and Co. were going to lose the election. They lost so badly that his party's future was sealed for all the time to come. Bhandari managed to form the government in the state and remained in power for the next 15 years. It is ironic that the Kazi, a former monk of mixed Lepcha-Bhutia parentage, who was accepted by the *Nepamul* Sikkimese to dethrone 333 years of Namgyal rule was to have such an exit.

Bhandari had raised three demands all through 1980s and turned out to be the spokesman of the *Nepamul* grievances: (1) Restoration of Assembly seats for *Nepamul* Sikkimese; (2) Granting of citizenship to the stateless *Nepamul* residing in Sikkim for long; and (3) Recognition of Nepali language and its inclusion in the VIII Schedule of the Indian Constitution. He could largely succeed in getting his last two demands fulfilled, but getting the 'General' seats reserved for the *Nepamul* could not be clinched. It appears that now the community is reconciled to status quo and demands are made now to increase the seats in the State Assembly to partly answer the above grievance. Bhandari ruled the State ruthlessly and any form of dissent was not tolerated. It was he who established the political tradition according to which the winner takes every thing either by getting the candidates elected or causing defection from the opposition to one's fold. His consecutive success for the second and third terms to the office of the Chief Minister went to his

head and he began to treat Sikkim as his pocket bureau (Kazi, 1994). However, it goes without saying that Bhandari did consolidate the *Nepamul* Sikkimese as a sub set in the social commonwealth of Indian Union.

From *Nepamul* to OBC Identity

The caste structure of the Nepali society is based on the same pattern of purity and pollution as the rest of Indian society is. But the caste-based disabilities are not as severe as in some parts of India. A three-tier categorisation of Nepali castes known as 'Tagadhari' (the twice-born), 'Matwali' (those who take alcoholic drinks), and 'Untochables' exists among them. The Matwalis were again divided into enslaveable and unenslaveable as per the Muluki Ain promulgated by Rana Jung Bahadur in 1853. All through the Rana period in the history of Nepal, the social scene in Nepal was governed by the same civil code. On occasions, the *Nepamul* in Sikkim and Bhutan were treated in the light of the Nepalese code of law. Inspite of the democratic innovations in 1950s, the Muluki Ain continued in practice till it was abrogated in 1963 by King Mahendra, but ethnic situation remained frozen on the pattern of past practices.

Things began to change in Nepal in 1980s, when Magurali (a federation of Magar, Gurung, Rai and Limbu) was formed. The country was declared as a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual state. Nepal Janajati Mahasangh (Nepal Federation of the Nationalities—NEFEN) was launched with a view to bring in all ethnic groups under one umbrella. To begin with NEFEN was founded as a federation of seven different organizations: by 1993 it had 21 federating units representing 21 ethnic groups. It maintains an anti-Bahun (hill Brahmin) attitude in its dealings and its members are supposed to be anti-Hindu. Thus when the associations of Chhetris and Dalits tried to seek membership of NEFEN, they were asked to shun Hindu practices before they could be welcomed to the 'club' and naturally their request was turned down (Gellner, 1997: 22). Thus, there is a trend among the ethnic groups of Nepal at large to distance them from the Hindu caste system, Brahminical practices and what came to be termed as the Hindu great traditions. The ethnic groups are now engaged in emphasizing their distinctive identity markers.

Coming to the Sikkimese situation, the Government of India had issued the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste Order notifying Bhutias and Lepchas as Scheduled Tribes and Damai, Kami, Majhi and Sarki as Scheduled Castes

on June 26, 1978. The Bill No. 9 (for rearranging seats in the State Legislative Assembly in Sikkim) was introduced in the Lok Sabha on May 18, 1979, which became an Act in 1981 during the Prime Ministership of late Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

It is very pertinent to remember that elsewhere in India seats in the legislative bodies have been reserved for the Scheduled Tribes of the particular state, but in case of Sikkim an exception has been made by mentioning Lepcha-Bhutias by name. Similarly, considering the unique role played by the Buddhist monks and monasteries in the body politics of Sikkim in the past, secular India made a special provision to allot a seat to them in the State Legislative Assembly of Sikkim.

Nar Bahadur Bhandari's third term as the Chief Minister of Sikkim from 1989 onwards marked the gradual integration of Sikkim with Indian political system. The Union Government of India had decided to implement the recommendation of the Backward Class Commission Report by reserving 27 percent seats in educational, welfare, political and administrative offices to the communities listed by the Commission. Incidentally, the Commission had listed all the communities in Sikkim as economically and educationally backward. Naturally, Sikkim could not remain untouched from this development. Bhandari, hailing from the Chhetri caste, instead of responding positively to the demand of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs), was busy spearheading a demand for the recognition of the Nepali language as one of the Indian national languages. One of his long time associates, Pawan Kumar Chamling, and also a cabinet minister in Bhandari regime, raised the issue of implementing the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report in Sikkim in 1992 and for that he was expelled from the Sikkim Sangram Parishad Legislative Party. However, a turning point came in 1994, when the state assembly passed a resolution against the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report. Within no time 19 out of 31 members of Bhandari's legislative party deserted him to form a parallel political forum, Sikkim Sangram Parishad (Sanchman). Bhandari was voted out of the office of the Chief Minister on May 19, 1994. The successor government immediately recommended to the Union Government to include seven communities from among the "Sikkimese of Nepali origin" as "socially and educationally backward Classes (OBCs)". Consequently, Bhujel, Gurung, Limbu, Magar, Rai, Sunuwar and Tamang were declared OBC in Sikkim on June 2, 1994.

The fourth general election for the state assembly in Sikkim was held

on November 16, 1994 and Pawan Kumar Chamling fought it on the slogan of "*Bhasha Na Bhat*" (language or food?) against Bhandari's credit for getting Nepali recognized as a national language of India. Electorate rejected language in favour of food and Chamling formed the government with 19 members in the house of 32. By the time the fifth general election was declared in 1999, Chamling had consolidated his position by according recognition to ten languages (Nepali, Lepcha, Bhutia, Limbu, Magar, Rai, Gurung, Sherpa, Newar and Tamang) as the official languages of the state in 1995, promised to include all Nepalis in the list of OBCs in 1996, and opposed merger of Sikkim with that of Darjeeling in 1997. His strength in the state assembly after the fifth general election rose to 24. By the time the sixth general election was announced in 2004, Chamling's SDF had literally replaced Bhandari's SSP. By then Bhandari was the lone member occupying the opposition benches in the state assembly, as other six members elected on his party tickets had joined Chamling's fold. In such a situation, the result of the next election was almost certain. By getting all his 32 candidates elected to state assembly in 2004 Chamling repeated Bhandari's 1989 feat. One of the longest serving chief ministers in India, Bhandari found himself outside the state assembly for the first time in 25 years.

Search for Kirat Identity

The belated step to label the Limbus as one of the OBCs did not satisfy their expectations. In fact, the community was nursing a grievance against the democratic dispensation, which had lumped them along with the rest of the *Nepamul* for political representation. They even fondly remembered that they were allotted a seat in the State Council in 1967, which was done away with in 1974. Thus, they continued to press for recognition of their status as a Scheduled Tribe, as they were one of the original inhabitants of Sikkim along with Lepchas and Bhutias. At last, in December 2002, Limbus and Tamangs were accorded the status of the Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim and West Bengal. Furthermore, in partial modification of earlier orders of the State through the Notification No.2/WD of June 2, 1994 and Notification No. 236/SW/251(3) WD dated June 15, 2000, the Government of Sikkim declared (i) Bhujel, (ii) Dewan, (iii) Gurung, (iv) Jogi, (v) Kirat Rai, (vi) Magar, (vii) Sunuwar, and (viii) Thami as the "Most Backward Classes" (MBC). Similarly, (i) Bahun, (ii) Chhetri, (iii) Newar, and (iv) Sanyasi were given the status of "Other Backward Classes" (OBC) in Sikkim (vide Sikkim

Government Gazette: Extraordinary, No. 308, dated Gangtok, Friday 19th September, 2003). In this context, the readers may be reminded of a news item in the *Gangtok Times*, informing formation of a 'Bahun-Chhetri-Newar Association with avowed objective of "protecting unity of the Sikkimese People" on the plea that though some of them were considered 'forward', most of the members of these castes were poor and 'have-nots' (April 29-May 4 Issue, 1995). Through these notifications Chamling fulfilled the promises made in 1996 to the State to bring every *Nepamul* community under OBC quota.

It may be noted that the State Assembly has 12 seats reserved for the Lepcha-Bhutia communities, and not for the Scheduled Tribes as elsewhere in India. This provision was challenged in the court of law. The highest court in India upheld the provision as a part of the "Tripartite Agreement" signed in 1973 between the then ruler, representative of the Union Government and representatives of the political parties in Sikkim. Now, Limbu and Tamang, who have been recognized as Scheduled Tribes, are naturally demanding political representation in State Assembly. Apparently, 12 seats reserved for the Lepcha-Bhutias by name cannot be tempered with and there is no seat set aside for the Scheduled Tribes in the Assembly. The Government of Sikkim has come out with various suggestions to solve the problem. This has not deterred many other communities from the Most Backward Classes from staking a claim to be Scheduled Tribes. As many as eight ethnic groups (Bhujel, Dewan, Gurung, Jogi, Magar, Rai, Sunuwar and Thami) impressed upon the Government of Sikkim to accord them the status of Scheduled Tribe. The Government of Sikkim saw merit in their claims and approached the Union Government to accord its approval, but they were advised to re-apply for consideration along with an 'ethnographic report on the claims of the various communities'. The Government of Sikkim did that and is waiting for the decision of the Union Government.

Prior to approaching the Union Government, the Government of Sikkim asked their concerned officials to request the concerned communities to prepare their respective ethnographic reports. In terms of size, some of them are in thousands. For example, Rais are as many as 72,418 individuals as per the last census conducted in 2001. Gurungs (37,105) and Magar (10, 858) are other two numerically important communities. However, there are as many as five communities between 3326 (Bhujel) and 223 (Thami). Six of the communities (Bhujel, Yakkha, Gurung, Kirant Rai, Magar and Sunuwar) presented their respective reports for consideration of the committee appointed

for the purpose. It is interesting to learn that even the officers of the Department of Social Welfare failed to locate any social or welfare organization among two of the numerically smallest communities (Jogi and Thami) and thus, there was no 'ethnographic report' presented to the committee on their behalf. There was such a report on behalf of Dewans, but no community with this nomenclature is known to exist in Indian census operation.

Three of the communities claiming ST status in Sikkim - Magar, Sunuwar and Rai - published their ethnographic reports recently. It is apparent that the respective associations of the various communities went out of their way to showcase their unique customs, dress, food habits, arts, crafts, architecture, vocations, implements, ornaments, marital pattern, etc. In the words of a sociologist of culture, Bennett M Berger, they "want to assert, argue, persuade that such symbols/meanings like baskets, pots, and watches, are about getting us through the days and nights we are more or less stuck with, and in doing so providing us with a sense of having got through with some dignity. Dignity itself, of course, is a precious piece of culture…that to see the matter this way is not to demean (de-mean) the dignity; it is only to look it hard in the face, and ask it tough questions" (Berger, 1995: 8-9).

Reading their ethnographic reports one gets the impression that all these communities were Buddhists or Animists who were forced by Hindu kings and Brahmin priests to follow Sanskritic traditions and Brahminical rituals. All of them, with the exception of Jogi, claim to speak distinct languages of their own. But it was found that all of them speak Nepali among themselves. The State also has recognized their languages as official languages and has even appointed some language teachers in some schools but there are no pupils around in some of the schools willing to be taught their own languages. Their *rites de passage* exhibit a lot of commonality with those of other caste Hindus. Many of the communities have their own sacred specialists, but they often invite Brahmin priests on various occasions. Most of these communities are today suffering from lack of national symbols which would represent them and simultaneously differentiate them from the Tagadharis and Untouchables whose cultures are very similar to each other. The question of difference with Other Mongoloids is perhaps the most vexing one for various reasons. It is important for the Kirats to construct powerful symbol of differences with the Tagadharis for it is mainly the latter that they hold responsible for their present state of affairs (in Nepal). It is again the latter against whom they appear to be fighting. But this fight is uneasy: the symbol

of difference between them are not so powerful as the Kirat leaders would like them to be…other facts of their lives and living such as economic interdependence, language, dress, ecology and destiny bind them together rather than separate them. "Retreating to an ideal and convenient past to construct the symbol of difference is common but in no way easy for the Kiratas" (Subba, 1999: 106).

Nepamul ethnicity in Sikkim is nothing but a myth of collective ancestry. They had to suffer against the feudal oppression in the Buddhist kingdom of Sikkim ruled by Bhutia kings. They were exploited by the landed gentry, which was largely Buddhist. They had to pay a higher rate of land rent in cash compared to the older subjects of Sikkim, who paid it in kind. They were subjected to series of exploitative labour obligations in the forms of *kurwa, bethi, jharlangi,* and *kalobhari*. Against all such oppressions, they stood together as one community. They were known as fighters in the battlefield, but their fight against the unequal and unjust feudal system was almost unknown outside Sikkim. In a way, this fight came to an end in 1975, when the feudal dispensation came to an end and they chose a series of identities available to them with a view to appropriating certain resources (Sinha, 1981).

After 1975, *Nepamul* Sikkimese are engaged in a different kind of struggle, which is addressed to finding an honourable place in Indian political system. First, they fought for recognition of Nepali as an Indian language, citizenship rights to *Nepamul* Sikkimese and separate seats for them in the state legislative assembly. They succeeded in the first two and are trying to achieve the third one through the attainment of the constitutional status as Scheduled Tribes.

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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 (*Dobhashi*s), 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/, /ɷ/ 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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