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EDITORIAL

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

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

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

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

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

I wish all our readers a very happy reading.

T B Subba
Editor

Small and Medium Sized Business Opportunities in the Tourism Sector of Meghalaya

BENJAMIN F. LYNGDOH

Introduction

Tourism as an industry can be categorized under secondary and tertiary sectors of the country. Tourism involves exploration and conversion of the prospective places of interest into attractive products and selling this product involves services, both direct and indirect, which are crucial for the growth and success of the industry. Tourism industry can be defined as the only industry which is vastly dependent on socio-economic and cultural conditions and practices, habits, and overall nature of human behaviour, which all have an enormous influence on the quality of tourism products.

Tourism industry contributes a great deal to the growth of this country (as shown by the data available) and it is an accepted fact that it is one of the most important industries in our country. Statistics show that this industry contributes 6% of the Gross Domestic Product of the country and accounts for 10% of employment.¹ Tourism is one of the most important export industries of the country attracting millions of foreign tourists every year and thereby contributing to the foreign exchange reserves of the country. It is India's third largest foreign exchange earner after textile and software contributing around US \$1 bn per annum. In the year 2005 the in-bound foreign tourist count was 4.2 million and it was expected to touch 5.5 million in the year 2006.¹ Moreover, tourism stimulates other service segments (participants) like hotels, airlines, tour planners, travel and tour operators, etc into action and thereby contributing significantly to the revenue of the industry. Therefore, tourism does not comprise products (tourist spots) alone but key participants which move the products and sell them to the customers. They - products and participants - are inter-dependent and support each other and one cannot strive for growth without a positive correlation between the two.

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It will not be wrong to say that Northeast India is blessed with natural features attracting domestic as well as international tourists. The Seven Sisters (Eight Jewels, after Sikkim is included) are realizing more and more the importance and scope of tourism for the socio-economic growth and development of the region. Being landlocked and connected only through a narrow stretch with mainland India, tourism can be the answer to the geographical isolation of the region. The ever pleasing natural setting and untouched tourist spots are available in plenty. Some of the tourist spots in the state which are famous worldwide are shortlisted below:

Shillong Peak, Sohpetbneng Peak, Umiam Water Sports Complex, Botanical Garden, Lady Hydari Park, Golf Course, State Museum, Shillong Cathedral, Bishop Falls, Beaden Falls, Elephant Falls, Spread Eagle Falls, Sweet Falls, Crinoline Falls, Diengiei Peak, Dwarksuid River, Kyllang Rock, Sacred forest of Mawphlang, Hot springs of Jakrem, Cherrapunji Village, Noh Kalikai Falls, Mawsynram Village, Ranikor Village, Dawki Village, Mawlynnong Village, Nongkhnun Island, Jowai Village, Thadlaskien Lake, Monoliths of Nartiang, Syndai Village, River Myntdu and Syntu Ksiar, Tura Town, Imilchang Dare Waterfalls, Nokrek Biosphere, Chibragre River, Williamnagar Town, Simsang River, Hot springs of Resubelpara, Caves of Nengkong, Siju caves, Balkpakram National Park, Chidimak- Chianggal Black Water, etc.

Small and Medium Sized Business Opportunities

Tourism being the strength of the region presents innumerable business opportunities to the entrepreneurs of the region. The growth of tourism will help in the economic empowerment and upliftment of the people of the state and it will bring about a different dimension to the outlook of the people by making them broader minded and inculcating in them a professional outlook. This objective can be achieved with the creation of new ventures in the form of small and medium sized enterprises or SMEs.

The SMEs are the most important sector of the nation's economy. They provide and create jobs, especially during times of recession. They are a source of innovation and entrepreneurial spirit, harness individual creative effort, create competition and are the seed bed for business of the future. In short, SMEs are vitally important for a healthy and dynamic market economy.² This sector accounts for about 95% of industrial units, 33% of national exports, and there are about 28 lakh units providing employment to 160 lakh persons.

SMEs can be defined from operational and theoretical viewpoints.³ However, in India, they are defined in terms of size and investment in capital,

as India is a country where capital is scarce but labour is plenty. The definition used by Indian authorities is based on the level of investment in plant, machinery or other fixed assets whether held on an ownership, lease or hire purchase basis. However, medium sized enterprises are not defined either technically or legally.

A Small Scale Industrial Undertaking is an undertaking in which the investment in fixed assets in plant and machinery, excluding land and building, whether held on ownership terms or on lease or on hire purchase, does not exceed Rs. 1 crore (Rs. 10 mn)⁴. It is estimated that an investment of Rs.10,00,000/- (Rupees one million only) will create 50 jobs in tourism as compared to 45 in agriculture and 13 in manufacturing. On the basis of this statement alone we can guess the employment capacity of the industry with a modest start-up capital.

The small and medium sized business opportunities can be classified under direct and indirect business opportunities, both having their own features, scope and strategic approaches. Most of the business opportunities opened by the industry are not being initiated and started by the entrepreneurs of Meghalaya. These have huge potential for employment generation and revenue contribution to the state.

The direct opportunities in this field are as under:

Tour operators, sight seeing operators, mobile hotels, cultural item shops at strategic locations, low cost luxury hotels, transit house operators, exploration and development of new tourist spots, indigenous styled hotels, tourism spots planners, tourism sports in appropriate areas, amusement parks, way side facilities, re-birth of traditional handicrafts and handloom sector, infrastructure building, regional tourism news agencies, adventure tourism, flora and fauna tours, etc.

Moreover, the Directorate of Tourism, Government of Meghalaya has identified certain thrust areas based on the opportunities available in the state for the growth of tourism. Some of them are: nature tourism, cultural tourism, health resort tourism, golf tourism, casino tourism, and arts and crafts promotion tourism.⁵

The indirect opportunities refer to the increase in the demand for the services of the participants like hotels, transport, good food, clean water, fast moving consumer goods, etc. Such opportunities can help in the growth and penetration of rural marketing, rural to rural marketing, urban to rural mar-

keting and thereby improve the socio-economic conditions of the people. Basically it will take the concept of trading in rural areas to a different level and quality altogether.

Problems faced by the Industry

The scope of tourism in the state in all aspects needs no further elaboration and it is high time that we correct the wrong and build better infrastructure for tourism development. The tourist spots must be accessible to the people and it is a fact that the state has poor connectivity and most parts of the state are not connected. Poor connectivity, transportation problems, poor accommodation facilities, poor guidance and direction to the tourists, limited food choice, etc discourage tourists from visiting many parts of the state and spending time in such locations. Destruction of the environment and change in flora and fauna will result in the decline of tourist arrivals and hence reduce revenue and diminish business opportunities. Hence pollution control, afforestation, healthy practices and sustainable development is a must for sustenance of tourism. "Destroy environment, destruct tourism" seems to be the adage under present environmental conditions. Cherrapunji is the perfect example of it where losing the title of the wettest place on earth has resulted in lesser tourist inflows over the few years. However, the biggest factor which influences tourism is human behaviour. Tourism is also termed as a hospitality industry and rightly so as the behaviour of the people directly determines its growth. Friendly, welcoming, positive and hospitable behaviour of the hosts will bring tourists and invite more in future as person to person advertisement is the best form of publicity in this field. Law and order and a secure environment are also a must for the growth of tourism industry generally and in Meghalaya in particular.

If the business opportunities are to be taken advantage of and grow in future then the negatives and minus points of the state are expected to be eliminated and the best way to achieve this is by encouraging public participation at every level. Co-operation and support of the people can take the state tourism profile to the top and best level possible.

Who will create the Business Opportunities?

The growth of any industry depends largely upon the business environment. The availability of business opportunities and new venture establishment cannot be viewed in isolation. This explains why some parts of the country

are highly industrialized and other parts see very less business activity. A conducive business environment is a must for commercial activity but the pertinent question is who and how to create such an environment. Moreover, a mechanism for conversion of the opportunities into productive enterprises is to be created.

Business activity is influenced by factors like culture, society, economic conditions, skillful application of business concepts and level of education. Government policies and incentives also have a direct impact on new venture creation. These factors are interdependent and support each other. The presence of all these factors will result in a conducive and vibrant environment for business activity. Following are the main factors that have direct correlation with the creation of business opportunities.

The people of the state need to have a broad and business oriented outlook depending upon the nature of opportunities. It is true that entrepreneurial skill and ability development depends more upon generic factors and less upon environmental factors and the fact that the population of this region lack entrepreneurship ability is not challenged. Effort has to be made by the agencies and the authorities to develop business skills by holding entrepreneurship development programmes and providing the necessary help and guidance as and when required. Some mechanism has to be evolved to train and encourage people to look for business opportunities and start new ventures. Perhaps the education system, local authorities, institutions of knowledge can play a major part in this area. The basic need is motivation to the people to take up the opportunities present and provide the necessary mechanism, help and guidance to carry the business plan through. A strong publicity drive and awareness programme on entrepreneurship if run for a certain period of time at regular intervals can motivate people to the cause but this also requires a support system for the interested entrepreneurs during inception of their business.

It needs no mention that in case of tourism success depends squarely upon the number of tourist inflows and their duration of stay. It is true that this region is one of the most affected parts of the country as far as security is concerned but it is also a reality that this state is the least affected of the region. This fact is to be put forward as a positive feature of the state and be made known to the rest of the country

and the world so as to encourage tourist inflows. It has to be remembered that the demand for services creates business opportunities, which in turn depends upon the volume of domestic and foreign tourist inflows.

90% of the borders of the region are international. This provides scope for tourist arrivals from these countries and hence the need for good and friendly relations with such countries. Moreover, it provides a boost for foreign exchange earnings of the country. An efficient system for movement of foreign tourists from such countries can boost the industry of the state. Moreover, the Look East Policy of the Government of India if successfully implemented may be a boon for the entire region and boost this industry significantly. As mentioned earlier the industry suffers from serious infrastructure and logistical disadvantages. These issues are to be dealt with as early as possible for the growth of industry.

Pollution, environment, government policies, entrepreneurship programmes, sustainable development, etc. are all important for the future growth of the tourism industry. Managing all these factors require strong political will and determination. Proper policies according to the needs and characteristics of the region, implementation of the projects in full, public support and a broad business outlook can create a conducive environment for business in this sector.

The number of tourist inflows into the state has been increasing steadily over the years as shown by Table 1. From the year 1998 to 2004 there has been a significant increase in the number of tourist inflows, both domestic and foreign. However, the tourism industry of the state has not attained its full potential in physical and financial terms. With proper marketing of the region and creation of better infrastructure the industry can attain its full potential and accommodate more tourist inflows. This will require public-private participation in business and public support and participation for the growth and development of the industry. The business opportunities will have to be taken and converted into ventures supporting the industry. Emphasis should be laid upon the participation of the local bodies and village councils for the promotion of the industry. Aggressive marketing with a dual concentration on both domestic and foreign tourism can help the industry grow from infancy to maturity.

Table 1. Number of Tourists Visiting Meghalaya

Year	Indian	Foreign	Total
1996	1,36,183	1,573	1,37,756
1997	1,15,563	1,071	1,16,634
1998	1,36,952	1,055	1,38,007
1999	1,59,730	1,971	1,61,701
2000	1,69,929	2,327	1,72,256
2001	1,78,697	2,390	1,81,087
2002	2,68,529	3,191	2,71,720
2003	3,71,953	6,304	3,78,257
2004	4,33,495	12,407	4,45,902.

Source: Directorate of Tourism, Meghalaya

Brand Building in the Tourism Industry

It is important that tourism is developed in the state as a brand having certain distinct features which are not available in other parts of the world. This brand is to be advertised and publicized at the domestic as well as international levels. The brand image should concentrate on efficient management of present and prospective tourist spots and identification of the state's competitive advantage. Emphasis should also be given to regional tourism, rural tourism and urban tourism. Cultural tourism, culture exchange programme and more importantly tourism development training programmes should be encouraged.

Identification of competitive advantage is the major function of brand building and this advantage will be the driving force in the state's brand of tourism. The competitive advantages of tourism industry are natural features, existing tourist spots, new tourist spots, tourism services, hotel facilities, and most importantly, the hospitality of the people. In order to make the state's brand of tourism have more value and be more appealing to the prospective customers the direct business opportunities are to be taken advantage of and the said new ventures are to be started, first at a small scale with further scope for growth.

If the competitive advantage and the existing business opportunities are combined the brand of tourism in the state will be one of the best if not the best in the world. Image building and marketing of the product is a continuous process. Continuous evaluation and surveys at different points of time can help understand the feelings and experiences of the tourists which will help in the process of brand building. The state government has to play

the leading role in brand building by appointing appropriate authorities and holding appropriate programmes such as Autumn Festival⁶ and other cultural festivals so as to highlight the rich values of the state and has to pursue with the continuous process of brand value addition in future. The recent entry of the state into the Guinness Book of Records for the largest “drum ensemble” and “guitar ensemble” certainly add to the appeal as musical destination of India and is a perfect example of brand value addition.

However, the biggest hindrance to brand building of the tourism industry of the state is the lack of identification, promotion and development of tourist spots. Table 2 shows that the number of tourist spots in the state, district-wise has been the same from year 2001 to year 2005. This shows that in physical terms the industry has not grown over the years and under such a situation the industry of the state will not grow and there will not be any creation of business opportunities. This anomaly must be taken care of and appropriate steps should be taken to ensure progress of the industry through identification and promotion of new tourist spots.

Table 2. Number of Tourist Spots in Meghalaya

Districts	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Jaintia Hills	6	6	6	6	6
East Khasi Hills	27	27	27	27	27
West Khasi Hills	4	4	4	4	4
Ri-Bhoi District	4	4	4	4	4
East Garo Hills	7	7	7	7	7
West Garo Hills	9	9	9	9	9
South Garo Hills	7	7	7	7	7
Meghalaya.	64	64	64	64	64

Source: Directorate of Tourism, Meghalaya.

Conclusion

It is important that the people participate in the growth of tourism right from the local level to the national level. Tourism is positively related with the environmental, social and economic conditions of the region. Therefore, good connectivity, transportation facilities, provision of clean water, clean air, good accommodation, good food as per the cultural demand of the tourists, friendly behaviour and hospitality are of utmost importance for the industry.

The industry of the country as a whole has to be positioned as a high value destination so as to attract tourists who are on the lookout for artistic natural beauty, historical sites and variety of cultures. The industry has to

provide value for money and satisfaction to the visitors and this will lead to the creation of goodwill and reputation of the country worldwide.

Tourism as an industry has the potential to transform the state drastically and improve the state's gross domestic product if proper policies are framed and implemented with full sincerity. The flow of international tourists from neighbouring countries like China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and East Asian countries should be encouraged and this can be achieved only through friendly relations with these countries as tourism cannot grow in an environment of hostility. Tourism creates employment opportunities, both direct and indirect, and presents a conducive business climate for inter-state and foreign investment. It will help in the development of backward areas, bringing about co-operation, coordination and integration of the local community with other communities in the country as well as abroad.

References:

- ¹ *Indian Tourism Industry Outlook*, 2006. www.rncos.com/Report/IM039.html
- ² Ruth Hillary, *Small and Medium Sized Enterprises and the Environment Business Imperatives*, Greenleaf Publishing, 2000, p.11.
- ³ *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- ⁴ www.ciionline.org/services/112/Definition.html.
- ⁵ Tourism Policy 2001, Govt. of Meghalaya, Tourism Directorate.
- ⁶ An Appeal, *The Shillong Times*, Tura, 22.09.06.

Book Reviews

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reviewed by

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Reviewed by

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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T. B. Subba

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