

WOMEN AND CHANGING POWER STRUCTURE IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

The book cover features a photograph of a group of women in the foreground, some looking towards the camera and others looking down. In the background, a large, classical-style building with a prominent dome is visible under a cloudy sky. The title is printed in large, bold, white letters with a dark outline, and the authors' names are at the bottom in a similar style.

**ASOK KUMAR RAY
RAJENDRA PRASAD ATHPARIA**

Women and Changing Power Structure in North-East India

Edited by

Asok Kumar Ray

Rajendra Prasad Athparia

NORTH-EAST INDIA COUNCIL FOR
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH, SHILLONG



OM PUBLICATIONS

New Delhi

3000-1000-1000
RAN

Published by

OM PUBLICATIONS

2783, (1st Floor), Bhagat Singh Gali No. 6

Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj,

New Delhi-110055 (India)

Phone : 55354142

Mobile : 9811393986

e.mail ibp@ndf.vsnl.net.in

5090
18/01/06

All rights reserved

© Editors, 2006

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Requests for permission to make copies of any part of the work should be mailed to Copyrights and

Permissions Department

Om Publications

ISBN : 81-86867-89-9

Rs. 750

\$ 75

Laser Type Setting by
Creative Graphics

Printed in India by
B.K. Offset, Delhi

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	9
<i>Editorial Notes</i>	11
1. The Draft National Policy on Tribals-Does it Matter to the Traditional Power Structure? — <i>Asok Kumar Ray</i>	39
2. Changing Power Structure in the Traditional Modes of Adjudication in the Khasi Land of Meghalaya — <i>E. Jyrwa</i>	55
3. Changing Power Structure in A Matriarchal Society A Case Study of Khasis — <i>M. Sasikumar</i>	65
4. The Changing Power Structure in The Khasi Society With Reference to The Position of Women — <i>Saifun Nessa</i>	73
5. Role of Women in Khasi Society : Tradition, Continuity and Change — <i>Indrani Chaoudhury And Saphimosha W. Blah</i>	83
6. Political Participation of Women in Meghalaya : From Tradition to Modernity — <i>M.P.R. Lyngdoh</i>	93
7. Women Participation in the Society : An Analytical Study of Core-Periphery Shillong — <i>Aurelia Badwar and P.K. Ryngnga</i>	103

8. Constitutional Status to Traditional Institutions in Meghalaya : A Case Study of Khasi Society 109
— *B.P. Sahu*
9. Role of Khasi Women in Political and Administrative System Tradition to Modernity 123
— *Surojit Sen Gupta*
10. Socio Political Status of Women in Meghalaya 135
— *P. Devi*
11. Changing Status of Khasi Women in Society 141
— *Gita Pyal*
12. Women in Changing Power Structure in the Traditional Society of Garo Hill 145
— *H.N. Sinha and G. P. Bhandari*
13. Women in Garo Society : The Changing Trand in Socio-Political Life 153
— *Anjan Jyoti Borah*
14. Changing Power Structure in the Traditional Tribal Society of North-East India With Special Reference to The Role of Women 161
— *Dwijendra Nath Deka*
15. Socio-Economic, Educational and Political Status of Bodo Women in the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam 171
— *Bijan Kr. Kunda*
16. Right to Development and Women in Dimasa Society 185
Alok Sen
17. The Kocha-Rabha Women of Kalabari Village : An Appraisal of the Empowering Trends 193
— *Sujata Bhadra*
18. The Changing Power Structure in the Traditional Societies: the Role of Barman Women in Barak Valley 207
— *Mandira Datta Chowdhury*

<i>Contents</i>	7
19. Women in Assam Agriculture – Focus on Programme Planning — <i>C. Hazarika</i>	213
20. Women Labour in Rural Sector The Case of Assam — <i>H. Saikia and C. Hazarika</i>	223
21. Woman in Changing Economic Pattern of the Rongmei-Nagas of Cachar — <i>C.K. Biswas</i>	227
22. Commonalities and Peculiarities Among the Baman and Hmar Women in the Barak Valley — <i>Pranay Jyoti Goswami</i>	233
23. Customary Laws and Participation of Tribal Women in Decision Making Process of Tripura — <i>Suchintya Bhattacharya</i>	241
<i>Index</i>	251

Preface

Northeast India is a mosaic of different linguistic, ethnic, and cultural groups. This has made the region one of the most diversified regions of the country. There are 209 Scheduled Tribes (Arunachal Pradesh 101; Manipur 29; Assam 23; Nagaland 20; Tripura 18; Meghalaya 14; and Mizoram 53) other than number of small yet to be recognized ethnic groups. In Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh, the tribal population has overwhelming majority. Manipur and Tripura also have tribal population which are more than one third of the states' total population. It is due to this that northeast India is known as the region of traditional societies meaning hereby the uniqueness and separateness of these societies. This separateness of the region was given a legal framework by the Scheduled District Act 1874, Government of India Act 1919 and Government of India Act 1935. The pre-Independence day rulers enacted separate set of rules and laws governing the tribal societies relying largely upon the traditional power structures. The constitution of India further strengthened this trend.

The economic activities of these traditional societies have been based on shifting cultivation. The plains tribal societies were under feudal production relations. The traditional hill societies by and large depended on shifting cultivation done with primitive tools and in which the volume of production was small. The administrative arrangements and the power structures emerged to respond to the respective economic structures. The socio cultural practices, property rights, gender relations and the tribal worldview evolved round the power structures. Some village councils were republican, some were democratic, some were authoritarian and

others were of various natures of oligarchies. These different forms have been the part and parcel of traditional power structures in northeast India. The rulers of pre-Independence India did not consider it wise to interfere with the social and economic relations of these traditional societies. The system of land management and cultivation practices remained unaltered.

In these traditional set ups, the women happened to be a part, though they had only secondary political roles. But the women enjoyed more privileged position in the social and economic spheres than their counterparts in the mainland India. The women are partners in the production process and enjoy property and lineage rights of various shades. The matrilineal system in Meghalaya is living example of this.

The period of planned development during the last five decades has largely been individual based which has been imposed upon a population which still retain strong collective values. This has created a fissure in the otherwise semi-egalitarian tribal milieu which consequently brought changes within the traditional power structures. It has generated stress and strains in these societies resulting in various movements in these societies. Experiments with autonomous district councils and emergence of women agencies have brought new social and political awareness particularly among the tribal women.

North East India Council for Social Science Research Shillong held in December 2004 a Workshop on the Changing Power Structures in The Traditional Tribal Societies of North East India. This book contains some of the articles presented in that workshop.

We take this opportunity to express our gratitude to National Foundation for India, New Delhi and Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata for their generous support for holding this workshop. We would like to thank Om Publications, New Delhi for publishing this book edited by Dr. Asok Kumar Ray and Dr. Rajendra Prasad Athparia.

28 May, 2005

B. Dutta Ray, Secretary
North East India Council for
Social Science Research
Shillong- 793003

The Draft National Policy on Tribals-Does it Matter to the Traditional Power Structure?

Asok Kumar Ray

Immediately after the Independence, there was hardly any policy package for the tribal people except the Nehru-Elwin principle, later went in the name of Nehru Policy and came to be known as Tribal Panchsil (Five principles for the tribal people). This policy however remained 'short of specifics' as recent the 'Draft National Policy on Tribals' mentioned. In the mean time government of India formulated quite a few neighbouring policies including the National Forest Policy, National Policy for Relocation and Rehabilitation, and Draft Environment Policy etc. These policies have strong bearing on the tribal society, economy and polity and also on the Draft National Policy on the Tribals, the first of the kind in the country. In the context of both totalizing and post-modernist regimes, it is provocative to institute a discourse on the Draft National Policy on Tribals and its implications on the traditional structure of the tribal people. At the outset, this draft policy on Tribal appears to implicate also the National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation-2003, Draft National Environment Policy- 2004 and the National Forest Policy-1988. The policy is conceived within the broad generalities of the tribal 'Panchsil'. The different contours of the Draft policy register the benchmarks of a totalizing regime and its political economy that affects the traditional tribal structures in multiple ways. In this paper we will confine our discussion to a few important policy contours.

Assimilation

Let us start with the policy of 'Assimilation' first. The immediate-post-Independence anthropologists were preoccupied with the term 'assimilation' as the 'telos' of Indian statehood that would serve the need of political consolidation of the state and would build the state's capacity to mobilize resources. The 'chaos imagery' of tribal traditional structures impelled a large number of them to mandate the concept of assimilation and to seek cosmic integration of the tribal people with the rest of the communities in India. This dwarfed the self-governing image of the traditional power structures of the tribal people and virtually glorified homogenization trends of the state. The conceptual premise from which the homogenization trends stem was that of political primacy of the state backed by the positivistic jurisprudence, with all other structures remaining subordinate to it. There are three templates in this term which are dealt in greater length.

Doing away with 'primitive traits'

The Draft Policy on Tribals has willy-nilly landed itself to the long-standing anthropological discourses on the issue of 'primitive traits' of tribal groups, which the Draft policy seeks to do away with on priority basis. This statement needs a brief anthropological revisit.

Despite its ordinary use, the meaning of the term 'primitive traits' and the people whom it refers to are yet to be clarified in the policy. The studies on the theme 'primitive' were evinced in the later half of the 19th century by Henry Maine followed by Taylor and Frazier. Taylor's evolutionary approach viewed primitive culture to reconstruct origin and traits of different cultures in an evolutionary sequence from their early forms to their final development in the western civilization. This evolutionary scheme indicated at the same time evolutionary inferiority of primitiveness of the people and provided legitimacy to the initial colonial conquest. Contrary to the evolutionary approach and also contrary to the racist tendencies of evolutionism, Malinowski put forward the functional approach to explain the behaviour, customs, beliefs and institutions of the primitive men. To remove the misconceptions

about primitiveness, Malinowski found the so-called primitive behaviour from their utilitarian/functional point of view and showed that all behaviours are functions of some basic or derived needs, however irrational they were. Malinowski's functionalism and cultural relativism 'intended to maintain post- conquering regime of colonialism through the system of indirect rule'.¹ We shall deal with the cultural question in the next template. However, by the token of functionalism, the phenomenon of racial divide between the colonizers and the conquered (herein the tribal people) became manifest. The failure of both the approaches in overcoming the dichotomy of primitive and modern may be attributed to the political and ideological contexts of Europe. It may be noted that while the evolutionary scheme and racial superiority gave a rationale to European imperialism, (and Risley in his *People of India-1915* argued that Indian society being incapable of modern statehood, needed British rule indefinitely to inculcate a sense of nationhood in the polity.)² Malinowski's functionalism appeared at a time when British imperialism was challenged in which situation racial evolutionism needed to be discouraged as an ideology. In its place a more polite approach of functionalism and cultural relativism was harboured, the political expression of which was indirect rule. This therefore provided a corrective to the evolutionary theory of the 19th century to maintain stability and *status quo* in the colonies.

In the context of India there were two models of British rule: authoritarian liberalism that was in favour of coercive modernization of the natives through the rule of law (Stephen) and paternalism favouring colonial rule based on customs slowly educating the heathen into the ways of civilization (Risley). Stephen argued against the Ilbert Bill (1883) introduced to equate the white men and the native law, asserting the justification for imperial absolutism in the evident superiority of the conquering race. Stephen and Risley uncovered from two sides of the equation between the western belief in its civilizational superiority and the rule of colonial law in the late 19th century, some pathway of thought through which the practice of colonialism was rationalized in theories ranging across utilitarianism, conservative thought and

authoritarian liberalism and was indicated in an evolutionist, Eurocentric anthropology.”³

Coming back to the ‘Trait template’ it is not very clear to the policy makers that what is described and understood as ‘trait’ in tribal society it is equally found in ‘caste’ also.⁴ In the draft policy discourse, superiority-inferiority syndrome became subtle but perceptible which the policy makers or the state for that matter could not overcome. However it is not clear how the policy makers conceived the term ‘trait’ without defining it. The policy makers should have been adequately equipped with the clarity of what constitutes ‘primitive traits’ and what ‘does not’ and of the *differentia specifica* between the primitive and the modern traits. Did the policy makers really mean concordant racial trait of a distinctive sub-set of mankind having lower mental ability and lesser mental organization than the so-called civilized set of mankind? Were they aware of the ‘colonial’ implication and empirical invalidity of the term at the time of formulating the Draft National Policy? This policy statement otherwise shows not only intolerant attitude towards the tribal people, but also appears too judgmental and hegemonic on the part of the state. The Draft Policy did not care to look into the definitional aspects of tribe in the context of India. Whereas primitive trait appears to be one of the indicators for specification of a community as Scheduled Tribe and helping the President of India to notify “Scheduled Tribes” and the policy makers might have got the cue from this, they did not show awareness on the other definition of the term given by ILO as ‘Indigenous and Tribal People’ and by the Draft Operational Policy of the Indigenous People of the World Bank 2001 which preferred to use the term ‘Indigenous’. At the same time the draft policy did not make mention of the vanishing, nomadic, de-notified and other vulnerable groups in the policy.⁵

It is to note in this connection that the similar ‘trait theory’ guided the Victorian notion of identification of criminality and criminal classes with certain castes (and tribes) and led to the promulgation of the Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 for India just two years after the Habitual Criminal Act was passed in Britain.⁶

Preservation of Distinct Culture & Oral Tradition and Interaction With Outside Cultures

The colonial cultural policy was introduced during the East India Company Rule and culminated in the 'Queen's Proclamation' in 1858. The political significance of the cultural policy was obvious. Given the choice between cultural interference and political control, the British always preferred the later rather than the former. It was a paradoxical stand of the colonials to maintain cultural *laissez faire* with the maintenance of political dominance over the tribal people. In other words therefore whereas the political autonomy of the tribal people was surrendered, the cultural policy became the ideological legitimizing factor to the colonial rule.

The other set of colonial cultural policy lies in the global policy. Contrary to the classical approach to cultural insularity, Globalization tended to reverse it by a participatory approach. This is reflected in the Draft Operational Policy on Indigenous People of the World Bank.⁷ In the macro-policy background, when we view the template of culture in the Draft National Policy, it appears that the policy-makers were also not aware of the colonial implications of the cultural policy and the changing policy parameters from protection to participation, though both protection and participation modes did essentially address the state and global economic programmes respectively to the gross violation of the genuine and sovereign interest of the tribal society. It is also not clear from the Draft policy the purpose of preservation. Is it for exemplifying it as a critique of modern culture- based on urban-modernism with all pathologies of stress and anomie and on total or near-total lumpenisation, as Margaret Mead, the Anthropologist, did in case of contemporary American society or Tagore and Gandhi did in case of urbanized Indian society? Within the conflicting colonial parameters the Draft National Policy on culture seems to have exposed itself to a twin paradox. One is concerned with anthropological commitment to cultural issues of the tribal people from phil-anthropological point of view, not to create racial barriers and the other is to view cultural aspects from the perspective of a totalizing state which might do away with any 'cultural trait' (of

the tribals) that is repugnant to the interest of the state. Secondly, the use of the term '*outside culture*' in the policy document is a self-confession of a 'cultural divide' between the insiders and the outsiders, between the primitive and the modern and does not fit in with the ethical niceties of the assimilation philosophy.

Minimisation of Geographical Isolation Through Development of Transport & Communication

In the transition from tribal subsistence economy to market economy improved transport and communication can be viewed from the historical experience of the colonial expansion for trade and military mobilization in the tribal inhabited areas. Globalisation has influenced the transit policy even in the West.⁸ The ethical aspect of minimising geographical isolation is a point of concern. But the market expansion aspect is never to loose sight of while talking of development of transport and communication in tribal areas.

Land, displacement and rehabilitation

The Draft policy document has taken cognizance of the fact that dam and road construction, quarrying and mining operations, industrial locations and national parks involved compulsory acquisition of land cause displacement of the tribal people from their traditional abodes and land. It says that 'displacement of tribals from their lands amounts to violation of the Fifth Schedule to the Constitution. In this regard, this policy has exposed itself to certain operational and conceptual problems.

The policy mentions only about the Fifth Schedule areas which has been highly protested in a seminar on Draft Policy held at Aizawl where the need for extending the policy to include the Sixth schedule areas was stressed upon. However, the National Policy of Resettlement and Rehabilitation for Project Affected Families took care of the Sixth Schedule areas also in its policy guidelines.⁹ It appears that the omission of the Sixth Schedule in the Draft National Policy as alleged, is merely an applicational error on the part of the makers of Tribal policy. Secondly, the Draft Policy does not mention

about the involvement of Gram Sabha or the Panchayats or the traditional power structures in the matter of displacement and resettlement. While section 4(i) of the PESA Act says that “the Gram Sabha or the panchayat at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of lands in the Scheduled Areas for development projects and before resettling or rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the scheduled areas, the Draft Policy guidelines do not take cognizance of this mandatory provision of the PESA Act. Thirdly, the Draft policy realizes that when the states promote development projects like hydroelectric power stations and mining and industries, tribal land is alienated. But again it does not make mention of the mandatory provisions of Section 4 (i), (j), (k) and (i) of the PESA Act which say that ‘the Gram Sabha or the panchayat at the appropriate level shall be consulted before making the acquisition of land in the Scheduled areas for development projects and before resettling and rehabilitating persons affected by such projects in the scheduled areas.; planning and management of the minor water bodies in the Scheduled areas shall be entrusted to Panchayats at appropriate level; the recommendations of the Gram Sabha or the panchayat at the appropriate level shall be made mandatory prior to the grant of prospecting license or mining lease for minor minerals in the scheduled areas.; and the prior recommendation of the Gram Sabha or the Panchayat at the appropriate level shall be made mandatory for grant of concession for the exploitation of minor minerals by auction.’

Secondly, the concordance of the Draft National Policy on Tribals and the National Policy on Resettlement and Rehabilitation lies in making displacement inevitable. It is implied in both the policies that displacement is done in the larger interest of the state rather than of the affected community. A similar equation error is also done in the National Forest Policy –1988 by identifying production forestry with national need.

It is also appropriate in this connection to deal with the question of the right of the tribal people. The word ‘right’ appears in the policy document indicate that of land and forest and natural resource

use as well as control and ownership of those. This right is traditional right which has not been adequately dealt in the policy document. The contradiction lies between traditional right backed by customary law and corporate right backed by positive law. The policy document shows that positive law prevails over customary law in the "larger interest" in which case the policy made provision for a summary disposal of the serious issue of loss of customary right and usufruct rights of forest produce by giving additional financial assistance equivalent to nearly one and a half year's minimum agricultural wages for the same loss. This mercenary *quid pro quo* to the structural dislocation of the ecosystem people is a flawed policy. The question hence is what is the relative strength of customary law in the face of positive law? Commenting on the Draft National Environmental Policy Upadhyay said, 'Legal recognition of customary rights may not be easily a source of law. The court can be quite unpredictable in this regard. Somehow customary rights would need to be recorded as state sanctioned rights to be relevant. In fact, law 'in' society (including customary rights) has to be somehow seen as part of today's law 'for' society (formal laws laid down by statutes and courts) for them to find ready acceptance with the policy and lawmakers. The draft national policy on environment is silent on how customary rights of access to and use of environmental resources are to be integrated with formal policy, the law and the rights framework".¹⁰ To a great extent this comment also applies to the Draft National Tribal Policy. Customary rights appeared from the primitive accumulation of resources subsequently gave way to the commodification of common property resources. The enclosure of resources, of which the community was once the custodian, has become the integral part of capitalist infrastructure projects.¹¹ by displacing customary law by the iron hand of positive law. The ascendancy of positive law over customary law was established through the twin principles of jurisprudence- namely, *lex loci* and *res nullius* in which legal recognition alone could justify right. The customary law was ignored through the instrument of *res nullius* that extinguished the prior entitlements of the tribal people to the natural resources. This

implies that the customary law on common property resources can never be integrated into the formal legal system particularly when it does not integrate with the canon of private property regime. Similarly, through the doctrine of 'eminent domain', the totalizing state overrode customary entitlements and officially expropriated tribal land through acquisition- duly backed by the law of the land.¹² Judy Whitehead¹³ has quite intelligently introduced a discussion on the concepts of place and abstract space. Place is defined as subjective, familiar, here and now and having a local perspective. Abstract space is associated with a distant abstract and outsider's objective or universal viewpoint. Place has people, entitlements, history, myth and magic whereas space is devoid of these contents. The concept of abstract space enables the developers to highly objectified and external relations to the landscape, which becomes emptied of people, history, entitlements, myths and magic. This abstract space is the manipulative space of the corporatist and capitalists and through this concept of abstract space (*terra nullius*) the later tend to expropriate the tribal people.

The Assembly of Tribals indigenous and Advasi People made a Declaration in which recognition of natural, socio-economic and cultural rights of the tribal communities were made non- negotiable. In the wider context of formal jurisprudence and colonization the question of such recognition is to be understood. The trick may lie in policy recognition without integrating it with the formal legal system which is likely to leave enough caprice on the part of the state to manipulate the natural rights of the tribal people.

Shifting Cultivation

The Draft policy unfortunately exposes vapidly in understanding the basic economics of shifting cultivation and the incipient collective consciousness of the people. As such by its very nature, shifting cultivation is capital non- intensive and labour -light activity. A distinction can be made in this connection on the issue of land as an economic resource: one is the asset or the property component which essentially features the surplus yielding agricultural economy and which is largely identifiable with

privatization of land-based resources. The other is the subsistence component with a collectivist ethos and which does not have the space for privatisation of productive resources. The tribal economy essentially banks on the subsistence component with a collective-ethos. The emotional attachment to land as the asset or property is essentially highly individualistic which appeared in the history with the introduction of surplus yielding agricultural civilization. The emotional attachment of the tribal people to land is not individualistic but is an expression of collective consciousness. The so-called authoritarian power structure of the Chin-Kuki Mizo groups of tribes evolved around the subsistence component of shifting cultivation in which the chiefs were essentially the custodians of common property resources than anything else. The clan based power structures of many tribes of the northeast also evolved round the same component. In case of tribal societies land therefore has not only economic implications, it has strong political implications. This policy makers did not comprehend this aspect possibly because of two reasons: one, lack of an anthropological understanding of the economy of shifting cultivation and the other their own prejudice around the property component of the economic resources. The policy still goes on to state that 'no attention is made to replenish the soil fertility' (*of shifting cultivation land*). In fact an anthropological investigation should have been done to understand the phenomenon of "gestation period" as replenishment measure where human efforts supplement the replenishment by nature. Moreover, the policy makers turned blind eye to the fact that replenishment is habitually affected by the large-scale timber operation in the hills. The mainstream agricultural prejudices led the policy to talk in terms of rationalization of Tenural mode to ensure tribal right to land ignoring the fact that the Tenural mode does not as such apply to the dominant 'Usufruct' mode of land rights in the shifting cultivation economy. Again, the policy could not disillusion itself from the typical agrarian solution while taking policy decisions on shifting cultivation. The policy suggests evolving suitable technology for improving production and focused on cash crop for shifting cultivators. While evolving suitable

technology for shifting cultivation appears essentially technocratic in nature, the policy does not take into consideration indigenous knowledge to maintain the production system. The concept of cash crop has strict commercial implication and as shifting cultivation is not surplus oriented, but consumption oriented, the concept does not fit into the niceties of shifting cultivation economy. The policy focus on bringing the tribal people out of the shifting cultivation is risky as there is every apprehension of tribal people being lumpenised, inviting the civilizational crisis.

Research

The element of research in the Draft National Policy lands us to a significant discourse on the intellectual commitment to the cause of the tribal people, particularly, the commitments of the anthropologists and role of institutions in doing so. Viewed historically, institutional research has by and large, responded to colonial interest. This is true also for colonized India. What is significant in the national context now is the relationship of research with the state-led globalisation mandate, the people it concerns and the institutions it involves in the research process. The state level tribal research institutions are made instrumental in carrying out structured and sponsored researches. In other words, both the subjects and objects of research are coached by the state. This, along with the policy dictate for carrying out 'purposeful research', would affect the intellectual and institutional autonomies and would de-link research from conceptual maze for the sake of being 'purposeful'. The national level research institution that the policy envisages to establish is likely to be mere artifact. By virtue of its being so, it would be disabled from undertaking any independent initiative of its own. The institutional option to research is to maintain and to improve upon the schematic and project-based interventions in the tribal areas. This also raises the question of *locus standi* of the research institutions, other than those mentioned in the draft policy, which have given a relatively wider space and freedom for reflexive intellectual discourses on the tribal issues. The Declaration of the Assembly of Tribal, Indigenous and Advasi

People also demanded that any research conducted among the tribal people require their prior and informed consent and the findings should be discussed with them. In fact the policy does not give space to participatory research so as to involve the tribal people in it.

Women question

The policy document states that education is the key to all round human development and admits that in the tribal areas female literacy rate is only 18.19% compared to the national average of 39.29%. But the policy does not give specific focus on this phenomenon. Emphasis has been laid on vocational and professional education and on setting up polytechnics for studies in subjects like forestry, horticulture, dairying, veterinary science etc. The policy is insensitive towards the literacy and educational need of the tribal women.

Secondly, the policy recognizes that poor nutritional status of the tribal women directly influences their reproductive performance and infant's survival, growth and development. As policy measures strengthening the allopathic system of medicine in tribal areas with the extension of three-tier system of village health workers, auxiliary nurse midwife and primary health centers have been suggested. This supersedes not only the tribal system of medicine but also promotes the costlier allopathic system of medicine of the pharmaceutical companies in the otherwise poor tribal areas.

Conclusion

The institutional and policy mandates of the totalizing state demystify the self-governing character of the tribal people and the heterogeneous character of the pristine institutions. In the backdrop of this, the distributive concept of political power, as in decentralization, would inevitably promote the administration of a passive, consumption oriented clients rather than self-rule. The institutional questions of the tribal societies have been raised in the broader frame of poverty reduction and private sector investment. For this, global policy seeks to go beyond the protective

measures and tends to ensure participation of the tribal people in development. This made corresponding shifts in the allegiance of the people from their traditional institutions to Global policy. The contingent circumstance therefore arises out of expropriation of the tribal people from the natural resource endowments and the corresponding need to protect property right of the corporate bodies with the help of the iron hands of 'rule of law'. In expropriating the tribal people, the place-space contradiction has been brought in. This contradiction exposes the corresponding contradiction between traditional power structure and post-modern globalisation, operationalised through both the formal and the substantive domains of the state. The traditional power structure operates only on a place with communal, individual or clan ownership of common property resources. The place is also the station for social, political and economic control and interaction for the tribal people. A great threat to traditional power structure comes from the concepts of 'abstract space' and *terra nullius*, which the capitalists and the corporates often instrumentalise in their interest to the deprivation of the tribal people. The corporates invalidate the concept of 'place' by empowering the concepts of 'abstract space' and '*terra nullius*'. This, when viewed in tandem with the R&R policy of mercenary compensation for the loss of customary and usufruct rights over the forest produce and the family based approach to resettlement, appears to be a dangerous concept. It breaks the community commonplace first and melts the community base by the individuated family based approach second. In this way the tribal policy and R & R policy throw great challenge to the legitimacy of the traditional power structure.

To mollify the discontent, the Tribal Policy proposes to convert the forest villages into revenue villages or to develop them on par with revenue villages so that those can enjoy at least the minimum amenities and services, available to the revenue villages. The social provisioning is made to legitimize the state policy. But it is to note that the forest villages-turned-revenue- villages would also cause shift of allegiance of the people from their traditional power structure to the state. While these villages will enjoy services and

amenities, the villagers would be given opportunities to partake in Joint Forest Management- a Forest Departmental management agenda that would logically snatch the traditional eco-system management. These villages will be enclaves for private sector for commercial activity in the forestry sector and the tribal people will be made to participate without being owners of the forests. It is also doubtful what kind of institutional arrangement would be made for marketing of minor forest produce. In my study on marketing of NTFP in Bihar and MP, I have shown the dysfunctional state institution in marketing of NTFP giving way to unregulated intervention of businessmen who created stratospheric gap between the procurement price and end price of NTFP and left the tribal collectors to the poverty trap.

References

1. *Anthropology is the Child of Western Imperialism* (K. Gough-1968). <http://anthmapcolonialism2.blogspot.com/>
2. R. Srivatsan, Native Nose and Nationalist Zoo- Debates in Colonial and Early Nationalist Anthropology of Castes and Tribes. EPW, May 7, 2005
3. *Ibid.*
4. B.B. Kumar, The Tribe-Caste Continuum, Dialogue, Quarterly Journal of Astha Bharti, Vol. 1. No: 1, 1999.
5. Asha Krishnakumar, A 'Primitive' Perspective, Frontline, November 5, 2004. The advocacy groups including the Assembly of Tribal Indigenous and Adivasi People, Asian Centre for Human Rights do not subscribe to the idea of 'assimilation' on the ground of protection of their socio-cultural rights.
6. The Criminal Tribes Act provided for registration, police surveillance and control of certain criminal tribes and enuchs in India. These groups were subjected to forced labour, restricted movements, interning in settlements, separation of children from parents and reprisals. Conversion to Christianity was a requirement of the so-called civilising mission of the British. After notification these groups had no recourse to the judicial system. Mukul Kumar, Relationship of Caste and Crime in Colonial India-A Discourse Analysis, EPW, March 6, 2004.
7. The World Bank Policy on Indigenous Peoples, India Consultation on the Operational Policy and Bank Procedures, The World Bank, New Delhi, November, 2001.
8. See the preliminary Draft programme of the Conference on the Sustainable Development of Mountain Regions, European Transit Policy and the Challenge of Globalisation organised by the Parliamentary Assembly in co-operation

with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the Provincia di Trento, Cavalese, Trento, 16-18 June 2003)

9. 1.5 of the Preamble of the R & R Policy.
10. Vidheh Upadhyaya, National Environment Policy 2004- A Critique of the Draft, EPW, Sept, 25, 2004.
11. Judy Whitehead, Space, Place and Primitive Accumulation in Narmada Valley and Beyond, EPW- October 4, 2003.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*

This book gives an illustrative account of the space of women in the changing power structure in northeast India. The present volume contains 23 research papers based on rigorous empirical studies made by the regional scholars and covers the state scenarios of Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura. The thematic focus of the book is laid on the role and status of the tribal women in course of changing economic, social and political institutions in this region. Each paper bears on a particular aspect of the central theme and raises issues arising from such changes in this region.

The major women issues raised in this book are their missing space in the decision-making platforms, the emerging threats and opportunities in the traditional and the emerging socio-political and economic institutions and structures of power. Many of the issues need critical understanding in the course of change from tradition to modern and beyond. Given the relevance and adequacy of the thematic focus and also given the sharpness of the issues facing the tribal and the disadvantaged women in the northeast, this book not only stimulates high academic interest but also gives useful feedback for formulation of adequate social policy for the women of this region.

ISBN : 81-86867-89-9

Rs. 750

\$ 75

Dr. Asok Kumar Ray taught Political Science in Manipur. Has extensive research experience on the interdisciplinary themes of social science in the northeastern region. Wrote two books and co-edited two books including this volume. Has about 70 research papers presented in different seminars and workshops. Conducted studies on Marketing of NTFP for the Lead Economist of the FAO-Forestry Programme of the UN. Many of the research papers were published in different research journals. The author is a life member of North East India Council for Social Science Research-Shillong and Indian Sociological Society- New Delhi. Dr. Ray is now working in the development sector.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad Athparia is a well-known name in the world of Anthropology in North East India. At present he is working with Anthropological Survey of India, North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong. He is the Joint Secretary of North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong. He edited four volumes of publications including 'Renewable Energy Resource and Its Management, Reliance Publishing House, New Delhi. Many of his research papers on anthropological and social issues on north-east India are published in the well known research journals in the country.

**North-East India Council For Social Science Research
Shillong**



OM PUBLICATIONS

2783, (1st Floor) Bhagat Singh Gali No. 6,
Chuna Mandi, Pahar Ganj,
New Delhi - 110055 (India)

© (011) 55354142, (Mob.) 9811393986
e-mail ibp@ndf.vsnl.net.in

Rs. 750
\$ 75

ISBN 81-86867-89-9



9 788186 867891