

From the Editor

Dear colleagues,

It is my pleasure to present the fourth issue of *Explorations*. The issue consists of six essays of which one is a Special Article, two essays are published under the 'Articles' category and three essays under the 'Research in Progress' category.

The Special Article *Tribes in the Democratic Politics of India* by Virginius Xaxa argues that while the political 'reservation' extended to the tribes has been greatly successful in integrating them in the so-called 'mainstream' of Indian life, it has not helped much in the direction of protecting their rights over their traditional resources in making substantive contribution in the decision-making process. It further contends that the popular mobilisations, rather than the statutory democratic processes, have contributed more toward political empowerment of the tribal people in post-independence India. Yet being economically weak and demographically a minority, they are unable to translate political institutions and processes to their advantage.

The following article by Neshat Quaiser, titled *Consuming Leisure not so Leisurely: Political Economy of Leisure and Leisure*, examines the contemporary contours of leisure through an inclusive parameter by exploring the 'frontiers' of leisure that signifies the fluidity of leisure practices. Through the theoretical framework of political economy of leisure and desire, and leisure as an object of desire, the essay raises the question of consumption and the ownership of what one consumes within the hierarchy of social class locations of those who consume.

In the next article *Sovereignty Question and Culture Discourse: Interrogating Indo-Naga 'Framework Agreement' in relation to Naga Movement*, N.K. Das discusses the key features of the 'Framework Agreement', the Indo-Naga Peace Agreement, and situates them within the historically evolved notion of Naga sovereignty and territorial-integration questions. The paper puts forth a critical evaluation of culture discourse vis-à-vis Naga nationhood and positions it within the projected model of 'shared sovereignty'.

The first paper under Research in Progress is *Urbanisation of a Tribal City: Contestations of the New Shillong Township* by Aashish Khakha. The paper analyses the contestations in urban expansion and development in the context of a ‘tribal metropolis’ of the Northeastern region of India, that is, Shillong. The paper reflects upon the complex and interlinked future of urban space for its tribal population with regard to the tremendous change in its urban landscape.

The next paper, *Rural Out-Migration and its Impact on Caste, Family and Gender: A Study in a Nepali village in Assam* by Pinku Muktiar, discusses the issue of large-scale rural out-migration from Assam in recent years and highlights the various ramifications of this phenomenon on caste, family and gender relations in the context of a Nepali village in Assam.

The final paper, *The Silk Loom Community in Assam: Identity and Means of Livelihood amongst the Workers* by Atlanta Talukdar and Deepshikha Malakar, delves into the various socio-economic issues and problems faced by the silkworm sector in Assam. The paper highlights the impact on the livelihood of weavers in the present scenario of the declining position of Assam silk in the global market.

Explorations invites your contributions for future issues of the journal. We will appreciate your feedback or suggestions on the journal.

Chandan Kumar Sharma

Department of Sociology

Tezpur University

Editor, *Explorations*

Email: explorationsiss@gmail.com

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Special Article: Tribes in the Democratic Politics of India

Author(s): Virginius Xaxa

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Tribes in the Democratic Politics of India

--- Virginius Xaxa

Abstract

The paper explores the positions of the tribes in India's democratic decision-making processes. The paper argues that though the political 'reservation' which the Indian state extended to the tribes has been greatly successful in integrating them in the so-called 'mainstream' of Indian life, it has not helped much in the direction of protecting their rights over their lands, forests and other resources or in making substantive contribution in the decision-making process. But it has contributed toward raising the political aspirations of the tribal people. The popular mobilisation and movements, rather than their participation in the statutory democratic processes, have been the main factors toward political empowerment of the tribal people in post-independence India. However, despite political empowerment, the tribal people have been unable to advance their interest and safeguards. Being economically weak and demographically a minority, they are unable to translate political institutions and processes to their advantage.

Key words: Constitution, Movement, Reservation, Tribe

Politics is about the ways in which decisions, over the issues affecting society, are made and executed. The moot question is then, how are decisions made? Are they made by the collectivity without excluding any individual or group? Or are decisions made in a way and manner in which certain individuals/groups invariably find themselves excluded, even on decisions that affect their own lives. An important site where decision-making widely affects society is the institution of the state. State exercises power either to realise common goods or to pursue the interests and the agenda of certain groups and communities in the society. Keeping this in mind, the paper explores the positions of the tribes in India's democratic decision-making processes. Inquiry such as this is important, as Indian society is marked by enormous diversity in terms of language, region, religion, caste etc. At the same time, an important feature of these diversities is that they

often stand interlocked with each other in terms of inequality and the aspects of domination and subjugation.

Early writers on politics and state saw their writings as the same as on society and vice versa. This is no longer the case today. This has come about due to the distinction that is being made between the 'state' and the 'society' and this distinction – a recent phenomenon – has its root in the history of the European ideas. The distinction, in its embryonic form, could be traced to the notion of territorial society on the one hand, and the theocratic unity of the Christendom on the other, in the medieval period. Yet the real awareness about the distinction was not accomplished until the writings of the 19th century, especially that of Hegel and Marx. Whereas the distinction was philosophical in Hegel, it was social in Marx and it was with this 'distinction' that the study of politics emerged as an important study in social science inquiry (Runciman, 1963).

Political Articulation under Colonial Rule

Such a distinction had already emerged among some tribes in pre-colonial India. At the time of arrival of the British rule in India, tribes were at different levels of their polity formation. There were tribes with Chiefs, who were either autocratic or democratic; either they could not go against the will of the village Councils or they were all-powerful and autocratic. In a few cases, the land of a tribe had even evolved into a principality/kingdom with a form of centralised authority – a nascent form of the institution of the 'state'. Some of the Chiefs/kings had even accepted the suzerainty of the larger non-tribal kingdoms (Singh, 1983). However, a very vast majority of tribes had no system of Chiefs or kings and their unit of social and political life was confined to a village they inhabited. Even if there was a system of chieftainship, a village or at best, the confederation of villages was their effective unit of administration. No matter what has been the stage of polity formation among the tribes in India, in general they lived more or less as 'self-contained' units and enjoyed autonomy of governance over the territory they occupied. They, thus, lived in relative isolation from the dominant communities and thereby, almost outside of the state and civilisation, as has generally been conceived in social anthropological literature. Notwithstanding that, they lived in close interaction with the state outside and civilisation.

This interaction has been somewhat differently conceptualised by scholars. Sinha, for example, has viewed tribes as 'a dimension of little tradition which cannot be

adequately understood unless it is seen in relation to the great tradition viz. tradition that is pan-Indian as against local/rural' (Sinha, 1958). As against this, Béteille (1986) sees tribes more as those remaining outside of state and civilisation in a context where tribe and civilisation co-exist, as in India and the Islamic world. But even when tribes have been conceived as remaining outside of state, they have not been treated as falling outside the civilisation influence. Many tribes in different parts of India lived under alien political suzerainty at some point or other. The suzerainty ranged from symbolic gesture of loyalty on the one hand to the payment of tribute/tax to the political authority on the other. However, a very large majority of tribes did not live under such alien suzerainty and yet they were not outside the influence of the Indian civilisation. Thus, until the advent of the British rule, tribe-state relation was less pronounced, if not altogether absent, mainly due to autonomy of cultural from political institutions in the Indian civilisation; that is, cultural differentiation and culture inter-articulation took place independent of the political institution. This was unlike in China where there was close linkage between the cultural and the political institution. This led to a great amount of heterogeneity even in areas nearer the centre of political power (Burman, 1994).

The advent of the British rule, with Indians becoming a 'nation' for the first time, incorporated them into the larger economic, political and social framework. It is not that the tribes did not have such encounters earlier; but the extension of the British rule to their territories too was quite different because the new rulers had introduced new and uniform civil and criminal laws. But, the administrative structure that the British had introduced was alien. Like in many other parts of India, the British imposed upon the tribes the system of private property and landlordism, in place of lineage or community based ownership of land. The revenue collectors/administrative officials were like the owners and the landlords, which they were actually not.

This led to large-scale eviction of the tribes from their land and the settlement of the non-tribes in their lands. In places where tribes still had control over land, massive transfer of land took place from the tribes to the non-tribes through fraud, deceit, mortgage etc. on the part of the officials, appointed by the British Raj. Since tribes had no knowledge and experience of 'record keeping', and did not know how to read or write, naturally the non-tribes took advantage of the situation and forged evidences and documents in their favour. The local administration, which was manned by the non-tribes, worked hand in hand with their ethnic kin

men to ensure smooth transfer of land from tribes to non-tribes. The language used in the law-courts was alien and totally incomprehensible to the tribes and thus, they had absolutely no idea of what was happening in the courts. Over and above, the colonial state took upon itself the right over the forest thereby, denying tribes the right to collect fuel and other daily necessities of life for which they were so heavily dependent on the forest (Bosu, 1993).

Such processes at work continued all through the colonial period in different scales. Injustice, which was so alien a notion and experience to them in their traditional social setting, became something pervasive in the new setting. The root cause of injustice suffered by the tribes has been the state laws and regulation themselves. Paradoxically, the state laws and administration introduced by the British had aimed, to a limited extent, at doing away with iniquitous structures of the Indian society. However, this was of little relevance and benefit to the tribal society. On the contrary, the laws and the regulations, which have been aimed at securing justice and freedom to the people, had opened up a space for innumerable injustices to be inflicted on the tribal people. The laws and the regulation, aimed at equality, limited though it had been, enabled one set of people to take advantage of those and squeeze out the locals and dispossess them too. The tribes of British India, as a result of this, suffered leading to wide spread discontent and restlessness and giving rise to a series of revolts and rebellions.

The late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries were known for the early encounter of the British with the groups/communities (which later came to be described as 'tribes') and was characterised by a series of revolts and rebellions (by the latter). In response to these resistance movements, the British administration toyed with the idea of suitable administrative set up for the agitated tribes. After much experimenting, it came up with 'arrangements', different from those in the non-tribal areas. The distinct legislative and executive measures adopted for the tribes aimed primarily at protecting and safeguarding the interests and welfare of the tribes. Since 1874, tribes or tribal areas came to be governed by the Scheduled District Act. As per this act, the Government was required to notify as to which laws were to be enforced in the scheduled areas/districts. Such provisions continued under the Government of India Act 1919, which gave power to the Indians with regard to 'self-governance' on certain issues. It may be noted that the enactments, made by legislature/legislatures, were not directly applicable in the tribal areas, unless so desired by the executive authority. Even under the Government of India Act 1935, the tribal areas declared as 'excluded' and

‘partially excluded’, were not brought under the purview of the federal or the provincial legislatures. The British initiative for somewhat different system of administration for the tribes, distinct from those for the larger Indian population, limited as it may be, did provide some space for the tribes as they were allowed to be governed by their own traditions and customary practices. To that extent, the tribes enjoyed some autonomy even under the colonial administration. It is a different matter that such autonomy had much to do with political expediency than with genuine interests for protecting the tribal people.

Constitutional Provision of Protection: Theory and Practice

The framers of the Indian Constitution took note of the problems of the tribals. Accordingly, they provided for various kinds of provisions for them in the constitution. To begin with, like any other citizen of India, they have been given fundamental rights. In addition to this, there are special provisions for them. These range from statutory recognition as Scheduled Tribe (Article 342), ‘proportionate representation’ in the Parliament and State Legislatures (Articles 330 & 332), reservation in state employment (Article 16-4) and institution of higher education, to, provisions empowering the State to bring the area, inhabited dominantly by tribes, under special treatment for the administrative purpose. The administrative arrangement so provided, is in a way, a continuation of administration prevalent under the colonial rule (Burman, 1983; Verma 1990).

It is within this backdrop of the provisions in the constitution that the state’s agenda towards its tribes have to be understood. The different measures taken for their upliftment can be broadly divided into three categories viz. protection, reservation and development. Notwithstanding those provisions, tribes have gained little from them. The root to this lies in the character of the Indian society as well as the state. In India, development is the key state agenda and the development of the country as a whole, or its numerous states, is contingent on the optimum exploitation of the natural resources. The benefits have gone and continue to go primarily to the members of the dominant community/ies, while the tribes, living in those resource-rich regions, have benefited little. The Indian State or/and the regional States have invariably pursued the interests of the dominant communities over the interests of the tribal community/ies under the garb of larger national and regional interests. The same is the case with the Indian democratic system. Indian democracy is majoritarian and hence, unfavourably disposed towards the ‘minority’ communities. Since the tribes are socially and economically under-privileged and numerically small, they have very little say in

the so-called 'democratic' decision-making processes that affect their lives and interests. In short, there is an inherent contradiction between the tribal people and the dominant communities in the prevailing patterns of development and democratic politics, which explains the increasing plight of the tribal people in the post-independence era of India's development.

Notwithstanding the fact of subjugation under the British, the general Indian population did succeed to carve out a niche for political power, even if limited; it was 'self-rule' and governance due to which some control over the colonial state was possible. Tribes, as feared, remained outside the ambit of the decision-making bodies and processes in which the larger Indian population participated to a limited extent. This was so partly due to the policy of the colonial government and partly due to the attitude of the nationalist Indian leadership. The considered view of the colonial government was that the tribes were not politically ready to represent themselves and their interests. Hence rather than facilitating their integration into the larger state power, they were kept outside it. Laws, rules and regulation formulated by the state for the general population were however, not applicable to the tribes; in addition, regulations and special administrative measures were worked out, which aimed at preventing the tribes from social interaction with the non-tribes. It is in this sense of the term that the British followed a policy of isolation towards tribes. The nationalist leadership on the other hand, looked at the tribes merely as a force to be mobilised for the movement for freedom against the British rule. There was no effort even on their part to include the tribal people in the larger decision-making bodies and process. There was thus no process of integrating the various tribes with the other tribes in the political plane.

But, this was not the case in the economic domain. The process of integration (of the tribes) into the national level land, labour and the credit market went on unabated at varying paces, scales and intensity in the tribal areas, leading to deep cleavages between the tribes and the non-tribes. This had far-reaching consequences on the political process to take shape later, especially on the relations between the tribes and the non-tribes in the tribes-inhabited areas.

Participation in Parliament and State Legislatures

As observed earlier, though tribes were brought under one single political authority, they had little role or opportunity for participation in it. It is only after

independence that the tribes were given space to participate in the state structure to which they were already incorporated during the colonial rule. Until then, the integration with the state and the larger Indian society was more with respect to land, revenue, labour and the credit market. The political, social and cultural integration with the rest of India and Indians was conspicuous by its absence. Hence the general thrust of orientation in respect to the tribal population in the post-independence era has been one of integration into the domains referred to above. This, in the least, seems to be the general principle of the Indian Constitution, if one carefully examines the provisions laid down there for the tribes. It is important to note that till date, there has been no formal statement of a binding policy for the tribes in India.

As stated earlier, many provisions are there in the Indian Constitution for protecting and promoting the interests of the tribal population in India. One such provision has been ‘reservation’ of seats in the Parliament and the state legislatures, employment both in the government and semi-government sectors and education especially in the institutions of higher education and learning. A lot has been written on the issue of reservation in educational institutions and employment. This concerns more with the issues of the merits and demerits of the reservation policy and its implications in building a casteless and classless society. Of all the concerns with regard to the ‘reservation policy’, the aspect of reservation in the political domain has somehow remained unexplored and unexamined.

The Constitutional provision of reservation for the scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes in the Parliament and the state legislatures were made initially for a period of 10 years only. Such a time-frame has not been there in case of reservation in employment and educational institutions, though the ordinary citizens of India are ignorant about that. Reservation in politics has been extended again and again for a period of another 10 years and so on. The last time it was extended was in October 1999.

The reservation for the tribes (known as ‘scheduled tribes’ in our Constitution), like for the scheduled castes, in the Parliament and the state legislatures has been a Constitutional obligation. However, no such binding was attached when local self-government institutions were introduced in the country. It was left to the states to enact laws and regulations as they deemed fit. The result was that hardly any state in India, with Maharashtra as an exception, made provision for

reservation for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in local self-governing institutions. Other states extended this benefit much later through amendments to their Panchayati Raj Institutions Acts. In this sense, the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, to begin with, was an important shift from the past. The 73rd Amendment makes reservation of seats for the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes and women in the Panchayati Raj institutions mandatory both at the level of seats in the Panchayat and offices of the Panchayat such as chairman.

The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act came into effect from April 24, 1993. Hence, in keeping with this amendment, the provincial states either came up with new Acts or brought about necessary Amendments in the Acts that were already operative. In case of the tribal population, these state Acts were in force only in those areas, which were outside the 5th and 6th Schedule areas, because the 6th Schedule areas contained provision for the establishment of the Autonomous District Councils for the purposes of allowing 'local self-governance' to the inhabitants of those areas. But, there has been no such provision (viz. local self-governance) in the 5th Schedule areas. At the same time, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment exempts the 5th Schedule areas from the mandatory provisions of part IX of the Constitution with a hope that these areas could be left free for evolution of their own system of self-governance or continuation of their traditional Panchayats or similar bodies. Accordingly, the provision of the Panchayats (extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 came into force in the 5th schedule areas from 24 December, 1996.

Assessing the Participation

It is a worthwhile then, to make an assessment of the gains and the losses of such a provision, either in terms of gain or loss accruing to the Indian state/union or to the tribes themselves. Had there been no such provision for the tribes, would they have been able to represent themselves in larger political process and institution? It is very unlikely; at least in the earlier phases of the electoral politics. Tribals' struggles against the colonial rule were broadly of three kinds (i) the struggle in the form of revolts, rebellions and insurrections. This was the case in the early phase of the British rule in tribal areas; (ii) struggle through resistance to policies and measures introduced by the British like the Forest Act as part of its overall forest policy; (iii) non-payment of revenue and taxes to the British as a part of the civil disobedience and non-cooperation movement.

At times these were part of the larger struggle of the nationalist leadership against the colonial rule. Though tribals' participation in freedom struggle movement was not absent, the participation through the political parties and their activities has been relatively marginal. There had been minimal serious and systematic efforts by the political parties, during the period of India's struggle for freedom, to recruit tribe/s in their cadre. Hence, the participation of the tribes in India's larger political process would not have been possible if there were no special Constitutional provisions meant for them, and most of the political parties have been obliged to build cadres from within the tribes because of such Constitutional mandate and a kind of a moral obligation thus imposed. In spite of this, the tribes have, on the whole, been deprived of position of importance in the political parties and let us not forget that such or similar negligence cuts across political parties of all persuasions. Interestingly, this has not been the case only with the political parties but also with organisations like various trade unions.

The tea gardens' labour force in West Bengal and Assam, for example, is comprised primarily of the tribes. (It is a different matter that the scheduled tribe status has not been accorded to those in Assam). And, there are a large number of trade unions, affiliated to different political parties, which have been working among the tea garden population but, without the leadership, even at block levels, in the hands of a tribe. It is always with the people from outside the tribe and even from outside of the labour force. In the recent years one can see sometimes a shift in the social composition of the trade union leadership in the tea gardens of Assam and Bengal only at the purely local level. The scene is similar, if not identical, in case of the ethnic composition of the political parties. If there were no provision for reservation in the political field, tribes would have been at large, represented by the non-tribes only.

Notwithstanding the statutory requirement to provide space for the tribes in the larger political institutions, the space provided for them has been far from substantial or satisfactory. The composition of successive governments, formed in post-independent India under different regimes, is one of the pointers to this fact. The formations of the 'Standing' and other Committees by the Parliament from time to time, tell no different story. The same has been the case at the state levels too.

More often than not, the situation at the state levels has been worse than at the Union or the Central level. When we look at the role of the political parties, we

find that there hardly has been any place of substance for the tribes. There is not a single political party, which has thrown up leadership of a national stature from within tribes. It is doubtful if a majority of the national parties can make such a claim even at a regional level. If this is the scene after 50 years of political reservations, one can well imagine what would have happened if there were no reservations at all.

Well, there were two possibilities. There may have been intense and widespread articulation of the demands for 'cessation' from the so-claimed 'mainland' India from among the tribes from the Northeast India, especially from those at a higher level of development and with a sizeable population. The fact that the Indian state has been able to contain such demands by the tribes from this region has to do, in part, with the policy of reservation in politics, as well as in other domains. At the same time, it is worth noting that despite the provision of reservation, the integration of the tribes from this region to the so-called 'mainstream' has been extremely weak and tenuous. Elsewhere in the country, despite tightening geographical, political and economic integration, the emotional integration of tribes with the rest of the population has been far from smooth. This has been so largely due to the economic and political subjugation of the tribes by the non-tribes. The emotional alienation, especially of the emerging middle class from within the tribal society, has been partly alleviated by the measures related to the principle or the Constitutional obligation of 'reservation'.

This is not to argue that only the tribes can represent the interests of the tribes; the non-tribes can do and probably can do more effectively than the tribes themselves, because of their better articulation, network-mobilising and manoeuvring capacity. More often than not, however, there has been a wedge – social, political, economic, and cultural – between the tribes and the non-tribes and the interests of the tribes have often been sacrificed in the interest of others or the general population. This is the history of the tribes since the last sixty years and more.

As a part of the national reconstruction process, post-independent India had embarked upon a path of rapid economic development and social change. Industries, dams, hydro-electricity projects, minerals and forest exploitation, had become an integral part of this process. Ironically however, most of these projects had come up in the tribal areas, as these were rich in natural resources. Yet, the benefits arising from these have not gone to the tribes of that region. Rather, these

had led to their displacement and pauperisation of the people, affected by such displacements; the tribal population has a share up to 40 per cent in it, though they constituted only 7.5 per cent of the total population (Govt. of India, 2001).

As far as immiserisation is concerned, a larger proportion of the tribal people live 'below poverty line' than any other social category in post-independence India. In fact, the share of the tribal population living below the poverty line was 46.5 per cent, as compared to 27.6 per cent for the population as a whole as late as 2004-05 (Mathur, 2008). Even the share of tribal population in the state government employments fell far short of the size stipulated for them. The overall share was mere 2.81 per cent in 1974. Since then, there has been steady rise and in 1994 the same was 5.48 per cent (Govt. of India 1994). This is so even after more than six decades of the so-called 'special concern of development'. Thus, it can be comfortably said that the tribes have lost much more than they have gained out of the 'reservation' policy.

Extension of reservation had provided the tribes a 'space' to share and participate in the state's decision-making process. However, one wonders if their participation at the Parliament and the state legislatures has ever been more than mere formal and symbolic. Have they made any contribution, as MPs, in terms of posing of questions and participation in the debates on issues or enactments? In the event they did, has their contribution been effective and substantive? It is difficult to provide definite or clear-cut answers to these questions, because whatever information we have of the active and meaningful participation of the parliamentarians and the legislators among tribal people invariably suggest to the contrary. The tribes have not been able to effectively address and articulate the interests and the problems of the tribes, whether they pertain to the tribes as a whole or the tribes of a given region/Constituency or of some specific group/community. Have they been able to initiate any Bill in the legislative bodies towards their own welfare and protection as well as the promotion of their interests and then pursue that? Have they been able to stall any Bill or project that had the potential of adversely affecting themselves or the environment? If at all, such projects (Narmada, Netarhat Field and Firing, Koel Karo, etc.) had been stalled, it is more due to the mobilisation of the common people by some activist groups or NGOs and not on account of political initiative of the tribal legislators.

This has been so due to various factors. The major factor has been the demographic size. The share of 7.5 per cent of seats in the Parliament or, in

proportion to that tribe's size in the state's tribal population in the state legislatures is hardly of significance, where the decisions are made on the basis of the majority vote. Even on issues that have adversely affected the tribes such as displacement and land alienation, tribes could have hardly altered the situation because of their small demographic space in the parliament and legislatures. Tribes have to invariably sacrifice their welfare and interest in the interest of national development or general good of the people. There has been still another factor. That is, the tribal legislators have not been able to effectively articulate the interests of the tribes. This has been so due to factors emerging from the morphology of the tribal society in India. The category called tribes comprise of more than 400 distinct communities. They inhabit different parts of the country, possess different physical features, speak different languages and are situated at different levels of development. Hence there is a problem of unity and cohesiveness among them and therefore, even among their political representatives. In the absence of lack of unity, they are not able to act as a cohesive force in protecting and promoting the interests of the tribal communities. Besides, electoral politics invariably takes place along political party lines. The fragmentation of tribes along party loyalty and ideology has often been counterproductive to collective interests of the tribes (Xaxa, 2001).

Does that then mean that there have been no benefits or gains (for the tribes) arising from the policy of reservation in politics? There have surely been, but not in the field of protecting the tribes' interests, rather 'livelihood', in the lands and the forests and other resources that used to be theirs. The expected gains have been in another direction. It was in the direction of expanding the catchments and scope of the tribal leadership since the electoral politics threw up new, young and modern leadership in place of the old and the traditional. Leadership, in the form of the Parliamentarians and the state legislators, did not remain in the same hands; it kept 'circulating', as if. The individual legislators have been able to accrue gains both in terms of prestige and status on the one hand, and material benefits on the other. The material gains made have been, however, of a very limited nature. Their role as Parliamentarians and Legislators expanded the contours of their knowledge and understanding, i.e. of how the larger political system and politics work. They have been able to extend some benefits to a few members of their community/constituency, in terms of 'help' to a few in a problem or emergency and also in initiating some small/minor development projects or infrastructure facilities in their own constituencies. It is worth noting that there is hardly any constituency, which comprises of a single community. Often tribal

elected representatives forget this and tend to focus on their own community only and thus, 'support' (to the needy) has generally not moved beyond the ethnic or the religious community of which they have been members. On the whole then, the fruits of 'reservations' to a tribe in the Parliament or in the state legislature have been of tangible consequences in terms of actual material benefits accruing to the tribe. The reservation was therefore, of no consequence in providing space towards protection and welfare of the tribes.

While reservation served one kind of interest for the state, it served quite another for the tribes. The intended consequence of this policy, as pointed out earlier, was mere integration of the tribes and not their political empowerment. But, what happened to the tribes was precisely what was not intended. It is indeed, very doubtful if the tribes in India, excepting those from the Northeast, would have been able to participate in the decision-making bodies of a state and thus get empowered if there were no 'reservations'.

But, the reservation in politics, though a positive development, was not without limitations. To begin with, discrimination and domination have been endemic within the organisations in which politics worked. The decision making in liberal political institutions is contingent on majority vote. Tribes being just 8.6 per cent of the total population of the country as per 2011 census formed a small minority as a group in the parliament. Even in states, they formed minority except the hill states of Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Of course, the size varied from over 30 per cent and more in Manipur, Tripura, Chhattisgarh and Sikkim to less than 2 per cent in states like Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Bihar etc. (Govt. of India, 2013). Hence even in state legislatures they formed a minority. Given such structure of their representation both at the parliament and state legislatures, it was very unlikely that they could have been successful in pushing their agenda without the support of the majority. Often however, tribal interest was in conflict with the interest of the majority. In such instances, there was no chance for tribes to safeguard their interest due to the nature of the decision making process. The inadequacy inherent in the above institutions to address their distinct issues and grievances sharpened the tribal consciousness and aspirations for a greater participation and share in the political decision-making process. This found its manifestation in the emergence of distinct tribal organisations under which various kinds of movements were waged. The formation of new political parties, the resurgence of the old and the emergence of varied civil society organisations were prominent among them. The emergence of regional political

parties like APHLC (All People Hill Leaders Conference) in what was erstwhile Assam, Jharkhand Party in adjoining districts of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and erstwhile Bihar, Gondwana Raj party in Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, have to be seen within this context.

Social and Political Movements

Of the tribal movements, one that has been greatly concerned with greater power and participation are the autonomy movements for separate state, either sovereign or within Indian Union. Often autonomy movement takes the form of nationalism, which points to an aspiration of a group or peoples for a separate territorial boundary and form of rule in which they are sovereign or have the ultimate authority which exclusively takes care of their interest and welfare. Such movements have been widespread in the Northeastern region and intensely mobilised. These are dispersed over many tribal areas or groups. Some of the prominent ones are waged by the Nagas, Mizos, Khasis-Jaintia-Garos, Bodos and tribal groups in Tripura. Some of the movements, such as those of the Nagas and the Mizos, have gone to the extent of demanding secession from India. Even the movement led by the Bodos and tribes in Tripura has in later years assumed the character of a secessionist movement. Although some form of autonomy has been granted to tribes/regions making such a demand, the movement for autonomy has not come to a stop. Rather it has moved to new regions and tribes. Further, where the autonomy demand has been dormant or has not yet been granted, or where autonomy has fallen short of the aspirations of the people, there has been either renewed interest in the movement (Gondwana) or the movement has become intense and taken an aggressive posture. The latter is the case, for example, with Bodos and Karbis in Assam and tribals in Tripura.

In other parts, such movements have been confined to certain pockets of eastern, central and western India. In Gujarat there was a stir for autonomy among tribes living in the southern part of the state. Similarly, in Madhya Pradesh, there was demand in 1950s for a separate state of Gondwana for Gond tribes. Yet both in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh, the demand failed to get translated into an organised movement (Singh, 1983; Desai, 1983). In fact, the only autonomy movement worth its name in the mainland India has been the movement for a separate state of Jharkhand. The movement has been one of longest fought struggles and has passed through many historical ups and downs. In the process, it also underwent considerable change in its character, organisation, strategy,

mobilisation etc. since its inception in the 1930s. However, by the time the state of Jharkhand was created in 2000, Jharkhand had undergone huge demographic change with tribals becoming a minority in their own region. This being the case, the creation of the new state has belied the hopes and aspiration of tribals for empowerment and self-governance.

Side by side the formation of tribal political parties, there has also been formation of varied kinds of tribal organisations, which have been articulating and raising tribal issues, around which the tribes got mobilised and organised. The result is that there is greater political awareness and conscientisation among the tribes today than before. In tribal areas of the so called mainland India, the enactment of what is known as PESA in 1996, which provides for self-governance at the village level, emerged largely out of such process. In addition to creation of such institutions, tribals have also been engaged, through democratic process and movements, in protection of their land, forest and other resources. This is a movement against dispossession and displacement arising from various kinds of state/corporate sponsored infrastructure and other development projects. Indeed, tribal regions have become key centres of such projects due to rich natural resources they possess. While some of such projects such as the Vedanta Aluminum in Odisha, Koel Karo in Jharkhand, and Uranium in Meghalaya have been stalled due to continued resistance, in others resistance has been going on against many such projects in tribal regions such as Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh (Xaxa, 2012; Sharma, 2018). Indeed, much of what tribes have gained in post-independence India is the outcome of the process of their mobilisation and political movements rather than of their participation in the statutory democratic processes.

Conclusion

Political 'reservation', like other affirmative action programmes, was extended to the tribes with a view to integrating them in the so-called 'mainstream' of Indian life. In this the Indian state has been greatly successful. Tribes too, have made some gains but not that much in the direction of protecting their rights over their lands, forests and other resources or in making substantive contribution in the decision-making process, but, in the direction of raising the political aspirations of the tribal people. As mentioned earlier, the political empowerment by means of mobilisation and movements has been the major gain of the democratic politics in post-independence India; though these were not the intended, but rather the

unintended consequences of democratic politics especially, the electoral process and political reservation. In short, unlike in pre-independence era when tribes were regarded as unable to represent themselves, tribes today have come to a stage where they are not only able to represent themselves in the political fields, but probably, also able to do so even without the provision of reservation. It is a different matter that despite political empowerment, they have been unable to advance their interest and safeguards. This has been so mainly due to the structure of democratic politics in India. Being economically weak and demographically a minority, they are unable to translate political institutions and processes to their advantage.

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Virginus Xaxa is Professor of Eminence at the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University.
Email id: virg1978@gmail.com

Article: Consuming Leisure not so Leisurely: Political Economy of Leisure and Desire

Author(s): Neshat Quaiser

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Consuming Leisure not so Leisurely: Political Economy of Leisure and Desire*

--- Neshat Quaiser

Abstract

The paper examines the contemporary contours of leisure through an inclusive parameter by exploring the ‘frontiers’ of leisure that signifies the fluidity of leisure practices. Mapping the chaotic Indian landscape through the theoretical framework of political economy of leisure and desire, and leisure as an object of desire, the paper raises the question of consumption and the ownership of what one consumes within the social class locations. These concerns are explicated through an examination of political economy of leisure and desire; consumption of leisure; colonialism, elite, subaltern and leisure; post-colonial entangled contexts; two case studies on subaltern and leisure; and consuming desirable ‘leisure for religion’ unleisurely by exploring the social landscape under perceived/real religio-communal siege-like situation with reference to the controversial Indian Islamic preacher Zakir Naik; and the question of Halal meat.

Key words: Consumption, Desire, Leisure, Media, Subaltern, Religion

We begin with exploring the key concepts and the ways in which they acquire certain specific connotations in different sites of leisure in everyday life.

Political Economyⁱ of Leisure

Leisure is considered to be personal time, free from the demands of work or duty, time off the work situation, to be spent with family members and to follow one’s interests with grace and leisurely. But importantly leisure is an immanent human quality which has increasingly been transformed into an object of desire.

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Political economy refers to the ways in which politics and history structure the economic base of the society at a given juncture (existing mode of production) of history, where economy is treated as a dynamic system full of contradictions and which can be replaced by higher form social formation (see endnote 1). Political economy of leisure must then be situated within the particular notion of on-the-work and off-the-work time (leisure time) produced by the European enlightenment, industrial revolution and ultimately capitalist mode and relations of production. British colonial power was guided by this capitalist notion of time in the colonies, including India that had different notions of time.

The body of leisure since long is marked by struggle and is a marker of class location. With the clock emerging as the most potent symbol of a particular notion of time and work in the wake of capitalism, leisure time increasingly shrankⁱⁱ. Thus, eight-hour work day meant more leisure time and space for engagement in creative work and time to think beyond the given defined borders of social world marked by differential social class locations and relations of domination. Questions of availability of leisure time and struggle to get it, and how to make use of this time became critical. For example, the use of leisure time is with or without mediation by coercive surveillance or free will of an individual/class could be exercised.

As a result, question of the ownership of what one consumes in the capitalist social relations became critical. In other words, 'transaction' i.e. unequal material exchange is not immanent constitutive of leisure. And if a transaction is to take place it is to be the exchange of happiness. For example, presenting flower and in exchange you get smile, warmth. So, it is not transaction but sharing intellectual, spiritual, social and cultural affinity, which is the immanent human constitutive of leisure. Leisure, thus, is immanent human quality, which has become an object of desire with capitalist relations of production and market-driven commercial transactions as the core constitutive of it with a host of marketised attendant factors where social class-caste locations and the resultant relations of domination are the structuring principle.

Reflecting on deeply entrenched caste based discrimination in Indian society, Dalit thinker B. R. Ambedkar had argued:

In order that one may live worthily... a life of culture... is not possible unless there is sufficient leisure... The problem of all

problems which human society has to face is how to provide leisure to every individual... Leisure means the lessening of the toil and effort necessary for satisfying the physical wants of life (Moon, 2013, p. 284).

Political Economy of Desire: Leisure as Desire

The expression 'political economy of desire' has often been employed, but there seems to be no precise conceptual definition of this.

Desire generally refers to a strong feeling of wanting to have something or wishing for something to happen or strongly wishing for something. It is generally in a positive sense in terms of a normal social or economic situation. For example, desire for a non-exploitative, non-oppressive social and political system, or desire to work for a non-capitalist economic system, or desire to demand recognition in social life that one exists and makes sense in the world around, so must be recognised, or Dalits (untouchable castes in Indian subcontinent) and Blacks desiring to be recognised with dignity and as social equals. In most of the scholarly writings desire with reference to political economy has been employed in this senseⁱⁱⁱ. However, desire in political economy of desire and in leisure as an object of desire has specific connotations.

Political economy of desire would refer to the ways in which economy, in a given social formation, influences the structure of desire in a given social location. In the context of this paper it is market-driven economy that converts leisure into an object of desire available at a market-fixed price and market launches a resolute campaign to drive targeted people to consume it knowing well that it is not required to cover their real needs. Price to be paid for the object-desire is not just money but also in the form of petrification of leisure's real meaning. Market targets not only the rich but more importantly also the vast masses of all sections that can squeeze money out of their budget to acquire this object-leisure, which is not an immanent need but induced. It is designed to make them believe that it is not just their need, but really intrinsic part of their self, and absence of which would render their being incomplete. Thus, desire in this sense is different from that of Veblen's (1899) conspicuous consumption to display wealth to enhance social prestige to impress others. Instead, leisure as desire here becomes an ontological question for validation of existence not by others but essentially by one's own self. Thus, market strives to make this desire a natural part of one's

existence. Market constructs desire and distorts it by petrifying its immanent human meaning and a discursive terrain is made out to be ontologically concrete. Therefore, desire here is not symptomatic of possibilities for new frontiers but of closure.

Consumption of Leisure and Attracticide

From above what comes out are two opposite situations: first, leisure as immanent human quality without being an object of desire; and secondly, leisure as a marker of class, market, transaction, ownership and relations of domination, rendering it an object of desire. It is the second situation that has triumphed in most parts of the contemporary world. Consumption of leisure, thus, is inherently linked with the idea of ownership of what one consumes.

It is in this context that the consumption question becomes critical. Leisure, which should ideally be an immanent quality of social life, is to be consumed according to one's capacity to buy and own it. Leisure, thus, is not consumed only as material object but also as an ideological artefact, like caste, class, minority, ethnicity, nation, nationalism, state, syllabus, law, television programmes, advertisement, news, a dress, fashion, etc. This has rendered leisure an object of desire to be acquired in the marketised social world that often turns out to be attracticide.

However, it is not the market in the literal sense of the term that pushes thing-leisure but it is the marketised economy, state, media and political dispensations, together with religion, ethnicity, education, family, neighbourhood, peer group, all actively participate to render leisure as attracticidal. Therefore, leisure is no longer an aspect of immanent human quality but has become like assembly line production and reproduction of thing-leisure as desirable.

Consequently, leisure as desire produces a culture of conspicuous consumption (Veblen, 1899) of leisure sites that are not really necessary, but a means to become like those who have otherwise easy access to their desirable sites of leisure, in order to enhance social prestige in a market manufactured world of consumer goods projected as necessary and desirable.

However, consumption could be an act of appropriation from one's vantage location where object-leisure takes on new meaning. It could be transference of

intended meaning from one's vantage location. And despite overwhelming presence of the given primary attributes of the object-leisure as desirable, it acquires a certain specific connotation indicative of a contesting subject formation. But the act of appropriation can adversely be affected by pervasive, overwhelming and overarching presence of market in almost every sphere of social life.

It all appears quite totalising – individual as a plaything in the hands of market economy. However, the idea that there is something wrong and a-historical is never completely absent all the time in all the consumers of object-leisure. Thus, the possibility of a counter-intuitive subject formation with critical self-reflection can never be ignored as object-leisure produced by market-driven relations of domination is not desirable to many.

Colonial Context: Elite, Subaltern and Leisure

It is obvious that during colonial period Indians' ideas, forms, cultural and geographical sites of leisure were quite different from those of Englishmen. Geographical sites were predominantly villages and *qasbas*. Only towards the end of the nineteenth century, Indians began to have western forms of leisure in early amateur theatre largely influenced by the English stage theatre.

However, purely indigenous forms of leisure were many, but they were of two distinct caste-class based sites of leisure – high caste elite location and the subaltern location. But what is important is that elites, particularly the urban elites, were deeply disturbed by the growing colonial interventions in almost every sphere of social life. Colonially-driven new standards of morality, education, literature, clothes, etc. were in vogue. But more importantly the elites were fast losing their traditional sources of patronage which adversely affected their leisure time. For example, Ghalib^{iv} represented the Muslim high born elite location when he said:

jī DhūñDtā hai phir vahī fursat ki raat din + baiThe raheñ tasavvur-
e-jānāñ kiye hue

(My heart yearns again for the same leisure time that night and day
doing nothing I would remain engrossed in the imagination of my
beloved).

After the fall of the Mughal Empire, process of which began particularly with the Battle of Plassey in mid eighteenth century, the onset of colonialism and colonial rule produced new conditions, notions and sites of leisure. In the wake of colonial rule high born Muslim elites and nobles increasingly lost economic and political power with the enactment of Permanent Settlement Act in 1793.

Ghalib belonged to the high-caste Muslim elite of foreign origin and despised Shudra Muslims. He represented that section of Muslim elite who sided with the British. Thus, following the revolt of 1857 he denounced those who raised the banner of revolt against British rule in the strongest possible words with the intent that he would please colonial rulers for financial benefits for himself.

Though, Ghalib had written this couplet sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century, but reflected the unease and distress that the high born Muslim elite were faced with due to increasingly shrinking patronages from royalty and other nobility that was further eroded after 1857. The kind of leisure time that the elite enjoyed was considered natural with deep sense of entitlement to the extent of being pre-ordained, therefore, it was not the consumption of leisure in the sense we discussed above. Ghalib's couplet actually reflected the chaotic times when the prospects and spaces of leisure time of a privileged class, which could afford to indulge in feudal lethargy which enabled them to own time, love and leisure so leisurely, were fast shrinking. They were gentlemen (or ladies) of leisure who had plenty of material and cultural resources at hand. Here *baiThe raheñ tasavvur-e-jānāñ kiye hue* was a matter of right and inherited privilege. Ownership of the sites of desire, both animate and inanimate, with a belief of entitlement was due to their social location considered pre-ordained. It was this privileged position that was slipping out of hand. This was the leisure in high caste elite location distinct from that of the subaltern/Shudra Muslim locations.

Subalterns primarily were provider of leisure not user. They had truncated access to leisure time but made and provided means of leisure to the privileged classes for whom the very idea of ownership of leisure was very crucial for their social self. Subaltern modes of leisure were decidedly considered of low culture and were detested for being inexpensive.

Traditionally, festivals and *Mela* (a fair; public events organised to celebrate special occasions) were the main sources of leisure for the subalterns. For, example, events with the arrival of spring, kite flying festivities or events at

monasteries like Urs of Madho Lal in Lahore and several other events were the regular feature in almost all parts of the Indian subcontinent where people from all sections flocked in large numbers. In all such occasions the subaltern always found a place for themselves. But leisure then was not an object of desire.

These leisure occasions inform us that people always look forward to such occasions as sources not just to escape from the drudgeries of everyday life but essentially for spiritual happiness. These are immanently integral to human nature. But these events in traditional feudal societies were never free from caste-class based hierarchies with conflicting notions of leisure-time.

Post-colonial Contexts and Entanglement: Two Sites of Exploration

Since the time of colonial rule the very idea and modes of leisure across caste-class spectrum have travelled a long way, influenced by colonial economy to post-colonial mixed economy to liberal/neo-liberal economic-socio-cultural situations in India, introducing major shifts in the very structure and meaning of leisure and leisure time.

The post-colonial neo-liberal economy vigorously engenders fetishised desire, manifested through an ever increasing desire for more and more consumer goods to compete with each other. It is because within the framework of neo-liberal economy 'development' is to be propelled by desire.

In a ruthlessly market-driven contemporary India, leisure and its consumption are marked by the political economy of desire.

The political economy of leisure and desire in post-colonial India is driven not only by the rules of the neo-liberal economy and the expected consumption behaviour but also by non-economic factors influencing the lives of people significantly. It is a curious entanglement of what is called modern way of life and consumption, colonially propelled ideological, cultural, religious and economic trappings with the heavy baggage of patriarchy, patrilineal authority, urban-village-qasba, family, marriage, education and colonially mediated local knowledge. Given the chaotic situation, 'modern' should perhaps never have come of age. There are myriad and bizarre markers of modern.

The new market manufactured spectacle of the leisure arena is characteristically marked by this entanglement, where the social locations of leisure-desire are mixed-up, fluid, not so fixed, and aspirations emerge as an organising principle. To aspire and desire things that do not belong to the location to which the desiring individuals and groups belong to seem to be the rule. Thus, there is a market-driven irresistible desire to own the social location and the arena of leisure that one does not belong to. But market and media provide opportunities that you can have them by making them accessible within the ambit of your sight. You can see them though you do not own them – so, aspire for them through a tactile visual experience even if it is false. This whole process causes social dislocations critically at different levels, particularly to socially and economically marginalised large sections of people, as at the end, they acquire nothing but despair and commodification of their subjectivity.

The outcome of this whole situation is that consumption of such leisure is not so leisurely, but deeply disturbing as it dislocates and dislodges the social being and the core of innocence is damaged.

Two Sites of Exploration

Situating within this vast arena of leisure, desire and despair we briefly discuss two cases/situations, one of Hema and of Kanchan – the maidservants - where we explore how poor figure, fare and desire to consume leisure in this vast market-driven entangled arena; and secondly, the social landscape under perceived/real religio-communal siege-like situation; and the question of Halal meat. We explore the ways in which religion as a site of leisure is consumed by different sections and classes at a time when religion has become a critical battleground not only for religious/social/communitarian identity formation and assertion but also for economic rights and justice, citizenship and pluralist social landscape. The two cases are structurally inter-connected. One commonality between the two is the question of material and epistemological marginality.

Subaltern and Leisure: Hema and Kanchan – the Maidservants

The questions of availability of leisure time to subalterns, their struggle for and resistance to leisure time and the ways in which whatever available leisure time is to be used are critical elements. Importantly, time itself becomes a leisure commodity prompting you to desire what is made available to you by the market in a given span of time.

The personal time for leisure is very limited for the poor in the face of survival questions. Thus, leisure pursuits too are very limited, within home, television, immediate neighbourhood gossiping for a while, chatting with fellow maid servants, rarely going out of the area where you live, mostly visiting relatives on festival, marriage occasions.

It is television which is the biggest window to the world outside, through which inaccessible are made accessible within sight, instilling the desire to aspire for what is as yet not owned. And if one is not able actually to own yet can be 'owned' by tactile visual experience, for act of seeing is still within one's own control, to the extent possible.

Hema:

Hema, from a village in the province of Uttar Pradesh in North India, lives in an urban village in Delhi. She has almost no time for her leisure pursuits. Thus, Hema, instead of consuming anything concretely as per her needs, she herself is consumed by the conditions that produced absence of leisure for her.

Yet, she somehow sometime manages to consume something, for example, from Saturday market that displays objects of desire within her reach. Thus she is cornered to consume 'knowingly' or at times seemingly 'unknowingly' through protracted strategies of market.

And then she consumes things that are not owned by her – an idea, an advertisement, a dress – not in actuality but in the realm of imagination for *Dekh to liya* (at least I have seen them).

Ritualised propitiating of Gods/holy men with the hope of acquiring a leisure-thing is a common practice with her. She tries and desires to visit religious places and personalities or watches religious discourses on television whenever possible, or talks about it with fellow maids, with the view that Gods may be pleased and she gets what she thinks is due to her and her children – *woh toh sab kuch dekh sakta hai* (everything is under the watch of God).

This produces unintended consequences in the form of conflict within her inner self constantly nagging her – Ah! I did not have this, or good that I did not have

this as it will produce false hope in me and in my children in the times to come as these things any way cannot be got within the conditions one is placed in to do one's life.

But Hema's consciousness is not yet completely hegemonised as we see in the above raised question a counter-intuitive subject formation with critical self-reflection and resistance. Thus, she acts to undo her received location. A dialogue, an argument within herself enabled her to move forward to form a counter-intuitive subject in her own way, may not be fully equipped with critical self-reflection, but she becomes part of a collective resistance by voting for Jhadu (broom, the election symbol of Aam Aadmi Party) as she thinks this is the party for poor people. And she did it against the wish of the powerful right wing local leaders, even displeasing her husband.

Kanchan:

Kanchan is from a Haryana village, also a maid servant in the same upper middle class gated residential colony where Hema works, and stays in the same urban village in Delhi.

But her trajectory is different. She too has no leisure time. But unlike Hema, she refuses to be fully consumed by the conditions that produced absence of leisure for her. She not only aspires but also strives and struggles to consume things that *Kothi* (Bungalow) people have. She works very hard, goes to a *Dera of a Baba* (seat of a God man) in Haryana. She has acquired an air conditioner, a refrigerator, a television set, a small piece of land and is constructing a small dwelling gradually.

Kanchan is consumed not only by the logic of market but also by certain class ethos of power and prestige. She makes all attempts to be at par with those who are, in her eyes, in a desirable situation. But she does not think that she has damaged her consciousness as she is out there to acquire her objects of desire for her children, and for this, to put it mildly, she is ready to do anything. She is not contented with voyeuristic consumption.

For Hema religion is not a site of leisure to alter her situation but to seek solace, but for Kanchan leisure for religion is to seek things that she desires for creating condition for real leisure.

Consuming Religion as Leisure: *Leisure for Religion* and Religio-Communal Siege-Like Social Landscape

The claims that religion has greater integrative force were thought to have been increasingly eroded both locally and globally. However, in recent times a very strong tendency of closing-in the ranks is quite prominently visible both globally and nationally/locally. The problem is further compounded when secular ideologies too acquire the characteristics of religious zeal. Thus, both philosophical and constitutional secularisms and other secular ideologies are faced with deep crisis. There appears to be a near collapse of the boundaries of classical distinction between secular and religious.

The global Islamophobia, rise of radical Islamic movements, global Muslim/Islam bashing and their myriad national/local manifestations are some of the contexts for exploring the ways in which religion is being consumed.

The connection between religion and leisure is quite a complex one. Studies on the ways in which religion influences leisure behaviour among radically different religious groups 'are scarce'^v. Religious spheres/practices/activities have become desired sites of leisure. It means that through a process of religious rationalisation, desires are fostered for seeking *leisure for religion*. In the process a particular religion or a particular version of religion is privileged by deforming other versions in order to make it a desirable object. It becomes object for it is mediated, marketised and fostered to make it part of the self of those for whom it is intended, which otherwise is not part of their self. Through this mechanism consumers are made to believe that this object of desire i.e. the 'leisure for religion' would enhance importantly their social, economic status and prestige and instil in them a sense of belonging and togetherness. Leisure for religion fosters a notion of leisure where comfort is sought in religious activities by taking time out from one's main work and duties to indulge in leisure for religion. Religious spheres become sites of leisure. Pilgrimage, for example, becomes not only leisure time activity but also an act of leisure.

It is against this backdrop that we explore the following two cases: social landscape under perceived/real religio-communal siege-like situation; and the question of Halal meat.

Perceived/Real Religio-Communal Siege-Like Social Landscape

Consumption of religion as leisure (by Muslims) in India takes place according to the way in which it is played out in the public arena.

Modes and contents of display are: intra-religious debate and sectarian hostilities; and inter-religious responses that often turn out to be quite violent both physically and ideologically. The language of debate is quite violent. These practices, significantly, have also acquired the status of leisure-time activities even when one is engaged full-time in such activities.

However, consumption of religion and of religious activities in India is differently patterned with reference to majority and minority hostilities with constant overlapping of past and present.

Display of majoritarian religious hostilities towards religious minorities, particularly Muslims, is largely situated within the idea of reclaiming the glorious Hindu past that was lost and damaged as a result of Muslim invasion and rule for about thousand years in the Indian subcontinent and Muslims are decidedly considered to be responsible, to quote, for 'partitioning and bleeding the body of Mother India'. In order to validate its position, it employs the mechanism of *inverse victimhood* (Quaiser, 2012).

To these majoritarian hostilities, Muslim responses in India are projected and portrayed as homogenous, all encompassing, with the intent of projecting a united whole – the Muslim Ummah – by the dominant Muslim Ulama and other influential sections. They often resort to invoking glorious Muslim rule in Indian subcontinent and intend to reclaim the lost grounds, which may be characterised as the high-caste elite Muslim *restorational politics* and employ it as a strategy to mobilise Muslims across the caste-class spectrum (Quaiser, 2011). In the face of intense and concerted Hindutva onslaught and the perceived/real global Muslim bashing, religion has emerged as an *equalizer* as elsewhere I have argued.

Consuming religious discourses has now increased to a great extent and the ascendancy and proliferation of electronic media in the public arena has given rise to new modes of preaching along with the traditional modes of religio-political mobilisation.

For example, Islamic preacher Zakir Naik represents an interesting case of the ways in which religion is consumed in a mediatised^{vi} world by Muslims who seem to be under perceived/real siege, at a time when religion across the spectrum has emerged as a battleground for assertion for collective self and also for economic rights and justice.

Zakir Naik, termed as Televangelist, combines the role of a sectarian, Islamic preacher, and one who is out there for inter-faith dialogue. He is immensely popular both among his followers and detractors belonging to different sects. As a controversial figure, due to his strong *salafi* (purist) views, he has invited public protests particularly from the right wing Hindutva forces. Recently, following a to claim that a terrorist involved in the recent terror attack in Dhaka was inspired by his speeches, Naik has been under the scanner of Indian law authorities and intelligence agencies as Bangladesh asked for an investigation into his speeches and his writings.

His status is immensely enhanced as he recently was a recipient of prestigious Shah Faisal Award by the Saudi Government. His marketing strategies are regarded at par with modern marketing strategies of commerce and religions of the western world and are highly appreciated. He is consumed by his followers for he is strongly viewed as the one who is competent enough to face and respond to those considered to be inimical to Islam and Muslims both locally and globally. Naik's followers generate leisure time to participate in his programmes as a marker of their anger against the enemies of Islam; for Naik it is a site of leisure for religion as he does it ideologically with a vengeance. But this is not considered as a situation of so comforting leisure.

Halal Meat and Leisure for Religion

An online advertisement originating from USA Indians run restaurant announces the services that it provides such as dine-in, take-out, catering. But the most important part of the advertisement is its prominently highlighted announcement of 100% ZABIHA HALAL (Meat of the animal slaughtered as per the Islamic prescriptions that makes it permissible for the consumption by Muslims) as a special attraction for Muslims living in America^{vii}.

This advertisement has certain specific dimensions, foremost being its American context. Halal meat as a special attraction for Muslims living in America acquires

certain specific connotations, as it is not their familiar native place so one needs to be on guard, especially when they are faced with considerable amount of visible/invisible hostilities.

In the above we have raised the question of market-driven mechanism of making an object of desire an intrinsic part of a self, which otherwise is not part of the existing self. Halal meat in this case becomes as an object of desire to be consumed leisurely making use of leisure time desirably – that is indulging in leisure for religion, but knowing well that it cannot be done so leisurely in the given context. While Halal meat is part of Muslim self, yet it becomes an object of desire for it is marketised and fostered in a particular situation where hosts of religious, political and cultural trappings are present which are viewed as inimical, even threatening to Islam and Muslims; thus consuming it in an American restaurant, ironically renders leisure a cause of unease in the given context.

Conclusion

Leisure, which otherwise is an immanent human quality has increasingly been transformed into an object of desire by market-driven economy. The whole field appears to be constituted along the assembly line production of leisure, consumption, and desire. Individuals simply keep reproducing desire with the hope of acquiring what they desire for. However, class, caste, religion, region etc. impelled diverse social locations render fluidity to leisure-desire practices, with the possibility of a counter-intuitive subject formation.

Notes:

¹ Classical economist John Stuart Mill, had stated that ‘Political economy has remained destitute of a definition framed on strictly logical principle...’ (Mill, John Stuart, 1845. *Essays on some unsettled questions of political economy*, p.123). Even now there is no consensus among scholar about the precise definition of political economy. However, within Marxist discipline a more coherent understanding of the term is found. Here political economy refers to the ways in which politics and history structure the economic base of the society at a given juncture of history, where economy is treated as a dynamic system full of contradictions and which can be replaced by higher form rationality such as from feudalism to capitalism to socialism (K. Marx, 1977. *A contribution to the critique of political economy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, with some notes by R. Rojas; Wolfram, Michael L., 1976. *Political economy: Marxist study courses*. Banner Press). In recent time New Political Economy approach has been floated suggesting that political economy ‘interrogates economic doctrines to disclose their sociological and political premises [...] in sum, [it] regards economic ideas and behaviour not as frameworks for analysis, but as beliefs and actions that must themselves be explained’ (Charles S. Maier, 1987. *In search of stability: Explorations in historical political economy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp.3-6).

ⁱⁱ Engels, Frederick. *The condition of the working-class in England*; William Henry Davies (1871-1940), a Welsh poet, in his poem *Leisure*, mourns the pathetic predicament of modern competitive fixed goal-oriented capitalist society where people have been rendered as machine programmed to achieve the defined work/task within the assigned time. As a result, smaller things of social life and surroundings go completely unnoticed rendering them incapacitated to derive happiness out them. Thus, people are robbed of ingredients of their social self vanquishing the sources of imagination.

Leisure

William Henry Davies

What is this life if, full of care,
 We have no time to stand and stare.
 No time to stand beneath the boughs
 And stare as long as sheep or cows.
 No time to see, when woods we pass,
 Where squirrels hide their nuts in grass.
 No time to see, in broad daylight,
 Streams full of stars, like skies at night.
 No time to turn at Beauty's glance,
 And watch her feet, how they can dance.
 No time to wait till her mouth can
 Enrich that smile her eyes began.
 A poor life this if, full of care,
 We have no time to stand and stare

Songs of Joy and Others (1911)

ⁱⁱⁱ However, desire to kill somebody, or desire to wage war to occupy a territory or for political intervention, or desire to acquire nuclear weapons, etc. are different things that fall outside the purview of this essay.

^{iv} Ghalib, Mirza Asadullah Baig Khan (1797-1869), one of the most influential Urdu poets.

^v Monika Stodolska not very long ago pointed out that 'studies exploring the effects of religious beliefs on the leisure behavior of specific religious groups are scarce, focus almost solely on Christianity, and result primarily from the work of a single researcher...' Stodolska, Monika. 2006. 'The influence of religion on the leisure behavior of immigrant Muslims in the United States', *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol. 38, No. 3, p. 293.

^{vi} For media and public discourse, and media and religion, see: Lilleker, D., 2008, *Key concepts in political communications*. SAGE London; for media and religion, see: Hjarvard, S. 2008. 'The mediatization of religion: A theory of the media as agents of religious change', in *Northern Lights yearbook of Film & Media Studies*. Bristol: Intellect Press.

^{vii} Such advertisements can be seen in some parts of India as well, but the contexts are different.

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Neshat Quaiser taught at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Jamia Millia Islamia (Central University), New Delhi.

Email id: neshatquaiser@yahoo.com

**Article: Sovereignty Question and Culture Discourse: Interrogating Indo-Naga
'Framework Agreement' in relation to Naga Movement**

Author(s): N.K. Das

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Sovereignty Question and Culture Discourse: Interrogating Indo-Naga 'Framework Agreement' in relation to Naga Movement

--- N. K. Das

Abstract

This article tries to decipher the key features of the 'Framework Agreement', the Indo-Naga Peace Agreement, which is said to be based on spirit of equality, and situate them in historical trajectory of earlier parleys, which were often disrupted. The article discusses briefly the major landmarks of Naga movement in historical sequence and the flexible relationships of the Naga leaders with Zeliangrong and Frontier Nagaland movements in order to gain the larger perspective pertaining to current peace parleys. It assigns greater space to historically evolved notion of Naga sovereignty and territorial-integration questions and positions them within the projected model of 'shared sovereignty'. Since the agreement has explicitly acknowledged the primacy of culture as entrenched in the unique history of the Nagas, a critical evaluation of culture discourse vis-à-vis Naga nationhood is provided, demonstrating chiefly the indigenous scholarly perspectives.

Key words: Indo-Naga (Framework) Agreement, Naga Movement, Naga Territorial Integration, Sovereignty, Zeliangrong Issue

Indo-Naga Peace (Framework) Agreement, 2015: Challenges of Dialogue and Cooperation

The Indo-Naga Peace (Framework) Agreement signed by R.N. Ravi, on behalf of the Government of India, and Thuingaleng Muivah, on behalf of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland - Isak Muivah (NSCN-IM) on August 3, 2015 in New Delhi, marks the culmination of over 80 rounds of negotiations spanning over two decades. Unlike past treaties, the 'framework-agreement' acknowledges the 'unique history and culture of the Nagas' and promises to restore 'pride' and 'prestige' of the Nagas within a confederacy to be characterised by the 'shared sovereignty'. Naga leaders, it appears, have reconciled to affirm allegiance to the Indian Constitution and leave aside the demand of 'Nagalim' ('Greater Nagaland'). The chief negotiator R.N. Ravi has explained that, 'Both sides have

acknowledged the universal principle that in a democracy, sovereignty lies with the people'. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was present during the signing of the agreement, has appreciated the 'spirit of equality, respect, trust and confidence' behind the agreement (Nagaland Post, 2015, August 4). Though the text of the agreement remains secret, media reports quoting government and NSCN-IM sources indicate that the idea of a pan-Naga government with 'non-territorial' jurisdiction (covering all Naga territories) is the core issue under active consideration.

This article aims to decipher the key features of the 'framework' agreement and compare them with earlier discourses, which had remained inconclusive. It also discusses the main signposts of Naga movement, particularly the prickly issue of Naga sovereignty, which is integral to the Naga national question. The article explains briefly the major episodes of Naga movement, including related Zeliangrong movement and Frontier Nagaland movement which have shown plasticity. Since the agreement has explicitly acknowledged the primacy of culture as entrenched in unique history of the Nagas, a critical evaluation of culture discourse vis-à-vis Naga nationhood is provided, demonstrating mostly the native scholarly perspectives¹.

In view of the unusual delay and the increasing concerns of Naga people, over eighty senior members of the NSCN-IM, had issued a joint statement on May 13, 2017, assuring the Naga people that,

The Framework Agreement does not betray the principle of the Nagas and it will protect the rights of the Nagas and promote and strengthen harmonious interdependent relationship between two nations. It has turned the politics of confrontation into the politics of dialogue and cooperation; it has turned the threat of our future into protection of our future. It will rebuild the damaged psychology; and broken relationship of the two people.

(The Morung Express, 2017, May 13)

A Naga leader has further clarified that the framework agreement is 'A Preamble' which would form the basis on which 'a final solution to the uniqueness of history and political rights of Nagas will be reached'. The leader also stated that 'the Shillong Accord of 1975 and the 16-Point Agreement of 1960 will not mark out

the basis to decide the political and historical rights of the Nagas' (Gokhale, 2015).

Shared Sovereignty and Pan-Naga Hoho: A Probable Alternative for Nagalim

In a statement published in 2016, before his demise, Isak Swu, NSCN Chairman had said that,

The framework agreement is based on the uniqueness of Naga history; which means Nagas are a free people and they have never been a part of the Union of India... Both parties agreed that the sovereignty of the Nagas lies with the Naga people and sovereignty of India lies with the Indian people. However, with a view to solving Indo-Naga political problem both the parties agreed to share sovereign power for enduring and peaceful existence of the two entities.

(The Sangai Express, 2016, March 1)

The above statement definitely indicates an explicit shift from the original stand of NSCN-IM. It appears that such a turning point had taken shape in 2006, when the NSCN-IM had rearticulated its objectives and submitted a 'Framework' for constructive negotiations. In this framework the concept of 'asymmetric federalism' was proposed and the demands for full independence and sovereignty were toned down. The NSCN leaders sincerely acknowledged the Indian government's difficulty and were convinced that the Indian Parliament cannot discuss something against its own Constitution, to settle the Naga issue. At this stage when the parleys were underway, as per one media report, the NSCN-IM had insisted that 'the control over petroleum and natural gas, coal and other minerals should lie with the Nagas through "absolute right" over these resources' (Bhushan, 2015).

Soon after the signing of the historical agreement, Naga leader Muivah had addressed the Naga people's consultative meeting at Chumukedima. He clarified that there would be Naga integration but areas that cannot be brought under it would be covered by the 'Pan-Naga Hoho', which would be an independent entity, a statutory body with executive authority, separate budget and negotiating power (The Telegraph, 2015, August 26). Muivah further said that the negotiating

parties had agreed to share ‘competencies’ in deference to the Naga people’s wish to exercise their sovereign rights. Naga regime and the Government of India would jointly explore and exploit mineral resources. The NSCN-IM leader said the Framework Agreement was signed hurriedly as the condition of Isak Chishi Swu, the chairman of the group, was fast deteriorating. Muivah restated his appeal to all dissenting groups to forget and forgive and find common ground for a solution (The Telegraph, 2015, August 26). Marc Gangmei has tried to construe some fine points of the agreement. He says that Indian Parliament has to approve the important pacts (including pan-Naga-regime), which should satisfy the Nagas. Gangmei cautioned the Nagas that seeking at this stage any ‘full sovereignty’ will only put the Nagas in chaotic Dark Age with bloodshed within Nagasⁱⁱ.

In what could cause multiple reactions, Muivah, announced at camp Hebron on March 22, 2017 that Framework Agreement recognised the demand for territorial integration. ‘...The Framework Agreement will safeguard the present and the future of the Nagas’ (Times of India, 2017, March 22). This is the first time that Muivah had spelt out the crux of the hitherto closely guarded ‘framework agreement’. Should the centre agree to integration of all Naga inhabited areas, the neighbouring Manipur stands to lose more than 80 per cent of its geographical area. Muivah’s claims had created widespread protests in Manipur and Assam (ibid). Prime Minister Narendra Modi, however, in an election campaign speech at Imphal a few days later had assured the people of Manipur that the Naga peace deal does not contain anything that can harm Manipur’s territorial integrity. The ministry of home affairs clarified that no decision is taken to carve out a Greater Nagaland with territories of states adjoining Nagaland (Times of India, 2017, March 25).

People of Manipur and Assam have variously reacted to media reports pertaining to Indo-Naga agreement, which is still under discussion. In recent past, an ‘unofficial’ document had indicated that separate development authorities shall be constituted to execute the development programs in seven Naga inhabited districts of Manipur, two Naga inhabited districts in Arunachal Pradesh and one Naga inhabited district of Assam, that is, Dima Hasao district (Firstpost, 2018, March 27).

According to one report, the present Framework Agreement has taken note of a ‘twenty-point charter of demands’ presented by the NSCN-IM beforehand. The government till date has not conceded to any of them. Some of the supposed

proposals/demands of NSCN-IM under ‘shared sovereignty’ regime are as follows:

- An Independent Constitution, with defined co-federal relationship with India.
- Defense – A joint defense for the security of both countries. A ‘no-war’ policy would be declared in Nagalim territory. India would take the lead in handling the External Affairs matters that do not directly affect the Nagas.
- Police and Judicial matters – the creation of local police and judicial system.
- Immigration – The Restricted Area Permit would be repealed so that Nagas and Indians can freely travel between both nations and the world.
- Currency – Use of the Indian Currency.
- Trade – A joint Economic Development Council of India and Nagalim would be formed to promote trade, investment and joint ventures.
- Natural Resources – Nagas will own completely.
- Separate Flag.
- Permanent UN Representative.
- Joint Foreign Affairs (Naga Studies Group)

Several stipulations based on unauthenticated leaks are made which indicate about a separate constitution, a flag for Nagaland and facility of separate passport for the Nagas. One leak has even indicated that ‘Nagaland would have a UN representative though the Foreign Affairs and Defence would be a joint subject and the Pan-Naga Government will cover all Naga inhabited areas (Guruswamy, 2017).

Naga Movement/ Naga Insurgency and Creation of Nagaland

Naga insurgency, regarded as the oldest unresolved armed conflict in the world, is termed as the mother of all insurgencies in Northeast India. Naga insurgency however is part of a protracted and wide-ranging Naga movement, which encountered many ideological cleavages and factional outgrowth in its long history. The Naga defiance and initial encounters since 1832 with the British had displayed the Naga urge for liberty. A nominal British administration that was installed pursued the ‘indirect rule’ policy whereby Naga headmen and *dobashis* were nominated as intermediaries between village polity and colonial rulers (Das, 2012). In this backdrop, the early Naga ethnic assertion was expressed through formation of a Naga Club in 1918, which had explicit British patronage (Das, 1982). This club’s first political initiative was submission of a ‘Memorandum’ to

the British Statutory Commission (Simon Commission) on January 10, 1929. The memorandum stated that '(Naga) Hills should be withdrawn from the Reformed Scheme and placed directly under British Government. Before, we had intermitted warfare with the Assamese and Manipuris. They never conquered us... We are afraid new taxes will be imposed and foreign laws may supersede our own customary laws. We pray that the British Government must continue to safeguard our rights' (Das, 1989, pp. 262-263).

The Naga Club became Naga National Council (NNC) in 1946 and in the same year it submitted a four-point memorandum to government seeking 'local autonomy' within Assam, with a separate electorate (Ramunny, 1988). By June 1946, A. Z. Phizo had returned to Naga Hills after his release in Rangoon (ibid). As Phizo's meeting with national leaders in Delhi could not yield any result, some NNC members with Phizo, declared their own independence on August 14, 1947 (Das, 1982). Despite Phizo's declaration of 'Naga independence', no hostile situation occurred. During a convention held on 16-18 February 1950, Visar Angami was made the NNC President, who proclaimed that 'The Nagas are strongly determined to fight constitutionally for the liberation of their mother – Nagaland' (Ramunny, 1988, p. 49). In 1951, Phizo organised a plebiscite in the Naga Hills. He claimed later that 99 percent Nagas favoured Independence. According to Ramunny, the villagers were fed with oversimplified information. Viewed objectively, the plebiscite was definitely a marker of protest, which was in its initial stage. In September 1952, Phizo went underground and his 'extremist' supporters formed a minority side (Ramunny 1988). Through launch of armed resistance in 1954, Phizo established the 'Free Government of Nagaland' on September 18, 1954. Armed aggression had started growing. Alongside, rift between Phizo's extremist group and the moderate Nagas had gradually widened leading to inter-faction assassinations. In 1956 the NNC declared formation of underground 'Federal Government of Nagaland'. A document issued on this occasion declared Nagaland to be a 'Sovereign Republic' and claimed that this has been so from time immemorial. Soon afterward, Phizo left India and ultimately reached London on June 20, 1960 (Das, 2011). Armed aggression and clashes continued in 1950s and 1960s. A sharp division within the Naga underground in 1968 led to formation of the Naga Federal Government (NFG) on one side and Revolutionary Government of Nagaland, formed by the 'dissenters', on the other. The 'Revolutionary' extremists tried to capture the entire underground bloc and wanted a dialogue for a peaceful Naga settlement (Singh, 1972). By 1955 Indian armed forces had been deployed to quell Naga

insurgency. Massive insurrectionary belligerence led to setting in motion the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in 1958 which nonetheless resulted in reported human rights violations and highhandedness of armed forces (Das, 2011).

In the meantime, a group of Naga leaders, including Hokishe Sema and S.C. Jamir, discarding the idea of 'armed resistance', came out opting for path of dialogue. Such pro-dialogue leaders formed the Naga People's Convention (NPC) which organised three Naga Peoples' Conventions (NPCs) during 1957 and 1960. In its very first session held at Kohima from 22-26 August 1957, the NPC proposed for a larger administrative unit by merging the Naga majority-Tuensang division of North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA) with Naga Hills District. Prime Minister met the NPC delegation on September 25, 1957 to discuss this issue and at last the Government of India agreed on December 1, 1957, to carve out new 'Naga Hills and Tuensang Area' (NHTA) (Ramunny, 1988). Third NPC meeting was held in Mokokchung from 22-26 October 1959, where a ground-breaking Sixteen-Point Resolution was passed. In July 1960, a delegation of the NPC met the Prime Minister Pt. Nehru and the Sixteen-Point Agreement was formally projected. The government agreed to the proposals, which inter-alia provided for formation of a separate State for the Nagas within the Indian Union to be known as 'Nagaland' with a Governor and Secretariat, a Council of Ministers and Legislative Assembly. The state of Nagaland was finally inaugurated in December, 1963.

The NNC rejected the formation of 'Nagaland' state and depicted the Sixteen-Point Agreement as a complete 'sell-out' of the Naga political cause. Formation of the state of Nagaland was followed by the constitution of the Peace Mission. The church leaders such as Rev. Longri Ao actively supported Mission initiatives. The Peace Mission's credible success was to sign the first ever Cease-Fire Agreement on September 6, 1964, which was binding for the Naga Federal Forces and the Indian Army. Since militancy had recommenced, peace talks were resumed during 1966-1967, mostly in New Delhi. The NPC was formed again at the initiative of the Church leaders and a Liaison Committee was formed, which succeeded in convincing underground leaders, who participated in five rounds of talks. These talks resulted in the 'Shillong Accord' signed on November 11, 1975. The Nagas who signed represented the NFG and NNC and they surrendered arms and personnel. Shillong Accord was reached with the India-based NNC, which

did not enjoy support of Phizo. Sections within the NNC were thus divided over the ‘acceptance of the Indian Constitution’ as enshrined in the Shillong Accord.

The NNC leaders such as Isak Swu, Th. Muivah and S. S. Khaplang rejected the Shillong Accord and they later formed the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, breaking away from the NNC on February 2, 1980. By 1988, the NSCN further split on ‘tribal lines’ into two different factions – the NSCN (K), under the leadership of S.S. Khaplang (a Burmese Hemi Naga), and the NSCN (IM) under the leadership of Isak and Muivah (from Sumi and Tangkhul). The NSCN-IM’s manifesto emphasised the principle of ‘socialist-democracy for economic development’ with a spiritual pledge: ‘Nagalim for Christ’ (Shimrah, 2015).

Since Khaplang supporters had killed a number of Tangkhul supporters of Muivah, the National Naga Hoho (apex body of all Naga tribal councils) on November 7, 1988, declared Khaplang as a ‘national criminal’ and expelled him. The leadership of Isak Swu and Th. Muivah was reaffirmed (Ao, 1993). After the split, the NSCN-IM gradually built its base around Kohima and in the Manipur Hills among the Tangkhuls, while the NSCN-K, under pressure from the Myanmar Army in the Hukwang Valley, moved to the more-friendly Konyak and Ao areas in the Tuensang and Mokokchung region of Nagaland (Verghese, 1996). The entire Naga insurgency has been dominated by inter-tribal rivalry and a struggle for hegemony. The NNC President, Adino Phizo, in a letter to Hoho President, M. Vero, said that ‘Naga society has been festered with tribalism’ⁱⁱⁱ. Therefore, in order to achieve reconciliation, the NSCN-IM faction had suggested that, the Naga National Council (Adino faction) should publicly declare their rejection of the Shillong Accord, having failed to do so earlier. Secondly, the NNC (Merupfu faction) should recognise the IM group and stop calling themselves the ‘true NNC’ (The Pioneer, Delhi, 2001, August, 5).

The ethnic divide created through the splintering of insurgent groups runs counter to the goal of forging a larger Naga identity. In this respect, the Naga Hoho President, M. Vero, has rightly observed that:

There is no example in history of a divided people solving any of their problems. Nagas must resist the divisive tendencies within themselves and stop blaming one another. Is it possible for the national workers to solve the Naga issue on their own when they

are not able to solve their own differences first? Can the accepted constituents show more imaginativeness towards settling the Naga issue instead of only retaining power for as long as possible? And finally, can the Naga NGOs and public learn to be more open and neutral instead of pleasing or siding with one or the other of the underground groups?

(Reasoning Together, Naga Students' Federation, Kohima, 2001, pp. 4-5)

Sovereignty, Nationhood and Naga Integration: Diverse Perceptions and Fallacies

Sovereignty is a hypothetical covenant. It means a state's lawful control over its territory and authority to govern. Using such yardstick, in historical perspective, it may be problematic to apply the phrase 'sovereignty' in relation to Naga people whose pre-colonial era polities were strictly confined within 'village republics'. No 'tribe' existed beyond a village or a cluster of villages and even where chieftaincy prevailed (Konyak Naga), the chief could enjoy only some nominal authority. According to the People's Republic of Nagaland, however, the entire Naga inhabited areas – the Nagalim – is a 'sovereign nation' occupying a compact area of 1,20,000 square kilometres of the Patkai Range that lies at the tri-junction of India, Burma and China (OPIS, 1998). Nagalim was apportioned between India and Burma after their respective declaration of independence, without the consent of the Naga people. The Naga territory under India is subdivided under four administrative units, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Nagaland states. The Eastern Nagalim which Burma claims is placed under two administrative units, Kachin State and Sagaing Division (formerly Naga Hills). Nagalim, however, transcends all these arbitrary demarcations of boundary (OPIS, 1998).

The British incursions during 1830s were resisted by the Nagas. To do so, local inter-village alliances were established. Before Naga Hills became a District of Assam in 1881, the Nagas had no treaty with the British. How the Nagas reached a treaty with the British is best illustrated in the following piece by Imchen:

The independent Nagas fought the British from 1833 to 1879 in defence of their sovereignty. Finally, by [the] 27(th) March, 1880, an accord was reached with the British as per Naga customary practices. A circle was drawn on the ground and the

representatives of the British and the Nagas got into the circle. A cat was brought whose head was held by the Naga representatives; the British representative held the body and the cat was sliced [at] the neck. That was to signify that there would be no more fighting between the parties and whichever party was treacherous to the other party...would meet the same fate as...the cat. Since then, the British were verbally allowed to establish military bases in the land of Nagas as their friends and guests; there was no question of surrendering [Naga] sovereignty.

<https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/nagas-people-without-state>

The above citation is Federal Naga General Mowu Angami's version of the outcome of the Anglo-Naga war. Old writings suggest that initial Naga-British wars were all localised and involved a few villages. The Nagas in British era were divided and placed within Zeliangrong and Rengma areas, Naga Hills District, Eastern Frontier outside British India and Burma and the Nagas under the native state of Manipur. Over the years, this colonial legacy has been subjected to a number of interpretations (Imchen, 2009). Along with 'house-taxes', deceptive 'official' ethnic-names were hoisted on Nagas (Das, 2011). Some seventeen groups in Nagaland, seven groups in Manipur and three in present-day Assam are declared as the Naga 'scheduled tribes'. There are more than 15 Naga tribes living in Myanmar. Imchen and Das have compiled the basic ethnographies of Naga 'tribes' and non-Naga 'minorities' of Nagaland (Das & Imchen, 1994).

Naga 'nation' has been variously conceptualised as a political paradigm, as also a myth and an invention. Fact remains that, nowhere in the recorded Naga tribal accounts, do we notice any unity among people called Nagas today. Even the term 'Naga' including its various offshoots is foreign, a derogatory term intended to stereotype the people (i.e. 'Nagas') inhabiting in the hills, between the valleys of Assam and Burma/Myanmar (Salikyu, 2018; Das, 2011). Naga scholar Salikyu has argued that:

We have managed to invent a nation that is riddled with divisions; and instead of inventing a unified and all-encompassing identity, we have 'tribes'... where our first and foremost loyalties go toward our own tribes. It is, therefore, not surprising that the issue of 'sovereign nation-state', which is the fundamental basis of Naga

Nationalism, has been sidelined... it has been 'given up,' as one of the essential preconditions for the ongoing Framework Agreement. (http://epao.net/epSubPageExtractor.asp?src=news_section.opinion.s.Opinion_on_Manipur_Integrity_Issue.Naga_Nationalism_and_Naga_Integration_By_Salikyu_Sangtam)

Some Naga leaders have been vehement critique of the idea of Naga sovereignty and Naga nationhood. S.C. Jamir, a former chief minister of Nagaland, is in the forefront of such critics. Jamir published a booklet, 'Bedrock of Naga Society', on behalf of All India Congress in 2002. He wrote that:

Demand of Naga Sovereignty is a myth and state of Nagaland is a reality. The fundamental assumption underlying the notion that statehood compromised the sovereignty of Nagas is that the Nagas were a separate independent entity from time immemorial. Nagas were never an independent nation. A political entity pre-supposes the existence of a definite political structure. It also demands that the political structure would be a monarchy, a democracy, an autocracy, an oligarchy, a dictatorship or any other structure that is universally accepted by political scientist. Nagas lacked these criteria. (Jamir, 2002)

He further wrote that:

We were actually a group of heterogeneous and diverse tribes living in far-flung villages... Each village, was practically an entity in itself. The main 'contact' between villages was through the practice of headhunting. Internecine warfare was the order of the day. There was no trust or interaction between different tribes. In these circumstances, the question of a unified 'Naga nation' did not arise. No one can ignore such historical evidences and rely on emotional outbursts alone. (Jamir, 2002)

Muivah and Neiphu Rio later condemned S.C. Jamir for bringing out the booklet which describes Naga sovereignty as a myth and conceded the Sixteen-Point Agreement, which gave birth to the state of Nagaland, as the 'final solution' of the Naga issue. Jamir is also criticised for his political philosophy to 'Indianize the Nagas', for decades. Sometime in 2006 Jamir said, 'Mother India is inviting

all Nagas to come. So Nagas must come with one mind. If we continue to fight, we have no future and the future Nagas will blame the present Nagas' (The Morung Express, 2006, April). A rejoinder published in Eastern Mirror, Nagaland claimed, 'S.C. Jamir was a stakeholder of the sixteen-point agreement (1960) that had divided the Nagas... It has become a strong weapon in the hand of the colonial government of India, which fights Nagas through Nagas and kills Nagas through Nagas... Finally, the government of India and NSCN as two entities signed the second cease-fire agreement on August 1, 1997 for political talks at the highest level without any pre-condition. The government of India recognised NSCN as the legitimate organisation of the Naga people'. (Eastern Mirror, Nagaland, 2015, January 12)

Fact remains that on account of continued insurgency and perpetual and frequent 'peace parleys' stretching over numerous decades, many Nagas including the younger generation have been tired and shattered. Today, as a whole, the strength and spirit of Naga nationalism is at low ebb. Today, Naga National Movement continues to survive through the involvement of some Naga militant outfits and some Nagas outside Nagaland, who are aspiring to gain from an eventual 'greater Nagaland'. Describing this gloomy picture, a well-versed commentator argues:

Unfortunately, some of the Naga tribes, who are well ahead than others, are enjoying the fruit of India's independence and are backsliding from the Naga national cause. Many educated Nagas of Nagaland do not want to talk about Naga National Movement anymore. They do not want to contribute anything to sustain the Movement. They do not want to sacrifice themselves, their family and their tribe for the greater cause of Naga nation. They are quite satisfied with the 'provision of India', that meets their daily basic needs, and whoever disturbs this 'provision' is condemned.

[\(http://mattersindia.com/2014/12/present-situation-of-nagaland/\)](http://mattersindia.com/2014/12/present-situation-of-nagaland/)

In June 1994, Zeliangrong historian Gangmumei Kabui stated that, 'The Naga bourgeoisie have a stake in the insurgency. They say to New Delhi: give us more money to solve it. This is happening in Manipur also' (Far Eastern Economic Review, 1994, September 6). In order to restrain insurgency the Central government is pumping crores of rupees into the state every year. This has pampered many Nagas to live an easy life. Today the Naga youths are more lured towards easy life. The self-reliant economy of the state is dwindling and the

young generation today is not willing to work hard both physically and mentally. Majority of Naga educated youths do not want to go out for competitive exams but only depend on state government for job. This 'dependency syndrome' needs to be curbed as it will lead to the total collapse of the state's economy^{iv}.

Disjointed Early Negotiations and Ordeals of Current Indo-Naga Peace Parleys

Idea of a Peace Mission was floated by the Church leaders in the early 1960s. Thus, a Peace Mission was formed with Jayaprakash Narayan, Michael Scott, an Anglican pastor, and B P Chaliha, the then chief minister of Assam. After six rounds of talks, the Peace Mission was abandoned in 1967. Peace Mission was instrumental however in reaching a ceasefire agreement, effective from September 6, 1964. Since severe militant activities had been unleashed, a massive counter-insurgency operation was launched. Simultaneously, constant attempts were made to persuade the militants to give up violence. Even after the creation of the State of Nagaland in December, 1963, NNC remained uncompromising (Das, 2011). The fresh phase of peace process started when NSCN leaders Muivah and Swu met the then Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao on June 15, 1995 in Paris. They met the then Prime Minister again on February, 1997, in Zurich, and a ceasefire agreement was signed in 1997. From August 1997 onwards, several rounds of talks were held in India and abroad. The rival NSCN faction led by Khaplang had agreed to a truce with the government and began peace talks in 2000. Khaplang, however, ended the truce by 2015. The government declared the NSCN-K as a terrorist organisation in November 2015^v. A failed attempt was made by some disgruntled Zeliangrong youth to form the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) in 2011.

For the first time, the Centre and the NSCN-IM held peace talks at Kohima, on June 1, 2010. Despite best efforts, peace talks remained inconclusive. Questions of 'sovereignty' and the integration of all Naga areas remained the most difficult issues to be resolved. On part of India they posed constitutional and legal challenges. The NNC factions and Khaplang faction had continuously defied the centre. The major active (Naga) militant groups in Nagaland/Manipur include Federal Government of Nagaland-Non-Accordist (FGN-NA), Federal Government of Nagaland-Accordist (FGN-A), NSCN (K), NSCN-R, Non-Accordist faction of NNC (NNC-NA), NNC-Accordist and Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) (firstpost.com, 2017, May 10). The NSCN-Khaplang faction has

rejected any form of engagement with the Indian government. Khaplang, before his demise, had brought together various militant groups (ULFA^{vi}, NDFB^{vii}, PREPAK^{viii} and UNLF^{ix}) to create Western Southeast Asia (WESEA) Alliance, including Northeast (Debu, 2015). The NSCN-Khitovi-Neokpao views the ongoing peace process as an arrangement for the Nagas of Manipur alone. The NSCN-Reformation had earlier supported the agreement. Its stand is unclear. Similarly, factions of the NNC, the Manipur-based Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF) and the Manipur Naga Peoples' Front (MNPF) have all expressed their divergence with the current format of negotiations. Likewise, Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), Naga Tribes Council (NTC), Against Corruption and Unabated Taxation (ACAUT), and Zeliangrong Baudi (based in Manipur) have all reservations about the framework of the talks (Chhonkar, 2016). There are intrinsic disagreements between the Sema, Angami, Ao, Lotha and the Konyak Naga Hohos on many issues. The fact that Mr. Muivah is a 'Tangkhu' Naga from Manipur also affects his leadership claim (Narayanan, 2015). Muivah however has asserted that Framework Agreement recognises the legitimate right of the Nagas to integration of all Naga territories (The Indian Express, 2017, November 27).

In a major development, to unite all Nagas numerous civil society organisations and Church leaders had launched a Naga national reconciliation move in 2001. In an unprecedented move in 2012, thousands of Naga youths had protested against the militants in Kohima. The Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) had convened a huge meeting during February, 2012 where leaders of three major 'underground' factions shared the stage without hostility (Lotha, 2012). During 2013-2016, the relative peace achieved in Nagaland was credited to the signing of the 'Lenten Agreement' on March 28, 2014, between several factions, under the banner of FNR. FNR has appealed to the NSCN-IM and other political groups to grasp the 'rare opportunity' (of Framework Agreement) together and not to resort to any kind of provocation. The FNR also called upon the churches, Naga Hohos, civil society organisations and all the Naga people to remain alert and vigilant. FNR expressed concern that this 'rare opportunity' is in real danger since a section is portraying the negotiation only as an Indo-NSCN(IM) and not an Indo-Naga settlement^x.

Since the authority of NSCN-IM to represent all Nagas has been questioned from time to time, the NSCN-IM clarified that:

It is acknowledged by all that NSCN is the authentic organisation of the Naga people, not a 'faction' as supposed by some. No one should doubt that NSCN is the embodiment of the Naga national trust inasmuch as NSCN is built upon the rock of the national decision. (Singh, 2015)

It is reported that hectic efforts were made between December, 2016 and October 2017 and later on to persuade some of the dissenting groups to join the peace parley. Thus, in an important development, six major Naga groups, such as the NNC, GPRN/NSCN (Government of People's Republic of Nagaland), FGN (Federal Government of Nagaland), NSCN (Reformation), NPGN/NNC/NA (National People's Government of Nagaland (Non-accord) and NNC/GDRN/NA (Government Democratic Republic of Nagaland (Non-Accord)), regarded as the most important stakeholders in the fight for the rights of the Nagas, agreed to come forward to make the peace talks 'more inclusive'^{xi}.

The above settlement with six groups is going to be a major boost in attaining the final settlement. However, a few hurdles still remain which need to be sorted out. They are the peril of demand of 'Frontier Nagaland' within Nagaland and indecisiveness relating to the Zeliangrong movement, which has presence in three states. They seem to have theoretically accepted the validity of current peace parleys, yet they have kept voicing their concerns rather loudly.

Demand of 'Frontier Nagaland': A Challenge to Nagalim Theory

In Nagaland, the demand for creating a separate state made up of the four underdeveloped eastern districts of Tuensang, Mon, Longleng and Kiphire has been made since early 2010. The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation, ENPO, which is spearheading the 'Frontier Nagaland' movement, passed a resolution in September, 2018 to intensify the agitation. These eastern districts were merged with the Naga Hills district to form 'Naga Hills Tuensang Area' in 1957. Under the new state of Nagaland (1963) this region was given special status, for 10 years, and was governed through its own regional commission. In 1973, the region was merged within Nagaland fully. A public rally under the aegis of the ENPO was held on September 14, 2018 in Tuensang town to re-affirm its demand for a separate state of 'Frontier Nagaland' (The Morung Express, 2018, September 15). The rally which was attended by the six federating tribal bodies

along with respective village council associations, GBs associations, frontal organisations, ENPO executives, and advisors, unanimously reaffirmed the earlier resolution adopted on August 24, 2012 and its continued stand on 'Frontier Nagaland'. It was also resolved that the entire public under the aegis of ENPO shall continue to firmly reject any form of economic package^{xiii}. The ENPO is the apex body of the Konyak, Chang, Sangtam, Khiamniungan, Yimchunger and Phom Nagas. These tribes have expressed resentment over appalling neglect of their region.

In its Editorial dated November 27, 2016, The Statesman asserted that:

Even as the people in Nagaland are patiently looking forward to seeing the logical conclusion of the protracted peace talks, the cry for a separate 'Frontier Nagaland' is becoming louder. The NSCN(IM) leadership is not known to have commented on the issue so far. It will be interesting to watch how the Centre handles this issue before coming to terms with the NSCN(IM) leadership because a separate state carved out of Nagaland is certain to harm the conception of Greater Nagaland.

(Editorial, The Statesman, 2016, November 27)

United Naga Council (UNC) and Zeliangrong Movement of Manipur: Auxiliary Faces of Naga Movement

Compared to Nagas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, the Nagas of Manipur are proactively involved in the Naga Movement. Manipur Naga situation however needs to be perceived in the backdrop of the Zeliangrong Movement and formation of the United Naga Council (UNC) of Manipur. The formation of United Naga Council in 2003 in Manipur indeed shows a more contemporary coalition of Naga tribes of Manipur. UNC has adopted a constitution on February 16, 2003, emphasising the need to preserve and promote Naga culture. The Preamble of the UNC Constitution strongly asserts that:

We, the Naga people in the present Manipur State, having resolved to organise ourselves under United Naga Council to uphold the solidarity and unity of the Naga people, to protect our land, our identity and our history, to preserve and promote our culture and traditional heritage and to secure all round growth of our people,

do hereby adopt this (Amended) constitution in our council assembly on this 16th day of February, 2003 (Kaba, 2013, p. 153).

The Zeliangrong movement, which had commenced its journey as an anti-British resistance in 1930s (Mukherjee, Gupta & Das, 1982; Kabui, 1982), had sided with Naga underground leaders periodically, especially during 1954 to 1957 and on later occasions. Scholars have generally relegated the Zeliangrong movement to the margin, without realising the critical connectivity between two ‘movements’ and historical circumstances of their ideological underpinnings. The Zeliangrong Movement led by Haipou Jaduanang and Rani Gaidinliu was launched in 1925 in order to defy unjust colonial laws, to protect traditional religion and to establish an independent Naga Raj (Mukherjee et al, 1982). Local scholar Marc P. Gangmei regards this movement as ‘Naga-Raj Movement’ led by Jadonang (Gangmei, 2015). Naga Raj for Jadonang was mainly a notion of unity among the Makam people (Makam is a term used for collective identity among all Zeliangrong tribes). Jadonang stated that the Meiteis had their king and hence Makam people should also have their own kingdom, the ‘sovereign’ Naga-Raj (Das, 1996). Rani Gaidinliu, after death of Jadonang, accelerated the Zeliangrong movement and developed her version of Heraka theology alongside the notion of Naga Raj, which epitomised the Naga nationalism (ibid).

The period from 1954 to 1957 is regarded as a period of preparation by the Zeliangrong people to be a part of NNC launched movement, as the Zeliangrong segment. It is claimed that Naga movement reached the land of Zeliangrong in 1957 (Pamei, 2001). The banner of Zeliangrong was used earlier in 1954 under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo in NNC. Before that period, the members of Zeme, Liangmai, Rongmei and Inpui had joined the Naga movement under the banner of NNC, as a separate group. Phizo wanted Gaidinliu to be part of the greater cause of the Nagas and not just be a campaigner of the Zeliangrong Nagas. Gaidinliu’s dilemma was partly caused by the realisation that the Naga movement was more of a Christian movement than a freedom movement (Kamei, 2004; Pamei, 2001). Gaidinliu had started articulating the idea of homeland for her people after 1960s, when she realised that the ground breaking sixteen-point agreement had ignored the Zeliangrong people (Das, 1996), even though NNC had branded the sixteen-point agreement as a surrender. Gaidinliu actually visualised the arbitrary trifurcation of the Zeliangrong people in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland without their consent as humiliation and injustice (initiated by British and continued by the postcolonial government). Gaidinliu submitted a memorandum demanding a

separate 'Zeliangrong Administrative Unit' to Smt. Indira Gandhi in New Delhi on February 22, 1966.

Rani Gaidinliu later met Rajiv Gandhi in February 1988, and submitted a memorandum to him urging for establishing a development council for the Zeliangrong people. Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) was asked thereupon to study the problems of Zeliangrong area, which resulted in submission of a detailed report prepared by this author after visiting the contiguous Zeliangrong areas in all the three states, on behalf of ASI. Those days Gaidinliu was camping in Halflong where she allowed the author to discuss the Zeliangrong issue with her and other leaders. Along with detailed 'ethnography', a detailed map depicting all Zeliangrong villages in contiguous areas of three states was also prepared by this author, with the help of ASI cartographer. Prof. G. Kamei met Dr. K.S. Singh (DG, ASI) and applauded him for the effort, although the contents could not be divulged as the reports were to be forwarded to the PMO, with recommendations. During long discussions in Halflong, Gaidinliu had recited the Gandhi song partly which was translated by Bible translator D. Zeme for the author (vide Das, 1989, p. 242).

It needs to be noted that the Zeliangrong statehood movement was not 'deliberately' against the Naga National Struggle in any way. During the 1960s again, the Zeliangrong people had sacrificed their demand for Zeliangrong homeland when the high power NNC team led by a Kilonser Mr. G. Nganping requested them to give up the statehood demand in the interest of the Nagas^{xiii}. Yet again, when the Naga Movement was revived in the late 1980s after a long hiatus following the Shillong Accord, leaders of Zeliangrong People Convention had voluntarily suspended their combat in the larger interests of the Nagas in 1993 (ibid). It is generally believed that in the aftermath of the Kuki-Naga conflict in Manipur in 1992 the NSCN-IM had succeeded in creating a strong support base among the Zeliangrong people. After several dialogues, the collective identity and the name Zeliangrong was recognised by the NSCN-IM. This had further consolidated the Zeliangrong support for NSCN-IM.

Every year August 29 is observed as the Haipau Jadonang Martyr Day by Zeliangrong people. The Government of Manipur and NC Hills Autonomous Council have declared this day as government holiday in recognition of Jadonang's sacrifice for the nation. Speaking on the occasion of death anniversary of Haipou Jadonang on August 29, 2012, Ringthim, a member of the Steering

Committee of NSCN/GPRN, stated that Rani Gaidinliu's aspiration for Zeliangrong integration under one administration has not been fulfilled by Government of India and thus 'It is the bounden duty of the present generation [to] ensure that all the unfulfilled tasks are accomplished lest the present generation be blamed by the future generation'. Such a statement has political implication considering the occasional threats earlier issued by NSCN-IM. It may be argued that any ultimate pronouncement of Indo-Naga parleys has to take cognisance of Zeliangrong phenomenon.

In our 1982 article, we had described Zeliangrong movement as an amalgamation of politics and religion (Mukherjee et al, 1982). Indeed, the evolution of 'Heraka' from original 'Charaa Rek' faith introduced by Jadonang finally got completed with the codification of Heraka doctrines in 1990s. Rani Gaidinliu introduced several reforms and articulated the reformed religion 'Heraka', which means 'religion of a true God' (Mukherjee et al, 1982). It may not be correct to say that 'many of the practices of the Heraka are derived from Hinduism' (Dangmei, 2013). The fact remains that Heraka is a tribal religion essentially and Gaidinliu always regarded it so. It is also true that in the 1970s when Gaidinliu visited New Delhi with her demand for a separate Zeliangrong homeland, she had met several Hindu leaders from All India Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, Sanatan Dharma, Vishva Hindu Parishad, Dayanand Anglo Vedic, and etcetera. In 1979, the Vishva Hindu Parishad invited Gaidinliu to attend World Hindu Meet at Prayag. In the meantime, centre's attempt to glorify Naga freedom fighter Gaidinliu, who was also a spiritual leader, by constructing a memorial museum-cum-library in Kohima under the patronage of Nagaland government has outraged the state's civil society organisations (Hindustan Times, June 14, 2015). Several local Naga leaders in Nagaland have also questioned the very nomenclature of Rongmei and status of this tribe, to which Gaidinliu belonged. Since 2012, Assam and Manipur governments have recognised the Rongmei Naga, but Nagaland government retains the nomenclature Kabui (Das, 1994). Rongmeis thus exist as Kabuis in the electoral roll of Nagaland state^{xiv}.

In a rejoinder published in a local daily^{xv}, the Zeliangrong leaders have retorted to those who have misconceptions about the Zeliangrong movement vis-à-vis Naga movement as also about true identity of Gaidinliu. In the following excerpt of the rejoinder the leaders pull down such misconceptions. The rejoinder says:

Rani Gaidinliu was not only a Naga but her Zeliangrong people have a large chunk of ancestral land in Peren District of Nagaland. When (she) was fighting against the British colonial forces in the early 1930s, she established her bastion at Poilwa in Peren District... Sadly, she was arrested by the British and sentenced to life imprisonment in 1933... During 1955-56 the Zeliangrong Nagas had joined the Nagas struggle for independence in large scale under the banner of NNC... The divergence between the NNC and the Rani Gaidinliu Army was on complete different perspective. The NNC formed in 1946 with the slogan, 'Nagaland for Christ'. Rani Gaidinliu stood out against forcing foreign religion and she propounded 'secularism' where every religion including the Naga indigenous religion and culture should have a rightful place. She was neither anti-Naga- nor anti-Christian...

Civil Society Organisations and New Hopes

In the aftermath of signing of the historical Framework Agreement, NSCN-IM and the Indian negotiator have been trying to galvanise broad consensus amongst various civil society organisations. It is reported that the Forum for Naga Reconciliation, Naga Hoho, Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation, Naga Mothers' Association, Naga Students' Federation and the specific Hohos of Naga tribes have been regularly holding consultations with the NSCN-IM and the government interlocutor, R.N. Ravi for arriving at a settlement at the earliest (Biju, 2015). The Naga People's Movement for Human Rights (NPHMR) and Naga Hoho leaders have expressed happiness over the accord. NPMHR, however, has questioned the perpetuation of ASPA which gives the Indian Armed Forces the power to shoot to kill on mere suspicion. Some organisations have shown uneasiness in eastern Nagaland and Manipur, such as the Eastern Naga Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), Naga Tribes Council (NTC), Against Corruption and Unabated Taxation (ACAUT), and Zeliangrong Baudi (Chhonkar, 2016). United Naga Tribes Association on Border Areas (UNTABA) has urged R.N. Ravi to review the issue of historical transference of Naga lands that are still under Assam administration (Morung Express, 2017, July 8).

Naga Hoho is the voice of all Nagas. However, earlier the Ao, Sumi and Lotha Hohos had withdrawn from it. Some Naga leaders argue that Naga Hoho is concerned with major tribes ignoring minor Naga tribes. As per a survey, 50

percent of the Naga people don't know what Naga Hoho is and what they do (The Morung Express, 2016, October 2).

Action Committee for Unabated Taxation (ACAUT) was formed by several organisations under the aegis of the Naga Council in 2013, to check the rampant 'illegal tax' collection from government employees and business community, by militant outfits. ACAUT has apprised the interlocutor on the need to address such grievances. Fact remains that extortion, trafficking of drugs and weapons had often led to inter-insurgent group clashes. It is hoped NSCN-IM will hand over its weapons and relinquish control over the illegal trade^{xvi}.

Article 371-A, Shared Sovereignty and the 'Realm of the Possible'

Even after lapse of three long years, no official pronouncements are made about wrapping up of the Framework Agreement. Under this situation, R.N. Ravi, Interlocutor to the Indo-Naga Peace talks, has cheered up the Nagas by saying that they should not give up sovereignty. He said so to media persons after a three hour long closed door meeting with various Tribal Hohos at Kohima in first week of December, 2015. He also said:

Our approach is inclusive and the solution is going to be comprehensive. Inclusive, because it is not just Naga armed groups but it is also the civil society. They are all important stakeholders, hence their views are obtained. 57 representatives of various Naga tribes expressed their views on the current Naga political issue.
(The Morung Express, 2015, December 9)

Media reports indicate that Mr. Ravi is particularly engrossed in assessing the views of Nagas on the idea of a 'Pan-Naga Government' with 'non-territorial' jurisdiction (Bose, 2015). In a candid statement issued in February, 2016, R.N. Ravi had articulated the notion of shared sovereignty as conceived in administrative parlance. He said that, 'Sharing sovereign power will not be mere semantics or playing with words but that there will be a "genuine devolution" where Nagas will become "almost sovereign like".' On 'what would be the shape' of the arrangement for Nagas outside Nagaland, he said it would depend on how it was negotiated by both the parties. Regarding the crucial issue of integration of Naga areas, Ravi admitted that it still remained in the agenda, while adding that it would have to be achieved through a democratic process. Articulating relationship

between India and Nagas on the basis of shared sovereignty, Ravi said that, ‘sovereignty lies with the people and no country was independent but inter-dependent; yet for Nagas, it would be independent and the relationship between India and Nagas would be on the basis of sharing of sovereign power’^{xvii}.

Later, in an exclusive interview with Nagaland Post, on July 15, 2016, R.N. Ravi, Interlocutor, had explained the notions of sovereignty and Pan Naga entity in following words:

The Framework Agreement signed on August 3, 2015 lays down the fundamental principles of our relationship. It fully respects the aspirations of co-existence in an inseparably inclusive relationship on the basis of sharing the mutually agreed sovereign powers. Its details are being worked out. The universal principle of democracy is that ‘People are sovereign’. It is also the core of Indian democracy. There is no question of Nagas giving up sovereignty. Nagas are not colonised people.

He further said:

Sovereign power is an abstract noun. In reality it is a spectrum of powers. Sharing sovereign power means sharing the spectrum of powers between the government of India and the Nagas... “A Pan Naga entity” as a concept of a common platform for the Nagas to strengthen their identity is under discussion. However, Pan Naga Hoho, interpreted as a “super-government” was “inconsistent” with government of India’s position. We are trying to reach a convergence... Naga areas outside Nagaland should have genuine democratic self-governance...

Article 371A of the Constitution of India is specific to Nagaland. We are trying to evolve a system for the Nagas outside Nagaland to be self-governing in their everyday affairs. (As regards) separate flag and passport for the Nagas, these are issues of sentiments and the government of India respects the sentiments; however, these can only be addressed within the realm of the possible (Interview with Interlocutor, R.N. Ravi Nagaland Post, 2016, July15).

Culture Discourse: Naga Cultural Traditions and Ethical Values

The Naga tribes, in general, differ in terms of their language, village-polity, kinship system, indigenous faith, customary law and cultural traits. Each village was self-contained and autonomous. Some Nagas used to visit Assam valley based *haats* (weekly markets) for exchange of goods. Colonial era policies led to movements beyond village and solidarity at larger levels. Naga cultural life is shaped by agriculture festivals and village rituals conducted by shaman-priests to ensure celestial safety. Naga tribes believe in one Supreme Being with many subordinate deities. Each tribe has its own shawl designs. There are artistic traditions and rich heritage of Naga oral literature and myths. They are fast decaying. All Nagas celebrate their own festivals with a pageantry of colour, music and dance. A common feature is that the festivals revolve around agriculture, the mainstay of Naga economy. These festivals hark back to times prior to the advent of Christianity^{xviii}. The Nagas have their own set of ethical environmental values and moral standards. The Naga scholar Longchar argued that in the Naga worldview, the land not only holds together the clan, village and tribe, but ‘also unites the Supreme Being, spirits, ancestors and creation as one family’ (Longchar, 1999, p. 123; Thong, 2011). The Nagas had an oral narrative explaining that the spirit, human being and tiger once belonged to the same mother. However, conflict arose among the three and resulted in a permanent hostility between them. Here the animal represents forest realm and the mother symbolises the Mother Earth (Das & Imchen, 1994).

The introduction of Western education and Christian faith, in particular, has brought about tremendous change in the Naga belief systems. Today traditional Naga attires, dances, and other cultural symbols can be seen only during important occasions and in celebrations like the Hornbill Festival. Blind imitation of western culture and varied impact of media and cinema are witnessed in Naga society. A poll in newspaper, Morung Express (June 2008), revealed that 79 percent of the readers find Naga youth of today as confused. Naga youths are ‘becoming more receptive and adaptive’ to western influence. Nevertheless, the events like the ‘Hornbill Festival’ and the revival of the ‘Morung’ dormitory system is seen as an attempt to revive the almost forgotten cultural heritage^{xix}.

Nagas in general concede that their cultural traditions and ethical values have drastically perished, especially through Christianisation. Naga anthropologist Abraham Lotha said that ‘In all their enthusiasm to make the Nagas Christians,

the missionaries vehemently buried alive the Naga culture. Christianity in Nagaland is transplanted from America and Europe. Christianity is not nourished by Naga life experiences; it has not grown in Naga cultural soil' (Lotha, 2013, p. 77). Long ago anthropologist Furer-Haimendorf had regretted that rather than bringing the Naga culture and Christianity into harmony, the missionaries set them at opposite poles (Furer-Haimendorf, 1969). Today 90 percent Nagas pursue Christianity. Christianity has in fact become the culture of the people and one who does not profess to be Christian is now considered a 'second class' citizen (Thong, 2011). Lotha has rightly argued that the Christianity has to be integrated into the worldview, social-economic structure, cognitive and linguistic processes of the Naga society (Lotha, 2013). It is ironic that Naga nationalists should base their argument on the 'uniqueness of Naga culture' when most Nagas only ape western culture and do not have a positive attitude towards their own culture (Lotha, 2013).

Nandita Haksar, who as a lawyer had represented the Nagas in courts, said:

It seemed rather ironic that a prime minister ideologically committed to the promotion of a culturally homogeneous India, was talking of inclusive democracy and hailing the unique culture of the Nagas. Much of the Naga culture has been destroyed by the evangelising Baptist missionaries during British regime. They destroyed the old institutions and the administrator-anthropologists stole Naga cultural property which can be seen in museums in Western countries. The Indian education system further helped to erode the Naga culture and destroy the languages; with no place for Naga history in the school textbooks (Haksar, 2015).

Concluding Remarks

The history of Indo-Naga conflict shows that earlier parleys broke down due to the divergent perceptions surrounding 'sovereignty' issue. This time, it appears, a remarkable unanimity has emerged over sharing of sovereign powers. Indeed, the ongoing peace parleys have already achieved a huge success by shifting the Naga discourse from 'exclusive sovereignty' to that of 'shared sovereignty'. In the backdrop of numerous failed peace-parleys, a breakthrough is expected through the current parleys. The positive outcome so far has been that more and more outfits and stakeholders seem to have endorsed the initiative. Comprehensive

peace would need a comprehensive agreement by incorporating viewpoints of all stakeholders in and outside Nagaland. The huge delay in reaching the final accord seems to be on account of this factor. Piecemeal effort and 'shortcut' measures will fail and create further mistrust between the people and the government. There is a desire within the Naga community, various Naga Hohos, Naga civil society, the Church and the Forum for Reconciliation for an ultimate solution. Naga women's organisations and student federations too have welcomed the initiative. The dissenting 'outfits' should not see peace effort from the prism of the centrality of the NSCN-IM.

The Nagas in general are frustrated with more than two decades of peace parleys. They are also upset with the selfishness of the self-serving state politicians. Some straight questions are raised by concerned Naga scholars. Kikon has argued that more than half a dozen newly formed armed groups operate and factional violence is routine. These developments, in her view, make it impossible to imagine any positive outcome from the current negotiations. Kikon says that today, the immediate Naga pride and dignity is not attached only to aspirations for a sovereign homeland, but one that is grounded in seeking employment and supporting the families who lack any avenue to earn an income (Kikon, 2015). These are undeniably very genuine concerns. Some Naga scholars mark out the present miserable conditions as the creation of the state leaders. For decades Indian state has pumped crores of rupees to generate employment, but service opportunities were not created. A Naga scholar has related this serious malady to corruption. Unless corruption is curtailed, the development in the state will go from bad to worse (Ezung, 2012). Corruption is an irony for Nagas that pride itself so much in tradition of honesty. Naga traditional values mixed with Christian principle could have infused a super honest culture but on the contrary, the opposite exists^{xx}.

Two-decade-long ceasefire since 1997 has changed mental outlook of present generation of the Nagas, who have matured without experiencing conflict and the brutality of the army. They have nevertheless witnessed rampant corruption and failure of governance mechanisms. They must be hoping that once final agreement is reached and utmost sovereign powers are granted, the life of the Nagas will change as the good governance may then be installed. Will it happen? Nagaland no doubt is all set to emerge as a 'semi-sovereign state', but question remains whether that will automatically ensure justice and good governance for all sections of the Nagas?

Notes:

ⁱ This review-article is based on secondary source materials and due references are provided to all materials used, electronic and published. If any omission remains the author sincerely regrets the same; and seeks comments for future revision. Opinions expressed in this article are those of author alone.

ⁱⁱ <http://nagastudiesgroup.blogspot.in/2015/08>

ⁱⁱⁱ Adino Phizo questions Naga Hoho's White Paper
www.e-pao.net

^{iv} <http://mattersindia.com/2014/12/present-situation-of-nagaland/>

^v <https://www.timesdelhi.com/2017/06/11/>

^{vi} United Liberation Front of Assam

^{vii} National Democratic Front of Boroland

^{viii} People's Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak

^{ix} United National Liberation Front

^x <http://www.easternmirrornagaland.com/take-naga-society-forward-fnr/>

^{xi} <https://thewire.in/189489/centre-to-take-naga-peace-talks-beyond-nscn-im-rn-ravi/>

^{xii} <https://thewire.in/government/revealed-rss-draft-plan-nagaland-accord>

^{xiii} <https://rongmeiencyclopedia.wordpress.com/2018/04/25/>

^{xiv} <https://rongmeiencyclopedia.wordpress.com/2018/10/04/the-first-recognised-naga-tribe-by-the-british-empire/>

^{xv} Vide Misgivings about Rani Gaidinliu: A Rejoinder; The Morung Express, 2017, April 9

^{xvi} http://www.indiablooms.com/ibns_new/news/

^{xvii} Cited in Monthly Achieves, February, 2016; <https://kharingyoshimrah01.wordpress.com/>

^{xviii} <https://www.nagaland.gov.in/portal/>

^{xix} <http://www.trunity.net/rongmeinaga/view/>

^{xx} <https://www.nelive.in/nagaland/crime/>

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N.K. Das is a social anthropologist and a former Deputy Director of Anthropological Survey of India, Kolkata.

Email id: nkdas49@gmail.com

**Research in Progress: Urbanisation of a Tribal City: Contestations of The New
Shillong Township**

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Urbanisation of a Tribal City: Contestations of The New Shillong Township*

--- Aashish Khakha

Abstract

When we analyse the procedure of urban development in post-independence India, we find that it inherited uneven regional structures of city and town formations. This has a bearing on its complex relationship with its hinterland and rural areas, industrial and manufacturing output, infrastructural access and various forms of inequalities and governance structures. No other region in India is more marked by such unevenness as the Northeast. Until recently, it has suffered from a history of socio-political-economic alienation from mainland India. The historical dimensions of the relationship of the Northeast region with the Indian state, the uneven development, the incidences of unrest and conflict, its distinct geographical and ecological landscape and the specific legal framework, form a complex terrain in which the study of urbanisation needs to be carried out. This paper delves into this complex terrain with specific reference to a 'tribal metropolis' of the region, that is, Shillong, which is undergoing tremendous change in its urban landscape. The paper analyses the contestations in urban expansion and development and reflects upon the complex and interlinked future of urban space for its tribal population.

Key words: Northeast India, Shillong, Tribes, Urbanisation, Urban Development

Tribes in India, as elsewhere in the world have been associated with land and forest-based livelihood. Accordingly, their traditional habitat has been rural cum forest. Gradually, however, there has been change, which could be dated back to the colonial period. Under this period, tribes were not only integrated into the modern state but also with the wider economy and society, though the integration was far from uniform. This had far reaching impact on tribal society resulting in change in different spheres of the societal life. The post-independent India has

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accelerated those processes of change. Much has been written on those aspects of changes. However there has been another form of change in tribal areas which has remained unaddressed. This concerns the process of urbanisation in tribal areas and of tribal people. Like the other forms of social change, even this change in tribal areas could be traced back to the colonial period. Under colonial rule, the administration of tribal areas led to emergence of some towns. Tribes encountered those towns during their occasional visits. They did not form part of the town, as they were not part of the colonial administrative structure. There has been increase in the process of urbanisation in the tribal areas in post-independence India. This has been largely due to the expansion of administrative centers on one hand and setting up of industrial and infrastructure projects on the other. These developments did open up some avenue of employment for tribal people. However, only a few could make it and be part of an emerging new habitat in tribal areas. This is no longer true today.

In the case of post-colonial India, ‘the fundamental objective of planned development has been to transform a backward colonial system to a developed modern industrial one’ (Karna, 1990, p. 13). However, as Fernandes and Bharali (2011, p. 1) write, ‘Development literature has traditionally presented development as increasing wealth and income, a higher standard of living, improved technology and industrial progress by creating incentives for investment. Its criterion is the Gross National Product (GNP) and economic growth. It relies heavily on capital investment and advance technology to harness natural and human resources. One of the main reasons is that development projects in India (as elsewhere in the world) require a huge area, most of which lie in the resource rich tribal regions. Most of these areas are inhabited by tribal societies whom the project forces to sacrifice their sustenance in the name of “national development”. Land is basic to these projects and usually the state provides it to the executing agencies through compulsory acquisition. Such acquisitions displace people from their traditional habitats and sustenance.’ Thus, displacement and deprivation are integral to India’s development.

Tribal communities are the most affected by the process of displacement in India. It is in this context that studying their experience vis-a-vis the process of urban development occurring in their land is an interesting proposition, as it has not been studied much before. Tribes for long have been considered as forest dwellers. They have been looked upon as groups that were residing outside civilisation. Xaxa (2008) writes that, ‘they lived on hills and plateaus or in forests

and survived on hunting and food-gathering or practised settled as well as slash-and-burn agriculture, followed from being outside the civilisation complex.’

In this paper, there has been an attempt to situate tribes in the context of urbanisation within Northeast India in particular. In its attempt to understand the phenomenon of urbanisation in the region, the paper takes the case of The New Shillong Township of Shillong and examines the processes through which it has grown and expanded. It also discusses the challenges and problems that the expansion of township has posed.

Historically with the outbreak of Jaintia uprising in 1860-66 the inadequacy of Cherrapunji as the location of the District Headquarters of Khasi Hills was revealed. The search for a new location for the District Headquarters ultimately led the last of the commissioner of Assam Col. Henry Hopkinson to the valley of Yeodo. The present-day Shillong was covered at that time by deep forests surrounded by populous villages, like Laban and Mawkhar. Jungles were cut; some allotments were made to Europeans and Eurasians in the core areas. The migrant business people were allotted land in what is now known as Police Bazar. With the shifting of the offices from Cherrapunji, Yeodo was renamed Shillong after the sacred peak by Col. Henry Hopkinson on April 28, 1866. With the formation of the chief commissionership of Assam in 1874, the political and administrative headquarters of the Chief Commissioner Col. R.H. Keatings was shifted after 40 days of stay at Guwahati to Shillong on March 20, 1874. Chakravarty (1991) writes that after the partition of Bengal in 1905, Shillong became the most important commercial centre connecting the resource base of the interiors of the Northeast to that of Assam. In the post-colonial period, Shillong remained the capital of undivided Assam until the creation of the new state of Meghalaya on January 21, 1972. The S.P. Shukla Committee Report (1997) identified Shillong as a, ‘potential satellite town growth pole’ in terms of urban expansion and potential township development. Sengupta and Dhar (2004) have written that Shillong has witnessed a phenomenal urban expansion in the last three decades.

When we look at the land system in Shillong, at the time of colonial intervention, the Khasis had an organised political system under 25 Syiems (Syiemlieh, 1993). Each Syiem state had a distinct territory of its own and was known by different names. In the case of Shillong, it was governed by the Syiem of Mylliem. The Syiem administrative system was marked by ‘three distinct levels: 1) The raid

dorbar or hima dorbar of a Syiem consisting of all the heads of the clans in the Syiemship; 2) The dorbar elaka (all the adult male members of the elaka); and 3) The dorbar shnong at the Wahehchnong level of which all adult males of the village were members' (Lyngdoh, 2016, p. 6) respectively. Even post-independence, drawing from this organic framework, Shillong has maintained this unique administrative layout. The land ownership is under the control of the Syiem, who is the head of the community (Ri-Raid). Under one Rai there are many Dorbars. The clan land (Kur) cannot be made into private land (Ri-Kynti) without the permission of the Syiem. The reason as to why such a complex framework has been established is that tribal land cannot be sold to non-tribal people in the Sixth Scheduled Areasⁱ. Another reason as to why such a process has been made is that there might be a 'bureaucratic mess up' according to the town planner Raj Sokhlet. He suggests that if the ward commissioner and Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA)ⁱⁱ, chairman of the municipal body (in this case), takes authority then the Syiem loses his power. It is for this reason that there was no municipal election for 25 years for the post of ward commissioner. This was so as it would have created a rift between ward and traditional constituencies. An intervention came in the form of a judgment from the Guwahati High Court in 1993. It ordered for the municipal elections to be put in process. At the same time, it strengthened the position of the Dorbar. All the responsibilities of the Dorbar and the municipality have now been codified, having a legal local stand.

The acquisition of land for the construction of the New Shillong Township came about during the preparation of the Second Shillong Masterplan (1991-2011). It was observed around that time, that the holding capacity of the existing city had almost reached saturation level. The establishment of a new township became a necessity in order to make room for two lakh additional future citizens and prevent undesirable development in the already-congested city limits. The Masterplan envisaged setting up of the New Shillong Township near Mawdiangdiang, covering an area of 20.3 square km within the Greater Shillong Masterplan area, the government had stated. The lands allotted from 2003 onwards to various entities are located in areas like Mawdiangdiang, Diengiong, Umsawli Mawpat, Mawtari and Mawkasiang, all of which lie to the north-eastern side of the main city of Shillong. The new township is proposed to be developed over 2030 hectares of land. However, according to the Second Master Plan of Shillong, it was proposed that this project would acquire only 500 hectares of land, through direct Government intervention. In these 500 hectares, apart from

laying down the entire basic infrastructure, the administrative, institutional, general housing, community and commercial facilities were earmarked to be established.

The acquisition of land for development has given rise to intense contestation among different stake holders. The acquisition was done by bypassing the authority of the Syiem and by persuading villagers to sell off their land for educational and developmental agendas. Agnes Kharshiing, President of the Civil Society Women's Organisation (CSWO) and Shillong's leading civil rights activist, offers a very different take on the urban development process in the New Shillong Township. She states that 'the government became a land agent by buying off land from many dubious landowners and displacing indigenous farmers and residents, then parceling out the land to IAS officers, both tribals and non tribals.' Now in its 'smart' avatar, the Meghalaya government has opened a floodgate for tribal land alienation. The Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act (1971)ⁱⁱⁱ, the 'first ever law made by the state of Meghalaya' (Fernandes, Pala, Bharali, & Dutta, 2016, p. 54), which prevents the sale of Tribal land to non-Tribals, 'has no meaning in New Shillong Township' according to her.

In a series of letters, which she uncovered with the aid of Right to Information (RTI), Agnes unravels the extent of corruption which has burgeoned with the growth of the New Shillong Township. To begin with, land was acquired from the tribal villagers at Rs. 3 and allotted to the IAS's at Re 1. The original owners, John Kharkongor and Phron Kharkongor have claimed that the 28 acres of land at Mawier-Mawtari were owned by them. The two are also against the move of MUDA to handover the land to NEEPCO (North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited) recently. According to John and Phron, the land was registered under the office of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) since 1983. However, the RTI filed by them found that the same land was again registered under the same office in the year 1992 in the name of Unikey Kharkongor. Agnes states that, 'the original Gazette of the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act 1971 is no longer available and has been tampered with by the state officials. This has given them free rein to abuse the Sixth Schedule'.

The following table provides the details of the applicants of land at the New Shillong Township (TUR 2015):

Table: 1

Category	No. of Applicants
Government Organization	60
Private Companies / Organization (Non-Tribal)	23
Non-Tribal Individuals	38
Tribal Individuals	24
Total	145

(Source: RAIOT, September, 2015)

Agnes also revealed via the RTI files that governmental entities seeking land in NST are security agencies like Army, CRPF, Police and BSF. Here we see that The New Shillong Township has nothing to do with decongesting the city, but is in fact a gated haven for real estate developers and property speculators. This is further complicated by the fact that a large proportion of the applicants are non-Tribals, as shown in Table: 2, which categorises the applicants according to the Land Transfer Act, 1971:

Table: 2

Category	No. of Applicants (in percentage)
Government Entities	41.4
Non-Tribal according to Land Transfer Act	42.1
Tribal according to Land Transfer Act	16.5

(Source: RAIOT, September, 2015)

Here we see that 42 per cent of the applicants for the land are non-Tribals which is a direct violation of the Sixth Schedule clause and the Land Transfer Act, 1971.

Some of the displaced families, who mostly are farmers, narrate stories of their houses being demolished 3 times – in 2007, in 2009 and in 2013. The government cut off the electricity supply to the village in 2013. They never got the compensation for the lost land, and a case registered in the early 1990s by the village collective is still going on in the courts. When they questioned the urban authorities about the irregularity in the purchase of land at the New Shillong Township, they were told that it is only the office of the DC who is the concerned authority to verify to whom the land originally belonged to. This is so as the 28 acres of land has already been registered before it was sold to government. They added that they would also request the DC to put on hold the proposed handing over of this particular land to the different government departments until the matter is resolved. Additionally, MUDA was in the process of allotting lands in the New Shillong Township to the various departments for the project to take off at the earliest and the allotment of lands had been done by the Land Allotment Committee as per the Land Transfer Act of the state. While inquiring about the allegation of forging the land documents, it was revealed that the office of the Deputy Commissioner is the concerned authority to look into the matter.

Further, with regards to the allegations on the eviction drives conducted without prior notice, the authorities defended the move by saying, they have conducted an inquiry and found that MUDA does not have to inform these households as these are the same families which have been evicted from the place since 2006 after the government has won a case on the land. Most of them are living off rent from their ancestral property. ‘It is difficult to raise money for your family when you do not have a proper job. How do we feed them? Why does the state not understand this?’ they ask me. It is discussed that land and the relations that emanate from land, such as the relations between public authorities and citizens, are fundamentally political. Furthermore, it is revealed that their forefathers migrated over time, to this area from other parts of the Khasi hills. It is specifically mentioned that sacred rituals are still performed to connect their new homes with their original home at Lum-Shyllong. The message of these rituals is to underline the immense importance of nature in the Khasi cosmology and traditional belief system. ‘As a community, we need to reflect on how to preserve our traditional beliefs. This is what will eventually bring peace and prosperity back to us.’

In the case of the New Shillong Township, the state presents the case as a possible way out for congestion, which it says is a consequence of population rise, migration and the lack of space in the city. However, the plan of the state is not oriented towards meeting these required objectives. Rather, the plan of the state is to allot the land so acquired for a class of people who work for the state such as bureaucrats, government officials and the army. This is an open violation of the Sixth Schedule provisions that aims at protecting and safeguarding the interest and welfare of the tribal people. The people are not opposed to urban development but the manner in which it is being executed. In case of the New Shillong, there has been severe misuse of the law and power in favour of the state and private forces and players.

There is a deep divide between the state's manner of executing urban development and the tribal people's aspirations and their expectations from the state. The policies aimed at safeguarding the Sixth Schedule Areas need to be framed and enacted in a manner that the fundamental rights of the tribal community are protected while planning for urban development. There is a critical need to listen and incorporate the people's voices and aspirations into the development policy. It is in this sense I argue that development cannot be a state-led enterprise alone, but should also be an organic evolution of society.

Notes:

ⁱ The Sixth Schedule provides for administration of certain tribal areas as autonomous entities. The administration of an autonomous district is to be vested in a District Council and of an autonomous region, in a Regional Council. These Councils are endowed with legislative, judicial, executive and financial powers. They have the authority on land ownership, control over the forest and natural resources and no external body, be it government or private, can purchase, sale or exchange tribal land.

ⁱⁱ The Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA) was constituted under the Meghalaya Town and Country Planning Act (1973). Initially as per Section 8 of the Act, The Shillong Development Authority was constituted in March 1990, with its jurisdiction over Shillong Master Plan Area. Subsequently, in 1991, its jurisdiction was extended to cover the whole state and was renamed as The Meghalaya Urban Development Authority.

ⁱⁱⁱ This Act prohibits the transfer of land from a tribal to a non-tribal and from a non-tribal to another non-tribal. This Act does not apply to the areas in the European Wards, Jail Road and Police Bazar of Shillong Municipality and Mouza VI of the Garo Hills. Exception is granted to educational institutes and industries among others. Although, as per The Land Acquisition Act (1894), the government is empowered to acquire land for a public purpose, The Land Transfer Act (which is unique to Meghalaya) does protect tribal land from alienation to some extent.

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Aashish Khakha is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow at the School of Development Studies, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Naoroji Campus), Mumbai.

Email id: as_khakha89@yahoo.co.in

Research in Progress: Rural Out-Migration and its Impact on Caste, Family and Gender: A Study in a Nepali village in Assam

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Rural Out-Migration and its Impact on Caste, Family and Gender: A Study in a Nepali village in Assam

--- Pinku Muktiar

Abstract

Assam has witnessed a spurt of rural out-migration to the various metropolises in the recent decades. While in the past such rural out-migration was mainly confined within the state, the recent stream of rural mass exodus is largely to the outside of the state. Though it is seen that people from across communities have migrated out of the state, it is the immigrant communities who had pioneered the process and subsequently the indigenous communities also followed suit. This ongoing research paper mainly focuses on the various ramifications of such large scale out-migration on caste, family and gender relations in Nepali society.

Key words: Caste System, Family, Gender Violence, Nepali, Out-migration

Introduction

In the recent times, one witnesses a mad rush of out-migration of rural population of Assam to the major cities of mainland India. While the immigrant communities like Muslims from erstwhile east Bengal/Pakistan, and Nepalis pioneered this process in the 90s, later the other indigenous communities also followed suit. This paper seeks to examine the impact of out-migration on the traditional caste system, gender relations and family structures in a Nepali village of Assam.

Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines internal migration as population shifts which occur within nation states as labour migrates towards the growth poles in the economy (Scott & Marshall, 2009, p. 367). According to 38th and 43rd Rounds of the National Sample Survey Organisation, in India a migrant is a person whose place of enumeration is different from his/her usual place of residence. The usual place of residence is the place where the person stayed continuously for six months before moving to the place of enumeration. The place of enumeration is the place (village or town) where the person is being enumerated or surveyed.

The economic history of mankind shows that the material progress has been usually associated with the process of transfer of the economic agents from the traditional rural economy to the modern urban industrial sector (Reimeingam, 2016). People usually migrate from low productivity rural agricultural sector to a high productivity urban industrial sector. While the various studies (Cote, 1997) in Britain show that the tendency to migrate increases with the increase in educational qualification, in India, however, the trend is different from the Western-counterpart. In India, the majority of the migrants to the big metropolises are illiterate, semi-literate peasants, who have been absorbed in the informal sector (Breman, 2012). The Economic Survey 2016-2017 shows that the labour mobility in India is at all time high with female migration at twice the rate compared to the male migration in 2000s. It states that, 'there was an average outflow of around nine million migrant workers between the states during 2011-16' (Jha, 2017).

The magnitude of internal migration in India is much larger than the official statistics because it does not consider the full extent of migration, particularly short-term migration, seasonal migration or circular migration. All the major sectors of the economy are highly dependent on these migrant workers. These migrant workers are the source of cheap labour that stimulates the growth of the economy (Ghosh, 2012).

Recently, the Northeastern region of India, has witnessed a massive rural exodus towards different destinations such as Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Chennai and various south Indian states like Karnataka, Kerala, etc. (Reimeingam, 2008, 2011; McDuie-Ra, 2012; Talukdar, 2012). Interestingly, the majority of such rural out-migrants from the region are youth. The Census of India, 2001 reflects that half of the Northeastern migrants to Delhi belong to the age group of 15-29 years. The various studies on Northeastern migrants to Delhi reveal that the youth in the age group of 15-29 constitute above 90 percent of the total migrant population (Reimeingam, 2011; Ramesh, 2012). These Northeastern migrants often face racial prejudice and discrimination in the destination site (Haksar, 2016).

Field Area and Methodology

The Nepali speaking people popularly known as Nepalis or Gurkha constitute one of the important population segments in the region. The colonial regime

facilitated such massive Nepali migration from Nepal and to some extent from Darjeeling and Sikkim to work as herdsmen, porters, soldiers, marginal farmers, etc. (Sharma, 2012).

The present study is part of an ongoing study on the impact of inter-state rural outmigration among the Nepali community in Assam. Nepalis had migrated to Assam during the colonial period in the 19th century. The study is based on field work conducted in a Nepali village named Telia Gaon for a period of one year during 2017-18. The village is located about 35 kilometers west from the Tezpur town, the district headquarters of Sonitpur district, Assam. There are many communities such as Nepali, Bodo, Assamese and a tiny section of ex-tea garden labour communities (also called the Adivasis) inhabiting the area. However, the Nepali is the largest community followed by the Bodo tribal community. The main occupation of the villagers is agriculture and dairy farming. The village falls under the ambit of Thelamara revenue circle and Borgaon Gram Panchayat, respectively. The total area of Telia Gaon is about 2,886 *bighas* and it is located on the northern bank of the river Brahmaputra. (Source: Thelamara Revenue Circle). The study is qualitative in nature and various methods of data collection have been used such as observation, interview schedule, focus group discussion, etc.

Caste Groups in the Region

It is a well known fact that Nepali society is a caste hierarchical society. Caste system is very rigid in the Nepali society (Subba, 2007, p. 55). The Telia Gaon region is demographically a Nepali dominated area, and from the field study it was found that the village is, by and large, an upper caste dominated village though a small section of the villagers also come from the lower caste. The highest ranked caste group in the village is the Brahmin. However, within this group there are two sub-castes, viz. Upadhyay and Sharma. Traditionally the Upadhyay caste group used to engage in priestly works. They never used to engage in agricultural and other allied activities. On the other hand, the Sharma caste group generally do not perform priestly works. Their traditional occupation is dairy farming and agriculture. The Upadhyays consider themselves to be superior to the Sharmas. An octogenarian villager, Hikmat Adhikari said, 'Brahmins are socio-economically an advanced caste group in comparison to other Nepali caste groups. The literacy rate is higher among them. Traditionally Upadhyays are considered to be a superior sub-caste than the Sharmas. If a person

of Upadhyay sub-caste elopes with a girl of lower caste, then that person degrades from Upadhyay to Sharma.’

Telia Gaon is mainly an upper caste village and most of the people belong to the Chetry caste group. However, various lower caste groups also exist in the village, though small in number. The largest caste group in the village is Chetry caste group which is a Kshatriya caste group. The lowest caste group in the village consists of the untouchable caste groups such as the Damai (also known as Dorjee), Kami, Sarki, Bhujel, etc. Traditionally the people from Damai caste used to do tailoring works. Similarly, the Kamis were traditionally engaged in smithery. The traditional and primary occupation of the Sarki caste was leather work.

Many inter-caste restrictions are prevalent in the Nepali society. During the study, many villagers commented on the caste regime and its functioning in the village. An elderly villager mentioned that in the past, upper caste people never interacted socially with lower caste people. The members of the upper caste did not invite the lower castes as guests to their family rituals and marriage ceremonies. The involvement of the lower caste people in these ceremonies was only as labour. The Brahmins generally used to accept all kinds of food prepared by the Chetry caste except rice. Yuvraj Murula, a middle aged villager expressed that though the caste system is still present in the village, it is not as rigid as it was earlier. The elderly villagers still exercise age old caste practices, though it has been in decline among the young generation. Some of the lowest castes even today are engaged in their traditional liquor business. Murula further added, ‘My mother still has inhibitions about the untouchable caste groups and disdains the sight of them.’

Out-Migration and its Impact on the Caste System

Various studies have looked into the relationship between the phenomenon of out-migration and the caste system. Studies on the caste pattern of out-migrants in Bihar have revealed that the migration rate is higher among the Muslims and OBC households. On the other hand, the caste groups which are engaged with agriculture, be it cultivating own land or leasing-in of land, such as Yadavs and Kurmis, have lower propensity to migrate out of village. In terms of land ownership, migration is higher among the people who have the highest as well as least in terms of land entitlement (Karan, 2003; Rodgers, Datta, Rodgers, Mishra & Sharma, 2013).

The present study finds that the trend of large scale out-migration of villagers to the various metropolises has a negative effect on the traditional caste regime in the village. Narayan Basnet, a 50-year old migrant, states, 'Though Nepali society is based on a rigid caste hierarchy, now-a-days it is mainly confined to the marriage. Our society still prohibits inter-caste marriage. Otherwise, caste has minimal effect on our everyday life.' Basnet is one of the early bird migrants from the village, who migrated to Delhi in search of livelihood in 1991. He said that there is no caste hierarchy or discriminations among the migrants in their places of destination, where the migrants across castes live in a single room and there is no restriction on food and any other social interaction. Basnet, however, added that the elderly villagers still adhere to the traditional caste practices and make effort to ensure that the younger generations also follow them, although the latter seem to be somewhat reluctant in this regard. But changing economic landscape of the village has inevitably triggered a change in its caste scenario. Due to livelihood compulsions, the migrants across various caste groups are working and staying together in the site of destination and this has tempered the caste relations among them significantly. Raju Karki, a 30-year old migrant, who is working in a garment factory in a suburb in Bangalore said, 'I married a Bodo girl in 2015. Although initially my family was unhappy with my marriage, gradually they have accepted it. Probably twenty years back, I couldn't have imagined marrying a girl outside of my caste or community.' Another migrant Hom Bahadur Chetry, aged 51, said that caste is not a factor among the migrants. He revealed, 'During 1990s I was in a relationship with a Nepali lower caste girl from the village. But my family didn't accept it and later compelled me to marry a girl from my caste. But the things have changed drastically. Though our society still sticks to caste practices in matrimonial relationships, it is not as rigid as it was earlier.'

Though the study finds that the villagers from all the caste groups have migrated out of the village, the lower caste migrants usually get job in the security sector or in the manufacturing sector as unskilled workers. Sadananda Adhikari, a villager aged 45, explained that the migrant's caste identity does not seem to be a factor in their choice of jobs. However, many upper caste migrants find jobs in the hospitality sector which needs relatively better educational qualification, like some speaking ability in English, which is rare among the migrants from the lower caste. It was also found that the income in the hospitality sector is higher than the security or the manufacturing sector.

Changing Structure of Family System

The study finds that the large-scale out-migration of villagers has disintegrated their traditional family structure. Due to the out-migration, an evident impact has been observed on the traditional joint family system within the Nepali community, where there has been a gradual disintegration of the family system into a 'bi-locational' or 'multi-locational' household. A study on out-migrants in Bihar argues that,

The sex and age selectivity of labour migration in Bihar implies a massive out-migration of males, especially of young men from the rural areas, while the women, children and elderly are left behind in the village. This leads to a spatial distribution of the household. It results in a bi-locational or a multi-locational household, whereby the members of the household live in different locations; the household has one foot in the village and the other outside (mostly in the city).' (Datta, 2016, p. 218)

The present study finds many such joint families where multiple members have been working as migrant workers in the different metropolises, leaving behind their family in the village. There has been migration of members from a single family to diverse locations, abandoning their home which is temporary and marked by the yearly visit by them to their native village. The example of one such family will illustrate the changing structure of household. Padma Kharka, a 42-year old migrant, narrated his family's migration story. Besides his father Vir Bahadur Kharka, aged 70, he has four younger brothers, who are all married and presently working in Bangalore, Chennai and Arunachal Pradesh along with their families. However, their father Vir Bahadur stayed at the village with their extended family. On the other hand, Hari Khanal, a 35-year old migrant, has abandoned his village home along with his 28-year old wife Kaushila Khanal and their two kids. They visit their village home once a year. It may be mentioned that they are not permanent residents in their host location. The study finds many such families where all young male members have migrated out of the village and their elderly parents live alone in the village. Many of them battle with old-age health problems without anyone to look after.

Out-Migration and Women: Empowerment or Increased Vulnerability?

Datta and Mishra (2011) argue that out-migration of male villagers creates a gender imbalance where women outnumbered men in such villages, and thus it has its ramifications on women's work within and outside the household. Women have to conduct all the household activities from raising children to managing financial matters in the household. It is also seen that the presence of women has increased in the public sphere as a result of male out-migration.

Renuka Devi, aged 38, the wife of a migrant who has been working in Bangalore as a security guard said, 'I have been staying along with my two school going children for the last four years. I have two brothers-in-law who are also employed in Bangalore. I have to perform all household chores in the absence of the other male members. At present there is no financial insecurity and I have to take all the decisions for my family, be it the education of my children, health related issues, visiting relatives, etc. However, in the absence of male members, I often feel a sense of insecurity. But I have also learnt to live with it.' Lakhima Devi, aged 32, the wife of a migrant worker who works in Bangalore says, 'I am staying in the village along with my six year old daughter. My husband is an alcohol-addict and spends bulk of his income on it. Thus he seldom remits any money, which compels me to work as an agricultural daily wage-labourer.'

However, in many cases it was seen that the patriarchy has resurfaced as a result of out-migration. The role of women in household matters as well as their visibility in the public domain depends on the number of able-bodied male members, besides the husband, in their households. The presence of male members in a family puts restrictions on the movement of the women in the family. Several villagers said that, in the absence of their husbands, the other family members have imposed more restrictions on their movement.

One significant implication of such large scale migration from the village is the increasing number of violence against women. There have been a number of cases of rape, molestation and intimidation against women in the village in the last couple of years. Dil Bahadur Karki, the village headman of Teliya Gaon, said that noticeable changes have happened in the village in recent years, such as the increase in number of violence against the female members. The perpetrators hail from both within and outside the community. In one incident in 2016, a man from a different community was caught while trying to barge into the house of a lonely

woman and was lynched by the villagers. The incident was reported in the media. However, the villagers today avoid any discussion on the issue. Women, who do not have many male members in their families today, spend the night together in one house out of fear and apprehension. Moneshwar Bodo, a socially active villager said that there were several public meetings held in the village on this issue. In these public meetings, there was a consensus that there should be a voluntary village security committee which would work as a vigilant group in the village at night. Now due to this monitoring of the village at night, these kinds of incidences have reduced.

Besides the above, there has been a significant increase in the incidences of theft and robbery in the area in the recent years. The villagers allege that the immigrant settlers in the nearby riverine islets (*chapori*) are involved in these incidences.

Conclusion

The villagers opt for migration to the metropolises as a livelihood strategy to cope with the declining livelihood opportunities in the village. However, the large scale out-migration has resulted in various ramifications on their traditional caste, family system and gender relations. Though these migrants have contributed largely to the development of the host locations, the rural economy has to bear the cost of production and reproduction of labour (Datta & Mishra, 2011). The process of out-migration has reduced the intensity of the age old caste hierarchy and transformed the organisation of the traditional family system. On one hand, it increases women's vulnerabilities and on the other hand, empowers women by facilitating more movement in public domain as well as giving them a voice in the household decision-making process. It would be worth mentioning that the process of male rural out-migration has not culminated in the feminisation of work, as most of the women have engaged only in the unpaid household chores.

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Pinku Muktiar is an ICSSR Doctoral Fellow in the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University, Assam.

Email id: pinkumuktiar99@gmail.com

Research in Progress: The Silk Loom Community in Assam: Identity and Means of Livelihood amongst the Workers

Author(s): Atlanta Talukdar and Deepshikha Malakar

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The Silk Loom Community in Assam: Identity and Means of Livelihood amongst the Workers

--- Atlanta Talukdar and Deepshikha Malakar

Abstract

Weaving is an ancient art practice in the state of Assam and is one of the most important aspects of Assamese culture. Assam has the largest number of weavers in the country and weaving is the only source of livelihood for these people. Though Assam silk is renowned worldwide for its uniqueness, in the present market scenario, the demand has decreased due to various reasons. This paper tries to explore the various socio-economic issues and problems faced by the silkworm sector and the community attached to this sector in Assam.

Key words: Eri, Muga, Paat, Globalisation, Identity, Silk loom, Silkworms, Weavers

'Assamese women weave fairy tales in their clothes'

- Mahatma Gandhi

Introduction

The art of sericulture and silk weaving has a long history in the world. As far as evidence goes, silk culture seems to have originated in China. The Chinese historians trace back the use of the product of the silk worm to the period of the myths. From China as a centre, the sector is said to have radiated to other parts of the world including India via Tibet by about 140 B.C. through the famous Silk route/Silk Road. This was the name given to the numerous mountain passes and ways, known as 'Duars' which exist between Assam and Tibet through Bhutan. Across this route, a considerable amount of trade was carried on from early times. While the exports from Assam consisted of *lac*, *muga* silk, *endi* (eri) clothes among other articles, the Assamese used to receive woolen clothes, gold dust, rock salt, Chinese silk and Tibetan smoking pipes (Baruah, 1969; Bhuyan, 1985a). The other view is that mulberry and silk culture had originated in the lower slopes of the Himalayas and as such, they might have originated either in China or India or in both the countries at the same time (Baishya, 2003).

Weaving is an ancient art practice in Assam and is one of the most important aspects of Assamese culture. It has occupied an important place in the tradition

and civilisation in Assam since the ancient time. The womenfolk along with their domestic chore essentially run this sector. According to tradition, the skill to weave was the primary qualification of a young girl for her eligibility for marriage. Weaving is the only source of livelihood for many people in the state, and many families depend on the income from weaving. The completion of the full product is time consuming and costly as the raw materials used for the production is expensive and its cultivation is limited to Assam only. The weavers who go for rearing and spinning have to go through tremendous physical labour to meet the demands of markets as the products are handmade. Though, weaving is an essentially female craft, in villages such as Sualkuchi, both men and women practice weaving.

Silk loom is the most important cottage sector of Assam and Assam is well known worldwide for one of a kind Silk loom works with *Paat*, *Muga* and *Eri* silk. Varadarajan (1988) in her article, *Silk in the North Eastern and Eastern India: The indigenous tradition* defines the different categories of silk worms and determines their regional diffusion in India within some chronological framework. Under the Ahom patronage, the silk clothes received a great deal of encouragement.

Sualkuchi, also known as the Silk village of Assam, is located in the northern banks of Brahmaputra. The white *Paat*, the golden *Muga*, and the warm *Eri* are grown and cultivated here. The date of introduction of silk manufacture in Assam or the tradition of silk weaving in Sualkuchi cannot definitely be ascertained. However, historical records point to the fact that the *Katonis* or the rearers of the *Pat* silk entered Assam in the 12 century A.D. It appears then that this craft flourished under the Pala kings of Kamrupa kingdom (Baruah, 1914).

In the mid 17th century, the village took the shape as a weaving village when Ahom occupied Sualkuchi. With the coming of the Ahoms, we get a clearer picture of the importance of silk manufacturing among the Assamese rural folk and the role of women in it. Under the Ahom rule, manufacturing of silk cloth was extended to all sections including those of the upper castes in the valley. Queen Sarveswari, the wife of Siva Singha (1714-44) is said to have greatly encouraged weaving by the ladies, and also imported designs and patterns from other parts of India (Bhuyan, 1985b). The Ahom Kings established a Department of Weaving and maintained skilled weavers to supply the royal wardrobe with clothes. The weavers received rent-free lands and other favours in return for their services (Baruah, 1969). Elaborate arrangements were made for keeping sufficient quantity of clothes of different varieties in the royal store for presentation to foreign courts and dignitaries (Gait, 1933).

The encouragement given to spinning and weaving by the Ahom kings resulted in the concentration of silk production centers. In Medieval biographies of Vaishnavite preachers, one comes across certain areas or villages known for producing silk. Burha Ata, one of the foremost disciples of the neo-vasihnava saint Madhavdeva hailed from Tantikuchi where silk clothes were produced. Ananta Kandali, one of the contemporaries of Sankardeva, in his autobiographical reference to his ancestry, gives an interesting description of the locality in which silk was produced in abundance. He refers to Hajo which probably included Sualkuchi as well (Phukan, 1994).

Medieval records including the *Guru Charit Katha*, a hagiography of the neo-vasihnava saints, consists of mentions about women's engagement with spinning and weaving. The family loom was so essential that if any family somehow did not have its own loom it used to borrow one from others on the share-clothing basis or by selling or mortgaging gold or valuable ornaments. It is recorded that in times of need some families could supply as many clothes as the situation demanded. The domestic cloth requirement was entirely met by women. Almost every woman referred to in the work is mentioned in connection with weaving and spinning, indicating clearly that it was they who had the responsibility of supplying the household with necessary clothing (Gogoi, 2003).

Despite this, contemporary sources hardly contain any record of women taking part in the socio-economic production, despite the existence of volumes of records being kept and preserved by the Ahom state (the *Buranjis*), and biographical and genealogical records of medieval Assam. Once the skill became identified with women, it simply became part of her daily routine and ceased to be even valued economically or acknowledged as labour, even though it was the women's skill that helped to sustain the sector throughout the Ahom period. Female weavers were awarded only a peripheral status. It was this structure based on the exploitation of women's labour which laid the foundation for future hierarchical divisions in the sector. The British colonial regime which extended to Assam in the early 19th century had given much emphasis on the silk sector.

The traditional Silk loom fabrics of Assam unfold the creative genius of the local weavers. Silk culture is a traditional cottage sector rooted in the life and culture of Assam. Endi and Muga silks are considered to be of indigenous origin and found only in Assam and the foothills of Meghalaya. Most of the cocoons are purchased ultimately by the traders of Sualkuchi, where commercial reeling and weaving are done almost as a monopoly (Chakravorty, Dutta & Ghose, 2010).

However, in the recent times, the demand of silk has declined due to various reasons. The traditional loom sector is facing a number of problems due to scarcity and increased rate of raw materials and mechanised techniques which has adversely affected the livelihood of the weavers. Roy (1989, 2002) has stated that the silk loom weaving occupies a key place in debates about Indian industrialisation. The latter is identified with the rise of mechanised factories where artisans have a marginal role. Decline and transformation in the artisanship was a worldwide phenomenon in the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Harnetty (1991) stated that in the 20th century, the fate of the Indian silk loom weaver has been at the centre of the controversy over the concept of the 'de-industrialisation' in India. Two general points can be made about the relationship between the technological change and the experience of the artisans. First, technological change in silk looms cannot be seen as a simple response to competition from power-looms based in the mills since the new tools and processes came nowhere near to bridging the productivity gap between these alternatives. Secondly, noteworthy as these changes were, mills and power looms remained limited in scale and confined to certain places, products and groups of weavers. Technological change enhanced disparity within traditional mills and silk loom while raising its average productive capacity. Technological change refers to gradual changes embodied in the tools and processes used to compliment the traditional craftsmanship component. Silk looms survived because the market for clothes expanded in 19th century in the country.

This paper, besides examining the various socio-economic problems before the silk industry in Assam, also tries to understand its present status in the global market. It also delves into the challenges faced by the community engaged with silk industry. For the purpose of this study, research was conducted in Sualkuchi and a nearby village Bangshar under greater Sualkuchi block. The techniques of data collection included observation and interview schedule. Various people were interviewed including weavers and their family, owner of the looms, market owners.

The Silkworm Community in Assam: it's Identity in the Global Market and Livelihood amongst the Workers

Near about eighty per cent of the community of Bangshar and Sualkuchi is engaged in weaving and the rest are engaged in business cum weaving. There are also women entrepreneurs in the area who are actively engaged in their business. Most of the weavers who are engaged in business do not get much time to be directly involved in the production of silk. They are mostly into collecting raw materials or supervising workers and work for 10-11 hours a day. The main problem they face is the lack of capital due to which they cannot buy enough raw

materials needed to meet the demand for a required number of orders, as the raw materials are costly.

Working in the traditional loom, a Sualkuchi weaver can expect a partly income of 4000-7000 rupees a month approximately, which is not at all sufficient for their living expenses. A weaver gets 400 rupees for per piece of *chador*ⁱ, 150 rupees for per piece *mekhela*ⁱⁱ and 700 rupees for per piece silk saree they make. It takes around full three to five days to make a chador, one to five days to make a mekhela and one week to make a silk saree. Weavers are given monetary advance and are normally booked for a year. The wages of the weavers have increased at a slow rate over the 10 years. Not covered by any organised trade union, they do not have any platform to raise their problems and issues against the labour exploitation they experience. Majority of the weavers mentioned that besides them, there are two to three other earning members who are engaged in livelihood other than weaving; whereas some weavers also mentioned that he/she is the sole bread earner of the family and is engaged only in silk production. Other support stuff gets around 1500-2000 rupees monthly. Women and men, however, get the same wage for their work.

In recent years, due to economic fluctuation in the country's economy, there has been a negative impact on the weaving community and their source of income. The prices of the raw materials have increased due to which the price of the final product has also increased. Further, besides being a high maintenance product, manufacturing of silk product is time consuming. Thus, their buyers in the market have decreased as they opt for cheaper, machine made and easy to maintain silk products. Because of this, the whole weavers' community has undergone a phase of economic hardship. It is evident that their economic condition is not good. They borrow money or take loans to meet family expenses from various sources such as private society, gramin bank, NGOs, etc. The weavers have their own cooperative society called *Sipini Santha* (weavers' society) from where they can borrow money with a fixed rate of interest. It was found that the economic conditions were good when the weavers joined the profession and they are still hoping for improved conditions. While some of the weavers chose this profession as they did not have any other skills, others continued since they do not and did not have any other options. Moreover, it was found that the weavers were emotionally attached to their profession.

It is clear that the silk sector of Sualkuchi is facing a number of serious problems which needs immediate attention. Every weaver, owner and the rest of the workers have their own story and problem to share. Some of the problems and issues of the weavers that can be identified are:

- The biggest issue faced by the workers is the low wage. They need to take up loans to meet up the daily expenses of their family and while taking loans. Sometimes they cannot repay in time due to which their debts mount. Even though the government has increased the wages of the workers, the revised amount that they get is Rs.137 per day which is way too low to sustain their lives.
- Operating a silk loom is very hard and exhaustive task. It needs good physical strength for which they need to consume nutritious food. But due to their low wage, majority of the workers cannot afford nutritious food. Most of them suffer from weakness, body pain, and headaches.
- Workers are generally dissatisfied with the unhealthy work environment. In festive seasons they have to work for twelve hours or more daily to meet the demands.
- Another issue is the relationship between worker and owner. Some of the workers have complained about not being paid fare wages. The entrepreneurs and the shop owners sell the products to the customer at a much higher price than what they pay to the weavers.
- The work opportunities for the workers are not the same throughout the year which affects their economic condition. There is no guarantee that they will get work for the whole year.
- There is no trade union due to which the weavers do not get a platform to put forward their problems and raise their voices against the injustice done to them in the work place.
- There is very limited government support to the silk production, due to which even the quality of the Paat, Muga and silk are not of global standard. Presently, it can be seen that only a few renowned designers have taken up the silk sector to the global market with a lot of efforts.
- Women workers have their own gender specific problems. The lack of proper living place for silk producers has been identified as the problem for the community. From the study, it can be seen that if the workers are placed in a single area, it would be easier for the workers to deliver the services.

- Nowadays, people want less expensive dress with better design. Traditional loom needs more labour power and is time consuming due to which the final product is costly and it requires high maintenance. Because of this, people opt for machine made cheaper products which can be used in any condition, due to which the value of the traditional loom product has lost its value.
- Nowadays, cheaper materials in the name of silk are being imported from other cities to produce the same kind of designs and these have taken over the market place. Until one can identify the differences between the original and the fake material, people are often being cheated by businessmen and shop owners who earn much money by it. Due to this many people have lost faith in the traditional loom believing that all the products are made of duplicate materials.
- Another important factor that affected the traditional Silk loom sector is the changing climate of Assam over the years. Silkworm is highly sensitive to climatic conditions since they are grown outdoors. Unpredictable rainfall patterns, a rise in temperature and persistent floods have endangered Muga cocoon production across the state.
- Demonetisation had a major effect on the setback of traditional Silk loom sector in the past one year. Most of the businesses were run with liquid cash flowing from hand to hand. But due to a shortage of money, the works of the weavers were put to a halt, payments were due, works remain pending, workers faced grave economic crisis and struggled to sustain.

Conclusion

There has been a tremendous change in the socio-economic scenario of the silk loom sector as a whole. The sector that had once attained global recognition and accreditation because of its uniqueness, beauty, artistic work has now lost its identity, charm and has failed to meet the requirement in the global market due to various factors.

Efforts from the state as well as the central government along with the owners of the silk loom industries are necessary to save this heritage sector. The increase in wage is considered to be the most important matter as low wage has been identified as the major problem of the weavers to maintain their livelihood. The government can subsidise the sector by providing credit, building necessary social, economic and financial infrastructure, arranging marketing campaigns worldwide. There should be the provision for loans with low interest rate for the

workers. Promotion of marketing of indigenous Assam silk products in the local as well as in the global market is necessary to give the sector a boost.

Protection of the weavers and the sector should be identified as one of the major agenda. They must get the benefit of various acts of the government for protecting the interest of workers.

Sualkuchi has to depend for raw materials from outstation markets which are costly. Therefore, the government should monitor the price by putting a standard level for all the goods and materials so that it will be accessible to the owners and weavers at an affordable budget. There is also an urgent need to put a ban on the selling of cheap materials imported from other places in the name of original silk products, because these low quality machine-made materials have brought defamation to the traditional silk loom sector. This has led to loss of work for many weavers.

It is also very important to improve the relationship between the owners and the workers in this sector. Proper health and education facilities should be there for the workers and their children. Establishing cooperative societies for the workers, providing salary on time, training, funding, supply of raw materials, creating more employment opportunities and ensuring regular work in the sector, ensuring better work environment are viewed as important factors for the overall development of the sector and livelihood of the workers.

Notes:

ⁱ It is the ethnic costume of Assamese women and is draped like a saree waist upward by the women of Assam.

ⁱⁱ It is the bottom part worn downwards from the waist by the Assamese women along with the chador.

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Atlanta Talukdar and Deepshikha Malakar are Ph.D. Research Scholars at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Guwahati campus).

Email id: atlantatalukdar95@gmail.com
