

DIALOGUE
QUARTERLY

Volume-20 No. 4 April-June, 2019

Subscription Rates :

For Individuals (in India)

Single issue	Rs. 30.00
Annual	Rs. 100.00
For 3 years	Rs. 250.00

For Institutions:

Single Issue	Rs. 60.00 in India, Abroad US \$ 15
Annual	Rs. 200.00 in India, Abroad US \$ 50
For 3 years	Rs. 500.00 in India, Abroad US \$ 125

All cheques and Bank Drafts (Account Payee) are to be made in the name of "ASTHA BHARATI", Delhi.

Advertisement Rates :

Outside back-cover	Rs. 25, 000.00 Per issue
Inside Covers	Rs. 20, 000.00 ,,
Inner page coloured	Rs. 15, 000.00 ,,
Inner full page	Rs. 10, 000.00 ,,

DIALOGUE
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ASTHA BHARATI
DELHI

The views expressed by the contributors do not necessarily represent the view-point of the journal.

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Printed and Published by

Dr. Lata Singh, IAS (Retd.)

Secretary, Astha Bharati

Registered Office:

27/201 East End Apartments,
Mayur Vihar, Phase-I Extension,
Delhi-110096.

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Mayur Vihar, Phase-I Extension,
Delhi-110096.

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web-site : www.asthabharati.org

Printed at : Vikas Computer & Printers, Naveen Shahdara, Delhi-32

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Editorial Perspective

First of all we must apologise to our readers for an inordinate delay in bringing out the last two issues of *Dialogue*. This happened for the first time in twenty years of our existence. It is due to reasons beyond our control and an infructuous effort to restructure the production process. We are trying to catch up by March 2020. Our sincere regrets to our readers. editorials, however, will deal with current issues.

Editor

II. The Maharashtra Imbrolio: Lessons for Both NDA and Opposition

The results of Maharashtra Assembly elections (October 2019) on October 24, despite clear majority for NDA (BJP-Shiv Sena combine) ran into difficulties due to several reasons, mainly due to ambitions and fears of some and growing amorality of politics in the country. The developments sent several messages. The most important one was that now voter preference in an election has been hijacked by the spoil system of the political parties with no holds barred. These by now are becoming a pattern from Goa, Manipur, Karnataka and now Maharashtra, a premier State, which no one thought would sink to such low depths. No political party emerged with an iota of dignity and honour intact.

The ruling BJP-Shiv Sena (NDA) combine was supposed to win more than 211 to 233 of the 288 Assembly seats. In the event they just managed to cross the 145 mark (BJP-105, Shiv Sena 56 and a few other allies). On the contrary, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) and Congress coalition did unexpectedly well bagging 54 and 44 seats respectively. It happened mainly because of the efforts of Sharad Pawar (NCP) who was slighted by the BJP on the eve of elections. In normal times, the NDA with its clear majority should have easily formed the government without fuss, but for Shiv Sena's ambition and fears of progressively being marginalized by the BJP in the State. It claimed an agreement for power-sharing and wanted CM's post for the next five years. The BJP denied any such agreement and insisted that CM will be from the BJP.

The thin majority, provided a chance to the Shiv Sena to bargain with NCP and Congress to lead a coalition, rather than play a permanent

second fiddle to the BJP. The BJP had faced a similar situation in 2014, and it was able to resist Shiv Sena's tantrums due to outside support extended by the NCP, till Shiv Sena joined the government. The uneasy BJP-Shiv Sena alliance lasted the whole of 5 years including the Lok Sabha elections of 2019, with Shiv Sena all the time sniping to assert its separate identity.

However, by 2019 the BJP was a different party, particularly after its decisive victory in 2019 Parliamentary elections. It used all means to grab power in Goa, Manipur and Karnataka where the mandate was not clear. Inducements, defections and direct and indirect threat, from CBI, ED and Income Tax were being alleged and believed by people. Despite losing 3 major States in Oct 2018 elections (MP, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh), the BJP strategy of decimating the opposition by all means had become a habit inviting allegations of arrogance and intolerance, though fiercely contested by the BJP and its supporters, in media and outside. Infact, unnoticed the BJP had started functioning like any other political party.

It was in this background that the October 2019 Maharashtra elections were held. These were preceded by alleged defections engineered by the BJP from NCP and Congress, mainly from the former. The most significant was that of Bhosle, a sitting NCP MP from Satara, a scion of Shivaji family, who joined BJP to contest a by-election on a BJP ticket. Even Ajit Pawar (NCP-former Dy. CM) had ACB investigating old irrigation scam cases and ED even registered FIR against Ajit Pawar and the NCP chief Sharad Pawar for money laundering in Maharashtra State Cooperative Bank scam. In all this, BJP forgot that it was Sharad Pawar who had helped BJP to form government in 2014, as also the status and support he enjoyed in the State politics. Pawar felt slighted. He worked hard and the NCP-Congress combine did unexpectedly well in elections. Even Bhosle was trounced in Satara Parliamentary bye-election by an NCP candidate. Pawar extensively relied on Maratha reservations about BJP, his own charisma and alleged BJP arrogance. In the given situation, normally the BJP would have relied on NCP support to deflate its electoral ally Shiv Sena. But in its new found confidence alienated Pawar and NCP, and the angry Maratha leader cobbled a Shiv Sena, NCP-Congress alliance to oust BJP from power in Maharashtra.

The BJP did not know how to handle the deliberate slight and betrayal of Shiv Sena. It staged an overnight coup using fears of Ajit Pawar (NCP) by swearing in Devendra Fadnavis (BJP) as CM and Pawar as Dy. CM. It of course collapsed, under the Supreme Court

order for an early floor test. The BJP's anger over Shiv Sena's betrayal was justified. But it had no business to involve the high offices of the Governor, the Prime Minister and the President in an action which was neither legally, nor morally correct and defensible. The BJP lost the high moral ground in the State for no gain.

Maharashtra elections and developments have several lessons. The real winner in Maharashtra was Sharad Pawar who played the key role in formation of the new Maha Vikas Aghadi alliance government. Another gainer was the Congress who netted 44 seats piggy-back-riding the NCP. The BJP will take sometime to recover and learn not to nettle and ride rough-shod over local sentiments. Since 2018 second half the electorate is sending clear message that it is discerning and can and will vote differently for the Central and State governments. The result is that the footprints of BJP across the states has started shrinking. It will also make the BJP pause and think about its Hindu Rashtra agenda. If it loses few more States, its own; NDA allies in the Centre would start taking different stands, starting with the NRC and CAB. In politics, things tend to change fast if you repeat mistakes. Voters are sending subtle messages. So far the BJP had exploited non-bread and butter issues like patriotism, surgical strikes, Art 370, Ram Mandir, Triple Talaq et al. to consolidate power and pursue with vigour its ideological agenda. The economic slowdown and the changing political contours at the State level may necessitate a change in the narrative on part of BJP and to be more receptive to criticism. So far it has been in denial both on economic and intolerance fronts. The fate of Rahul Bajaj, being trolled, even by ministers for alleging an environment of fear in business community (November 30, 2019) would indicate that BJP is not yet ready to tolerate differing voices or criticism. Industry and business may go into a shell again, but nothing can prevent a voter from speaking his or her mind. And it has started speaking, rewarding good governance at the Centre and expressing different choices at the State level. Both the ruling BJP and the opposition have an option to heed or ignore the voter at their own peril. Yet, it is too early to speculate if Maharashtra will have impact on the opposition unity in other States as well.

JNU Fee Hike Protest: Serious Issues Involved

A move to significantly hike the hostel and tuition fees in the JNU, New Delhi; has led to wide-spread protests by the students, and even the faculty. Several efforts by the government and the university to

dilute the hike and appoint committees has had no visible effect. While the government/university may be justified in its effort to correct the imbalance in a highly subsidized hostel and university fees and protesters alleging anti-poor, anti-inclusive/Dalit, pro-savarna bias in the fee hike action, there are deeper issues involved. It is not only about money or alleged biases. Unfortunately, JNU has been at the Centre of controversies ever since the 2016 incident of Afzal Guru (Tukde-Tukde incident) in the campus and administrations efforts to discipline the students and the faculty.

All that has been happening for the last few years is rooted in the perception that the JNU is a bastion of left and radicalism; intolerant of differing views and liberal academia. This was true in the past, but in the last two decades a lot has changed both in faculty, and students. Besides, JNU's main USP is neither the erstwhile left monopoly nor the "Tukde-Tukde Gang". Student radicalism has been part of its culture but it never had deeper impact and at best was coffee house brand of revolutionaries, who faded away faster than its, aroma. After all, how many of us remember the names of JNUSU Presidents, and what these ersatz "revolutionaries" are doing today. Kanhaiya Kumar gained prominence mainly due to mishandling of the case and a bid to politically exploit the "Tukde Tukde" episode. These are best handled by ignoring them and let the university tackle it.

Infact, the JNU stands for more than all this. It is about inclusiveness, social justice, affordable excellence in education; and above all provide access to good education to those deprived on account of poverty, gender and other related social disabilities. Thousands have benefitted from it. All this has led to free debate and thought processes. It is these factors which have made JNU what it is. Let us celebrate and support its plurality and results and not nit-pick our political biases. If it has produced CPM, Secretaries, Karat and Sitaram Yechury, it has also produced Nirmala Sitharaman, (Finance Minister), S. Jaishankar (Foreign Minister), Asif Ibrahim (Director IB) etc. Its social justice credo needs to be supported and few hundred crores in subsidy mean nothing to ensure our constitutional values. A university should be allowed to tackle its own problems through debate and in democratic manner. Above all there is no need to panic. JNU has survived all these years despite these ephemeral revolutionaries and will do so in future also, only if we support its core values and let it be. Affordable higher education ought to be our objective, if not free education.

—J.N. Roy

Deconstructing Matriliney and Gender in India's North East

Patricia Mukhim*

A book serves many different purposes. It allows the author to travel into a world of her imagination and share those pleasant thoughts with her readers. Some write from a place of great hurt and halve their sorrows by sharing them with others. Still others write to highlight certain anomalies in the system. P. Sainaths' book, *Everybody Loves a Good Drought* is an instructive read for those who want to understand the plight of farmers in this country. Many an inquisitive journalist visits Meghalaya for one day to try and understand how the Khasi matrilineal society operates. The assumption is that women rule the roost here and that matriliney naturally empowers them socially, economically and politically. Nothing is further from the truth.

In a matrilineal society, the children take the mother's clan name. In other words lineage is from the mother's clan line. Also the youngest daughter or the *Khatduh* is the custodian of ancestral property. The man she marries lives with her and her family. The *Khatduh* looks after her parents until they pass away. Her unmarried brothers and sisters continue to live in the parental home along with the *Khatduh* and her family. It's a joint family of sorts. But not all is hunky dory about this society. Some statistics below will indicate why.

There is a very high rate of teenage pregnancies in matrilineal Meghalaya at 53 per cent. However, I was surprised that Mizoram, another Northeastern State with a very high literacy rate has a higher incidence of teenage pregnancy at 61 per cent and Goa at 64 per cent (NFHS-4). In Meghalaya the infant mortality rate which is the number of deaths per 1000 live births is 39 per cent. This means, out of every 1000 kids born, 39 die in the first year of birth or at birth itself.

*The writer is Editor, The Shillong Times.

According to nutritionists this is due to mainly because of the poor health of the mother (undernutrition and anemia) and the lack of access to institutional delivery. Only 51 per cent of women in Meghalaya give birth in some health facility. In a newspaper we see very frequent reports of women giving birth in ambulances while on their way to the hospital. It is no surprise that the maternal mortality rate in Meghalaya is 241/100,000 which means, out of one lakh women who give birth, 241 die because of many reasons but the primary one being poor maternal health. The NFHS-4 survey says 52 per cent of women in Meghalaya are anemic. This despite the fact that people here are supposed to consume a lot of proteins by way of meat, lentils etc! But the situation today is such that poverty is growing and women are unable to afford nutritious food. Again in this matrilineal society, 2/5 of children under the age of five or 44 per cent are stunted while children between 6 months and 5 years are anemic.

Another irony about the Khasi Matrilineal society is that physical and sexual violence are on the rise. There are 400 cases of rape against minors and sexual molestation pending before the POCSO court. Another issue that misses those who visit this State, to unravel matriliney is the high rate of divorce or abandonment which leaves women and their children completely helpless. Since this is a matrilineal society, the children remain with the mother and are brought up by her single-handedly. Many ask why women don't go to court and seek legal help to get maintenance. There are NGOs that help such women but when the man is working in the informal sector, it is not easy to get him to comply with court orders. Naturally, we have a growing number of female-headed households even as mothers strive to make ends meet and to keep the home fires burning. A local university has done some research on this issue but this is work in progress. Children from such homes are unable to attend school and are soon absorbed into the child labour force. This sounds incredible where women are supposedly, 'revered' as some observer said after reading the book. Well this is the reality of Meghalaya's matrilineal society.

Coming to politics, Meghalaya has never sent more than four women at any given time to the legislative assembly. Why? Many have asked this question. The reason is because tradition expects women to conform to certain social norms. A woman who dabbles in politics is called "a hen that crows," and when a hen crows then doomsday is at hand. So

that's how women are kept under a leash and not allowed to be part of the political space. The Khasi traditional institutions as also those of the other tribes of the North East are all male-centric. With time, these institutions are becoming platforms for those aspiring for electoral politics. Since women are not allowed to take part in elections to traditional institutions and, therefore, cannot hold any decision making positions, they find it harder to contest elections to the State Assembly or to Parliament. Till date the women who have contested elections all come from political families. The former Chief Minister of Meghalaya Dr. Mukul Sangma is a case in point. His wife and daughter are both elected MLAs in the State Assembly. Others come from similar lineage too. At present there are only four women in the 60 member assembly.

However, the situation in the other North Eastern States is even starker. Nagaland and Mizoram have no women MLAs and have never had them since the States were created. Manipur has one woman MLA in a house of 60. This time Arunachal Pradesh elected 3 women MLAs; Tripura too has 3 women MLAs out of 60 and Assam has 8 out of 126 members. So, whether we look at Meghalaya or at all the seven States, political empowerment of women in the region is a huge challenge. What exacerbates the situation is that the States of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya were exempted from the purview of the Panchayati Raj System which allows 33 per cent reservation of seats for women in the local bodies. The exemption is because it was assumed that the three States had robust traditional governance bodies. Two years ago in Nagaland women claimed the right to 33 per cent reservation in the elections to the urban local bodies. This led to violence that claimed a life and women were just not allowed to contest. The rationale that was peddled is that Nagaland is exempted from national laws by virtue of Article 371 (A) which says, 'Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, (a) no Act of Parliament in respect of (i) religious or social practices of the Nagas, (ii) Naga customary law and procedure, (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, will apply in Nagaland. This therefore puts the lid on any form of political empowerment of women whether in Nagaland or any of the tribal States of the North East. Without political empowerment there can be no economic or social empowerment.

The question that women across all the seven North Eastern States should be asking is whether it is worthwhile conserving tradition and

customary practices that keep women at the fringe of politics? Customary laws have become the leviathan for keeping women out of crucial decision-making bodies and made it difficult for them to enter electoral politics unless they come from a political lineage.

True, we don't have dowry here and the evils of female feticide or bride burning but these are small consolations for what women actually lose out by being kept out of political decision making.

Water Resource: An Untapped Source of Growth for the Assam Economy

M.P. Bezbaruah*

Assam is sometimes described as rich land inhabited by poor people. The State used to be indeed very rich in forest resources, minerals and fertile soil. Most of these resources were extracted and exploited during colonial period to establish plantation, mining and some manufacturing industries. After seven decades of independence from colonial rule, these old extractive industries are either facing closure or at best uncertain future. But the resource which the State possesses in plenty and which is yet to be exploited significantly is its fresh water stock and flow. The mighty Brahmaputra with its numerous tributaries that flow right through the middle of the State is one of the major perennial river systems not just of India but of the world. The State also regularly receive plenty of pre-monsoon and monsoon precipitation which partly flows down the rivers, partly get collected in numerous water-bodies and partly get permeated to replenish the sub-surface aquifers. The hill areas and the southern Barak Valley are somewhat deficient in sub-surface water stock due to geological conditions. But even these parts are well endowed with surface water.

However, the abundance of water is often seen as a bane, especially because of annual floods, waterloggings in cities and erosion of river

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banks, than as a boon. The present write-up is aimed at discussing how this unpriced yet priceless resource of the State can be turned into a fountain of fortune for the economy of Assam.

The abundant water resource of the State can be put to domestic use, agricultural irrigation and industrial use. Further, the water bodies and the river system can be a source of recreation and hence, an attraction for tourists. There is also possibility of reviving the waterways used extensively for transportation of cargo and people in the colonial period. Each of these uses, however, possesses specific challenges and opportunities.

As in the case of any major river, several urban centres are located also on the banks of the Brahmaputra. Guwahati, the largest city and the gateway to the entire Northeast India is situated on the southern bank of Brahmaputra. The city has been expanding rapidly over the last four decades. Among the basic facilities, water for domestic use is often very scarce in many parts of Guwahati, despite millions of cusecs of pristine water flowing down the river largely untapped and unused. Dependence of households and household societies of ground water and private supplies by tankers is not only expensive in terms of cost and prices but has had serious environmental consequences in terms of progressive lowering of the ground water table. This is a pure case of government failure. The State government and the city municipal corporation have not been able to commission large enough water supply projects which could supply water from the river to the citizens, as well as commercial establishments at a much more economical rate. The stories about the river bank towns like Tezpur, Dibrugarh and Dhubri can be similar without being as severe as in case of Guwahati.

Despite availability of abundance of surface and easily accessible ground water resource, Assam has one of the lowest irrigation ratio in the country. The reason for this, however, is not exactly simple government failure. For the main crop of the State, namely winter rice, monsoon rain is usually adequate for the farmers. Indeed excessive water in the form of floods and waterloggs are often a problem for the farmers. However, increase in farm production to enhance farmers' income, it is necessary to grow crops in commercial way in the dry season. For this purpose, however, irrigation is a must. For Assam, canal irrigation has not been found to be very conducive as canals can aggravate the problems of floods and waterlogging in the high rainfall

seasons. Irrigation development therefore, has primarily taken the form of ground water drawing tube well irrigation. Though this has not seriously lowered, the water table in rural Assam as in some other parts in the country, the ground water in several locations are contaminated by iron, fluoride and even arsenic. Time has now come to shift to greater use of surface water which will require greater community involvement, even involvement of the government.

As of now, Assam is not a highly industrial State, but once industries start emerging, water should be available for industrial use. But the challenge here is to use water in an environmentally sustainable way. In this context, it is worth mentioning that unsafe mining in Meghalaya and in some parts of Assam has contaminated streams and rivers leading to serious environmental consequences. For environmentally sustainable water resources, it will be necessary not only to design suitable institutions but to see that the rules and norms are strictly enforced. While effective governance will be required, the community involvement will also be equally important.

Probably the two most significant economic use of the water resources of Assam can take place in the areas of water transportation and recreational tourism. The Brahmaputra and its tributaries used to be a prime channel of transportation and communication in the economy of Assam. In the colonial period the waterways extended up to the Bay of Bengal through Kolkata. The cargo of tea and other industrial products used to be transported using the waterways. After partition of India, the traffic on the waterways got reduced and after 1965 Indo-Pak war traffic through waterways to Kolkata port virtually stopped. Water transport now primarily serve passengers crossing the rivers especially in areas where bridges are not available. Moreover, after the great earthquake of 1950, the river bed became shallow at places hindering water transport. For reviving water transport along the river it will be necessary to manage a navigable channel using dredging wherever required. Deepening of a channel through the middle of the river may in fact have other benefits. Resulting reduction of water pressure on the banks may work to mitigate river bank erosion. Development of the waterway will also facilitate delivery of public services such as education, health care and governance in the riverine habitants of *Chars* and *Chapar is* which are otherwise difficult to access.

Government of India has already declared the entire length of the Brahmaputra River in Assam, from Sadia in the northeast end of the

Assam Valley to Dhubri in the western end of the same, as the National Waterway No. 2. Indeed this waterway need to be extended across Bangladesh to provide Northeast India an access to the sea.

The recreational tourism potential of the Brahmaputra river system and other water bodies in different parts of Assam are obvious and widely discussed. As of now this potential is utilized only to a meagre extent. Necessary investment in infrastructure and supporting business facilitation can turn these water resources into highly productive tourism capital. Indeed the other touristic capitals of the region should be combined with this form to convert Northeast India to an important tourist destination throughout the year.

Midlife Crisis in BJP-led Manipur Government

Pradip Phanjoubam*

The new BJP-led coalition government is midway through the term of the 11th Manipur Legislative Assembly. Unfortunately for them, they are also going through a severe mid-life crisis threatening to overturn the ministry, or even end their innings altogether, leaving the State administration to the emergency measure of President's Rule under the provision of Article 365 of the Constitution. Quite obviously, the trouble being witnessed now is a curse of the bad foundation on which the current team in power opened their account, ensuring the stability that the Chief Ministerial secretariat, popularly known amongst locals as *Heinou-makhong*, (foot of the mango tree, after the lush mango tree that grows in the compound of the Chief Ministerial office cum residential bungalow), seems to have won initially after ending the Congress' 15 year reign, was elusive at best. It cannot have been otherwise. In the February-March 2017 elections, the Congress was the single largest party with 28 seats against the BJP's 21. However, thanks to the fickleness of MLA loyalty in the State which tends to gravitate

*The writer is editor, Imphal Free Press.

towards whoever is in power, and a BJP friendly Governor as arbitrator at the time, the BJP ultimately managed a razor thin majority in the House of 60, and the price the party paid for this victory was in terms of ministerial berths gifted away to other parties which it brought into its fold, in particular the NPP each of whose four MLAs were made cabinet ministers.

For reasons which probably had to do with the BJP's eagerness to destroy the Congress, the Party did not however rest content with winning the race to State power, but took trouble to also engineer defections of Congress MLAs. Hence, in trickles of one and two at a time in the initial month of the BJP government, altogether eight MLAs elected on Congress tickets have so far declared themselves as having joined the BJP. Although these defectors sit in the Opposition Benches but vote with the Treasury Benches, surprisingly there has been no official declaration on their status in the House yet, leaving people to conclude the 10th Schedule of the Constitution, popularly known as Anti-Defection Law, first introduced in 1986 and then modified in 2003, is a damp squib, completely powerless to control defection. But leave the manner in which insecure legislators disgrace politics of the State for the time being for right now the existential crisis the BJP government are going through must have the attention.

As they say, what goes around comes around. The circle has turned full round, and ghost of 2017 are returning to haunt the BJP ministry. Obviously, the eight Congress defectors did not stroll into the BJP camp out of love for the Party. They probably are now demanding their "pound of flesh" which is probably why the Chief Minister, N Biren Singh, tried to make the move to shake up his cabinet with the promise of a reshuffle, ending up instead stirring a hornets' nest. Of the eight Congress defectors, only one is a cabinet minister. But what the CM probably thought would be manageable was the growing unrest among the BJP MLAs who feel they are more entitled to minstership and the spoils of office that come along, than the non-BJP MLAs. The 10th Schedule stipulates that Manipur can have only 12-member strong cabinet including the CM. Since six have already been sacrificed to non-BJP MLAs, and the CM has accounted for one more, there are only five berths left to accommodate BJP's own MLAs. This leaves 15 BJP MLAs in the lurch, and this being so, the rebellion now was only to be expected. Given this reality, it is difficult to imagine how the

present problem in the government is going to be settled. As the entire State has been witness all along since the crisis broke out in the open, the CM is obviously exasperated and helpless how he would stem the crisis. All he has been saying is that the BJP Central leadership will intervene and resolve the crisis. True enough now almost the entire ruling front are shuttling between Imphal and New Delhi to present their cases to their Party's Central leaders. It remains to be seen how the problem is resolved, if at all, but for the sake of stability in the State we do hope the crisis ends soon, whichever side wins. However, the gut feeling is, whichever of the two BJP factions in the State emerges victorious, until the next election, it is unlikely the State will see stability.

2019 Teachers: Prime Pivots of New Education Policy

J.S. Rajput*

Context

The advent of the twenty-first century was preceded by intense professional activity around the globe, preparing to welcome the arrival of the new millennium. Education sector was no exception, and one of the outstanding outcomes at the global level on policy issues was the Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century titled “Learning The Treasure Within.” The Commission was tasked to envision the shape of global education in the twenty-first century. The Chairperson of the Commission; Jacques Delors begins the Report with a title that says it all¹: ‘Education: the Necessary Utopia’! Yes, there is no end to expectations from education. It has always been so, particularly amongst the downtrodden and suppressed. In a letter written on April 24, 1922, Mahatma Gandhi wrote²: *“We should remember that immediately on the attainment of freedom our people are not going to secure happiness. As we become independent, all the defects of the system of elections, injustice, the tyranny of the richer classes as also the burden of running administration are bound to come upon us. ...But there is hope, if education spreads throughout the country. From that people would develop from their childhood qualities of pure conduct, God fearing, love. Swaraj would give us happiness only when we attain success in the task. Otherwise India would become the abode for grave injustice and tyranny of the rulers.”*

Pure Conduct emanating out of education amongst all human beings was the Gandhian vision, and he considered that this must figure

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prominently in education policies. And why not, it is education that acculturates! It transforms a lay individual from a 'person to personality'! Education illumines, inspires persons and groups to heroically strive to create and achieve, support and help, comprehend life, its purpose, obligations and ways and means to live a life of satisfaction and harmony. All this; and much more; was in the hearts of the makers of the Constitution of India, who having inherited a nation ravished by violence, truncated and submerged in poverty due to alien exploitation, had the courage to direct the State to provide free and compulsory education to all children till they attain fourteen years of age. The pre-independence role of freedom fighters in preparing education plans for free India was unique and historical. From his experiments in South Africa to Basic Education to Buniyadi Talim, Gandhi ji had the vast majority of illiterate Indians in his mind. He understood them better than his contemporaries. However, after Independence, India persisted with an inherited elitist system of education that was specially designed for preparing a small supportive manpower, and it had very specific objectives laid down for the products. Several committees and commissions appointed after 1947 made attempts to reform the system, made major and substantial recommendations for changing the system, but none could recommend a system that could be "rooted to Indian culture, emerging aspirations of free people and commitment to new knowledge."

One could immediately add that our achievements in access, participation and attainments are indeed noteworthy. These appear more laudable in the face of over threefold increase in the population. However, large-scale expansion has led to severe dilution on several counts. Practically all of the sarkari schools have lost their credibility and acceptability, teacher education is now largely in the hands of dividend-seekers, agriculture stands displaced from the priority list of young and old alike. Who remembers the promises of providing a 'common school system' to every child of India? The Constitutional mandate; very clearly; expects no discrimination in the facilities and professional support available to schools. What we have for over 60 per cent children are schools without basic essential facilities, as against the glitz and glamour of 'Public School' that charge exorbitant fees. The consequences are obvious, and that enlists some of the major challenges before education policy formulation, and those responsible to do so. India has major issues in education; loss of credibility, downward slide in the quality and professional readiness of its products,

inadequacy of high-level research and innovations, lack of interest amongst the young in teaching and research, and much more. There is acute teacher shortage at every stage of education.

Who to Teach?

It is in this background, that the Report of the Kasturirangan Committee: (Draft NEP-19 –) needs to be seen and analyzed. The Preamble envisions “*An India centric education system that contributes directly to transforming our nation sustainably into an equitable and vibrant knowledge society, by providing high quality education to all.*” The Report acknowledges repeatedly that quality of education is organically dependent on the quality of teachers. Quality of teachers determines the quality of citizens, and vice-versa! Teacher educators become the key drivers of quality in its extended canvas, in every sector of human activity and Endeavour. The Objective under the chapter ‘Teachers’ reads: “*Ensure that all students at all level of school education are taught by passionate, motivated, highly qualified, professionally trained, and well equipped teachers.*” It goes on to say that ‘Teachers truly shape the futures of our children – and therefore, the future of our nation.’ The report dexterously enlists what teachers impart to children, and this includes values, knowledge, empathy, creativity, ethics, life skills, and social responsibility. It also reminds us that in ancient India, ‘only the best and most learned became teacher.’ Even in past; as in this report; the qualities of teachers could be found generously articulated in each and every document on education policy; anywhere and everywhere. The Indian tradition of knowledge quest acknowledges it, and place the teacher next to God, if not ahead of him. There are genuine reasons for the same. The Teacher leads the learner from³ “Humanity to Divinity.” In a knowledge society, the quality of education would determine the quality of citizens, the quality of teachers; and values imbibed by them; shall determine the quality of education. The quality in every sector of human activity would, hence, be an outcome of the extent of primacy accorded by the State and society to teacher education institutions, and teacher educators.

The Chapter on the Draft NEP-19 on Teacher Education captures the concern and anxiety of everyone interested in education, next generations and future of India when it states: “*Heartbreakingly, the teacher education sector has been beleaguered with mediocrity as well*

as rampant corruption due to commercialization.” Where we really stand in the context of teacher preparation has been courageously acknowledged by the Draft NEP-19 on page 283: *“Indeed, according to AISHE data for 2015-16, of the 17000 + colleges in India that teach just a single programme, nearly 90% are teacher training institutes! Moreover, according to Justice J.S. Verma Commission (2012) constituted by the Supreme Court, a majority of those standalone teaching institutes – over 10, 000 in number, are not even attempting serious teacher education, but are essentially selling degrees for a price.”* The number has steadily increased⁴, on page 114-15; the number of teacher education institutions in the country is mentioned as 17000+, of which 92 per cent are privately owned. It has been inferred that a large number of these are ‘functioning as commercial shops’ where degrees are available for a price. It is no secret that most of these private institutions — exceptions apart — were established with a view to earn higher and higher dividends.

The statutory body, the National Council of Teacher Education – NCTE, – created by the Parliament of India by NCTE Act of 1993, heralded its arrival on the scene around 1995-96 with the motto of being “supportive, yet firm.” It could regulate major universities that had reduced teacher education by correspondence to a mere resource geminating exercise, unmindful of the fact that it was leading to a downward slide in the quality of output. The very establishment of the Council, over 25 years ago, was to prevent malpractices in teacher preparation. Its function as enlisted in the Act are very comprehensive: *“It shall be the duty of the Council to take all such steps as it may think fit for ensuring planned and coordinated development of teacher education and for the determination and maintenance of standards for teacher education.”* However, what happened afterwards would make only a pathetic recount. It is best to learn from the experience, and envision steps that could check the downfall, and simultaneously, initiate steps to improve the system. The Draft NEP-19, in its own perception, attempts the same.

The Challenges

The first challenge identified in the Draft NEP-19 is the expected one: restoring integrity and credibility to teacher education system. The problem is how? It is known for decades together, and has visibly

declined due to mushrooming of commercial ventures as teacher education institutions on one hand, and neglect – utter neglect – of public funded teacher education institutions by the State governments. It was also brought down due to intrusion of corrupt practices in the conduct of recruitment tests, and subsequent procedures followed in the appointment of teachers. The quality was ruined further by recruitment of Para teachers on the pittance of an honorarium by State governments. They were young persons, unsure of their tomorrow! How could one expect them to give their best? The well-known widespread practice of the “Proxy Teacher” – with full connivance of district level officers – is now ‘well-established’. Teacher-Pupil Ratio is mostly very high, teachers in areas like arts and music, guidance and counselling are mostly not available. Teachers, in spite of several court orders, are made to engage in non-teaching tasks. Creating a school environment and work-cum-activity culture that would be conducive to joyful and inspiring learning has mostly remained a dream in most of the public-funded schools. These schools have rather consistently suffered on teacher shortage and inadequate infrastructure support.

Recommendations

The Draft NEP-19 devotes one full chapter to Teachers, and another separate one to Teacher Education. The Objective under teacher education is: *“Ensure that teachers are given the highest quality training in content, pedagogy and practice, by moving the teacher education system into multidisciplinary colleges and universities, and establishing the four-year integrated Bachelor’s Degree as the minimum qualification for all school teachers.”* It reiterates the importance of teacher education as an activity that requires multidisciplinary perspectives and knowledge. It is encouraging to find that due note has been taken of essential basic requirements that must be put in place in a school before even a competent, committed, professionally trained and willing-to-perform teacher could really make an effective contribution. Some of these, as one could comprehend, are:

1. Merit scholarships to attract talented young persons to teaching profession,
2. Streamline teacher recruitment process, bring in transparency, and infuse integrity,
3. Ensure presence of teacher in right proportion to learners,

4. Ensure local teachers, and take due note of diversity being taken care of,
5. Teachers to be recruited at district level, and then posted to school complex, concept of shared teachers in subjects like art, music, physical education, languages, vocational crafts is to be introduced,
6. Incentives to teachers in rural, tribal and remote areas. One expects it includes difficult areas like hill terrains,
7. Halting teacher transfer, to ensure better teacher-community relationship, it has also been realized that there would be hurdles in implementing and, hence, a tenure-based and rule and empathy based fixed tenure provision has also been incorporated,
8. All newly recruited teachers shall be registered with a Centre for Professional Development for mentoring,
9. Urgency of manpower planning in education has been realized: A careful and comprehensive teacher-requirement planning exercise will be undertaken immediately,
10. Adequate physical infrastructure, facilities, learning resources shall be provided to all schools, either individually, or within their school complex,
11. Schools shall attempt to develop and demonstrate a caring, collaborative and inclusive school culture, it would be monitored on regular basis,
12. Teachers shall neither be 'requested nor allowed 'to participate in any non-teaching activities, during school hours, this would include cooking midday meals, vaccination campaigns, procuring school supplies, or any other time consuming administrative assignment .
13. In addition, there are recommendations regarding remedial teaching, peer teaching, communities connect, and materials for teachers in Indian languages.

All these recommendations appear sincere, genuine, essential and necessary. Discuss these in any informed group of educators and they would immediately come out with details how each one of these exists in one or the other previous policy or 'program of action' document in various schemes and programmes launched earlier. And this knowledge arouses suspicion, and a little bit of unconcern, when one speaks to teachers. This shall have to be seriously attended to while the final

version of the education policy is transmitted to the system for implementation. In a federal system, State governments have the major say in the implementation and that is a very significant aspect. Past experience clearly indicates that success or otherwise of central initiatives is directly related to the extent of commitment at State government level.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Once the basic support system, necessary to meet the objectives and goals of the final policy, are put in place by the policy makers and implementers, attention must concentrate on the pivot of the entire exercise: The Teacher! In the current times, when every teacher has to remain alert all the time to new developments in knowledge; content and pedagogy; he must be professionally equipped to internalize the real import of 'lifelong learning'! The teacher preparation systems and institutions must gear up to face an upheaval in the existing content and pedagogy, most of which shall have to be substituted by new technological support systems that are now easily available. Even that all has to be and remain dynamic. The Draft NEP-19 has taken a conscious note of this and has made suggestions on the nature, structure and adequacy of teacher preparation courses. It emphasizes looking after of teacher interests, their continuous professional development, and suggests a modular approach, providing opportunities to be associated with professional communities and chances to update their knowledge and skills has been appropriately indicated. It provides pointers for 'self-directed personal development', and in-school teacher development processes. It assures parity in service conditions for teachers across all stages of school stages. It recommends common guiding set of National Professional Standards for Teachers (NPST) to be developed by 2022. While emphasizing periodic performance appraisal of teacher, it expects SCERTs to develop – based on NPST – norms for autonomy and empowerment in teacher's role within their States. Teachers must get what they deserve to properly perform their assigned professional tasks⁵: *"Give education and educators their due. Trust the teachers, prepare them professionally, and support them in their tasks. This will be the first step towards implementing the policy."* Once this is achieved, accountability would not be far off. While examining these aspects, the structure of the existing pre-service courses has also been thoroughly scrutinized.

The recommendation to replace the present one-year B.Ed courses by four-year integrated programmes in multi-disciplinary institutions is indeed courageous, bold and professionally sound. It is indeed interesting to recall that this perspective was very well understood in early sixties, and four-year integrated courses leading to integrated twin degrees like B.A. B. Ed, and B.Sc. B.Ed. were introduced in India on experimental basis in 1964-65, in four Regional Colleges (Now Institutes) of Education of the NCERT, located in Ajmer, Bhubaneswar, Bhopal and Mysore. Yes, four-year courses require both material and professional inputs that definitely have to be far ahead of what routine colleges imparting one-year B. Ed courses are formally supposed to put in place before getting recognition. The products of these integrated courses established their distinct professional superiority not only as school teachers, but also in higher education, research and in every profession that they decided to join. Now that a recommendation has been made for these integrated courses after more than half a century, one could only rue how the nation has neglected its teacher preparation responsibilities and consequently allowed the quality and credibility to plunge downwards. The introduction of four-year courses on national level would warrant – very rightly – huge investment from the State. Before the intrusion of commercial sharks in teacher education, teacher training courses for primary and secondary stages were the only professional avenues in which young persons from weaker sections could aspire to enter and get a teaching job in and around their own place. It stands disturbed at this stage. The recommendation to offer merit-based scholarships to encourage outstanding students to enter the teaching profession has to take note of several other dimensions also. Judging merit after +2 examinations without taking note of inequality of opportunities in school education would certainly not be a right step. Recommendations like strengthening the TET – Teacher Eligibility Test - , introduction of demonstration or interview before recruitment create positive impact on policy level, but do create serious apprehensions amongst even the most optimistic minds that have seen how the system has resisted positive changes all along in previous decades. Similarly, ‘halting the harmful practice of teacher transfers’ would be resisted at implementation as it has political nuances. It happens in India: one Hon’ble Chief Minister had allocated quota of transfers to every MLA. One of them used it all, and then got each one of them cancelled! Will they be willing to give up such a privilege? The idea of school complexes

and sharing teacher expertise would require incisive planning and its execution. The process of school merger – already introduced in ample measure – supposedly considered a panacea for abolishing non-viable schools has several dimensions that do create considerable negative impact that is not receiving attention at this stage, but may have to be considered at some stage.

Several of the recommendations, though necessary and genuine, appear routine as these have been made repeatedly in the past, without any sincere effort at the implementation stage. Take the provision of rural housing for teachers. Even if made available, the same may just not inspire young persons to drift towards teaching profession in the absence of health centre, transport facilities connectivity, safety, and other factors. Similarly, the recommendation on ensuring parity in service conditions for teachers across all stages of school education sounds logical, reasonable and essential, but will the State governments implement it? They are accustomed to appoint Para-teachers/part-time teachers and save on finances! Absence of professional and academic leadership at decision making stages inflicts irreversible damages, and Indian teacher education system is a revealing example of the same. What happens in high-fee charging ‘Public Schools’ where salaries that are actually disbursed, and what is shown in account books may not necessarily be the same? There are encouraging suggestions on career progression paths that may enable teachers to become educational administrators and administrators. The problem is that over the years, positions like that of director of education, chairman school board; SCERT, etc. are being given to IAS officers! What could be the justification for a career bureaucrat to head the Text-book Corporation of a State? Positions of heads of schools mostly remain vacant for years together, and the impression goes around that none is interested in advancing the institutional interests! It impacts on general morale and institutional climate is negative. It also demotivates the genuine aspirants to higher positions. The Draft NEP-19 has assessed it in a broader perspective, but all that leaves serious apprehensions on these being implemented with the desired level of urgency and sincerity.

Moving four-year teacher preparation programmes to university level and to multi faculty institutions, closing down the single faculty institutions are all very encouraging steps. The two-year B. Ed course initially recommended; after very careful analysis and assessment; by the NCTE in 1998 and implemented by the NCERT in its four Regional


Institutes of Education 1999 onwards was indeed a very bold initiative. The first reaction – very logical – was: who would offer a two-year programme in distant institutions when one-year course is available next door? The Counter: people are seeking quality; young persons would flock to two-year course. It really happened that way. It was resisted by vested interests and not allowed to flourish. It is a genuine via media till the four-year programmes are in place. The Draft NEP-19 has emphasized and endorsed it.

Road Ahead

When one talks of teachers and teacher education, one is practically talking of reshaping future, and future generations. What is the type of person we intend to prepare? This was best articulated by Mahatma Gandhi in 1909 in *Hind Swaraj*, when he quoted Professor Huxley's definition of education⁶: "That man I think has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will and does with ease and pleasure all the work that as a mechanism it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine with all its parts of equal strength and in smooth working order... whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the fundamental truths of nature... whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience... who has learnt to hate all vileness and to respect others as himself. Such a one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education, for he is in harmony with nature. He will make the best of her and she of him." Only the best and fully academically inclined ones from so educated individuals would be a suitable teacher; and teacher educator. The search for such an education continues worldwide and that in itself is a very encouraging sign of civilization growth and evolution. Huxley indicates what could be the output of excellence in education: "The well-developed, well integrated personality is the highest product of evolution, the fullest realization we know of in this world." He goes on further to emphasize; "The exploration of human nature and its possibilities has scarcely begun. A vast new world of uncharted possibilities awaits in Columbus." And that is why the creation of; and quest for new knowledge characterizes dynamic systems of education. Let the final education policy remain fully conscious of the emerging knowledge society, and linked knowledge economy. Francis Bacon,⁷ in 1620 argued that 'knowledge is power'; and we now understand it

better. Let the New Education Policy be the harbinger of giving the teachers their due, and let them 'empower' every learner to become persons of character, commitment and ready to scale new heights in their area of interest, in the interests of others; and to establish that World is but One Family; 'Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam'. We need *Acharyas* in every nook and corner of India who would, without consciously being aware of it, would become the Icons of the Young. That would be new education, and new India.

Notes

- ¹ UNESCO, 1996, Learning The Treasure Within, UNESCO, Paris
- ² Rajput, J.S., 2016, Education in times of Global Change, Shipra Publishers, Delhi
- ³ The Logo of the NCTE  was taken from Shanti Parv of Mahabharata.
- ⁴ The NCTE Act of 1993 came out of immense pressure put on central government by sincere academics and teacher educators who were worried how teachers were being prepared by correspondence courses, the entire exercise getting reduced to generating resources for the needs of universities. This included State universities as well. Some of these were enrolling 40,000 aspirants with a small office and two-three faculty members. In 1999, the NCTE took up the case of some Bihar State Universities 'selling degrees'. On an inquiry ordered by the Chancellor, a major scandal was unearthed. It could be perused on internet by clicking a search button: Bihar B.Ed Scandal of 1999. It would reveal how we have deprived millions of children of their fundamental right to competent, committed and performing teachers. The depressing aspect is: people have lost hope, and are convinced that no one is interested in improving these schools that now cater only to those sections of the society that cannot afford private schools.
- ⁵ Rajput, J.S., India Today, July 01, 20
- ⁶ Rajput, J.S., T2019, The Dynamics of Indian Education, pp. 106, Yash Publishers, Delhi
- ⁷ Yuval Noah Harari, 2011, Sapiens, A Brief History of mankind pp. 288-89, Vintage, Indian edition

Education and Research: Some Concerns*

Dr. B.B. Kumar*

I am happy and feel honoured that your university has invited me to deliver the 11th Convocation address as its Chief Guest. Those who are going to receive the degree today are the privileged ones of our society as you know that a very large section of our students who enter the educational stream and drop out, become misfit in the society. Of course you, and all of us, are equally concerned about the challenges of life which you are going to face after getting the degree.

As all of us know the liberal education is supposed to liberate but it often fails to do so and the degree holders continue to face the challenges of life. However I have full faith in your capacity to take the challenges positively.

Education in India today has the colonial legacy. It is not rooted deeply in the society as it happened in the past. Our traditional education had four channels which were: (1) traditional schools; (2) education by socialization through family and village community, (3) education through socialisation by youth, dormitories of *Dhumkuria*, *Mourng* etc. and (4) education through the gild experts. In a tribal village of Jharkhand, Orissa and elsewhere education of carpentry, blacksmith etc. was given in the gild family itself and not in the dormitories. Thus, learning the skill was also the recognised part of education. Today, of course the degree holders are only considered part of the educated lot and the persons with traditional knowledge are bracketed as illiterates. This has resulted into loss of traditional knowledge wealth in our country.

Education, as we provide to our children today is a highly wasteful system. Majority, who enter the system drop-out and are misfit as the education, we give them, in cut off from the real life situation. And again, only a small section of those, who come out successful with the

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university degrees, get the jobs, the remaining ones join the army of unemployed and unemployable.

Equally worrisome are our weaknesses in the field of study and research, especially in the social sciences, where dominance of colonial and ideological myths blur perception of the educated ones of our own society.

North Orissa University is located in an area where the population is a happy mix of tribes and castes. Unfortunately, the tribal studies and research in our universities continue in the overall colonial frame. The tribe-caste divide, rather than tribe-caste continuum is often at the focus. Needless to say that tribal studies and research need to be strengthened in some of our universities. This is, of course, apart from other areas of educational reforms and research arena.

The continuum in India is multidimensional. It pervades through our thought process, through our being. It also operates in considerable time depth and takes into its domain the 'living non-living continuum' in the broad frame of 'man-nature-spirit' complex. It, however, needs mention that our vision of continuum is highly blurred due to a frame of mind non-receptive to commonality and continuum.

Our Myopic Vision: Its Roots

We have developed the habit of over-emphasising differences and ignoring the threads of unity. The continuance of colonial education even after seven decades of independence perpetuates the myths created by the British. There are rampant distortions and misinterpretations of our history, culture, religion and society. As a result, we have borrowed a blurred and compartmentalised vision; we cannot fix facts properly; we lack the capacity to use facts critically. We explain everything bringing in conflict situation; have made 'social divide' a paying venture. Marxist dominance in the academia and media, and unprincipled myopic politics has further worsened the situation.

The British colonial functionary, Lyall, conceived India as a confused entity of castes and tribes, religions and sects, languages and dialects unrelated to each other and the British Empire as the only unifying factor. Thus, India was, for the British, an imaginary state; it was an administrative construct; the British presented themselves as its creator/unifier. India, as a creation of the British Empire, is a reality rather than a myth for a section of English-educated Indians.

They also gave us to understand that there is a mainstream and the fringe in India under conflict situation; that the so-called core-fringe conflict is a reality. In reality the mischievous concept of 'mainstream' has no substance.

The foundation, the basic framework of colonial study of India was laid on conflict situation and isolation, which is wrong. In fact, the meeting ground of different communities of India is of socio-cultural, religious continuum. Different communities of this country neither lived nor are living in isolation.

Creating the Caste-Tribe Divide

Indian society has hereditary unity, Jati. (Sanskrit: Jana 'to be born.')

The English word, Caste is derived from the Portuguese word, Casto, meaning race, breed (Latin Castus). It is both interesting and important to note that Jati (used in almost all languages of India) has no racial meaning. But the Portuguese 'caste' does. *Varna-Jati* is a scientific, time-tested socio-cultural order. It was to this that the British gave a racial interpretation.

The first major attempt of the British in India was to divide our society into castes and tribes. But even they were not sure of the divide, as the dividing line was very blurred. This was the reason that the monographs they got written were on 'Castes and Tribes,' rather than on castes and tribes separately. The series were titled as 'Castes and Tribes of Cochin' or that of Punjab and so on. The colonial writers and functionaries of the census of India, through which such divide was planned and executed, freely expressed the difficulty in distinguishing between caste and tribe, as is discussed in this write-up. A fact needing special mention here is that the tribe (more specifically the Scheduled Tribe) does not have a fool-proof definition; the Indian Constitution only lists Scheduled Tribes and does not define it (Kumar, 1998, pp. 1-11).

Some scholars have tried to explain the caste-tribe divide in the parameter of organic society versus segmental society. Such a projection was a highly generalised one. I think, one talks about the organic versus segmented society, while referring to the castes and tribes because of the lack of macroperception of Indian society. The microperception of the individual tribe or caste gives a feel of distinctiveness. Therefore, for a country like India, we need to have macroperception, and once

we go for macroperception, the dividing line between the castes and the tribes based on the organic versus segmental division is just shattered. In reality, neither is caste society totally organic, nor is tribal society totally segmentary (Kumar, 1998, pp.20-21). Mandelbaum used the adjective 'more' in this context, which makes the statement ambiguous.

Distancing Tribes as 'Animists' – the Census Game

When the British administrators planned to put artificial barriers between castes and tribes, they tried to categorize their religion separately in the Census Reports. Accordingly, they first labelled the religion of the tribal communities as 'Animism,' 'Polytheism' 'Nature-worship,' 'Tribal Religion,' 'Tribal Animism,' and so on. Next they named the religion of the tribes after their respective tribe names, such as, 'Khasi religion,' 'Garo religion,' 'Ao Naga religion,' 'Sema Naga religion,' 'Munda religion,' 'Santhal religion,' 'Ho religion,' etc. (Ibid, pp. 27-36). This was done in spite of knowing fully well that there was practically no difference between the so-called 'animism' or 'Tribal Religion' and Hinduism. Sedgwick writes:

.....Animism as a religion should be entirely abandoned, and that all those hitherto classed as 'Animists' should be grouped with Hindus..." (Census of India, 1921, Bombay Report, p. 67).

Risley also writes almost the same thing: "No sharp line of demarcation can be drawn between Hinduism and Animism." Hinduism is "Animism more or less transformed by philosophy" or "as magic tempered by metaphysics," he further writes (Ibid).

The census of India differentiated 'tribal religion' from Hinduism. It was not an easy proposition as we find in the view expressed by P.C. Tallens: "The difficulty of distinguishing the religion of such persons from lower types of Hinduism has always been experienced at every Census" (Census of India 1921, Bihar & Orissa Report, p. 125). The Census of India, later on, changed the heading of the religion of the Indian tribes from 'Animism' to 'Tribal Religion.' This, however, did not bring the difficulty of the British colonial functionaries to an end. J.T. Morten wrote: "If the word, 'animism' is vague in respect of what it connotes, the word 'Tribal' Religion is not by any means definite in what it denotes" (Census of India, 1921, India Report, Vol. I, pp. 110-111). These observations clearly indicate that the religious system of the country shows uniformity on many levels. There is no distinction

between the popular religion of the country and that of the Scheduled Tribes.

Caste-Tribe Continuum

Castes and tribes have a lot of social, cultural and religious commonality. With few exceptions, clan exogamy was practiced throughout India among tribes and castes (Kumar, 1994, p.10). There was a trend to absorb distinct and diverse ethnic elements (Ibid). The concept of the Supreme-being, the creator is shared by different communities (Ibid). These aspects and many more shall be discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

A point, which needs special mention, is that 'caste' in the present form is a post-Turk phenomenon. Al-Beruni came to India only a thousand years earlier. About the Hindus he wrote, that they had only four castes; all the four sit together and eat together. Only the *pankti* [line], in which they sat, used to be different if persons of different *varnas* took their meal together. The place was the same; there was no segregation. All used to live together in the same town and in the same village. Then there were only four *varnas*, today we have thousands of jatis! How did it happen?

The simple phenomenon, which I have explained in my book, *India: Caste, Culture and Traditions*, the phenomenon of multiplication of caste identity in the present form and untouchability, took place after the Turk invasion of India. According to Al-Beruni, at least in Western India, there were only four castes; there was no untouchability; they were taking meals together. In Assam, even now there is very little untouchability. The question is: What really happened? Why are there so many castes today? The only explanation may be that the guilds (*Shrenis*) – the professional groups became endogamous. Earlier, all the working groups, all the *shrenis* were categorised together into a single endogamous 'Shudra' category. The same thing happened with the other three *varnas* also as the Hindus stopped marriage at distant places.

In the face of the Muslim challenge to their religion and society, the Hindus gradually became over-protective; they stopped marrying into the wider group, in the *varna* frame. People also stopped marrying at distant places. This gave rise to the social institution of 'mul' and 'dih' – a very recent social development in many areas of the country.

There was yet another factor split and then the re-alignment of the social groups. It is called fission and fusion. There are a number of examples to illustrate fission and fusion – the making of new castes/tribes. The overlapping of traditions also played its role. For example, amongst the *Yadavas*, there are two traditions – one that derives its origin from *Yadu*, the *Pauranic* hero, and the other linked to the profession of milk production and selling. Both overlapped. This is just one example, In India, we have numerous such cases. The need today is to have a deeper understanding of our society based on rich data and macroperception. Such changes have taken place many times in India, and therefore, any analysis shall be fruitful if the basic frame of analysis does not ignore multiple changes in considerable time depth.

Linguistic Continuum

Take the case of our languages. Linguistically, India is one of the most diverse countries of the world. Yet, it is a language zone. Almost all the languages of India, except Kashmiri and Khasi, follow the ‘SOV’ (subject, object and verb) pattern. The score-system of counting is supposed to be the trait of Munda languages. But even many Naga dialects, such as Chang and Sangtam, and a language like Bengali, exhibit this trait. Languages of different families have inclusive and exclusive first person pronominal plural. Lexical borrowing is numerous. In reality, there is a need for an in-depth study of Indian languages in the frame of ‘India as a Language Zone.’

The colonial theory emphasises upward mobility of the tribal groups by entry into the *varna*-frame and then moving upwards. They, however, ignore some facts pointing towards the reverse process.

Tribalization Process: For example, what happened to Agariyas of Jharkhand, or the Assamese of the Brahmaputra Valley, who migrated to the neighbouring hills to save themselves from the atrocities of the Burmese during their invasion of Assam in early 19th century.

Two-way mobility: Many parts of the Brahmaputra Valley, such as Dhansiri and the Kapili valleys and other parts of Assam became depopulated. The Nambar forest between Golaghat of Assam and Dimapur of Nagaland, once the capital of the Cachari kings, became the most densely-populated forest of Asia, after the Burmese aggression, known in Assam as Maanar Upadrab. The Assamese population migrated to the hills and became part of the tribal society

Thus, the fact cannot be ignored that there has always been a two-way movement in India, both in the *Varna*-frame and the Caste-tribe continuum frame. The colonial explanation of our social mechanics, in this case, is faulty.

The tribal traditions needs in-depth study in deep time frame. In our classical literature, in Ramayana, we have the monkey God, Hanumana and the monkey king Bali. Coming back to the issue of Bali performing Sandhya, the question is: “how can it be explained?” Certainly, Bali, if a monkey, is not entitled to perform Sandhya. Hanumana, if a monkey, cannot be a Sanskrit scholar. Now if they were not monkeys, then why does our literature say so? The reason for the same lies in blurring of the perception due to a lot of time depth, expressing facts in literary form and the lack of deeper understanding of the Indian society. Totemism – that is adoption of a natural object as a religious emblem/symbol is not only followed by the tribals of Chota Nagpur and Odisha, but even by Brahmins and other communities. The communities that have totems, trace their origin from a plant or tree or an animal or even from some odd phenomena or happening, giving odd name to the originator of the clan name.

It is pertinent to mention here that the names of gotra – originating *rishis* also reminds us of totemism. What about *Kashyapgotra*? Any Hindu who forgets his *gotra*, his *gotra* becomes the *Kashyapgotra*. If I go somewhere and I forget my *gotra*, my *gotra* becomes *Kashyapgotra*. What is *Kashyapa*? *Kashyapa* is tortoise. The same is the case with many other *gotras*. Sunak is dog, *Vatsa* is calf, *Bhardwaj* is a bird. In Sanskrit literature, we find the name *Jaradgava*; it is old cow, ox; *Zarathushtra*, the name of the Persian prophet, means old camel. All these names indicate that in the olden days even the names of the animal were taken as personal names.

Baudhayan has listed about nine hundred *gotras* in his ‘Shrauta Sutras’ Pravaradhyaya or Mahapravara. Samskarkaustubhlista 1600 *gotras*. Gotravalaya, cluster of *gotras*, are recorded in Sanskrit texts. If anybody became very prominent, his descendants would name him as the originator of a *gotra*. The tradition is often forgotten and if the name of the *gotra*-originator happens to be odd, then it is often mis-explained. The name of the *gotra*, then, becomes a totem. What I mean to say is that we have to go for proper explanation of our tradition. The tribal folklore must be collected; it must be edited and published. And there we will find a lot of proof of inter-community cultural and social

continuum. We may then find cross-community sharing of ethnic elements.

The myth of race is also used by colonial scholars and anthropologists needing in-depth research and correction.

This is a solemn and happy occasion for all of us, especially for all of you who have been awarded with degrees, diplomas and medals today during the 11th Convocation of the North Orissa University. All of us are aware that you, the degree and diploma holders belong to a better and privileged section of the society, as in our society all are not so lucky as to have university degrees. I wish a very happy and successful life for you as you are entering today a new phase of your life.

But today is also a day of reckoning and self-appraisal for you, as to how to reciprocate positively to the family, society and the nation for what they have done for you. We can never forget that reciprocation and sharing have been the core of our social ethos. I take this opportunity also to request you to take the advantage to the fullest of the benefits provided by Indian Council of Social Science Research. I shall be the happiest man if you and your university does so.

*Edited version of the 11th Convocation Address of North Orissa University by the Chief Guest Professor Braj Bihari Kumar, Chairman, Indian Council of Social Science Research, New Delhi.

The Draft National Education Policy (2019): Some Critical Observations

Amit Dholakia*

I. Introduction:

Public policy is essentially a statement about a particular sector that articulates the vision of a government; its medium-term and long-term objectives and priorities; viable strategies for achieving these objectives in time-bound fashion and the process of policy implementation. Policies, thus, comprise laws, regulations, guidelines, executive order, administrative procedures and judicial decisions that provide practical direction for public action, as also set terms for evaluating such actions. It is due to the mandate derived from a public policy that governments choose to act (or not to act) in a particular domain. Policies are rarely meant to address a single problem. They generally deal with a cluster of interconnected problems and challenges that have existed without a solution for a long time.

Policy revision is a continuous process in both private and public organizations, as the old policy instruments are often rendered inadequate or ineffective in accomplishing their stated goals, sometimes even after their implementation over a fairly long period. The need for formulating new policies arises when old policies are rendered irrelevant due to the emergence of new challenges, realities and actors. Calls for making of new policies become louder when the nature of policy environment alters due to a regime change or due to the ideological reorientation of the State. A sound policy document, therefore, must begin with a clinical and critical analysis of the previous policy regime (in terms of both ideas and implementation) and identify its shortcomings. Such critical

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analysis of the old policy and proposal for a new policy has to be evidence-based rather than impressionistic.

Education policy is an important segment of the set of main public policies. It essentially lays down the strategies and programmes that a government employs to achieve pre-determined objectives in the spheres of teaching and learning, research, skill development, socialization and imparting of values. Well-designed education policy and its effective implementation can bring valuable transformation in the working and output of an education system which is an intricate network of horizontally and vertically interlocked institutions. As education plays a very significant role in the holistic development of an individual and the achievement of national goals, study and research on education policies also assume critical importance as an interdisciplinary academic field.

The larger ecosystem under which an education system functions has changed dramatically throughout the world since the 1990s due to the impact of the forces of globalization, liberalization and privatization. Market-oriented economic concepts have supplanted the idea of education as a public good and as a welfare right in public discourses. The making of education policy has become very complex in the recent years, given the continuing influence of social, political and cultural contexts on the educational processes, as also due to the irreversible impact of global factors. Demand for efficiency, relevance and practical utility of educational outputs has caused incremental marginalization of the traditional vision of education as a creative process aimed at empowering and liberating of autonomous individuals.

II. Draft National Education Policy (2019) Background:

After nearly five years of extensive preparatory exercise by two high-level expert committees, and consideration of thousands of suggestions received from the stakeholders and the public, the Draft National Education Policy (DNEP) is finally available for everyone to read and comment upon. The DNEP is prepared by a committee chaired by the eminent space scientist, Dr. K. Kasturirangan, which consisted of several distinguished experts and professionals from the fields of education, social sciences and administration. The committee's report, submitted to the Ministry of Human Resource Development on 1st December 2018, was made public on 30th May 2019, after the Narendra Modi-led

government assumed power for the second term. This document is only a proposal at this juncture which would become an official policy once it is adopted formally through due legislative and executive action after the incorporation of the required modifications and additions.

This draft is meant for the adoption of the third National Education Policy of India. The first National Education Policy was adopted in 1968, based on the report of the Kothari Commission, while the second National Education Policy was adopted in 1986. The DNEP, which has been proposed three decades after the promulgation of the second National Policy, has understandably aroused a great deal of expectation as well as debate among those who are directly or indirectly concerned with the education sector in India.

III. Key Recommendations of the DNEP:

The DNEP visualizes an ‘India-centred’ education system that would promote the creation of an ‘equitable and vibrant knowledge society.’ It proposes a policy that is meant to address the challenges of access, equity, quality, affordability and accountability in India’s growing education sector which has performed far below its potential during the previous decades. The main recommendations made in its voluminous 484-page report cover almost every aspect of India’s education sector: school education, higher education, vocational education, adult and continuing education, educational financing, governance and regulation of education sector, new technologies in education, research and innovation, teachers’ training and so on.

These are some of the most important recommendations made by the committee in its report:

1. Bringing the pre-primary or early childhood care and education into the fold of formal schooling and implementation of the suitable academic reforms and institutional modifications for the same.
2. Extension of the entitlement of free and compulsory education under the Right to Education Act (2009) from pre-primary to higher secondary levels, i.e. from the age of three to eighteen.
3. Reorganization of the existing slabs of primary, secondary and higher secondary schooling into four phases: the first phase of foundational stage of three years of pre-primary and standards one and two; the second phase of preparatory stage

of three years from standards three to five; the third phase of middle stage of three years from standards six to eight; and the fourth phase of secondary stage of four years from standards nine to twelve.

4. Restructuring of the school curriculum and reforms in the examination system to achieve contemporary teaching-learning goals, infuse national character and instil moral values.
5. Establishment of a State Regulatory Authority to monitor school education system and lay down the standards and procedures for school accreditation.
6. Scaling up the Gross Enrolment Ratio in the higher education sector to 50 per cent by 2035 from the current level of about 25.8 per cent.
7. Restructuring of higher education sector into Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 3 institutions, with Tier 1 consisting of research-based universities, Tier 2 of mainly teaching-oriented universities and Tier 3 of undergraduate colleges.
8. Consolidation of India's nearly 800 universities and over 40,000 colleges into about 10,000 to 15,000 institutions of excellence to facilitate the improvement in educational quality and capacity expansion.
9. Gradual abrogation of the system of affiliation of colleges. All affiliating universities to transition to a Tier 1 or Tier 2 type of institutions. All affiliated colleges to develop into autonomous degree-granting colleges (Tier 3) by the year 2032 or merge with the university that they are affiliated to or develop into a Tier 1 or Tier 2 type of a university.
10. Grant of autonomy to colleges to offer degrees after the fulfilment of laid-down norms.
11. Establishment of a Central Board of Undergraduate Education along with State Boards of Undergraduate Education to develop relevant curricula and conduct examinations for such undergraduate colleges which choose to, or are mandated to, affiliate with them.
12. Restructuring of the curricula of undergraduate programmes to make them interdisciplinary and to include a common core curriculum along with one or two areas of specialisation.
13. Introduction of the option of a four-year undergraduate programme in Liberal Arts with multiple exit options with appropriate certification.

14. Establishment of five model Indian Institutes of Liberal Arts in the next five years' period in order to achieve excellence in the streams of human and social sciences.
15. Implementation of institutional and academic measures for promoting study of classical and regional languages in colleges and universities.
16. Establishment of the *Rashtriya Shiksha Ayog* under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister for developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising the vision and strategies for the entire education in the country on a continuing and sustainable basis.
17. Separation of the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) from the University Grants Commission (UGC) and conversion of the former into an independent and autonomous body that would function as an apex accreditor, and also issue licenses to different non-governmental accreditation institutions to carry out accreditation of educational institutions.
18. Establishment of an autonomous National Research Foundation for funding, mentoring and building the capacity for world-class research in India in the fields of science, technology, social sciences, arts, humanities and other areas as identified from time to time.
19. Renaming of the Ministry of Human Resource Development as Ministry of Education to give it a clear focus of operations.
20. Reaffirmation of the commitment made in the previous two education policies for spending 6 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product as public investment in the field of education.
21. Doubling of public investment in the education sector from the current 10 per cent of total public expenditure to 20 per cent during the next ten years' period in a phased manner. Out of the additional 10 per cent expenditure, 5 per cent to be utilised for higher education, 2 per cent for additional teacher costs or resources for school education and 1.4 per cent for early childhood care and education.

IV. Critical Observations on the DNEP:

1. Overall, the DNEP appears to be a progressive and balanced document marked by the seriousness of intent and clarity of vision. If implemented effectively and in conformity with its spirit, the new policy holds the promise of transforming India's educational landscape qualitatively and make a positive long-term impact on the Indian society, culture and economy.
2. It is appreciable that contrary to widely-held beliefs and tenets of neo-liberal international regime on education, the DNEP reiterates a commitment to the principle of public education. It endorses the idea of education as a public good rather than as a tradable service. For a country like India where millions still suffer from multiple socio-economic disadvantages, this comes as a welcome normative position.
3. Apprehensions raised by some commentators and observers that the exercise of drafting a new national education policy was only a tactic to infuse and promote right-wing and illiberal orientation in India's education system have been falsified. The DNEP has recommended nothing that would warrant such an alarming projection. Also, unlike what some commentators had feared, there are no recommendations that challenge the federal spirit of the Indian constitution or threaten States' rights over the management of their education sector.
4. Public policies in democratic societies are rarely based on a model of best choices. They are generally shaped by a trade-off among different interest groups and constituencies. Policies that manage this trade-off well have a high probability of success at the implementation stage. The DNEP has tried to balance and accommodate the diverse, if not conflicting, interests which are involved with, or impinge upon, the educational sphere in India.

The DNEP attempts to address the expectations of the State agencies (public schools, colleges, universities and research institutions), private educational providers, civil society organizations, industries, international educational providers, skill-development and vocational agencies etc. on the one hand and teachers, students and parents on the other. It thus

adopts a composite approach towards educational development in which public, private and semi-government agencies work simultaneously and collaboratively to achieve educational goals.

5. The DNEP has not set out new goals and objectives for the educational sphere. It is mainly a statement of new strategies to be followed to achieve the objectives that were already defined in the earlier policies and the documents of the various regulatory agencies. The objectives of access, equity, quality and relevance have remained constant all throughout the post-Independence period and have been stated with a great deal of emphasis by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, erstwhile Planning Commission, University Grants Commission etc. The DNEP has only carried forward the ongoing education policy framework with new additions of strategic and programmatic nature. As its proposals do not entail a radical break from the existing policy framework, either in an operational or philosophical sense, the DNEP has not provoked extreme criticism or resistance so far from any of the stakeholders or interest groups involved in the education sector in India.
6. One of the major issues plaguing the policy-making process in India is the lack or insufficiency of credible data and evidence to support new or revised proposals for achieving the policy objectives. The quality of policy-related choices would improve significantly, if all credible information and data relevant to the implementation of the previous policies are available and the same are factored into the making of the new policy. However, very rarely would an education policy, or any facet of such a policy, be a result of an evidence-based assessment of the earlier strategies or decisions. The DNEP is no exception to this generalized trend observed in India's policy-making space.
7. The fiscal and social costs of the new measures proposed in the DNEP need to be assessed carefully. Because of the fast-changing national and global economic scenario, the estimation of such costs is not an easy task. Not just resource generation, even the unsystematic and ad hoc system of resource allocation is a major challenge in India's education sector. The

implementation of the DNEP's recommendations is predicated on the assumption that the public funds available for education would get doubled over the next decade on account of consistent steps by both Central and State governments. However, such assumption might prove misplaced given the previous record that confirms all governments lack interest or the lack of will to spend on school or higher education sector, and their urgency to offload the State's responsibility in the education sphere on the private players.

8. While a substantial increase in the funding for the education sector as suggested by the DNEP is both welcome and encouraging, an equally critical issue is the effective and fair utilization of the existing and available funds. There are a lot of items in the higher and school education sector which are funded without any explicit need for such funding any more due to the availability of education technologies and digital resources. Also, the model of subsidizing the school needs to be gradually replaced by an alternative model of subsidizing the needy students directly to save precious national resources and channelize them to the really deserving beneficiaries. There also exists an urgent need for establishing a transparent and monitorable system to stop leakages from government grants disbursed to colleges, universities, schools and other institutions.
9. Preserving and promoting academic freedoms and a culture of deliberation are essential for the intellectual development of a society and for research. Hence, a provision for a statutory charter of rights of students and teachers should be incorporated in the final draft of the national education policy.
10. While the DNEP does highlight the need for institutional autonomy as a prerequisite for educational development, it neither provides for an actionable roadmap for achieving this goal nor dwells on the reasons why the autonomy of education institutions got eroded over the past decades and what forces and factors were responsible for it.
11. Early childhood care and education is an area that requires professional training and knowledge on the part of teachers for a child's emotional, mental and physical growth. Hence, the recommendation made in the DNEP to rope in the existing

Anganwadis and some NGOs to provide for pre-primary education does not seem good enough for formalizing this most important phase in a child's education. Anganwadis have not been structured for the explicit purpose of pre-primary education; nor is their staff trained or motivated suitably to handle this task effectively.

12. The DNEP appears to recommend a rigid, 'one size fits all' kind of an approach towards curricular reforms and restructuring of the existing educational institutions. Considering India's federal structure, as also considering the social, ethnic and cultural diversity of the country, the draft policy should have allowed for variation in the curricular and institutional designs, depending upon the differences in socio-cultural and geographical backgrounds. Likewise, the institutional forms in the higher education sector might have to be designed differently for different disciplines and thrust areas.
13. The DNEP has a generic approach which has insufficiently addressed the operational details regarding the implementation of its provisions. The timelines for achieving various targets might not work out successfully because of the pace at which the government agencies and processes function in India. Policies, no matter how well-intentioned and well-designed, do not succeed in achieving their objectives unless they are backed by a strong political will and administrative framework to implement them. The greater blame for the below-par performance of the Indian higher education sector can be attributed to defaults and deficiencies in the area of political will and administrative commitment to implement the earlier policies, rather than to any fundamental flaws in the objectives or strategies proposed in those policies. There have been several examples of ambitious and well-calibrated policies failing on the ground on account of their partial implementation or neglect of their spirit during the implementation process. The DNEP also carries the same risk.
14. For a successful roll-out of the DNEP, the Union government should take initiatives to forge a consensus between the Union and the State governments regarding the provisions of the

new policy. The Union and State governments should also try to build the confidence of all the stakeholders who are involved with its implementation before putting the new policy in the operational grind.

V. The Way Forward:

Obviously, a lot of careful deliberation has gone into the making of the comprehensive text of the DNEP. There is nothing in its report that could be objected to for a gross default on normative or operational grounds. The proposed policy contains a lot that was overdue for decades. Its framers have tried to straddle a middle ground between the paradoxical pulls of privatization and globalization of education on the one hand, and the traditional Indian visions of education on the other. It is the effort to balance and harmonize these paradoxical pulls which has probably caused the appearance of certain ambiguities and ambivalence in the DNEP's proposals. Such ambiguities and ambivalence could be taken as an inevitable feature of the policy landscape in contemporary India which is transitioning to a new social, economic and political order. The very fact that the DNEP makes an advance over the National Education Policy of 1986, should be a reason for welcoming it. It is now time to act upon and implement its provisions in true spirit for overhauling India's education sector for the imperatives of the 21st century.

Imaging the Urban: Social Commentaries from Early India

Shonaleeka Kaul*

Cities in history have had not just a spatial existence but an ideational one an existence in the realm of ideas. They have typically gathered around themselves a host of images, notions and associations that are arguably as material a part of the story of urbanism as the structures that delimit it on the ground. In this essay we journey precisely into the idea of the city. But where should we look for this idea, where can we expect to find it? For early India, ideally, we should be able to read it off the archaeological site, but the reality is that what is called cognitive archaeology, a branch that studies meanings and mental processes through material remains, has been little practiced in this country. Similarly scarce is horizontal excavation with a concern for recovering settlement spread and layout, and the relationship between different segments of the settlement space, in this case of urban space. Instead, there is a preponderance of vertical excavation or cutting tiny sections through occupational deposits or sometimes only through the city rampart to obtain an idea of merely chronology and culture sequence. Material remains that are incidentally recovered in the process are then practically decontextualized or disembedded from their location and, therefore, from their function and value within the urban scape. In any case, early Indian history-writing has been obsessed with an exclusively materialist understanding of urbanism where, for instance, the very status of a civilization as urban is seen predicated on fluctuations in long distance trade or artisanal production; this unidimensional conception does not even begin to engage with the city as the complex cultural entity that it was and is.¹

So, where should we turn for the kind of exercise we have in mind: reading urbanism as a mentalite? I suggest literature, but not prescriptive

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literature on urban architecture and planning necessarily, which we do get from early India. It is instead narrative texts in Sanskrit, a genre called *kavya* comprising poetry, drama and tales composed across the first millennium CE that I will plumb for what I call ways of imagining the urban, that is, seeing and thinking the city and rendering it as a social imaginary, that is, a set of values, institutions and meanings common to a particular society as perceived by a social subject. I argue then for the eloquence of Sanskrit literature in telling us about the citiness of the city beyond its physical contours. One compelling historical reason for choosing these texts that were contemporary with early Indian urbanism is that they locate themselves in the quintessential cities of early India, like Pataliputra and Ujjayini, with which they self consciously engage and provide critical commentaries on, and thereby resonate with an urban referentiality. The fact that the Sanskrit plays, *natakas*, were often performed at street crossings and temple courtyards and other such very public and congregational sites within cities means that their rendition of the city and their take on it would have stood the test of contemporary reception by an equally urban audience.

The other reason for calling attention to literature is a methodological one. As A.K. Ramanujan famously put it, once the 'specific density' and 'refractive index' of the literary medium are understood, the special research potential of literature lies in its vision, its intuitive grasp of structures, and the realm of symbolic values the writers express, which provides a repertoire of perceptions otherwise not available to the social scientist. The significance of this for architecture in particular lies not only in the physical attributes of the city that are posited, but more so, in the semantics and social symbolism that are invested in the representation of the physical attributes. It is this symbolism that reminds us that ultimately, beyond utility, space is meaning. How texts conceptually organize space and how historians read space is never free from an understanding of society itself. I will today attempt by way of just a few examples to illustrate and also interpret this integral relationship between urban space and society.

I should begin by pointing out that historians have usually not looked to *kavya* representations for doing urban social history, and this is on account of the apprehension that these poetic and aesthetic representations are merely conventional and stereotypical. I, on the other hand, argue that literary conventions and stereotypes are not sterile constructs or self indulgent conceits but rather universalized

strategies of representation that bear a wealth of meanings and truth claims. They only need to be unpacked and decoded to apprehend the sociology of urban spaces.

Accordingly, I propose that *kāvya*'s treatment of the city functions somewhat like a tourist guide map: it highlights select sites, routes, and images to frame cities in a way that certain special urban qualities are projected. This then is the idea of the city which is worked into a literal description of it.

One of the first things that is always mentioned in Sanskrit literature *kavyas* when talking about the city is the city wall, *prākāra*, and its rampart, *vapra*. Both are always described using hyperbole (*atisyokti*) and simile (*upamā*) as being massive and impregnable as mountains. Indeed the close association between the city and its wall appears to be universal in the ancient world, the ideogram for city in the Egyptian hieroglyphic was a cross enclosed in a circle, indicating intersecting streets and the wall. And the wall and city were literally synonymous with the city in the early Chinese script, the same character denoting both words. Now, we know archaeologically that walls were a cardinal feature of city planning but not all Indian cities had walls. Their invariable description in literature then perhaps served more than a functional purpose: city walls were meant to mark out and defend a particular type of settlement whose significance in the socio-cultural, political and economic landscape was far greater than that of a village could ever be. Hence, city walls were striking and exceptional in the texts for their sheer magnitude and scale of construction because they enclosed only a settlement that was just as extraordinary and set apart from every other space. In a sense, all literary descriptions of the city, including the ones in this essay, essentially engage with and attempt to capture what it is that makes for this singularity and civilizational superiority of urban space and the society that inhabits it.

In the same light, wherever references to the origins of a city are to be found in the texts, the city always comes across as planned – a deliberately, even ceremoniously embarked upon and systematically executed construction, *nagara māpana*, *nagara karaṇa* or *purasthāpanā*.² Now again, not all historical cities, like their modern counterparts, would have been planned; many would have emerged out of spontaneous, diachronic, haphazard processes of migration, production, commodity exchange, or pilgrimage and so on. Yet the literary insistence on cities being founded and planned can, if we listen

carefully, perhaps be read as a statement on the city as artefact which in turn would be suggestive of other qualities of an urban settlement: its scale, complexity and efficiency of structure, for example, and its fixity and control of space. That this reading may be correct is seen in how it correlates to the standard literary formula *grāme, kharvamṭe, nigame, nagare, mahānagarevā*³ – that expresses a hierarchy of settlement types peaking in the city and the megalopolis *mahānagara*. The attribution of superiority is thus recurrently encountered in the texts in different forms.

Turning now to the layout of the city. The perspective that *kāvya*s offer is not a cartographic one by any means but a synoptic, freewheeling collage of the functions and interrelation of the different segments of urban space. In the statist text, *Arthasāstra*, the urban layout is king-centric, with the palace at the notional centre and the rest of the built-up zone positioned vis a vis it.⁴ In the architectural manual, *Mayamatam*, on the other hand, a temple or altar lies at the *brahmasthāna*, the heart of the settlement, the streets, bazaars, and the palace positioned around it.⁵

In poetry and drama, however, these king-centric and cosmic-symbolic reasons do not obtain and one finds a utilitarian organization of space with numerous functions represented. Neither palace nor any ceremonial centre is depicted as the nucleus. In fact the impression one gets of the city is not that of a settlement nucleated in any sense. A linear or rectilinear orientation seems to be more the case, and so an element of axiality rather than nuclearity can be said to characterize the urban layout.

Chiefly responsible for the impression of axiality is the phenomenon of the royal road (*rājamārga, nagara-rathyā*). This is described or alluded to so often that it emerges as the focus of the city, if ever there was one. Rows of all prominent buildings (*prāsādamālā*) appear to converge on the royal road, lining it on both sides.⁶ Every sector of the city, and the area outside it as well, is connected by or reachable via the royal road—veritably a structural artery or backbone of the city. And nearly everything worth the mention that takes place publicly in the city takes place on the royal road. This can be routine urban activity like evening promenades by the *culturati*, or the occasional spectacle such as a festive or royal procession, or more rarely, sensational events such as a man being taken away for execution to the cemetery outside the city walls.

Together these activities, and a whole array of humdrum goings-on, constitute the royal road as a site of urban rhythms. By urban rhythms is meant anything from the regular comings and goings of people about the city to the vast range of repetitive activities, sounds, and smells that punctuate life in the city. In the process, some essences of the city can also be experienced here, making the *rājamārga* represent not just structurally but "essentially" the hub of urban space. More on this a little later. First, the physical features: The royal road is physically distinctive: grand and straight and wide open. It is flanked by several streets, giving rise to something of a grid pattern. This is also indicated by the occurrence of squares (*catuspatha*), quarters (*catvāra*), and crossroads (*sr̥ṅātaka*). Partly on account of these many streets and their catchment areas feeding into and being accessed through the royal road, the overwhelming characteristic of this highway is its crowds (*anekapuruṣankulamārge*).⁷ There are horses, elephants, chariots, and of course teeming pedestrians. Among them are all manner of people, including the drunk, the poor, and the crippled and invalid (*pratyāṅga-vikalendriyasā*), in addition to a host of monks, merchants, courtesans, *vitas* or libertines, gentle folk and the hoi polloi, strolling, chatting, lounging about, or at work.⁸ Indeed, as a text pithily puts it: "the touch of strangers is all too common on the royal road" (*rājamārgesulabhamaviditajanasansparsām*).⁹

The royal road thus clearly emerges as an extended point of convergence and thereby helps enact one of the primary definitions of the city itself as a point of centripetal nodality. Starting at the city gate, the royal road probably ran up to or past the royal palace, explaining perhaps why it was called the king's road when all and sundry used it. Other dwellings lining it were also of a kind, belonging to the elites: ministers and courtiers, prominent merchants, and rich and famous courtesans *ganikas*. What is noteworthy is the dense use of space in the residential area, conveyed perfectly by the descriptions of rows of mansions "as if calling to one another like the ten mouths of Rāvaṇa"¹⁰

The king's palace itself (*rājakulam*) was a sprawling complex, comprising several buildings and sectors, and also considerable open spaces, most notably, landscaped royal greens catcombed with tree-lined paths and avenues. It has been suggested that this presented a botanical simulacrum of the palace itself, mirroring its elaborately choreographed space.

The residences were all *catuhsāla* structures, i.e. rooms arranged around a central yard, and definitely multi-storeyed as shown by references to the top floor and the terrace (*prāsādoparī-harmyatala*) and to stairs leading up to it (*sopāna*) and pillars a top it.

The terrace (*harmya*), a pinnacle of luxury complete with stucco work and canopied pavilions, offered privacy for inmates, who took to it for sleep and pleasure-living in the main, the womenfolk also resorting to it for sulking and confabulating, in addition to looking out at the goings-on in the city and, not infrequently, for flirting with men on the street and indulging in illicit love affairs with those they could smuggle in! The urban terrace thus emerges as a complex index of gender equations. It appears as a heterotopia, a site for fulfilling deep desires. However, since it aided the confinement and sequestration of high caste women away from the public world, it was surely also a site of patriarchal control. But adulterous and premarital affairs on the terrace suggests that the very qualities of seclusion and isolation there could be used to subvert the sequestration and control these were meant to effect.¹¹

Another interesting sociological observation is that *kāvya*s identify quarters or segments of the city in terms of their functionality, not in ritual terms, especially not appearing to allocate living space on the basis of *varna caste*. This is unlike normative texts like the *Dharmasāstras* and the *Arthasāstra* which, as an extension of the caste principle, prescribed that *cāṇḍālas* and heretics were to be placed outside the settlement. Instead narrative texts that the *kāvya*s are casually depict *cāṇḍālas* and followers of heretic sects alike as accessing and freely roaming through the city in the course of their pursuits and vocations.¹² Thus, considerable movement and interaction among diverse groups across the supposedly exclusive segments of space is witnessed.

Something of that interaction and variety we have already glimpsed in the crowds on the royal road, and is also revealed at sites like the courtesans' quarter, upon which customers from all social strata are colourfully depicted as descending. It should also then be mentioned that the architectural treatise *Mayamatam* recurrently states that "the city is inhabited by people of all classes/castes," suggesting thereby an intense sociological heterogeneity concentrated and negotiated within the urban space.¹³ Not only caste, according to the texts this complexity is amplified by the presence of variegated occupations, ethnicities, regional affiliations and religious faiths. A cosmopolis at all levels.

This intense heterogeneity points to an altogether different quality of life projected on the city in *kāvya*s, which underlines the importance of *kāvya*s as a contrarian, more realistic vantage on early cities and societies, one where city dwellers seem preoccupied not with maintaining ritual or social order but with attending, say, literary conclaves and salons (*goṣṭhis*) and musical concerts sangitakas on the one hand, or simply heading for the gambling house and the courtesans quarter, on the other. All this underlines urban life as public and congregational, as well as relatively free of religious and moral strictures and constraints. These were there, to be sure, but could be transcended commonly. In fact these unorthodox, hedonistic, even transgressive preferences and behaviour – something I have elsewhere called *kāma* culture, orientation to an ethic of pleasure comes to define the city in *kāvya*s and, I argue, can be traced directly to the concentrated sociological variety engendered by the city.

This distinctive ambience is evocatively captured in literary collages of urban sights and sounds, underscoring the experiential paradigm – how it actually *felt* the city – that often organizes urban descriptions. So, if you were standing near the gambling hall, you would be within earshot of a place "adorned with abusive words" (*sādhikṣ epavacanālamkṛtam*). If you were in the market, you would see "hordes of shoppers moving in file." And if you approached the temple, you would be assailed by the fragrance of flowers and incense.¹⁴

Bringing it all together in a vibrant sensorial mapping of the city is the following declamatory description by a libertine standing on the royal road: He exclaims:

"Aho! *Ujjayinyāḥ parāśrīḥ* ! How wonderful is the supreme splendour of Ujjayini! One can hear recitation of the Vedas, the noise of chariots, horses and elephants, twangs of bowstrings, enactment of plays, recitation of poems, disputations of the learned, buying and selling of goods come from beyond the four seas. At some places there is the talk of *viṭas* (libertines) and at others, practice of all the arts; one can hear butchers chopping meat, ironsmiths serrating metal, drums and flutes in a bit of intoxicated revelry at the drinking booth. The palace gong reverberates through the sky while the mansions resound with the tinkling of bangles and girdles."¹⁵

Now, this entirely auditory rendition of the city not only shows that it was possible to capture the urban experience just by its sounds, but that the noise, perhaps an element of any human settlement, was most compellingly so of a city. Moreover, the cacophony reveals, again, an intensely heterogeneous ambience, deriving from a multiplicity of occupations and functions performed in relative proximity. This thoroughly differentiated and interactive use of urban space points to the teeming mix of life that this space contains. *The physical effect is therefore also a social fact.* Further, the press and excitement and chaos of so many people with so many purposes all in one place is an identifiable quality in the descriptions. It transforms, for example, the main road, which is not frightening in itself, into a human jungle (*puruṣakāntāra*).¹⁶ Physical effect and social fact combine to create an altered psycho-sensorial perception of being in a city.

To sum up, the social structure of the city, then, tallies with its physical structure. For, just as neither palace nor temple represents the hub of the city but the royal road does, so too the urban social order is not dominated by the king or priest but by the very qualities that the *rājamārga* symbolizes: variety, mobility, congestion, and intermingling. Indeed, I find that the verses capturing the city in terms of the variegated sounds it produced also capture symbolically the nature of the urban social order. For, while these sounds—the chanting of the Vedas, clinking of ornaments, recitation of poems, twanging of bowstrings, chopping of meat, etc.—convey vibrant heterogeneity, these do not give the impression of a heterogeneity that coheres. It is instead a random, crowded miscellany, so that we are left wondering if a loss of social connection which cannot be read, and ultimately a loss of society itself.

However, the same evidence can also be interpreted as essaying a perception that there is no single, primary social order in the city, only multiple micro-orders. In other words, *the urban universe is more properly a multiverse.*

Moreover, if the different social streams comprising the urban flow are translated in traditional terms as the *trivarga*: *dharma*, *artha*, *kāma* (piety, power, pleasure) then the city is enacted by *kāvya*s as the only place where all three goals of worldly life can be pursued, and simultaneously at that. The suggested complexity—social, economic, ideological, and behavioural—is thus recognized as hierarchically superior to other settlements, and at the heart of the civilization represented by the city.

Footnotes

- ¹ I am referring to R.S. Sharma's famous deurbanization thesis. For a statement and critique, see Shonaleeka Kaul, *Imagining the Urban: Sanskrit and the City in Early India*, 2010: pp. 10-11.
- ² Kummanimata. 177, p. 77; Śisūpālavadhā. III. 35; Rāmāyana VII. 101; Arthasāstra. II.III, p. 50; Mayamata cited in U.N Roy, *Studies in Ancient Indian History and Culture*, vol.I, 1969, Allahabad, p. 135. This concept of the founding of a city, and the terms used for it, occur in other, early medieval normative texts too—such as the Samarāṅgaṇasūtradhāra, *Aparājitaprecha*, *Yuktikalpataru*, and *Yuga Purana*—as also in early texts like the *Jātakas* and *Milindapañho*. See Roy 1969, pp. 134-5.
- ³ *Mayamata*. chap. 9, p. 26; *Mahābhārata*. II.V, p. 13.
- ⁴ B.D. Chattopadhyaya, 'The City in Early India: Perspectives from Texts,' *Studies in History* 13, 2, n.s., New Delhi, 1997: p. 186.
- ⁵ *Mayamata*. chap. 9, p. 28; chap. 10, pp. 44-5.
- ⁶ *Avimāraka*. III, p. 303; *Raghuvmsā*. VI. 67; *Buddhacarita*. III. 13; *Padmaprābhātaka*., p. 115.
- ⁷ *Cārudatta*. II, p. 24; *Avimāraka*. V, p. 360; *Dhūrtavimasāmvāda*., p. 33.
- ⁸ *Jātakamālā*. XVII, p. 145; *Buddhacarita*. III. 4. See *Buddhacarita*. X. 4-7 for a vivid description.
- ⁹ *Padmaprābhātaka*., p. 54 of the Sanskrit text.
- ¹⁰ *Ubhayābhisārika*., p. 5; *Pāḍatītaka*., p. 115.
- ¹¹ See Shonaleeka Kaul, *Pleasure and Culture: Reading Urban Archetypes in Kāvya Literature* in U. Singh and N. Lahiri eds, *Ancient India: New Research*, 2009, Delhi.
- ¹ See *Arthasāstra*. II.IV and *Mayamata*. pp. 31, 33-4 for allocation of residential space in the settlement, and *Mayamata*., p. 44, for that of commercial space. Also chap. 27 of *Mayamata*. for house types for different castes.
- ¹³ *Mayamata*. chap. 10, pp. 39-40; *ibid.*: chap. 29, p. 266.
- ¹⁴ *Padmaprābhātaka*., p. 82.
- ¹⁵ *Padmaprābhātaka*., p. 72, verse 9.
- ¹⁶ *Pādatītaka*., p. 143; *Dhūrtavitasāmvāda*., p. 33.

China in Space: Military Space Capabilities and Strategy

Pushpinder Singh Bath*

Abstract

China has made spectacular progress in the domain of space, with particular reference to the utilisation of space for enhancing its military capabilities. China's space development is an integral component of its military transformation effort. China is rapidly improving its space-based intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, navigation and communication capabilities allowing for greater military support from space. Concurrently, China is developing counter-space capabilities to limit or prevent the use of space-based assets by adversaries during times of crisis or conflict. It is evident that the militarisation of space by China has a profound bearing on the security of India.

Introduction

The launch of mankind's first artificial satellite, Sputnik I, by Soviet Union in 1957, spurred China to develop its own space capabilities. Mao adopted 'Project 581' in 1958 with the intention of placing a satellite in space by 1959, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the founding of People's Republic of China (PRC). Thereafter, Zhou En Lai emerged as a major supporter of Chinese ventures in space and in 1967 he re-mustered Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) under the control of People's Liberation Army (PLA). This very step was a landmark in Chinese Space history as all its space missions now had a military flavour. China launched its first satellite Dong Fang Hong (The East is Red) on 24 April 1970 and became the fifth nation to attain this capability.

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In the PLA's strategic thought reflected in their pamphlet '*Science of Military Strategy*', the ability to control and exploit space, serves for both force enhancement and as a deterrent factor.¹ Therefore, establishing space dominance (*zhitianquan*) is an essential enabler for information dominance (*zhixinxiquan*) – a key prerequisite for fighting wars under informationised conditions.² This alludes to China's intentions of using Space as a new war domain.³

China's Space Support Architecture

China's space support architecture comprises launch centres, Telemetry, Tracking and Control (TT&C) centres and launch vehicles. These have been discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Launch Centres

China has four launch centres as under:-

- a. *Jiuquan Launch Centre*: Situated at the southern edge of Gobi desert in Kansu province, the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre is also known as Base 20. The facility has three launch pads and can place satellites in the Low Earth Orbit (LEO).⁴ From Jiuquan, China launches most of its Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) satellites and spacecraft involved in human space flight missions. It has also been developed for testing of surface to air and surface to surface ballistic missiles.
- b. *Taiyuan Launch Centre*: Also known as Base 25, this site is in Shanxi Province, Kelan county. From Taiyuan, China primarily launches meteorological, resource sensing and scientific satellites in LEO. The site has one launch pad. It has also been developed as a missile testing site.⁵
- c. *Xichang Launch Centre*: Also known as Base 27, the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre is located in Sichuan province of southern territory of China. Used primarily for launching satellites in Geosynchronous Earth Orbit (GEO),⁶ the centre has to its credit launch of some of the most prestigious missions like lunar orbiting probe and the DF-21 Anti-Satellite (ASAT) test conducted in 2007. From Xichang, China primarily launches commercial and communication satellites.

- d. *Wenchang Launch Centre*: It is located on Hainan Island. It is used to launch heavy satellites and modules for the manned space programme. The launch centre's closer proximity to the equator can increase launch payloads by 10-15 per cent.

Telemetry, Tracking and Control (TT&C) Centres

The TT&C Centres not only control and monitor China's satellites, but also enable China to track and target adversary's satellites. Such a capability can greatly augment China's ASAT operations in a conflict. TT&C operations are conducted primarily by two TT&C centres. These are Xian Satellite Monitoring and Control Centre (XSCC) and the Beijing Aerospace Command and Control Centre (BACC). Details are as under:

- a. XSCC, also known as Base 26 is a satellite control facility located at Weinan near Xian.⁷ It exercises command over geographically distributed stations which carry out TT&C tasks for satellites in LEO, GEO and experimental orbits. It also controls three land based mobile TT&C stations.
- b. BACC acts as the nerve centre for space flight testing and manned space flight missions. It is also responsible for TT&C of Shenzou missions.⁸ It exercises control over various TT&C stations located inland and abroad. It also controls the four Yuanwang TT&C ships in the Sea of Japan (YW-1), southern tip of South America (YW-2), Atlantic Ocean (YW-3) and Indian Ocean off Australia (YW-4).

Launch Vehicles

China has developed various types of launch vehicles to launch satellites in various orbits like LEO and GEO. Based on *Dong Feng* intercontinental ballistic missile are the Long March (LM)-2C and LM-2D rockets which remain China's most commonly used launch vehicles for launches in LEO. The LM-4B and 4C provide for medium lift capability to China in LEO. The LM-2F is used to launch heavy satellites in LEO. It has earlier been used to launch the Shenzhou spacecraft. The LM-2F/G has been used to launch unmanned modules of Tiangong-1 and Tiangong-2 space stations. The LM-3, 3A, 3B and 3C are used to launch medium and heavy satellites in Geostationary Transfer Orbit

(GTO). The LM-2D and LM-2F can also be used to place light and medium satellites in GTO. In the LEO, China can lift 25 tons of payload with LM-5B and 13 tons with LM-7. In the GTO, the LM-5 is expected to carry 14 tons. The LM-11 which made its maiden flight on 25 September 2015 is expected to be China's largest solid-fuelled rocket and will enhance China's launch on demand capability during conflicts. China has also been developing 'Kuaizhou' (Quick Vessel) series of launch vehicles, based on DF-21 missile. Similar to LM-11, the Kuaizhou also provides China the launch on demand capability. To this effect, China launched Kuaizhou-1 (KZ-1) in September 2013. China currently can launch a maximum payload of 25 tons in LEO and 14 tons in GTO.

China's Military Space Capabilities

China realises that space dominance will be a vital factor in securing air, maritime and electromagnetic dominance and it will directly affect the course and outcome of future wars.⁹ As per US Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) report released in 2019, China is building space capabilities in a way to deter others from intervening in military conflicts in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁰ China's Military Space capabilities can be discussed under ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), PNT (Position, Navigation and Timing), SATCOM (Satellite Communication) and counter space capabilities.

Space Based Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)

China employs a robust space-based ISR capability designed to enhance its worldwide situational awareness. It is used for civil and military remote sensing and mapping as well as terrestrial and maritime surveillance. Space-based ISR figures prominently in Chinese writings and is often considered a critical component in extending China's power projection capabilities. As China's military is increasingly employed to conduct operations farther from its mainland, the utility of space becomes all the more important. China has been working persistently towards gaining a strong foothold in the space arena in order to use it as a strategic outpost. String of advanced satellites with wide spectrum of ISR capabilities serves PLA as "eyes and ears" to keep a tab on the adversaries and complements its strategy of informationised warfare.

China began working on Space imagery in the mid 1960s, launching its first ISR satellite in 1975. Presently, China operates an extensive network of military satellites. Prominent satellite constellations for ISR applications are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

Yaogan ISR Constellation

The Yaogan satellites, launched by China from 2006 onwards, provide it global surveillance capability. These satellites are completely owned and controlled by PLA and form an important component of its Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) strategy. The Yaogan constellation comprises 31 satellites, which are a mix of Electro Optical (EO), Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) and Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) satellites.¹¹ Details of Yaogan constellation are given below:

- a. *Triplet Clusters of ELINT Satellites*: There are six triplet clusters of ELINT satellites that enable coarse tracking of targets such as an Aircraft Carrier Group (ACG). These satellites pick up electronic transmissions and are able to locate the position of targets by triangulation method. Considering the mission life of these satellites to be 5-7 years, atleast four such clusters are likely to be currently operational viz. Yaogan 17 (A,B,C), Yaogan 20 (A,B,C), Yaogan 25 (A,B,C) and Yaogan 31 (A,B,C).
- b. *Broad Area Coverage EO Satellite Cluster*: This cluster comprises EO satellites at an altitude of 1200 km. They have a broad swath and a medium resolution of 3 to 10 m. Four such satellites are likely to be currently operational viz Yaogan 15, 19, 22 and 27.¹²
- c. *High Resolution EO Satellite Cluster*: This cluster comprises satellites at an altitude of 630 km and with a resolution of 1 to 3 m. Four satellites are likely to be currently operational in this cluster viz. Yaogan 4, 7, 24 and 30.
- d. *SAR Cluster*: These satellites utilise a high resolution radar to capture images both during day and night. Six such satellites are likely to be currently operational viz. Yaogan 18, 21, 23, 26, 28 and 29.

Ludikancha Weixing (LKW) Satellites

The LKW series of satellites comprises four military satellites launched by China between 2017 and 2018. These satellites have been placed at

an altitude of 500 km and are very similar to the Yaogan high resolution EO satellites.

New Yaogan Theatre ELINT Constellation

China has launched four triplets of this ELINT constellation known as Yaogan-30 between 2017 and 2018. These triplets have been placed at an altitude of 600 km and an inclination of 35 degrees. This constellation will provide constant electronic surveillance to China over land and sea covering Taiwan, Korean peninsula, Japan's southern waters, Guam, ASEAN countries and Indian Ocean.¹³

Gaofen Satellites

The Gaofen series comprises both EO and SAR high resolution satellites, capable of providing imagery with sub-meter resolution. The Gaofen family of high resolution Earth Observation satellites are part of the China High-definition Earth Observation System (CHEOS) meant for civilian purposes, with the first satellite launched in 2013. While these were developed for non-military usage but their payload and resolution render them capable of dual applicability. Nine Gaofen satellites are currently operational.

Jilin Satellites

Jilin satellites are designed to be light weight commercial remote sensing satellites with high definition (HD) video and EO sensors of approximately metric resolution and are being fabricated by Chang Guang Satellite Technology Company. Presently six satellites are in orbit, however, future plan of launching 60 satellites by 2020 and 138 by 2030 will bring the revisit capability to 10 minutes. These satellites also have dual applicability, for both civil and military usage.

Shijian Satellites

Owned and operated by China's Academy of Space Technology,¹⁴ these satellites have a variety of configurations and missions. Although some have been used for civilian purposes, many appear to be having military ISR payloads due to their orbital characteristics and the secrecy surrounding their launches. Some Shijian satellites are also utilised to

experiment contemporary technologies like ion and electric propulsion, Signal Intelligence (SIGINT), missile tracking payloads and counter space applications like Rendezvous and Proximity Operations (RPO).

Tongxin Jishu Shiyan (TJS) Early Warning Satellites

From 2016 onwards, China has launched two satellites of the TJS series in the geo-stationary orbit. These satellites will provide early warning of the launch of ballistic missiles. Thus, bridging the gap in China's early warning capability for their BMD programme.¹⁵

Space Based Position, Navigation and Timing (PNT)

The 1991 Gulf War and subsequent US military operations illustrated the value of the Global Positioning System (GPS) for troop movements, force tracking and precision guidance. This prompted other countries to develop their own satellite navigation systems. Today, satellite navigation services are critical to military and civilian users worldwide, with applications in land, air and sea navigation, munition guidance, surveying and mapping, search and rescue, tracking and numerous other applications.

In 1994, the Chinese government gave the go-ahead for the development and deployment of an experimental satellite navigation system called '**Beidou-1**'. The first pair of satellites, known as Beidou-1A and Beidou-1B, were launched in 2000 and a third backup satellite Beidou-1C in 2003, making the system fully operational. The Beidou-1 services became available to civilian users in 2004. Thus, China became the third country in the world after USA and Russia to have deployed an operational Space-based navigation and positioning network. Subsequently, **Beidou-2** was planned with ten satellites. By 2012, Beidou-2 started providing regional positioning services covering China and Asia Pacific region. It has two kinds of services, a civilian service with positional accuracy of 10 meters, velocity accuracy of 0.2m/s and timing accuracy of 50 nano seconds. Strategic users are provided better accuracies.

The **Beidou-3**, China's next generation worldwide Beidou constellation project commenced in 2017. Beidou-3 is envisaged to have 35 satellites and will be fully operational for global coverage by 2020.¹⁶ The Beidou constellation also offers text messaging and user

tracking through its Short Message Service (SMS), to enable mass communications for specific Beidou users and provide additional command and control capabilities for PLA.¹⁷ Director of China Satellite Navigation Office, had quoted that they are aiming for positional accuracy of 2.5m, which will further be improved to centimeter level with additional ground stations.¹⁸

Beidou was originally designed exclusively for military purpose in order to reduce reliance on foreign PNT services. However, it has now turned into a commercial opportunity with its expanding reach. The Chinese government has enunciated policy measures to ensure Beidou integration with current PNT based applications in civilian domain. It has coverage along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) countries, thereby incurring massive income for China by providing Beidou services to participating nations.

Satellite Communication (SATCOM)

China's initial Command, Control and Communication (C3) modernisation efforts were focused on developing a robust and secure terrestrial network of fibre-optic cables, mobile radios and data-links. However, after realising the importance of space during the Gulf War of 1991, China enhanced the scope of modernisation by including space applications in its modernisation plans. China has been investing in advanced space based communication capabilities, as nearly all of China's strategic goals and military plans rely on information dominance. The prosecution of Anti-Access Area-Denial (A2AD) strategy is impossible without an advanced space based and terrestrial C3 network. The development of China's communication satellites started at the beginning of 1970s and their first Geostationary communication satellite was launched successfully in 1984. Initially, the technical threshold of Chinese communication satellite payloads was much lower than that of the advanced countries, however they have gradually developed critical payload technologies like high-power transponders, on-board processing, multi-beam antennas, controllable spot-beams, shaped-beam antennas and inter-satellite relay capabilities.

China is currently using a large number of communication satellites for both its civilian and military requirements. Civilian Chinese operators providing SATCOM services are Asia Broadcast Satellites (ABS), Asia Satellite Telecommunication Company (Asia Sat), China

Telecommunication Broadcast Satellite Corporation (China Sat) and also from Hong Kong based Asia Pacific Satellite Company (AP Star series). Fabrication of satellites is being done by Chinese agencies like China Great Wall Industrial Corporation (CGWIC), China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation (CASC) and by foreign vendors like Hughes, Lockheed Martin etc. Altogether, China utilises hundreds of transponders in C, Ku and Ka band for servicing its enormous civil and military SATCOM requirements.

China's specific defence SATCOM requirements are also being met by PLA operated satellites.¹⁹ CASC has developed the **Fenghuo (FH)** and **Shentong (ST)** series of military communication GEO satellites to provide secure voice and data communications for military users. Fenghuo is a family of tactical communications satellites. These satellites are used to support a theatre-level C3 network called '*Qudian*'.²⁰ Fenghuo satellites provide C and UHF band communications. Shentong is a family of strategic communication satellites, providing secure voice and data communications in the C and Ku band.

The mission life of a GEO satellite is normally planned for ten years. Accordingly, replacement satellites are launched. Going by the date of launch, it is evident that *presently China has 5-7 dedicated satellites to meet its military communication requirements apart from hiring transponders, from a vast array of civil satellites.*

China launched its first data relay satellite, **Tianlian (TL)-1**, in April 2008. It was followed by **TL-1A** in 2008, **TL-1B** in 2011, **TL-1C** in 2012 and **TL-1D** in 2016, to complete global coverage for its data relay system. In March 2019, China launched its first satellite of the **TL-2** series, a new family of bigger, more capable data relay satellites to link ground controllers with Chinese Shenzhou spacecraft capsule and China's planned space station.²¹ China has been making a focussed effort to develop niche capabilities in the SATCOM domain in order to fill its present capability voids and further gain a technological edge in space over its adversaries. China's state-owned satellite operator 'China Satcom' currently operates a fleet of 10 GEO communication satellites. It has been making huge investments in the development of high-throughput satellites (HTS) and LEO satellite constellation for communications. It had launched **SJ-13 (Shijian-13)** or **ChinaSat-16** to test electric propulsion for future satellite buses. **ChinaSat-18** is a HTS slated to be launched in 2019. China Satcom is also part of a joint

venture for development of the '*Hongyan*' constellation of 320 small satellites to provide LEO communication services. With present and future planned array of sophisticated satellites, China Satcom is gearing up to support the country's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), thereby highlighting the strategic nature of the entire programme.²²

The importance of secure communication for the armed forces cannot be overemphasised. The recent developments in Quantum communications could potentially prove to be of immense significance for ultra-secure communication network and the Chinese have been researching in this field extensively. Quantum Cryptography can be used to transmit secret messages between two points by 'Quantum Key Distribution' method in which photons are used to transfer the data.²³ Chinese have adopted the twin approach of attempting quantum communications using both optical fibres (terrestrial) and outer space. They established a 712 km Quantum communication link in November 2016 between Hefei and Shanghai²⁴ and to enhance the ranges, launched a 'Quantum Experiment at Space Scale' (QUESS) or '*Micius*', a 500 kg satellite into LEO on 16 Aug 2016.²⁵ Micius satellite is a technological demonstrator for hack-proof communication and China's National Science Center has announced the launch of additional quantum satellites to realise a secure network for both civilian and defence applications.

China is pursuing parallel programmes for military and civil communication satellites. China continues to launch new satellites to replace its aging satellites and increase its overall satellite communications bandwidth, capacity, availability and reliability. Adequate, robust and reliable satellite communication will enhance PLA's C3 capabilities especially while operating in remote and inaccessible areas where terrestrial communications are difficult. Dedicated military communication satellites will also enhance the reach and footprint of PLA Navy in the Indian Ocean region.

China's Counter Space Capabilities

China's counter space developments are coherently and asymmetrically designed to mainly counter a far more technologically advanced adversary's capability. China is pursuing an array of counter space projects, which include direct ascent anti-satellite missiles, co-orbital anti-satellite systems, directed energy weapons (DEW), cyber attack

capabilities and ground based satellite jammers.²⁶ During a conflict, China would employ a combination of “hard attacks”, which use kinetic methods to cause permanent and irreversible destruction of a satellite or ground support infrastructure and “soft attacks”, which use non-kinetic methods to temporarily affect the functionality of a satellite or ground systems. These have been discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

Direct Ascent Anti-Satellite (ASAT) Missiles

In January 2007, China tested a direct ascent kinetic-kill missile (SC-19) against a defunct FY-1C weather satellite.²⁷ The test demonstrated China’s ability to strike satellites in LEO. Since then, China has conducted four anti-satellite tests for engaging targets in LEO (160-2000 km altitude) in between 2010 and 2014. On May 13, 2013, China is reported to have tested a direct ascent ASAT weapon at an altitude of 10,000 km. It was a cold test with no impact or debris. It is expected that this rocket could be made to reach 30,000 km to threaten GEO satellites.

Co-orbital Anti-Satellite Systems

These systems consist of a satellite armed with a weapon such as an explosive charge, fragmentation device, kinetic energy weapon, laser, radio frequency weapon, jammer or robotic arm. Once a co-orbital satellite is close enough to a target satellite, the co-orbital satellite can deploy its weapon to interfere with, disable or destroy the target satellite. Co-orbital satellites also may intentionally crash into the target. These systems provide several advantages over direct ascent anti-satellite weapons, including their ability to be used to target satellites in every orbital regime, generate less debris, conduct attacks without geographic limitations and limit escalation, as many co-orbital attack options are reversible and offer plausible deniability. Chinese satellites have conducted co-orbital manoeuvres in 2008, 2010 and 2013. On July 20, 2013, China launched three satellites: the Shiyang-7 (SY-7), Chuangxin (CX-3) and Shijian-15 (SJ-15). SY-7 initially flew close to SJ-15, then it changed orbit, coming closer to CX-3. SY-7 also carried a robotic arm which the Chinese claimed was for proving in space manipulation technologies. However, in anti-satellite role, it could also be utilised to alter the orbit of target satellites or cause damage to them.²⁸

Directed Energy Weapons (DEW)

China has been committing substantial resources to research and development (R&D) for directed energy weapons (DEW), including those that could be used for anti-satellite missions, since the 1990s. DEWs can deliver concentrated energy along a line of sight trajectory at or near the speed of light to damage or destroy equipment, facilities and personnel. In 2006, China is suspected to have fired a laser at a US satellite, resulting in a temporary degradation of its functionality.

Cyber Attack

The Chinese are also developing systems to degrade or damage data links that connect satellites to ground stations.²⁹ Space dominance can be achieved if a key satellite is shut down, its mission payload is pointed in the wrong direction or it is unable to communicate at critical moments. Indeed, this may be a preferable option, since attribution may be difficult and such approaches are unlikely to generate space debris. PLA during a conflict would attempt to conduct cyber attacks against satellites and ground-based facilities that interact with satellites. These, cyber attack capabilities are an integral part of China's counter space capabilities.

Ground Based Satellite Jammers

Since the mid-2000s, China has acquired a number of foreign and indigenous ground based satellite jammers, which are designed to disrupt an adversary's communications with a satellite by overpowering the signals being sent to or from it. PLA may employ jammers to degrade or deny an adversary's satellite link during operations.

China's Military Space Strategy

China's space strategy has evolved over the years from peaceful utilisation to military utilisation of space. In 2002, China's Defense White Paper stated: "*At present, outer space is faced with the danger of weaponisation and protection of outer space from weaponisation and an arms race has become a very urgent and realistic issue.*" In 2004, Hu Jintao laid down the "*new historic missions*" for PLA which included space security as one of its missions.³⁰ In 2006, just prior to

the ASAT test, *The Science of Campaigns* in its new edition stated: “*the space domain daily is becoming a vital battle-space. Space has already become the new strategic high ground.*” The White Paper ‘Space Activities in 2006’ identified that the aims of China’s space activities are national security, protection of her rights and building up comprehensive national strength. Even the Chinese ASAT test in 2007 was justified by China as a mere response to US’ withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2001 with the aim of demonstrating its capability against US satellites.³¹ The Defence White Paper of 2015 for the first time designated space as a military domain. In 2016, the White Paper ‘China’s Activities in Space’ laid out China’s space vision as: “*To build into a space power in all respects to reliably guarantee national security.*” The Defence White Paper of 2019 states: “Space is a critical domain in international strategic competition.” Thus, China’s space strategy has gradually evolved with the realisation that dominance in space shall prove vital to winning wars under informationised conditions.

To realise its intentions, China has been developing multiple types of space capabilities to include high resolution electro-optical (EO) sensors, Synthetic Aperture Radars (SAR), Electronic Intelligence (ELINT) sensors and navigation satellites. China is also investing heavily in the development of quantum communication satellites.

With its thrust towards aligning PLA doctrines to ‘winning informationised wars’ China has started according high priority to space for conduct of military operations and denying the utilisation of space to its adversaries. China’s use of space manifests in its strategies pertaining to Anti Access Area Denial (A2AD), Counter Space Programme, Ballistic Missile Defence and Regional Power Projection.

China’s A2AD refers to restricting the adversary’s access to key locations identified as strategic in nature. It is executed with a design to ensure that the adversary is forced to engage Chinese forces from a stand-off distance in the waters claimed by China in the South and East China Sea. The execution of A2AD strategy calls for information superiority in this strategic area. While ground and sea based assets play a substantial role, space based ISR and navigation assets form the backbone of China’s information superiority mechanism for prosecution of its A2AD strategy. The eight pillars of A2AD strategy as given out by Anthony Cordesman are cyber operations, information operations,

long-range precision strikes, surface and undersea operations, ballistic missile defense (BMD), space and counterspace operations, air defense and the air operations.³² All of these pillars have linkages with space for their successful conduct. In order to execute A2AD, China needs to engage targets in deep seas far from its mainland. China has developed various sea and land based Anti Ship Ballistic Missiles (ASBM) like DF-21D³³ to suit such operations. However, the success of these missiles would require precise target information and tracking which is facilitated through space. China's ASAT programme is another facilitator to its A2AD strategy.³⁴ With a capability to disrupt or destroy adversary satellites PLA can reduce the effectiveness of adversary in this strategic area. Thus, China's ASAT programme would help China to attain information dominance over an adversary.

Another employment of China's space based assets is in the field of BMD. China has launched the Tongxin Jishu Shiyan (TJS) and Gaofen³⁵ satellites, some of which have infra-red payloads meant specifically for detecting the launch of ballistic missiles. Such satellites will prove to be the eyes and ears of China's BMD Programme.

China's space strategy is also related to regional power projection. In the realm of soft power, China has used its space assets to monitor and conduct humanitarian assistance and disaster relief programmes in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Dominica, Antigua and Barbuda. It has also employed Gaofen³⁶ and Haiyang series of satellites in counter-piracy operations and securing sea lanes of communication in the Gulf of Aden, South and East China Seas. Even China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is expected to have a linkage to space, with vehicle tracking and transshipment being controlled through satellites. This soft power is often complemented with hard power when Chinese frigates frequent the disputed Senkaku islands or blockade the approach to Scarborough Shoal. In the disputed waters of South China Sea, China has bred a number of fishing militia. These militia are given free satellite communication sets and navigation devices and are enticed with higher payment if they volunteer to fish at distances far off from main land in the disputed waters claimed by China.³⁷ With the phenomenal growth in naval capabilities, PLA Navy (PLAN) assisted by space assets is increasing its maritime footprint in littoral South Asian countries like Bangladesh, Maldives, Myanmar, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

Conclusion

The Chinese strategic thought envisions that the commanding height of strategic competition would be in space. China's rapid growth and success in space is attributable to political patronage and national vision. The Chinese believe that as important as it is to possess advanced space based ISR capabilities, it is equally important to deny these capabilities to their opponents in a combat situation. This is of paramount importance for gaining information superiority. Thus, China is developing systems and technologies that can interfere with or disable vital space-based navigation, communication and intelligence satellites of an adversary. Therefore, PLA is moving steadily to meet the essential elements of 'winning informationised wars'. The strides made by China in its space and counter-space capabilities pose a potential threat to India's space assets and national security.

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De-jure and De-facto Rights of Property Ownership of Women: A Feminist Review

Ashim Shil* & Chandrika Basu Majumder**

Abstract

An equal right to own property and adequate housing are necessary to the full realization of human rights. The scholars, who have worked on land or property rights of women, have not denied the gendered barriers that hinder women from accessing property rights. There are many factors related to gender that work in the dichotomy of legal ownership and the actual control of women in landed property. In this paper I have tried to develop some issues that I found as a researcher working on property rights of women. I have conceptualized the objective of this paper with the theoretical analysis of various studies on property or land rights of women, government reports, court verdicts, case studies and news reports of local and national dailies. Thus, this research paper is an attempt to understand the dichotomy between de-jure and de-facto rights of property ownership of women.

Introduction

Property right is a very vital factor in access to education, food, sustainable living and all human rights rolled into one factor. The Human Rights Resolution 2005/25 confirms women's equal ownership, access to and control over land. Universal Declaration of Human Rights also

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advocates that equal right to own property and adequate housing are necessary to the full realization of human rights.¹ One of the scholars, who have worked on land or property rights of women have denied the role of gender and the resultant barriers that hinder women from accessing property rights. The right to property, specially the right to inheritance of property is one of the most debatable rights because of its association with the political, economic, cultural and religious beliefs of a nation. Feminist scholars like Bina Agarwal, Nitya Rao, Flavia Agnes, Govind Kalker, Sofia Amral et.al have critically discussed the gender issues in access to property ownership of women in their writings. Among them the feminist economist Bina Agarwal has argued that though the legitimate share of landed property is a significant entry point for the empowerment of women, in reality the gender based constraints of society influence the accessibility of women to their legitimate share on it (Agarwal, 1994). The community and customary practices also discourage women from accessing their right to property where the exclusion of women from property ownership has not only happened with married women; even the unmarried daughters are excluded from the inheritance property rights. Sometimes, these customary laws are in contradiction with the constitutional laws and then the court interventions uphold gender equality in access to property ownership of women.

This paper studies various issues related to the property rights of women in general, especially their inheritance rights to property and the dichotomies that one come across in the process of the research. As there are very limited government records or data on inheritance, purchased, government programs and gifted property acquired by women so it is very difficult to categorize the mode of property ownership by women. Hence, I have to rely on individual researches and the studies of non-government organizations. However, here I have tried to develop some questions that I have conceptualized with the theoretical analysis of various studies on property or land rights of women, government reports, court verdicts, case studies and news reports of local and national media. Thus, the following sections of this paper are an attempt to understand the importance of property rights of women and finally the dichotomy between de-jure and de-facto rights of property ownership of women.

A Brief Evaluation of the Equal Property Rights of Women in India

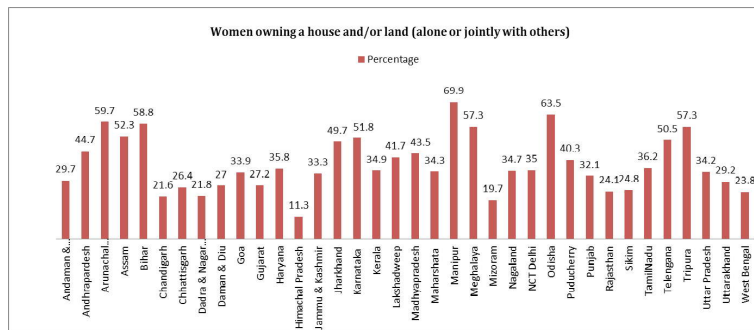
The debate on landed property right of women goes long back; divided into several phases with its controversy and evolutions. In Vedic period the property rights of Hindu women are described in different schools of thoughts like 'Dayavanga' and 'Mitakshara'. Later in colonial period the British rulers enacted the *Hindu Women's Rights to Property Act* (1937). But the debate continues and it reflects on the Hindu Code Bill controversy and the enactment of the *Hindu Succession Act* (1956). The implementation of this act shaped another dimension of the debate which has raised the question of equal rights for women in inheritance of property. Then the *Hindu Succession Amendment Act* (2005) came into force. Though there are several ways in which a woman can acquire landed property but the most important and frequent avenue to acquire land is by inheritance² and inheritance in India is mostly associated with kinship, marriage and family patterns of a particular society.

In India the equal voting rights of women, right to education, right to reproductive health, right to equal remuneration and all the rights have evolved from historical struggles to become the constitutional rights. Similarly, the constitutionalisation of the equal rights of women and men in inheritance property has its legacy of the equal rights movement in India. Women's participation in India's freedom struggle, the socio-political movements in 1960-70s like the agitation of women against price rise, peasant movements like Tebhaga movement in Bengal in 1946-47, Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh, Budhgaya movement in Bihar in 1978, the establishment of the Self Employed Women's Association in 1974, and many other women's movements across the country created an atmosphere of equal rights consciousness among the rural and urban women in India and boosted the struggle for equal rights of women on their ancestral property. Along with this activism the feminist scholarship has also been developed, for example, the *Towards Equality Report* (1974), the resolutions of the *Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* (1979) and many other conventions and conferences brought all feminist scholarship on a single platform. Thus the debate on legal reform of inheritance property rights of women in the traditional Hindu family system got a voice. Due to this the enactment of *The Hindu Succession Amendment Act* (2005) came into force and it gives an equal share to both son and daughter in their ancestral property. But after a decade of the amendment

the debate is still on. The question of gender constraints in access to actual rights of women in inheritance of property is still a live debate for the policy makers and as well as for the scholars.

As Bina Agarwal said that due to gender barriers and poor socioeconomic condition of women the modes of land acquisitions are very limited to them, thus acquisition through inheritance right is the key avenue to acquire landed property. So let's have a look at the current status of property or house ownership by women or jointly and the modes of acquisition across India.

Table: 1



Source: National Family and Health Survey, 2015-16

Table: 2
Modes of Acquisition of Land for Rural Households
Modes of Acquisition of Land

Modes	Inherited by men	Inherited by women	Undivided family land	Purchased as gift	Received	Other
Central	85.8	1	6.5	1.5	3.3	1.8
East	87	1.4	6.8	2.3	1.6	0.9
North	91.8	1.4	3.3	1.9	0.8	1
North-east	70.2	9.1	13.4	2.6	3.2	1.5
South	69.3	3.2	13.3	11	1.8	1.4
West	80.8	0.9	12.5	4.4	1.1	0.2
India	82.9	1.8	8.4	3.7	2.1	1.2 ³

Source: Lahoti.Rahul ,Suchitra J Y &HemaSwaminathan. *Not in Her Name – Women's Property Ownership in India*, EPW, Vol. No. 5, January, 2016

Methodology of the Paper

To address the main objective of my paper that is to search the 'De-jure and de-facto rights of property ownership of women' I have made use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative approach is more meaningful to understand the subjectivity of the problem and quantitative approach helped me to gather empirical information. I took the help of primary information from census report and government surveys and also made use of case studies of the Tripura Commission for Women, court verdicts and news reports of local and national dailies.

Dichotomy in Property Ownership and Domestic Violence

Feminist scholars who have worked on Property rights of women have shown the co-relation between violence, especially domestic violence and women's property ownership. Author like Sofia Amaral have opined that the chances of inheriting property by women reduces the conditions such as dowry payments, spousal violence etc. A research study (Panda and Agarwal, 2005) shows the co-relation between ownership of property and violence against women, it shows that 29 per cent of non-propertied women had experienced some form of physical violence and 49 per cent women had experienced some form of psychological violence. The study also exposed that only 3 per cent of propertied women faced dowry related violence. These two studies reflect that if women have property ownership then violence against them can be less than in case of non-propertied women. But in contrast, I have obtained a very interesting fact in Table-3 that compares some states where women are having higher ownership of property, but the spousal violence is also higher than other states.

Table: 3
Highest percentage women owning a house or land and highest incidence of spousal violence

Sate	Land own by women	Percentage of spousal violence
Manipur	69.9	53.1
Andhra Pradesh	44.7	43.2
Bihar	58.8	43.2
Jharkhand	49.7	34
Telangana	50.5	43
Odisha	63.5	35.2
Madhya Pradesh	43.5	33

Source: *National Family and Health Survey, 2015-16*

So the above table contradicts the idea that, if women have more property rights then there are less chances of incidence of violence against them.

But to develop a feminist understanding the above facts cannot be conclusive and there is a need for critical analysis of the facts. Thus, here the question is about the actual control of women on landed property. Here the reality is that, the purchase of land in the name of women normally depends on the initiative of men and women have hardly any real control over the land that is in her name. Sometimes, to avoid the deed registration fee and government tax women become namesake owners of the land. Alcoholism, adultery, sexual dissatisfaction in married life may also increase the percentage of spousal violence against women. On the other hand in states like Himachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Uttarakhand, Rajasthan, despite the low percentage of women's land ownership; spousal violence is also comparatively lower than other states of India. But we must remember that, the fear of reporting to police, fear of being 'outcaste' from the family and society, restrictions on women's movement by the family and society, fear of marital breakdown and alternative shelter, lack of support from local administrations, lack of transportation, the economic independence of women from other economic resources may also reduce the percentage of spousal violence against women even not having ownership of land or houses.

The patriarchal nature of violence against women is related to subjugating their accessibility to enjoy the rights of property. Spousal and domestic violence like beating and threatening of wife and elderly women are common. The murder and witch-hunt of elderly women is not also unfamiliar. A report came in almost all daily local newspapers of Tripura on 10th February, 2016 that a woman and her 26 years old young son were murdered in Dukli, West Tripura District of Tripura by her son-in-law. The arrested perpetrators confessed to the police that they have been paid to kill them and the motive behind the murder was to grab her property by her son-in-law. Another incident happened in this state in 2015, where a tribal woman (55 years) was murdered by her close relatives in Dhalai district of Tripura after being branded as 'witch' (The Times of India, 18th March, 2015) to snatch the property. So these incidents show that having property in the name of women has not secured their lives from violence, sometimes it can be the reason for it. Sometimes, the transfer of property to the woman increases the

fear of violence used by the husband or by the male relatives. Thus the women from wealthier families experience higher possibility of suffering from marital violence (Amaral, 2012). Sometimes a husband or other male relatives of the marital family force women to file court cases claiming her ancestral property share and often they threaten the women or become physically violent with her. Often it happens with widowed women and the pressure comes from the son, daughter or close kin relatives with whom she is staying. In one such example I have found in the Tripura Commission for Women in 2016, where two sons of a widowed woman appealed to the Commission to look after the matter where their mother was always trying to tarnish their public image and making unnecessary chaos in public though she has been given the maintenance ordered by the Commission. And on that particular appeal they categorically mentioned the name of their sister and brother-in-laws who was tempting their mother in doing so. The motive behind their fueling is to capture the property as their widowed mother is staying with her son in law.

Dichotomy in Property Ownership and Household Decision Making

Land ownership and household decision making power of women is very much interlinked. There is a common perception that if women have ownership of land then they can take more independent decisions on household issues.

In Table-4, I have shown the fact that indicate the dichotomy of land ownership and Household (HH) decision making power of women.

Table-4

Highest percentage of land ownership and lowest percentage of HH decision making

State	Land own by women	Percentage in HH Decision Making
Andhra Pradesh	44.7	79.9
Bihar	58.8	75.2
Haryana	35.8	76.7
NCT Delhi	35	73.8

Source: *National Family and Health Survey, 2015-16*

In a patriarchal social structure the major economic power is exclusively exercised by men. The expenditure on health care, education and notably decision on major household purchases is an economic decision. So, in a male dominated society it is common that all economic decisions are taken by the men and sometimes women can make their choices being a viewer or an “object” which can be accepted or not by the earners (‘subject’). For example, if the head of a household (man) pre-decides to purchase a car then in addition, his wife or partner can make her choice on the design or color of the car. So, that doesn’t mean that the woman of the house took the decision in major household purchases. In this regard the Marxist feminists argue that, the hierarchical gender relation among propertied families made women economically dependent on men and restricted their participation in the labor market in the name of household work, child care, elderly care and other ‘reproductive works’. The work that is done by the women in a household, works like a catalyst to devolve and reserve the private property through the male lineage. The women do all ‘reproductive works’ in a household as a bearer of male lineage. So that, total abolition of the private property, socialization of household work and child care is the solution to make women’s participation in labor force and their economic independence. But in contrast, feminist scholar like, Bina Agarwal argued that entry into the labor force is not only to reduce the economic dependency on men. Equal and independent rights of property can be another effective way to save women from the risk of poverty and marital disputes.

Dichotomy in Govt. Policy and Women’s Access to Property

All the scholars who have worked on land or property rights of women, none of them have denied the gender role and its attuned barriers that make hindrances for women to enjoy their property rights. For example, in our country, 19.92 per cent of the headed by a female household in rural area having irrigated land and only 6.73 per cent of them having irrigation equipment and only 2.21 per cent are having a Kishan Credit Card (Socio-economic and caste Census 2011). So that, earnings from agricultural activity is heavily linked with control over land, Government support and agricultural equipments. But this census data depicts that the lack of Government initiative and lack of irrigation equipments may leads to the lack of actual control of women on agricultural land

and they may lease it rather than do farming. There are other gender factors which work in the dichotomy of legal ownership and the actual control of women on landed property.

During National Family and Health Survey (2015-16) the surveyors asked several questions to the respondents, basically the women to measure the involvement of women in household decision making; the questions were like:

- i. Who usually decides how the money you earn will be used?
- ii. Who usually makes decisions about health care for you?
- iii. Who usually makes decisions about making major household purchases?

Now here the question is whether the daily life experiences of women can really justify their responses? Or are they actually having the household decision making power?

In the National Family and Health Survey the house owned by a woman or jointly may indicate the effect of government housing programs like *Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana* where registration is mandatory in both woman and man's name and that is showing the good number of women's ownership in some states. And subsequently, as similar statistics is not available for men so it is difficult to explore the gender gap in house ownership.

The important point is that the land ownership data on women does not specify the specific source of ownership that poses another difficulty in understanding the gender constraint in land ownership of women. Because,

- i. Through this data we cannot recognize the equal rights of daughter and son to ii their family property.
- ii. The married women inheritance rights to her natal family property.
- iii. Most importantly, to recognize and understand the gender gap in inheriting deceased husband's property of widowed women.

If we look at the reality thus, we see that, many women give up their share in the paternal land in favour of their brothers to be a 'good sister'. It is also a common social practice that married women needed her husband's consent to give up her inheritance property. Sometimes the lack of social security for women compelled them to see brothers as the source of security, especially in case of marital dispute. So that the real picture of the patriarchal Indian society indicates that the legal

rights in inheritance of property do not guarantee the actual rights on it. Another area of gender constraints that Nityo Rao pointed out in his book *Good Women do not Inherit Land : Politics of Land and Gender in India*, where he described the pathetic situation of a Santal Women of Dumka District of Jharkhand where she faced exceptional occurrences of gender based barrier in relation to custom, marriage and property right. The patriarchal gender notion of Indian society made it common that when the husband dies the widowed women is always given a lower position than the children. She is considered as ‘beneficiary’ and can be ‘willed out’ from her deceased husband’s property (Agnes, 2009). These gender based constraints in access to inherited landed property of widowed women is seen not only within the women of a particular community, it is very much pertinent to the women of the overall Indian patriarchal structure.

Property, Custom and Conflict with Judiciary

The community and customary practices also discourage women from accessing their right to landed property. The tribal women across geographical boundaries are mostly ruled by their customary laws that exclude women from inheritance of landed property. Even unmarried daughters are also excluded from the inheritance of property and subjected to sex discrimination. Sometimes, these customary laws are in contradiction of the legitimate laws. For example, Kajal Rani Noatia a young tribal woman from Tripura whilst she was deprived of her ancestral property in the name of customary practices, she filed a case in the High Court of Tripura. The Hon’ble High Court of Tripura on 26.02.2015, (Smt. Kajal Rani Noatiavs. Sri Raybahadur Tripura reported in RSA No.38 of 2009), ordered that,

Henceforth the tribal women of Tripura from all tribal groups or clan would succeed to the estate of their parent, brother, husband, son et al as heirs by intestate succession and inherit the property with equal share with the male heir absolute rights as per the general principles of Hindu Succession Act, 1956 as amended and interpreted by the apex court and equally of the Indian Succession Act to the tribal Christians.

(Ref. The High Court of Tripura, RSA No.38 of 2009, pp. 29 of 30)

Hence, the High Court judgment also portrays the gender constraints to access the inheritance of property in the name of custom.

Another landmark judgment delivered by the Himachal Pradesh High Court in June 2015 on Bahadurvs Bhatiya and Ors. Case no. RSA No. 8 of 2003, where the married women of the Gaddi tribal community of Himachal Pradesh ruled by their customary law inherits the property of their deceased father. In the name of customary law the daughters of the deceased father (Rasalu) have been denied their share of their inherited property. They filed a case in the Himachal Pradesh High Court and the High Court upheld the inheritance property right of Tribal women in the judgment delivered by Justice Rajiv Sarma's single bench. In his judgment, Justice Rajiv Sarma said, "The tribal belts in Himachal Pradesh have modernized with the passage of time. They profess Hindu rites and customs. They do not follow different Gods. Their culture may be different but customs must conform to the constitutional philosophy".

So, in this context the lack of active judiciary and administrative policy by the state compels women to forgo their inheritance claims. It is often the failure of states to integrate flexible law and policies that encourage women to access their rights to the inheritance of property.

Dichotomy in Food Security and Land Ownership

The link between food security and land rights has been shown in several research studies and becomes more significant when it is seen as women's land rights. A research study done by Landesa in the state of Andhra revealed that 76 per cent people who have household land significantly have higher level of food security and have two meals a day, compared to 50-57 per cent of non-household land owning people. Feminist economist Bina Agrwal argued that assets in mother's hand are found to have significantly greater positive effects on nutrition and survival than assets in father's hand. She also argued that, women owning land face significantly lower risk of domestic violence which is also linked with their own nutrition and their children's health.³ So from the above argument it is quite clear that if the women have right to access land then the risk of malnutrition and anaemia can be reduced. But the dichotomy is that though the women have de jure land ownership, in practice the lack of food security makes them anaemic. Here I have portrayed in the table -5, that there is a dichotomy in women property ownership and anaemia amongst them. The table below portrayed that the mentioned states where women own comparably higher percentage

of land than other states but the percentage of anaemic women are also higher than other states. Now the question is why is it so?

Table: 5
Highest percentage of land ownership and highest percentage of Anemic Women

State	Highest percentage of land ownership by women	Highest percentage of Anemic Women	Anemic Men
Jharkhand	49.7	65.2	29.9
Bihar	58.8	60.3	32.2
Telangana	50.5	56.7	15.4
Meghalaya	57.3	56.2	32.4
Tripura	57.3	54.5	24.7
Odisha	63.5	51	28.4
Assam	52.3	46	25.4
Karnataka	51.8	44.8	18.2
Arunachal Pradesh	59.7	40.3	16.9
Manipur	69.9	26.4	9.6

Source: *National Family and Health Survey, 2015-16*

In this regard I would like to argue that though women have legal rights to own land but men generally are considered as the de facto owners of the land. Sometimes, women are only name sake consenters in getting government benefits, getting loans and reduction on tax payment. Another point is that, in Indian patriarchal structure the dominant perception on women is that women/wives cannot take the decision on cropping/harvesting. In general it is found in India that a gender stereotyped perception prevails among the media, agricultural officials, NGOs on farm related services that the receivers are only the men rather than the women landowners. Sometimes it is seen that the land or property that is given to the women from her ancestral house as inheritance share falls under non-farming land.

Conclusion:

It can be said that the de-jure and de-facto property rights of women depend on each other and on a multiplicity of factors that are deeply rooted within the socio-economic and legal structures of the society.

In addition, there is a very close relation with 'care work' and property ownership. One of the most significant factors of land inheritance of Indian society depends on who looks after the parents in their old age. Thus, in the patriarchal Indian society (in general) the brides move to her in-laws house after marriage and it is assumed that the sons will live with the parents and take care of them so the property would go to the sons as a financial support of their elderly parent's care. But if we look at the any studies on violence against elderly women then the findings of the study does not match with the pre-assumed 'care work' and the access of property ownership by the sons in the name of care work. Therefore, it is quite clear that though land rights of women is an essential prerequisite of women's empowerment, but there are huge mismatches. Therefore, there is a need to reform the land rights policy of women, documentation process, ground level monitoring and survey process etc. The state-wise percentage of women's control over property is very fishy and the absence of a category-wise data on women's control over property creates hindrances to the policy makers, researchers and law makers to frame a comprehensive Govt. policy and suitable recommendations towards the advancement of both de-jure and de-facto property rights of women.

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Notes

- ¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 17, says “Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others; No one shall be arbitrary deprived of his Property.”
- ² In 2012 a study done by UN Women and Landesa where the study found that only 10 per cent of households received their homestead plots through the govt. programs, 16 per cent of the couples have purchased their homestead while 70 per cent of the households inherited their homestead plots.
- ³ Discussed in the working paper on Food Security, Productivity, and Gender Inequality by Bina Agarwal published in IEG Working Paper No. 320, 2012.

Thoughts on Religion: Swami Vivekananda, Christianity, Missionaries, and Conversion

Ravi K. Mishra*

The life, ideas, and achievements of Swami Vivekananda have been at the centre of considerable historiographical inquiry.¹ His formulation of Hinduism, especially his reform agenda for the Hindu society, has also been the subject of much scholarly analysis.² What is not so well covered by historians and other scholars is his interface with Christianity in general and Christian missionaries in particular. This paper focuses on these relatively neglected aspects of Vivekananda's work. It argues that Vivekananda firmly believed in the equality of all religions inasmuch as they preach similar morals and lead to the same truth, irrespective of their external forms. Though he had a very positive opinion of Christianity as it was preached by Jesus Christ as also of the character of Jesus as a prophet, he was quite critical of the historical Christianity as it had existed in Europe for close to two millennia and in North America for a few centuries. He was especially critical of the attitudes and the activities of Christian missionaries in India because not only did he reject conversion from one religion to another as a matter of principle – since all religions are equal and lead to the same truth – but he was also highly critical of the methods adopted by the missionaries to gain converts. The paper argues that this was a typically Indian approach to the religious question and to the issue of proselytization. Led by this approach, Vivekananda asserted that though Hinduism, as it existed in his own times, needed a lot of reform, there was no need of conversion to Christianity which itself, he asserted, needed considerable reform.

The paper discusses Vivekananda's formulation of religion as such in the first part; in the second part, it dwells upon Vivekananda's views

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on prophethood, Christ and Christianity. The final part of the article deals with Vivekananda's critique of Christian missionaries' activities in India, especially their proselytizing work.

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It is, of course, a well-known fact that Vivekananda was a keen observer of religion and spirituality and believed in the congruence of all religions. He was a revered sage of India, in fact, the only one to have acquired an international fame of great magnitude, parallels with which can hardly be for any Indian to this day. He rose to world fame with his historic lecture delivered at the Parliament of World Religions at Chicago in 1893, and went on to deliver many more of such lectures, sometimes invited by the Unitarian Church of the United States.³

Vivekananda's interactions with Christianity focused on its theological and philosophical aspects as much as on the issue of conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. The latter concern arose in a specific context of late nineteenth-century India in which religious conversion sponsored by the Christian missionaries had started gaining considerable ground.⁴ Vivekananda, therefore, launched a lifelong campaign against this proselytizing agenda, making a critique of conversion on philosophical, theological, and cultural grounds, while engaging with Christianity as a whole. He displayed a peculiar capacity to bring out the essence of religion without demonizing any aspect of any religion. Thus, Vivekananda's views on Christ and Christianity can never be understood in isolation from his overall understanding of religion. Bearing that in mind, this paper begins with an analysis of what religion meant to Vivekananda and would then go on to discuss his views on Christianity and conversion.

Right at the outset, it must be clearly stated that religion to Swami Vivekananda was perhaps the foundational aspect of all humanity. Not only that, he held that it was more pronounced in that sense in the 'Orient' than in Europe. "In Asia, even today, birth or colour or language never makes a race. That which makes a race is its religion."⁵ He was quite categorical in his approach when he went on to make the assertion: "Religion is the tie, unity of humanity."⁶

To many, Vivekananda might seem to be someone who supported the idea of "believing" as understood in monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam. Though he was not averse to the notion of God

sending his messengers to enlighten the masses on earth that ought not to mislead us into believing that he was in accord with the idea that one must believe in God and his religion in order to be truly pious and sublime. His understanding of religion is well illustrated in the passage quoted below:

[Religion] is not a doctrine, [not] a rule. It is a process. That is all. [Doctrines and rules] are all for exercise. By that exercise we get strong and at last break the bonds and become free. Doctrine is of no use except for gymnastics. ...through exercise the soul becomes perfect. That exercise is stopped when you say, "I believe. ..."⁷

It stands out among Vivekananda's ideas on religion that while he is, at times, critical of ritualistic religion as it often leads to dogmas, that does not deter him from upholding the significance of rites and rituals as an integral part of religion. To make himself more intelligible, this is how Swamiji explained the origin of Buddhism:

Do not mistake Buddhism and Brâhminism. In this country you are very apt to do so. Buddhism is one of our sects. It was founded by a great man called Gautama, who became disgusted at the eternal metaphysical discussions of his day, and the cumbrous rituals, and more especially with the caste system.⁸

Despite criticizing both ancient society of India just prior to the coming of Buddha and the Jewish society⁹ at the time when Jesus of Nazareth appeared, he clearly extends his support for rituals in everyday practices of religion, lucidly stated in his statement, "The attention to forms, to formulas, to the everyday details of religion, and to rituals, may sometimes be laughed at; but nevertheless, within them is strength."¹⁰ Though the above statement was made during his lecture on Jesus Christ and related to the social conditions prevailing in the Jewish society at that time, the spirit of his utterance can't be completely severed from his Hindu roots.

Vivekananda, being a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, clung to the teachings of his Guru. He strongly maintained that all religions lead to the same truth, albeit through different paths.¹¹ He held all religious teachings including those of Islam and Christianity to be on the same pedestal as Hinduism. Pondering upon the philosophical basis of all religions, Vivekananda maintained that the difference between them is one of degree and not of form. He considers various religions

of the world as different stages toward one eternal Truth. He once said: "So all forms of religion, high or low, are just different stages in the journey towards that eternal state of Light, which is God Himself. Some embody a lower view, some a higher, and that is all the difference."¹² His understanding of religion compels him to take an evolutionist perspective on the issue (as evolutionism was in vogue in most social science literature at the time when he produced most of his works).¹³ Thus, he considered a primitive stage of religion to be emanating from the minds of the uneducated masses in whose imagination dwells a God, the very conception of whom is beyond the mundanity of this universe (this conception of God sounds somewhat akin to the idea of "substance" that Spinoza substituted for the concept of God).¹⁴ Vivekananda posited this argument while deliberating upon the role of Christ as a messenger of God:

Therefore, the religions of the unthinking masses all over the world must be, and have always been, of a God who is outside of the universe; who lives in heaven; who governs from that place; who is a punisher of the bad and a rewarder of the good, and so on.¹⁵

This being a primitive stage of theological development, Vivekananda pointed towards the fact that spiritual advancement has led us to consider God to be an omnipresent entity, a personal meeting with whom is not impossible. According to him, some individuals "who had developed enough and were pure enough, went still further, and at last found God."¹⁶ Vivekananda was, thus, of the opinion that Christianity as a religion represented this advanced level of theological understanding. Thus, he quoted from the New Testament which says: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."¹⁷ He further took help of verses from the New Testament to illustrate his scheme of evolutionist classification on the question of the relationship between man and God. Assigning Jesus an exalted position, he called him "the Great Teacher" and pointed out to the prayer from New Testament which says: "Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name".¹⁸ Vivekananda told his audience that this prayer was meant for the uneducated masses who visualized God in the form of a superior being occupying a high throne up there in the heaven. According to him, for the more spiritually advanced, Jesus had a different prayer to recommend: "I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you."¹⁹ All this effort at outlining various facets of imagining God was aimed at showing

the efficacy of Jesus Christ as a teacher who had sublime things to teach the world.

At the same time, Vivekananda sought to argue that Hinduism contains similar characteristics. In one of his lectures, he quoted from the *Bhagvad Gita* (IV, 7-8) where Lord Krishna said:

Whenever virtue subsides and immorality abounds, I take human form. In every age I come for the salvation of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, for the establishment of spirituality.²⁰

This is clearly an attempt to highlight the fact that Krishna acts as the guardian of human virtues, which is a task that prophets of every religion strive to perform. Both Christ and Mohammed were to him prophets of peace and compassion symbolizing the highest order of virtues that human beings ought to aspire for. At the same time, he saw their teachings as not being at odds with the ancient teachings of Hinduism. He opened one of his lectures by alluding to this point in the simplest possible terms. He said: “The ancient message of Krishna is one harmonising three – Buddha’s, Christ’s and Mohammed’s. Each of the three started an idea and carried it to its extreme.”²¹ In that sense, he was not averse to the idea that the people of India be amenable to the teachings of Christ as he did not see much of a difference between the core teachings of Christ regarding morality and purity and the teachings contained in ancient Hindu scriptures.²² This synthesis was described by him as “practical religion”:

[You may] pray all the time, read all the scriptures in the world, and worship all the gods there are, [but] unless you realise the soul there is no freedom. Not talking, theorising argumentation, but realisation. That I call practical religion.²³

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Vivekananda, keeping in consonance with his own mission in life, accorded special place to all prophets who ever walked the earth, irrespective of the region where they were born and religions or creeds they preached. Prophets, in his view, were humans of extraordinary energy as well as disposition. Thus, two chief characteristics that he highlighted in the character of Christ are ‘renunciation’ and ‘selflessness’. Expounding the significance of renunciation to his audience at LA, California in 1900, the Swami thus proclaimed:

You are the heirs of immortality, sons of the Eternal Father. This is the great lesson of the Messenger, and another which is the basis of all religions, is renunciation.”²⁴ He asked: “How can you make the spirit pure?”²⁵

To grant his audience some respite, Swamiji came up with a laconic reply: “By renunciation.”²⁶ Therefore, it was the path of renunciation that ought to be seen as the most sublime, that leads one to the highest truth, that is, God and helps one to attain salvation. He cited an aphorism from New Testament where Jesus has this to say: “Whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall find it.”²⁷ He further said while referring to teachings of Jesus of Nazareth:

This is the one ideal he preaches, and this has been the ideal preached by all the great Prophets of the world: renunciation.²⁸

It is in the course of his attempt at explaining the meaning of renunciation that Vivekananda asked another question²⁹ to his audience: “What is meant by renunciation?”³⁰ As always, he himself answered the question: “That there is only one ideal in morality: unselfishness. Be selfless. The ideal is perfect unselfishness.”³¹ Though he referred to these characteristics found chiefly among prophets while outlining the salient features of the character of Christ, Vivekananda took utmost care to generalize his idea with regard to the overall concept of prophethood. Thus, he spoke: “One more point. All the teachers of humanity are unselfish.”³² He asked his audience to imagine a situation where a man walked up to Jesus of Nazareth and said:

What you teach is beautiful; I believe that it is the way to perfection and I am ready to follow it; but I do not care to worship you as the only begotten Son of God.³³

The most probable answer that would be forthcoming from Jesus according to Swamiji would be this:

Very well, brother, follow the ideal and advance in your own way. I do not care whether you give me the credit for the teaching or not. I am not a shopkeeper. I do not trade in religion. I teach truth only, and truth is nobody’s property. Nobody can patent truth. Truth is God Himself. Go forward.³⁴

Vivekananda also expressed his concern for the relegation of this ideal to background in his own times.³⁵ He was not at all impressed by the views disciples of various prophets held in his times. The notion held by them was: “No matter whether you practise the teachings or

not, do you give credit to the Man? If you credit the Master, you will be saved; if not, there is no salvation for you.”³⁶ Swamiji was convinced that any prophet, if alive, would not approve of such opinions held by his disciples.³⁷

He completes the connection between God and Man with the prophet playing the interlocutor by asking the common men and women to imbibe the teachings of the prophet to an extent where they themselves play the role of prophets. He addressed each one from his audience and said:

In a sense you are all Prophets; every one of you is a Prophet, bearing the burden of the world on your own shoulders.³⁸

As far as his estimate of the character of Jesus of Nazareth is concerned, it may be noted that his conception of the Christ was free from any mythical as well as mystical aspects commonly associated with the tales and fables of Jesus as well as other prophets.³⁹ Swami Vivekananda’s Jesus of Nazareth was a purely historical character with undeniable historicity rooted in the history of the Jewish race right at the time when Jesus is said to be born. He called him an “Incarnation of the Jews”.⁴⁰ The state of the Jewish society in those times was considered by Vivekananda to be the necessary condition for Jesus to appear on the scene.

Not only the question of historicity, but the issue of the proper geographical location where Jesus was born and lived was also addressed by Swami Vivekananda. He considered Nazareth to be a part of the ‘Orient’ that led him into contrasting his evaluation of the character of Jesus with the manner in which he is characterized in the West. He reminded the audience of Los Angeles, California with great eloquence:

Yet notwithstanding all your attempts to paint him with blue eyes and yellow hair, the Nazarene was still an Oriental. All the similes, all the imagery, in which the Bible is written – the scenes, the locations, the attitudes, the groups, the poetry and symbolism — speak to you of the Orient: of the bright sky, of the heat, of the sun, of the desert, of the thirsty men and animals; of men and women coming with pitchers on their heads to fill them at the wells; of the flocks, of the ploughmen, of the cultivation that is going on around; of the water-mill and wheel, of the mill-pond, of the millstones — all these are to be seen to-day in Asia.⁴¹

Vivekananda doubtlessly admired the personality of Jesus Christ as a Messenger of God who had a lot to contribute to the world of

ideas. In a lecture delivered at LA, California in 1900, he called Christ a “great soul” and considered him to be a person of enormous energy; energy that was much larger in magnitude than what common people possess (it is interesting to note that he considered himself to be an ordinary person of the same level of energy as everyone else in the audience which is a sign of his modesty). His views on Jesus came out clearly in the lecture:

And the three years of his ministry were like one compressed and concentrated age, which it has taken nineteen hundred years afterwards to unfold, and may yet take who knows how much longer? Little men like you and me, are reservoirs of just a little energy. A few minutes, a few hours, a few years at best, are enough to spend it all, to stretch it out, as it were, to its fullest strength, and then we are gone forever. But mark this giant! Centuries and ages pass, yet the energy that He left upon the world is not yet stretched out, nor yet expended to its full. It goes on gaining new vigour as the ages roll on.⁴²

Continuing with his praise for the character of Christ, the Swami weaved a novel fabric of theological explanation of what he stood for. In sharp contradiction to what Christian theology professes, he introduced elements from Hinduism. He said:

So the Omnipresent God of the universe cannot be seen by us until He is reflected by some one of these giant lamps of the earth, – the Prophets, the man-Gods, the Incarnations, the embodiments of God.⁴³

He went on to say something that appears to be a typical Hindu interpretation of the universe and its relation to God, which is to say, that divine power is not the exclusive domain of God; in fact, through one’s endeavour, a human being might attain Godhood in this world, a thought he expressed by means of the following statement:

Never forget the glory of human nature! We are the greatest God... Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless Ocean which I am.⁴⁴

He said: “However much you may try, by struggle, by abstraction, by whatsoever method you like, still so long as you are a man in the world of men, your world is human, your religion is human, and your God is human.”⁴⁵ He derived the conviction to profess such heresies from his reading of the character of the Messenger of God, that is, Jesus Christ. He asked his audience to draw a comparison in the form

of a thought experiment between the ideals attributed to God and the real life of a living Prophet:

Take one of these great Messengers of light, and compare His character with the highest ideal of God that you ever formed; and you will find that your God falls short of the ideal, and that the character of the Prophet exceeds your conceptions.⁴⁶

Thus, he asks some questions from his audience expecting them to shout out a resounding 'No'. His first question was: "Is it wrong therefore, to worship these as God?"⁴⁷ The second question was probably a comment on the stringent rules to be followed by a devout Christian for whom equating any human being with God is taken to be a cardinal sin. Vivekananda asked this simple question then: "Is it a sin to fall at the feet of these man-Gods, and worship them as the only divine beings in the world?"⁴⁸ He obviously wanted his audience to answer the question in the affirmative. For him, it was not at all a sin to revere and worship those great souls who walked the earth in the form of Messengers of God.

This view of Vivekananda's clearly goes against the monotheistic ideology which does not approve the idea of worshipping a human being who happens to be a Prophet, assigning him the same place of divinity as possessed by God, the almighty. In fact, compared to Christianity a more stringent view is held by another monotheistic religion Islam on the subject. The Quran very categorically puts an end to any debate that could potentially be raised on the issue of duplication of the idea of God and calls it *Shirk*. It says: "He is the God, other than whom, there is none."⁴⁹ Rejecting all claims of any sharing of divinity with one God, the Quran also tries to make it clear that all Prophets including Muhammad are nothing but Messengers of God. They cannot in the least be equated with God. It is clearly stated in the verses of the Quran that Muhammad has never claimed to be "a master of treasures but only a Messenger of God; that God could, if He wished, bring about these things at the hands of a prophet, but a prophet cannot do these things on his own (6.al-An'âm:9, 37, 111; 17.al-Isrâ':95; 7.al-A'râf:188; 11.Hûd:12)."⁵⁰

The running theme in almost all that Vivekananda had to tell the world was the superiority of the 'Orient' when it comes to philosophy and religion over the 'Occident' that kept itself concerned with minute details of politics and public affairs, often neglecting the importance of

religion in everyday life. However, that is not to suggest that for once he considered conceding Christ to the West for Christianity had largely flourished in the West. Of Christ he said: "So, we find Jesus of Nazareth, in the first place, the true son of the Orient, intensely practical."⁵¹ Here again he shows his concern for "practical religion" as discussed during the course of his other lectures. Hence, he keeps moving back and forth between Christ as God and as Messenger of God. Considering Jesus a Messenger of God who acquired a human body and came down to earth in order to preach the Truth about God and lead the entire humanity towards Him, the Swami said: "He was a soul! Nothing but a soul, just a working body, for the good of humanity; and that was all his relation to the body."⁵² Thus, he acknowledged that their Christ had a human form who believed in and preached the idea of evanescence of the world. But the Swami was quite alarmed at the ways in which Christianity as a whole had in his opinion twisted and misinterpreted the teachings of Christ.

Emphasizing the practicality of life that Jesus preached, Vivekananda said of him: "He has no faith in this evanescent world and its various belongings. No need of text-torturing, as is the fashion in the West in modern times, no need of stretching out texts until they will not stretch any more."⁵³ He maintained that Jesus as depicted in the practices of Christianity is not the result of honest interpretation. He said:

Let us all, mark you, be honest. If we cannot follow the ideal, let us confess our weakness, but do not let us degrade it; let not try to pull it down. One gets sick at heart at the different accounts of the life of the Christ that Western people give. I do not know what He was or what He was not! One would make him a great politician; another perhaps, would make of him a great military general; another, a great patriotic Jew; and so on.⁵⁴

What comes out clearly is that Vivekananda had a strong conviction that the ideals preached by Jesus of Nazareth were worth following, but the way in which the West had adopted them was nothing but a "degradation" of all that he preached and stood for. His esteem for Christ was so high that he took him to be the personification of all ideals that humans ought to strive to achieve. He issued a command for collective confession by his audience when he said: "Let us confess and not put to shame that great Teacher of Humanity!"⁵⁵ What did he

expect his audience to confess? It was their inability to follow the path of humility and renunciation shown by Jesus. The Swami was critical of the manner in which people were lost in affairs of “me and mine”.⁵⁶ He asked them to listen to Jesus Christ who preached to his disciples in a metaphorical sense: “The foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.”⁵⁷ According to Vivekananda, this is the manner in which one could attain salvation in Christ’s views; a life without worldly possession is the kind of life that he recommended.

In order to sever Christ off any worldly representation, Vivekananda equated him with “soul” and “spirit”. He said about Christ: “He was a disembodied, unfettered, unbound spirit.”⁵⁸ Further stretching the idea of spirit and applying a sort of Vedantic interpretation to the term, he told his audience that Jesus knew that all living entities are parts of the same spirit. Of Jesus he said: “And not only so, but He, with his marvellous vision, had found that every man and woman, whether Jews or Gentile, whether rich or poor, whether saint or sinner, was the embodiment of the same undying spirit as himself.”⁵⁹

A sharp contrast emerges in Vivekananda’s views on Christ regarding the manner in which he asked his disciples to stand upright to the challenges of life. While the common way of handling the miseries of life is to magnify them and ask the people to somehow trudge through the path of life, Christ, according to Vivekananda, tried to instil a feeling of confidence among his followers by revealing to them the fact that the soul within them is indestructible, a thought that surely has its roots in the classical literature of India, especially the school of Vedantic philosophy. In Swamiji’s words, this is what Jesus said:

Give up, He says, these superstitious dreams that you are low and that you are poor. Think not that you are trampled upon and tyrannised over as if you were slaves, for within you is something that can never be tyrannised over, never be trampled upon, never be troubled never be killed.⁶⁰

The viewpoint expressed here could sound like an anomaly in the political context of the two big monotheistic religions – Christianity and Islam. It could be argued that much of the process of evangelization has quite a lot to do with capitalizing upon the sentiments of resentment among the masses against the order of the day, especially against the ruler who is often characterized as a tyrant. For example, a survey of the ecclesiastical history of the Roman Empire before Constantine goes

on to prove that the discontents among the populace against the ruling class formed one of the prime reasons why Christianity could strike roots in the pagan Roman Empire.⁶¹ Similar is the historicity of the origin of Islam. The then prevailing conditions in Mecca pushed a lot many people into poverty and slavery with only a few wealthy people leading an enjoyable life in material sense. This skewness in the society probably led a vast majority to accept Islam in seventh-century Arab.⁶² What if people had accepted and believed in what Jesus preached as mentioned in the statement quoted above? They could have risen above the worldly sense of tyranny and temporal rule, at the same time holding their heads high. Could those organized religions still seem appealing to them?

X

Combining his Vedantic ideas with the western views on the character of Jesus Christ, Vivekananda expressed his non-dualistic perspective when he said: "If I, as an Oriental, am to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way left to me, that is, to worship him as God and nothing else."⁶³ In complete agreement with the classical sense in which Hinduism understands its ancient theology, the Swami found it futile to distinguish between God and Messenger of God which is of foundational value to Christianity and Islam. His discomfort with the nature of distinction maintained in classical Christian theology came out in the form of a question: "If we bring him down to our level and simply pay him a little respect, as a great man, why should we worship at all?"⁶⁴ He continued, "Our scriptures say: "These great children of Light, who manifest the Light themselves are light themselves, they being worshipped become one with us, and we become one with them."⁶⁵ Thus, his reluctance to accept Christ as a figure worthy of worship merely in the form of a Messenger of God seems to be assuaged by commandments of the scriptures he mentions here. What are these scriptures? They are ancient Indian scriptures, the backbone of Hinduism, or at least an interpretation of scriptures that is informed by his learning derived from Vedanta? Thus, the guiding force behind all his philosophical musings was Hinduism.

While admiring the persona and the message of Christ, Vivekananda exhibited strong reservation about Jesus as son of God, a core belief among Christians and arguably the single most important point of

contention between Christians and Muslims who object to the idea of assigning relatives to God that is “Allah.” Dwelling upon his evolutionary scheme of the progress of religion, especially Christianity, Vivekananda informed his audience that Christ’s teaching for the uneducated masses differed from what he had to tell the more elevated. He alluded to the verse from a prayer that says: “I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”⁶⁶ Vivekananda did touch base upon the issue of disagreement regarding this between the Christians and the Jews and especially the reason Jews thought Jesus was blasphemous. He said: “And then, when the Jews asked him who He was, He declared that He and His Father were one; and the Jews thought that, that was blasphemy.”⁶⁷ What seems striking is the fact that Vivekananda found all three stages of religion embedded within the teachings of Christ enshrined in the form of New Testament. Thus, Christ, according to Swami Vivekananda, could be all three – God, Son of God, and the Messenger of God, depending on the stage of religion one identifies oneself with.

One of the notable things about Vivekananda’s views on Christ and his teachings is that he finds them compatible with the ‘practical religion’ mentioned earlier:

Serve as worship of the Lord Himself in the poor, the miserable, the weak. That done, the result is secondary. That sort of work, done without any thought of gain, benefits the soul. And even of such is the Kingdom of Heaven.⁶⁸

Thus, Vivekananda was somewhat Schopenhauerian in his approach in the sense that he saw a radiant, sublime being in the character of Jesus Christ whose teachings he found suitable to serve as the guideline for humanity in his own times; for this is how Schopenhauer extols the deeds, and with it, the character of Christ:

Now if we keep in view the Idea of man, we see that the Fall of Adam represents man’s finite, animal, sinful nature, in respect of which he is just a being abandoned to limitation, sin, suffering, and death. On the other hand, the conduct, teaching, and death of Jesus Christ represent the eternal, supernatural side, the freedom, the salvation of man. Now, as such and *potentiâ*, every person is Adam as well as Jesus, according as he comprehends himself, and his will thereupon determines him.⁶⁹

However, this is not to suggest that Vivekananda was comfortable with the manner in which Christianity has been practised and propagated.

The Christianity that he witnessed was to him at great variance with what Jesus had intended to teach the world. He displayed great intellectual dexterity when it comes to establishing the fundamental difference between Hindu and Christian thought:

One of the chief distinctions between the Hindu and the Christian religions is that each human soul had its beginning at its birth into this world, whereas the Hindu religion asserts that the spirit of man is an emanation of the Eternal Being, and had no more a beginning than God Himself.⁷⁰

Thus, Vivekananda was trying to construct a novel theology. His idea of 'practical religion' referred to earlier attempts to subsume both similarities and differences between Hinduism and Christianity. A staunch believer in religious harmony and unity of all religions, he advocated an exchange of ideas between Hinduism and Christianity, 'Christians can learn from Hindus, and Hindus can learn from Christians. Each has made a contribution of value to the wisdom of the world.'⁷¹

He reiterated this point in another lecture delivered at Detroit in March, 1894. He believed that all religions talk about the same truth and thus, there is a scope for exchange of ideas between religions. Addressing a Christian audience, he said:

Help the Jew and let him help you. Help the Hindoo and let him help you. I deny that any human being has the faculty of seeing good at all who cannot see it in all places.⁷²

X

Thus far, it has been established that Vivekananda had a positive view of Christ, and had some good things to say about Christianity, though his evaluation of Christianity as a religion was not uncritical. It is however with regard to his views on missionaries that Vivekananda was strongly critical, especially of the often venomous propaganda carried out by the Christian missionaries in India in the nineteenth century. Notwithstanding the fact that he had a positive view of Jesus and Christianity, Swami Vivekananda cannot be seen as being in approval of Christianity as a whole or as somebody who would revile the popular Hinduism of the day on the lines similar in tone with the Christian missionary propaganda in India launched against Hinduism in the nineteenth century. He would not subscribe to the popular Christian view of Hinduism popularised by a sermon from the pulpit all across

America, mainly in response to the massive success attained by him in his tour there. He became strongly committed to clear the mud off India's reputation in the West in simple and unambiguous language. When faced with the question, "Do they burn widows with their husbands?" He unhesitatingly answered in the negative. The report in the *Detroit Free Press* went thus: "No, the speaker repeated, the people do not burn women in India; nor have they ever burned witches."⁷³ The statement came in response to a question put to him on the practice of *Sati* in India where he had to face the accusation that there was a bizarre and inhuman practice in India, according to which widows were forced to immolate themselves on the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands. Furthermore, he sought to refute exaggerated claims about the social evils of Hinduism spread by missionaries all across western countries in the 19th century. He rubbished accusations such as infants were thrown in the Ganga to be consumed by crocodiles and people committed suicide by laying their bodies beneath the wheels of their lord, Lord Jagannath.⁷⁴ Such cultural defence of Hinduism and of India was the hallmark of his lectures and informal talks on numerous occasions. Vivekananda did not mince his words in his criticism of Christianity and its missionaries which is evident from his statement below:

Christian nations kill and murder, he said, and import disease into foreign countries, then add insult to injury by preaching of a crucified Christ.⁷⁵

This was the opening sentence of a media report on Swamiji's lecture at Detroit published in *Detroit Tribune*, dated March 11, 1894. The utterance, in a sense, summarizes what he felt about the impact of preaching that was practised and propagated by Christian missions around the world. It is also evident that he was well aware and also disapproving of the tactics employed by such missions that entailed substantial use of violence. As one can make out from the history of Christian Inquisition spread across geographies and cultures, the emphasis on the words, "kill and murder" is more of a resonating statement signifying the often untold horrifying stories that characterize the historical event called Inquisition.⁷⁶

Though critical of the means employed by the missionaries in order to proselytize the Indian populace, Vivekananda saw one particular benefit emanating out of a project about which he had nothing else positive to say. He argued that due to the arrival of Christian missions

in India, education actually became cheaper which is always a welcome thing to happen in any modern society, notwithstanding the fact that providing cheap education was not the principal motive of the Christian missions in his day.⁷⁷ Rather, there was an attempt by these schools to influence the young minds and win them over to Christianity. One such case exemplifying the agenda to convert in the name of education surfaced during the early part of the twentieth century in the hill town of Almora where a school was almost shut down because a Hindu student was converted to Christianity under the influence of the missionary education that the school imparted.⁷⁸ An official estimate that was published as *General Report on Public Instruction in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*, 1912, reported that in U.P., 70 per cent of all schools were mission-controlled.⁷⁹ Nonetheless, Vivekananda expressed his satisfaction over the fact that these efforts proved too fragile for the young Hindu boy to fall prey to it. This is what he had to say in this regard:

There are no conversions from the schools to the Christian religion. The Hindoo boy is very clever. He takes the bait, but never gets the hook.⁸⁰

Not just young boys at school, the Swami was also worried about the attempt at indoctrination that took place within homes of the village-folk that was mainly led by “lady missionaries” who would go there and read the Bible while the girls around them were apathetic to what they had to say. However, they did not entirely lend a deaf ear to what the female missionaries had to say. According to Vivekananda: “The girls, like the boys, he said always alert to learn practical things, but they will give little heed to the Christian religion, although they will espouse it to get the other advantages.”⁸¹

The last part of the sentence needs careful analysis. What were the advantages that would probably drive these otherwise indifferent people toward embracing Christianity? It was nothing but hunger and poverty. This is how he explained the situation that he experienced in India, his homeland:

We sometimes have famine in India. And so the young missionaries will hang about the fag end of a famine and give a starving native 5 shillings, and there you have him, a ready-made Christian; take him. That was probably a Baptist missionary, and so when a Methodist missionary comes along he gives the same native 5 shillings, and his name is again

registered as a convert. The only band of converts around each missionary is composed of those dependent upon him for a living. They have to be Christians or starve.⁸²

That the Christian missionaries often converted starving people by giving them aid was a well-acknowledged fact in Vivekananda's times can't be disputed if one goes through the entire lecture, a part of which has been quoted above.⁸³ However, what seems startling is the continuation of the tactic by Christian missionaries in today's India. Media reports last year covered a story that was about some slum-dwellers in the city of Agra who were lured into accepting Christianity in exchange of *samosas*.⁸⁴ Thus, what Vivekananda observed about the tactics of the Christian missionaries in his time does not seem to have changed even to this day.

But, besides being critical of the methods applied by the missionaries for conversion, Vivekananda also questioned their qualifications and intentions to be able to play the role of a real missionary. He pointed to the ignorance of the missionaries when referring to them he observed: 'I have never known of a single man who has studied Sanscrit [*sic*] before going to India as a missionary and yet all our books and literature are printed in it.'⁸⁵

He also commented on the approach and the general behaviour of the missionaries that in his opinion marked a fundamental shift from the character of Jesus whom he admired as a "Great Teacher". In the process of admonishing the missionaries, he also issued a sort of prescription for them:

When you come to us as missionaries you ought to throw over all idea of nationality. Jesus didn't go about among the English officials attending champagne suppers. He didn't care to have his wife get into high European society. If your missionary does not follow Christ what right has he to call himself a Christian?⁸⁶

At the same time, he conveyed to his audience that he was not averse to the idea of missionaries coming to India:

We want missionaries of Christ. Let such come to India by the hundreds and thousands. Bring Christ's life to us and let it permeate the very core of society. Let Him be preached in every village and corner of India.⁸⁷

The closing sentence might sound as if Vivekananda was promoting the work of Christian missionaries, but he actually meant something

contrary to what it suggests. He was quite straightforward in his statement that suggested to his audience the impossibility of imagining a Christian India. He said:

As far as converting India to Christianity is concerned, there is no hope. If it were possible it ought not to be done.⁸⁸

Moreover, he strongly criticized the Indian missionaries for their refusal to rise against the bloodshed caused by Christians in the process of converting the natives of India. He sought to shame them in the following manner:

What Christian voice goes through the land protesting against such horrors? I have never heard any. You drink the idea in your mothers' milk that you are angels and we are devils.⁸⁹

Thus, he looked upon the role of Christian missionaries in India in clearly negative terms. One of his most important concerns in this regard was that masses in India were largely incapable of dealing with the missionary propaganda. His estimate of the unequal relation between the masses and missionaries is evident from his reference to a passage from Louis Rousselet, a French traveller:

Is there a people in the world more tolerant than this good gentle Hindoo people, who have been so often described to us as cunning, cruel and even bloodthirsty? Compare them for an instant with the Mussulmans, or even with ourselves, in spite of our reputation for civilization and tolerance...And in what country could such a spectacle be witnessed as that which met my eyes that day in this square of Benares? There, at ten paces from all that the Hindoo holds to be most sacred in religion, between the Source of Wisdom and the idol of Siva a Protestant missionary has taken his stand beneath a tree. Mounted on a chair, he was preaching in the Hindostani language, on the Christian religion and the errors of paganism. I heard his shrill voice, issuing from the depths of a formidable shirt-collar, eject these words at the crowd, which respectfully and attentively surrounded him – “You are idolaters! That block of stone which you worship has been taken from a quarry, it is no better than the stone of my house.”⁹⁰

The passage ends with a gentle confession indicative of a sigh of resignation on the part of many a missionary in India. It reads thus:

...and it is this tolerance that most disheartens the missionary one of whom said to me, “Our labours are in vain; you can

never convert a man who has sufficient conviction in his own religion to listen, without moving a muscle, to all the attacks you can make against it.⁹¹

A similar observation was made by Vivekananda elsewhere:

The Hindu is acute; he takes the bait but avoids the hook! It is wonderful how tolerant the people are. A missionary once said, "That is the worst of the whole business. People who are self-complacent can never be converted."⁹²

Speaking in a similar vein, he also reminded his audience of the futility of the whole idea of conversion in the following manner:

"The more a man sees of himself, the less he sees of his neighbours. Those that go about converting, who are very busy saving the souls of others, in many instances forget their own souls."⁹³

X

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, Vivekananda believed that all religions lead to the same truth, and that they have a moral equivalence. This is a quintessentially Hindu philosophical position which has been adopted by most thinkers of modern India, including Gandhi. Looking at Christianity from this perspective, Vivekananda made a critical but positive assessment of Christianity on the whole. However, this assessment was full of internal diversities and complexities. Whereas, he comes out as a great admirer of the character of Jesus Christ whom he compares with Krishna, his assessment of historical Christianity contains strong points of criticisms and disagreements. Thus, he argues that the message of Jesus Christ as contained in the New Testament has been clearly distorted by his followers. Despite carrying out a vigorous cultural defence of Hinduism and India, Vivekananda did not believe in dividing the world between us and them. At the level of philosophy and theology, Vivekananda seeks to establish similarities between all religions arguing that they have the same moral essence. He even seeks to create what he describes as practical religion which is a synthesis of what he regards as good elements from all religions. In fact, he regards this 'practical religion' as the need of the hour. Insofar as Vivekananda's interface with Christian missionaries in India and abroad is concerned, he is clearly critical of their methods of conversion as well as their propaganda which generally

sought to project Indian society in a negative light. However, one of his key ideas on conversion was that Hinduism already possessed the good aspects of Christianity, and therefore, the 'self-complacent' Hindus were hardly in need of conversion. In any case, according to Vivekananda, since Hinduism did not believe in finding fault with other creeds, its followers could hardly be persuaded to abjure their own tradition and way of life. Moreover, he believed that despite its apparent defects and shortcomings which needed reform, Hinduism was only as good or as bad as any other religion, and was thus in no need of being substituted by any other religion.

Notes and References

- ¹ In fact, a considerable amount of literature on the Swami has been produced by his disciples and successors in the Ramakrishna Mission, prominent among whom are Swami Nikhilananda and Swami Abhedananda who have presented rich and vivid biographical accounts of Vivekananda's life, his philosophy and mission. Apart from the activity carried out by scholars within Ramakrishna Mission, there are others who have paid remarkable attention to Swami Vivekananda. His adventures in the West have been well documented by Marie Louis Burke in her book, *Swami Vivekananda in the West* first published in 1957. Preceding Burke's work was another illuminating analysis of Swamiji's thoughts authored by Romain Rolland published as *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, Advaita Ashrama: Calcutta, 1931. Another useful volume on the topic in our times is *Cosmic Love and Human Apathy: Swami Vivekananda's Restatement of Religion*, HarperCollins, 2013, wherein the author, Jyotirmayya Sharma traces the shift in Ramakrishna Mission's cultic emphasis from Kali to Shiva after the death of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, all due to the influence of Swami Vivekananda.
- ² See *Hindus, Hinduism, Hindusthan* by Swami Vivekananda (G. M. Jagtiani, Bombay, 1983) for a crisp, but rich compilation of Vivekananda's ideas on the core principles of Hinduism.
- ³ In fact, he delivered the concluding lecture of his series of lectures in 1894 at the Unitarian Church in Detroit, Michigan. It was reported by the *Detroit Free Press* on February 18, 1894.
- ⁴ A well-constructed argument in this regard can be found in *Missionary Education, Religion and Knowledge in India, c. 1880-1915* by Hayden J. A. Bellenoit in *Modern Asian Studies*, 41(2), 2007.
- ⁵ See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 9.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*

7. Excerpted from one of his lectures delivered on March 25, 1900 in the San Francisco Bay Area. The article was recorded by Ida Ansell in shorthand and was published under the title, Mohammed. The “dots” in the article indicate the omissions to the article.
8. Words extracted from his lecture, “On Lord Buddha” that he delivered in Detroit. See Vol. 4 of The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda (Published by Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission: Belur Math, Kolkata, 2006).
9. He alludes to this point during his lecture, “Christ, the Messenger” delivered in Los Angeles, California, 1900. For a detailed discussion, see Christ The Messenger, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958.
10. See Christ The Messenger, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, pp. 5-6.
11. See Hindus, Hindusim, Hindusthan (1983) for a detailed discussion.
12. See Christ The Messenger, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 16.
13. The chief proponents of this approach in the West were Lewis Henry Morgan and Edward B. Tylor. There were others such as August Comte, Charles Darwin, and Herbert Spencer, who espoused this approach in explaining human society.
14. For Spinoza’s excursus on the problem of God, see his Ethics.
15. See Christ The Messenger, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 16.
16. Ibid. pp. 16-17.
17. Ibid. p. 17.
18. Ibid. p. 17.
19. Ibid. p. 17.
20. As quoted in the article, Mohammed contents whereof are drawn from the Swami’s lecture delivered in San Francisco on March 25, 1900.
21. That is how the opening sentence of his lecture Mohammed goes. It was delivered on March 25, 1900 in the San Francisco Bay Area.
22. This thought probably formed the central theme of his lecture, “Christ, the Messenger” delivered in Los Angeles, California, 1900. In another of his lecture entitled, “Christianity in India” which he delivered on March 11, 1894 in Detroit, he said, “I pity the Hindu who does not see the beauty in Jesus Christ’s character. I pity the Christian who does not reverence the Hindu Christ.”
23. Excerpted from the lecture entitled, “The Practice of Religion” delivered at Alameda, California on April 18, 1900.
24. See Christ The Messenger, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, pp. 18-19.
25. Ibid. p. 19.
26. Ibid. p. 19.
27. Ibid. p. 19.
28. Christ, the Messenger, Los Angeles, California, 1900, p. 9.

- ²⁹ Vivekananda seems to be immensely inspired by the traditional ways of excursus emanating from the Hindu tradition that relied heavily upon the Q&A model, a bright example of which is the Bhagavad Gita. The method is not unknown in the western civilization where it is known by the term, “catechism”. Jesus made ample use of catechism in the New Testament in order to preach his gospel.
- ³⁰ See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 20.
- ³¹ *Ibid.* p. 20.
- ³² *Ibid.* p. 20.
- ³³ *Ibid.* pp. 20-21.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 21.
- ³⁵ Swami Vivekananda believed that only if one meets success in burying one’s ego to a degree so that phrases such as “me” and “mine” sound meaningless, could one be said to be leading an ideal life. He discussed this view in detail in his lecture, *Christ, the Messenger* (LA, California, 1900).
- ³⁶ See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 21.
- ³⁷ Most controversies regarding acts called blasphemy could be seen as a consequence of this line of thought where followers of a religion find any criticism of their prophet absolutely intolerable.
- ³⁸ See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 23.
- ³⁹ The view was made public in his lecture, *Christ, the Messenger* in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 4, Belur Math, 2006.
- ⁴⁰ He made this claim in a lecture he delivered in Los Angeles, California in the year 1900. The title of the lecture was *Christ, the Messenger*. See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 5.
- ⁴¹ See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, pp. 7-8.
- ⁴² *Ibid.* p. 2.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.* p. 3.
- ⁴⁴ He spoke thus in America in 1895. Quoted from *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel (Volume II)* Sixth impression by Romain Rolland, Advaita Ashrama: Calcutta, 1965.
- ⁴⁵ See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 4.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p. 4.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.* p. 4.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.* p. 4.
- ⁴⁹ *Al-Hashr* (The Gathering), Chapter 59, verse 22.
- ⁵⁰ Rahman, Fazlur, *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, 1980, p. 53.
- ⁵¹ See *Christ The Messenger*, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 11.
- ⁵² *Ibid.* p. 13.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.* p. 11.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.* p. 12.

- ⁵⁵. Ibid. p. 12.
- ⁵⁶. He was pretty dismissive of this approach of “me and mine” in his lecture of 1900 delivered in Los Angeles, California.
- ⁵⁷. See Christ The Messenger, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 12.
- ⁵⁸. Ibid. p. 13.
- ⁵⁹. Ibid. p. 13.
- ⁶⁰. Ibid. p. 13.
- ⁶¹. Friedrich Nietzsche alluded to this aspect in On the Genealogy of Morals (1887).
- ⁶². See Major Themes of the Quran (1980). The argument could be found in the Introduction to the book.
- ⁶³. See Christ The Messenger, Udbodhan Office: Calcutta, 1958, p. 15.
- ⁶⁴. Ibid. p. 15.
- ⁶⁵. Ibid. p. 15.
- ⁶⁶. Ibid. p. 17.
- ⁶⁷. Ibid. p. 17.
- ⁶⁸. Ibid.
- ⁶⁹. Schopenhauer, Arthur, The World as Will and Representation, Mineola, Dover Publications: New York, 1969, p. 628.
- ⁷⁰. *Indian Religious Thought* in Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 4, Belur Math, Kolkata.
- ⁷¹. Ibid.
- ⁷². *Kananda, The Pagan*, in New Discoveries by Marie Louis Burke, pp. 316-322.
- ⁷³. See his lecture entitled, The Divinity of Man (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 3, Belur Math, Kolkata, 2006).
- ⁷⁴. Ibid.
- ⁷⁵. See Christianity in India, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 8, pp. 214-219.
- ⁷⁶. See The Goa Inquisition by A. K. Priolkar (Voice of India, 1998).
- ⁷⁷. Swamiji shed light on this aspect of missionary activity in his lecture delivered in Detroit, March 11, 1894 as reported by Detroit Tribune. During this lecture, he categorically said in respect of the missionary activity that “It makes education cheap.” (Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries, 2nd edition, Advaita Ashram: Calcutta, 1966).
- ⁷⁸. See Bellenoit, H. J. A. (2007). Missionary Education, Religion and Knowledge in India, c. 1880-1915 in Modern Asian Studies, 41(2), pp. 369-394.
- ⁷⁹. Ibid. p. 371.
- ⁸⁰. Excerpted from Kananda, the Pagan, Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries, 2nd edition, 1966, pp. 316-322. It was also published

in Detroit Tribune on March 11, 1894. See the section, “Antagonize Native Interests”.

- ^{81.} This is how he was reported to have spoken in the Detroit Tribune of March 11, 1894. See Kananda, the Pagan, Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries, 2nd edition, 1966, p. 319.
- ^{82.} Ibid.
- ^{83.} Ibid.
- ^{84.} See <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-missionaries-try-to-lure-agra-slum-dwellers-to-convert-to-christianity-with-samosas-2592454> Also see, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/viral-news/twitter-flooded-with-jokes-after-reports-of-missionaries-offering-samosas-for-conversion/articleshow/63264854.cms> A tweet in this context also seems noteworthy: <https://twitter.com/republic/status/972294882789179392?lang=en>.
- ^{85.} Excerpted from Kananda, the Pagan, Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries, 2nd edition, 1966, pp. 316-322. It was also published in Detroit Tribune on March 11, 1894. See the section entitled, “Most Missionaries Incompetent”.
- ^{86.} Ibid.
- ^{87.} Ibid.
- ^{88.} Ibid.
- ^{89.} Excerpted from Kananda, the Pagan, Swami Vivekananda in America: New Discoveries, Vol. 1, pp. 410-416. It was also published in Detroit Tribune on March 11, 1894. See the section entitled, “Filled the World with Bloodshed”.
- ^{90.} Rousselet, Louis, India and its Native Princes – Travels in Central India and in the Presidencies of Bombay and Bengal, 1876, p. 533. The passage quoted here has been taken from Chapter 4 of New Discoveries, Vol. 1 entitled The Midwestern Tour p. 145.
- ^{91.} Ibid. p. 146.
- ^{92.} He spoke these words in one of his lectures entitled “Christianity in India” delivered at Detroit on March 11, 1894.
- ^{93.} Ibid.

North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) and Political Change in Northeast India

Tarun Gogoi*

Abstract:

The landslide victory of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2019 general election and many State assembly elections after 2014 have marked a “BJP Dominant System” in Indian politics. BJP’s rise as a formidable force with remarkable adaptability in Northeast India is a spectacular phenomenon. The formation of North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) as coordinating as well as a political coalition became very significant strategic move for BJP’s rise. This article examines the NEDA as a contributory factor and key strategy of BJP in Northeast India.

Keyword: NEDA, Northeast India, BJP, Electoral politics

The landslide victory of Narendra Modi led Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2019 general election after 2014’s historic win along with many State assembly elections has marked a “BJP Dominant System”¹ in Indian politics. BJP becomes the single largest party with an absolute majority of 303 seats and 37.4 per cent vote share. The BJP-led NDA won 353 seats with 45 per cent vote share and formed a surplus coalition government at the Centre. In this election, BJP has emerged as a pan-India party by capturing most of the seats except the South region. As a region, Northeast India also first time has experienced a tectonic shift with BJP’s phenomenal rise in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Manipur as the dominant national party. In these two recent Lok Sabha elections, BJP has proved itself as a formidable force in Northeast India.

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The rapid expansion of BJP in Northeast India as the dominant national player is a spectacular phenomenon for many reasons. After independence for a long decade, Congress Party was politically dominating the region where until 2014, BJP was considered as a marginal player with minimal seats and vote share. In Northeast India excluding Assam, Tripura and Sikkim, many of the States are Christian and tribal-dominated State where a party like BJP with the tag of Hindu Nationalist party considered as an outsider found it difficult to establish its political presence for a long time. However, BJP's landslide victory with Modi wave in 2014 general election, Northeast India also shifted in an opposite direction with joining BJP's "*Congress-mukt* Northeast India" mission where North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) became a unique strategic move. Scholars see this rise as an inorganic growth of BJP through co-opting local leaders from other parties or localisation of BJP or saffronisation of Northeast India.² However, BJP is seen adopting multiple selective strategies in Northeast India from politics of appropriation to politics of development. Among these, the best political move of BJP is the formation of NEDA as a political coalition with regional parties of Northeast India that ousted the dominance of Congress from the region after 2014.³ With the establishment of NEDA on 24th May 2016, BJP not only for the first time formed their State governments in this region but also reinforced its nationalist agenda in Northeast India. In 2014 general election BJP won only eight seats; however, this 2019 general election for the first time BJP won 14 seats alone, and NEDA as a whole won 18 seats out of total 25 seats from the region (Table 1). For the first time, the Indian National Congress (INC) has to limit itself with just four seats in this region that includes three from Assam and one from Meghalaya.

Table 1: Electoral Performance of INC, BJP and NEDA in 2019 General Election

State-Party	INC		BJP		NEDA	
	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote	Seats	Vote
Arunachal Pradesh (2)	0	20.69	2	58.22	2	58.22
Assam (14)	3	35.44	9	36.05	9	46.76
Manipur (2)	0	24.63	1	34.22	2	56.7
Meghalaya (2)	1	48.28	0	7.93	1	30.2

Mizoram (1)	—	—	0	5.75	1	50.64
Nagaland (1)	0	48.11	—	—	1	49.73
Sikkim (1)	0	1.13	0	4.71	0	48.64
Tripura (2)	0	25.34	2	49.03	2	53.19
Northeast India (25)	4	—	14	—	18	—

Source: Data compiled from Election Commission of India’s statistical report on general election 2019 available at [<http://results.eci.gov.in/>]

For the first time, BJP has won both seats in Tripura, and one seat in Manipur. Whereas Nagaland is the only State in Northeast which BJP did not contest the election but supported its alliance partner Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party (NDPP). In States like Mizoram, Meghalaya and Sikkim BJP has very nominal political presence, however, in these States it got support from alliance partners. In this context, NEDA can be seen as a strategic move for BJP to exploit the anti-Congress sentiment among regional parties and garner it for their electoral benefit as well as expand their support base as insider party in a localised form.

At the initial stage, BJP could understand that only with the religious card and marginal support base as well as weak organisational base, it could not challenge the dominance of Congress Party in this region. The party also understood it very well that to enter the political landscape of Northeast India, BJP has to oust the dominance of Congress Party from Northeast India. Moreover, without taking help from regional parties, BJP could not materialise their “*Congress-mukt* Northeast India” mission. Instead of fighting with the regional parties, BJP chose to play a facilitator role in terms of representing their voice in the national capital as their partner.⁴ It not only helped BJP to get support from most of the regional parties, but also “enhance its legitimacy and acceptability in a region characterized by deep diversity along regional, religious, linguistic and ethnic lines, but could also serve to contain the anti-Congress vote split.”⁵

NEDA: BJP’s Strategic Move in Northeast India

North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) became the significant factor for BJP in Northeast India to consolidate its position by replacing Congress from this region. NEDA is mainly a political coalition under the banner of BJP led NDA federal coalition formed by BJP along with

more than ten regional parties of Northeast India. The alliance was formed in Guwahati through Guwahati Declaration one day after the oath-taking ceremony of first BJP-led coalition government in Assam on 23rd May 2016. BJP's national president Amit Shah along with the Chief Ministers of Northeast of Assam's Sarbananda Sonowal, Arunachal Pradesh's late Kalikho Pul, Nagaland's T.R. Zeliang and Sikkim's Pawan Kumar Chamling along with regional parties' president joined hands with BJP to form NEDA as a first political coalition in Northeast backed by a National Party. In this first meeting more than 10 regional parties (Table 2) including Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), Bodoland People's Front (BPF), Naga People's Front (NPF), Mizo National Front (MNF), Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF), People's Party of Arunachal Pradesh (PPA), National People's Party (NPP), United Democratic Party (UDP), Indigenous People's Front of Tripura (IPFT), Ganashakti Party joined the coalition.⁶ However, since its formation, many of its alliance partners PPA, NPF, UDP exit the alliance over different issues, BJP is also continuously searching for alternative partners in this region.

Table 2: BJP-Led NEDA –Statewise Alliance Partners

NEDA Present Members	Arunachal Pradesh	Assam	Manipur	Meghalaya	Mizoram	Nagaland	Sikkim	Tripura	Pradesh
	AGP	NPF-M	NPP	MNF	NDPP	SDF	PFT		
		BPF							SKM
Past Members	PPA	GSP	MPEP	UDP		NPF*			
			MDPF						

Note: *NPF was alliance partner of NEDA since 2016, but in 2018 Nagaland State Assembly Election BJP made an electoral adjustment with newly formed former Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio led NDPP party. Although in Nagaland NPF is not part of NEDA, but in Manipur, the Manipur unit of NPF remain part of NEDA.

****Full name of Political Parties :** AGP- Asom Gana Parishad, BPF- Bodoland People's Front, GSP- Ganashakti Party, IPFT-Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, MDPF- Manipur Democratic People's Front, MNF- Mizo National Front, MPP- Manipur Peoples Party, NDPP- Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, NPP- National People's Party NPF-Naga People's Front, NPF-M – Naga People's Front- Manipur, PPA- People's Party of Arunachal, SDF- Sikkim Democratic Front, SKM-Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, UDP- United Democratic Party.

Source: Interview with Himanta Biswa Sarma (2018) and from Newspapers The Indian Express, The Hindustan Times, The Hindu and Economic Times (2016-2018).

Before this political coalition, the North-Eastern People's Conference or *Purbanchaliya Lok Parishad* in 1978 for the first time visualised an effective united platform of all regional parties of the North Eastern States.⁷ Similarly, in 2013, with the initiative of AGP and NPF Northeast Regional Political Front was formed, but without any national party's back up, it could not fulfil its goal. NEDA, according to NEDA Convener Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma, "institutionalises a broader political cooperation."⁸ For BJP, "NEDA is not just a political alliance, but also a regional alliance, geo-cultural alliance. It's a platform that is boosting the cultural integration across the Northeast".⁹ NEDA has instrumentalised all-round development of the Northeast and better coordination among the States and Central government.¹⁰

NEDA became the most significant factor for BJP's strong political consolidation in this region within a very short period. While in the absence of a strong organisation and support base with poor political performance in the earlier general elections in most of the States excluding Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, BJP was a marginal player in this region. For political consolidation, BJP has made some significant changes in Northeast from their party agendas for expanding their social base through localisation of Party. Depending on Modi's image and co-option of leaders from other political parties with an inclusive approach, BJP used NEDA as an instrument to expand their presence in Northeast, which helps them to achieve the status as a true pan-India party. Forming such a grand political coalition also removed the tag of the Hindu nationalist party by giving them a secular flavour.¹¹ One significant achievement for BJP in Northeast India is to co-opt leaders like former powerful Congress minister of Assam Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma as the expert negotiator, a formidable organiser for BJP's further expansion in Northeast India. As the NEDA convener, Dr. Sarma becomes an instrumental factor for BJP's rapid expansion in Northeast India. Because of his strategic political management, BJP led NEDA successfully and formed their governments in Manipur, Meghalaya, and Nagaland, where BJP was always considered an outsider party due to its Hindu nationalist ideology.

Another significant success of BJP is that by exploiting the anti-Congress sentiments the party has not only succeeded in isolating the Congress Party but also within a short period, dismantled the dominance of Congress Party from this region. Table 3 shows the government formation in Northeast India after 2014 general election where BJP-led

NEDA political coalition becomes the instrumental factor of this drastic change. From 2016 to 2019, Assembly elections in Northeastern States have shown how BJP managed to oust the dominance of Congress and tilt the political axis in their favour by addressing the coalition lacunae created by Congress. The strategic formation of NEDA by recognition and accommodation of political aspiration and mandate of various regional parties creates a kind of self-respect of the local parties. It also creates a responsible framework in the region that has helped them to stitch together a coalition is based on trust.¹²

Table 3: State Governments in Northeast India by NEDA

State	Govt. Since	Largest party & Seats	Alliance Partners & Seats
Arunachal Pradesh	31 December, 2016	BJP (41)	
Assam	19 May, 2016	BJP(60)	AGP(14), BPF(12)
Manipur	15 March, 2017	BJP (21)	NPEP(4), NPF(4), LJP (1)
Meghalaya	6 March, 2018	NPP(19)	BJP(2), UDP (6), PDF(4), HSDP(2)
Nagaland	8 March, 2018	NDPP(16)	BJP(12), NPEP(2), JD (U) (1)
Tripura	9 March, 2018	BJP(35) IPFT(8)	

Source: Data compiled from various newspapers The Hindustan Times, Economic Times, The Indian Express and Election Commission of India's statistical report on State Assembly elections of States from Northeast region 2016-2019.

BJP's political journey as a dominant national force started with its significant political victory in 2016 Assam election where BJP won 60 seats as the single largest party and formed a coalition government with two major regional players of Assam AGP and BPF. The Assam victory has played a decisive role for BJP to expand its support base from marginal player to a formidable force. In this political journey, BJP has become remarkably adaptable by assuming a new *avatar* in terms of political management in Northeast India, where for long-time BJP did not even win one single seat in many Northeastern States.¹³

For their electoral expansion in Northeast India BJP did not hesitate to become a junior partner in the government formation process at Meghalaya to overthrow the Congress dominance from this region. In Manipur, after 2017 Assembly election, BJP formed a coalition government with two NEDA partners NPP and NPF along with its old NDA ally LJP. In Nagaland, where BJP had just one seat in 2013 elections became the kingmaker party with 12 seats between two regional parties NPF led by T.R. Zeliang and NDPP led by Neiphiu Rio, shift their alliance partners from NPF to the newly formed NDPP, and joined the State government as part of NEDA. In Tripura also for the first time, BJP was able to destroy the left bastion by securing absolute majority along with alliance partner IPFT and formed the first BJP government in Tripura. The recent 2019 Assembly election in Arunachal Pradesh also became a significant victory for BJP that formed the first elected BJP government in Arunachal Pradesh with its own 41 MLAs.

NEDA: The Future Prospect in Northeast India

Though NEDA is projected as an instrument of coordination and a common platform to address the common issues, but since its formation, NEDA deliberately avoids all the contentious issues of Northeast India starting from Citizenship Amendment Bill to NRC issue.¹⁴ It is also questionable, how BJP as the NEDA's voice at national capital will deal with the regional aspirations of Northeast India? Since its formation, NEDA is seen only as an informal party machinery of BJP that has worked for its electoral arrangement in Northeast India. BJP has the realisation that they cannot expand in the Northeastern States unless and until BJP has an alliance with the regional parties. Therefore, BJP used this coalition for their electoral expansion, and it has helped it a lot in Assam where without the support of NEDA partners AGP, BPF and Ganashakti Party, BJP would not have been able to expand their support base among different tribal communities that converted into electoral victory.

Similarly, in Tripura also without the support of IPFT, BJP could not get such landslide victory. Without the concept of NEDA, BJP would not have formed government in Manipur, Nagaland. BJP used NEDA as a strategic move to overthrow the Congress dominance from Northeast India and become a genuinely pan-India party with this electoral victory in Northeastern States. Although NEDA institutionalises

a broader political co-operation but most of the regional parties in this context were limited to give their support to BJP at the Centre. In general, NEDA became the political alliance for electoral understanding among BJP and its alliance partners, but many of its alliance partners like NPP, MNF, SDF, NPF-M could not agree to the pre-poll alliance considering the former's Hindutva image. They had the same stand even in the Assembly elections. They fought election differently in States like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Sikkim but they have maintained an underlying cooperation during the election and fought for the common cause, i.e. overthrow of Congress from Northeast India.¹⁵

Northeast, unlike any other Indian States under the asymmetrical federal framework in terms of political representation becomes politically less significant due to its small population and small size which resulted in the very few numbers of representatives from this region in both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. Northeast's share of 25 seats in Lok Sabha where only Assam has a total of 14 seats and all other States share 11 seats. In such political asymmetry in terms of representation, due to its small size and population, these States have a very limited role or bargaining power in the national decision-making process. Therefore, it is evident that States from Northeast India have been historically inclined towards the party running the Central government because of its heavy dependence on the grants and funds from Central government. In this context, the practical relevance of NEDA as a political coalition or coordinating forum among BJP and its alliance partners for the future time is questionable. From such dependency factor also this political arrangement in Northeast can be seen just as a temporary adjustment.

The alliance partners of NEDA also change over the times. From first NEDA conclave in 2016 to recent fourth NEDA conclave on 9 September 2019 many of its alliance partners PPA, NPF, UDP etc. exit the alliance over different issues. In Arunachal Pradesh, BJP formed its government for the second time without winning the election but through defection from their old alliance partner PPA. PPA accused BJP of hijacking their MLAs to install BJP's government on 31 December 2016, when Chief Minister Prema Khandu along with 32 out of 43 MLAs of PPA joined BJP.¹⁶ In Nagaland, BJP had dumped its 15 years old alliance partner NPF in Nagaland and forged a new alliance with

the newly formed NDPP, led by three times former Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio. However, the Manipur unit of NPF supported the BJP led coalition government in Manipur. In Sikkim also though BJP allied with opposition party Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM), before the Sikkim Assembly election but the alliance failed due to differences over the seat-sharing between the two parties. At the same time, BJP's old alliance partner SDF continues to be part of the coalition at the national level. However, after election, SKM as the largest party formed its State government joined NEDA at its fourth conclave on 9 September 2019, along with the other partners. Interestingly, after Assembly election in Sikkim on 13 August, 10 MLAs of SDF party joined BJP. For the first time, BJP as the first national party become the main opposition party in Sikkim.¹⁷

One significant change after BJP coming to power as a force in Northeastern State is the reinforcement of their party agenda towards Northeast India, both politically as well as ideologically. BJP's attitude towards passing the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill (CAB) 2016 became a major concern in this case, which can be seen as their majoritarian party agenda towards Northeastern region. Although most of the NEDA partners including major regional parties NPP, AGP, MNF, NDPP, IPFT, SDF strongly opposed this stand and they even united as a common platform to convince the Centre against the CAB, but they did not take any serious action over the issue. The only party from this coalition United Democratic Party (UDP), a constituent of Meghalaya's ruling alliance officially exit from BJP led NEDA over the controversial Citizenship Bill. After 2019 general election, with this significant electoral victory in Northeast now, BJP became more confident about passing this Bill, as they promised in their party manifesto. For its territorial expansion as well as strong political consolidation and even to push their party agenda, BJP successfully used NEDA as a platform in Northeast India at the cost of the regional parties.

Notes

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- ² Tripathi, Vikas, Tamasha Das and Sandhya Goswami (2018): “National Narrative and Regional Subtext: Understanding the Rise of BJP in Assam,” *Studies in Indian Politics*, Vol. 6, No 1, pp. 1-11; Bijukumar, V. (2019): *Parties and Electoral Politics in North East India*, New Delhi: Kalpaz.
- ³ Interview with Himanta Biswa Sarma (NEDA Convenor, BJP), New Delhi, 22 December 2018.
- ⁴ Interview with Himanta Biswa Sarma (NEDA Convenor, BJP), New Delhi, 22 December 2018.
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- ⁶ Kashyap, Samudra Gupta (2016): “BJP gets 10 regional parties under NE Democratic Alliance Umbrella,” *Indian Express*, 24 June, available at <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/bjp-gets-10-regional-parties-under-ne-democratic-alliance-umbrella-2871930/> (accessed on 11 February 2017).
- ⁷ Misra, Udayon (1987): “North-East Regional Parties-High Hopes and Hard Realities,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 22, No. 24, pp. 922-923.
- ⁸ Interview with Himanta Biswa Sarma (NEDA Convenor, BJP), New Delhi, 22 December 2018.
- ⁹ BJP [BJP4India] (2018, May 22) : NEDA is not just a political alliance, but also a regional alliance, geo-cultural alliance. It’s a platform that is boosting the cultural integration across the North East: Shri @ AmitShah [tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bjp4india/status/999181132418768898>.
- ¹⁰ Shah, Amit [AmitShah] (2016, May 24): Main objective of the NEDA will be all-round development of North East and better co-ordination among the States and Central govt. [tweet]. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/amitshah/status/735144495449149440>.
- ¹¹ Misra, Udayon (2016): “Victory for Identity Politics, Not Hindutva in Assam,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. 51, No. 22, pp. 20-23.
- ¹² Daga, Mohitkumar (2018): “BJP’s massive surge in the Northeast is a result of a patient but smart strategy,” *Economic Times*, 3 March, available at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/view-bjps-massive-surge-in-the-northeast-is-a-result-of-a-patient-but-smart-strategy/articleshow/63148040.cms> (accessed on 14 June 2019).
- ¹³ Jha, Prashant (2018): “How the BJP made the Northeast its own,” *Hindustan Times*, 16 February, available at <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/how-the-bjp-made-the-northeast-its-own/story-102sWkIBhY3DUC3M3zE1DL.html> (accessed on 14 June 2019).

- ¹⁴ Interview with Himanta Biswa Sarma (NEDA Convenor, BJP), New Delhi, 22 December 2018.
- ¹⁵ Interview with Himanta Biswa Sarma (NEDA Convenor, BJP), New Delhi, 22 December 2018.
- ¹⁶ DNA (2016): “Arunachal Pradesh: PPA blames BJP for ‘hijacking’ its MLAs,” 31 December, available at <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-arunachal-pradesh-ppa-blames-bjp-for-hijacking-its-mlas-2288101> (accessed on 14 June 2019).
- ¹⁷ The Week (2019): “Sikkim: BJP becomes main opposition party as 10 SDF MLAs join,” 13 August, available at <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2019/08/13/sikkim-bjp-becomes-main-opposition-party-as-10-sdf-mlas-join.html> (accessed on 14 June 2019).

Assamese Language and Neo-Assamese Muslims

Monoj Kumar Nath*

(The percentage of Assamese speakers has been decreasing in Assam census after census since 1971. There is an impression in Assam that the Assamese language has been losing its dominance because of the neo-Assamese Muslims living in Brahmaputra valley. Here is an attempt to understand the relationship between the Assamese language and the neo-Assamese Muslims.)

A large section of immigrant Muslims living in lower and middle Assam of Brahmaputra valley, who were originally Bengali speakers, started to identify Assamese as their mother tongue in census enumerations since 1951. After the separation of Sylhet at Independence and the acceptance of Assamese as mother tongue by immigrant Muslims of Brahmaputra valley, Assamese became the majority language of Assam in 1951 census. The Assamese people were grateful to the immigrant Muslims in Brahmaputra valley for declaring Assamese as their mother tongue and thereby ensuring the majority status of the Assamese language in Assam, and these Muslims were accepted as Na-Asomiya (neo-Assamese) Muslims by the Assamese Muslims.

In recent times, the neo-Assamese Muslims have been emerging as a threat to indigenous Assamese communities because of their fast growing population and subsequent growing dominance on electoral equations. The Muslims constitute, as per 2011 census report, 34.22 per cent of total population of the Assam. In Assam, during the last seven decades after independence (1951-2011), the Muslim population grew by almost 10 per cent. With the increasing population, the Muslims as a community is becoming decisive in electoral politics of Assam election after election. Assam has a total of 126 Assembly constituencies out of which 102 are unreserved. From the unreserved constituencies,

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at present, Muslims are an overwhelming majority in at least 23 constituencies. In another eight constituencies, Muslim voters play a decisive role. Muslim voters are determinant even in three reserved constituencies (reserved for Scheduled Castes) [Nath 2015: 144-153]. The increasing dominance of Muslims in the electoral equations of Assam has created a fear among the indigenous Assamese of the State that that the Muslim community would wrest the power of the State very soon. Against this, these Muslims have remained necessary for the Assamese people for the sake of Assamese language. The Assamese language has still remained the majority speaking language in Assam only because of the support of these Muslims. In Brahmaputra valley, an overwhelming portion of neo-Assamese Muslims have been identifying Assamese as their mother tongue in census enumerations. While the community's counterparts living in Barak valley speak Bengali, large section of the community in Brahmaputra valley has become bilingual and even a section of the community speaks Assamese at their home also.

Table 1
Assamese and Bengali Speakers in Assam (in percentage)

	1951	1961	1971	1991	2001	2011
Assamese Speaker	56.29	57.14	60.89	57.81	48.80	48.38
Bengali Speaker	21.2	18.5	11.7	21.7	27.5	29.91

Source: Census of India.

The immigrant Muslims, now neo-Assamese in Brahmaputra valley, migrated from East Bengal/East Pakistan in search of better livelihood. Their first and foremost goal for migrating to Assam was to secure livelihood. These people were more concerned about their settlement and livelihood than culture and language. They realized that acceptance of Assamese language and culture would help them to be a part of Assamese society which will make their settlement and livelihoods in Assam much easier. This realization made them to accept Assamese as their mother tongue in Brahmaputra valley. By accepting Assamese as their mother tongue in census enumerations, the community tried to

avoid any conflict with the Assamese population in Brahmaputra valley. And since the immigrant Muslims became neo-Assamese in Brahmaputra valley, the community has remained a great support for the Assamese people to maintain the dominant status of their language. Nagaon district can be taken as a case study in this regard. In 1971, the Hindu and Muslim population of the district was 59.6 per cent and 39.2 per cent respectively, and the percentage of Assamese and Bengali speakers were 75.6 and 19.3 respectively. In 2001, Muslims became majority in the district consisting 51 per cent of populations, while Hindus consisted 47.8 per cent of population. In 2001, while 64.4 per cent of population of the district identified themselves as Assamese speakers, 30.5 per cent of population identified themselves as Bengali speakers. The contribution of neo-Assamese Muslims to the Assamese language is widely accepted by the Assamese society and intelligentsia.

....A large section of the Muslim immigrants in the Brahmaputra valley have identified themselves as Assamese speakers in the successive censuses since 1951, which has helped Assamese retain its status as the majority language in Assam till date. Otherwise, in the event of the immigration of large linguistic groups from other parts of India and the tendency among several erstwhile ethnic groups in the State to identify themselves as the speakers of their own ethnic languages instead of Assamese in recent censuses, it would be almost impossible for Assamese to retain its majority-status in the State....(Sharma 2016: 99-100).

The situation is such that, now, majority status of Assamese language in Assam depends upon the neo-Assamese Muslims. Study of this situation is very interesting to say the least. The Bengali speakers, both Hindus and Muslims, have always been considered as a threat to their socio-cultural and linguistic identity by the Assamese. The antagonism between the Assamese and the Hindu Bengalis that has remained prevalent in Assam even after Independence has some historical roots. In this regard, Udayon Misra states as follows:

The replacement of the Assamese language by Bengali in the early years of British rule, the struggle for restoration of the status of the Assamese language led by Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan and strongly supported by the American Baptists as well as by Bengali scholars like R.C.Dutt, the competition for jobs between the well-developed and well-entrenched Bengali middle class and its newly emerging Assamese

counterpart, the belligerent stance adopted against the Assamese language by a section of the Bengali Hindus in the Brahmaputra valley and the support they received from a largely-partisan Calcutta press, as reflected in the debate on the pages of Mrinmoyee, Bharati and Prabasi, are but a few of the well-known historical reasons for the antagonism that has been existing between these two communities – an antagonism that seems to have largely shaped Assam and Assamese politics in the decades immediately preceding and following Independence. Assamese antagonism was often propelled by the fact that the Bengali lifestyle came to exert an important influence on the Assamese middle class and this was seen by Assamese socio-cultural organizations as a threat to the Assamese identity. Thus, in many ways the question of Assamese identity got linked up with the struggle to disprove the contention being made by a section of Bengali intellectuals that Assamese was, in fact, a dialect of Bengali language (Misra 2014: 188).

The Bengali became the majority language in Assam during the pre-partition days as Sylhet was made a part of the State. After Sylhet went to Pakistan in Independence, Assamese language got majority status in Assam but the threat perception of Assamese towards Bengali language remained. As a consequence of this threat perception, Assam witnessed two language centric conflicts in 1960, when Assamese was declared as the State language of Assam by the Assam Government, and in 1972 when the Gauhati University made Assamese as the medium of instruction for Brahmaputra valley. On both the occasions, the Muslim immigrants took the side of Assamese language. The support of immigrant Muslims from Brahmaputra valley to the Assamese language was accepted by the Assamese as a great gesture from the community to the Assamese society and nationality. This recently migrated community has become an integral component of Assamese nationality because of its support to Assamese language.

Assamese is a language originated from mutual interactions between Mongoloid, Austric and Dravidian communities of ancient Assam which became a *lingua-franca* among people of all these communities. However, there was a constant attempt from a section of caste Hindu Assamese to make it an Aryan origin language by tracing its origin to Sanskrit language. This section strongly believe that all the people of Assam, including the tribals who have their own languages, should

speak Assamese and should accept Assamese as their mother tongue (Oja 2011: 174, 181-182, 199-200). This attitude of a section of Assamese and the perennial fear to Bengali language of being subjugated created the situation of 1960 language movement to make Assamese the State language of Assam. The language movement paved the way for the neo-Assamese community to emerge as the saviour of Assamese language. On the other hand, the decision of the Assam government to make Assamese the State language of Assam began to alienate the tribals of the State from the language. With the demand of Assam Sahitya Sabha, the largest literary organization of Assamese language, to make Assamese the State language of Assam, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) was formed in July, 1960. The APHLC opposed the idea of imposition of Assamese language on the hill people and demanded a separate State for the hill people of Assam. Gradually, the demand for separate hill States took momentum under APHLC and the hill people began to decline to identify Assamese as their mother tongue. Again, Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA), an organization of plain tribals of the State, was formed in the later part of 1960s which termed the official status to Assamese language as imposition and exploitation on plain tribals. In 1960 itself, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the literary organization of Bodos, largest plain tribe of Assam, agitated demanding Bodo as the medium of instruction for the Bodo people. Later, Mishing, another plain tribe of Assam demanded Mishing as the medium of instruction in primary and secondary education for Mishing people. Both the tribal communities dissociated from Assamese language and demanded Roman script for their respective languages (Nath 2013: 90-92). However, Table 1 shows how in 1971 census the percentage of Assamese speakers jumped, despite the fact that different tribal groups declined to identify Assamese as their mother tongue, after Assamese was made the official language of Assam. It became possible only because of the acceptance of Assamese language by neo-Assamese Muslims.

However, the Assam movement significantly changed the attitude of immigrant Muslims towards the Assamese society and language. While the movement started against all outsiders illegally residing in Assam, but at the later phases it became particularly against the Muslim immigrants from East Pakistan. During the movement, the immigrant Muslim community came into direct conflict with the movement by participating in large numbers in 1983 Assam Assembly election. As a consequence of this direct conflict, the Nellie massacre happened in

February 1983, which was targeted against the community. The Assamese-immigrant Muslims bonhomie that started with the acceptance of Assamese language by the immigrant Muslims in Brahmaputra valley during 1951 census began to wane since the beginning of the Assam movement. After Assam movement, the immigrant Muslim community of Brahmaputra valley began to think differently about its relationship with and position in Assamese society.

A psychological barrier was created by Assam movement between indigenous Assamese communities and the neo-Assamese Muslims. This situation prompted a section of neo-Assamese Muslims to discard Assamese language as their mother tongue in 1991 census. In this regard we can cite the decision of a public meeting organized by a section of neo-Assamese Muslims. On the eve of 1991 census, many of the immigrant Muslims who identified themselves with the Assamese society and language in 1971 census, in a meeting at Hazi Musafirkhana at Guwahati, openly expressed the futility of false pretensions of assimilative gestures and their efforts towards consolidation of their Assamese identity. While vast majority of the immigrant Muslims who have already gone far ahead of the process of Assamization adhered to their decision of 1971 in respect of their mother tongue issue in 1991 census also, an insignificant minority did say Bengali as their mother tongue (Ahmed and Yasin 1997: 148).

The census was not held in Assam in 1981 because of the Assam movement. In 1991 census, the percentage of Assamese speakers declined to 57.81 per cent from 60.89 per cent in 1971. During 1971-1991, percentage of Assamese speakers declined by three per cent. Against this, the speakers of Bengali language increased by 10 per cent during the period. This shows how a large section of neo-Assamese left Assamese language in 1991 census. And since then, Table 1 shows, speakers of Assamese language have been declining census after census against subsequent rise of Bengali speakers in Assam. During 1971-2011, percentage of Assamese speakers in Assam declined by more than 12 per cent against the 18 per cent rise of Bengali speakers. Again during 1991-2011, Bengali speakers rose by more than eight per cent in Assam against more than 10 per cent decline of Assamese speakers.

Some tribes left Assamese Language in 1971 census after Assamese was made the official language of Assam and some others left by 1991 census, after the medium of instruction movement in 1972 and the Assam Accord in 1985. Few tribal groups of Assam still recognize Assamese as their mother tongue. However, leaving of the Assamese

language by the tribes only cannot be considered as the cause of the rise of Bengali language as these tribes have not recognised Bengali as their mother tongue. And this can no way be denied that the sharp rise of Bengali speakers in Assam is mainly due to the neo-Assamese Muslims. In Brahmaputra valley, the neo-Assamese Muslims are increasing very fast census after census. Despite the high growth of neo-Assamese Muslim population in Brahmaputra valley, the Assamese speakers in Assam declined from 57.81 per cent in 1991 to 48.80 per cent in 2001 census. This means the neo-Assamese Muslims are increasingly declining to identify Assamese as their mother tongue.

Table 2 shows how the neo-Assamese Muslims have been increasingly siding with Bengali language by leaving Assamese language. The revenue circles selected for Table 2 are from Brahmaputra valley and overwhelmingly dominated by neo-Assamese Muslim.

Table 2

Decline of Assamese Speakers and Rise of Bengali Speakers (1991-2001)

Revenue Circle (District)	No. of Assamese Speakers 1991	No. of Assamese Speakers 2001	No. of Bengali Speakers 1991	No. of Bengali Speakers 2001
Kalgachia (Barpeta)	68982	33790	55539	114345
Baghbor (Barpeta)	133449	45022	111441	250091
Dalgaon (Darrang)	173288	92923	115120	279120

Source: Mahanta, Nani Gopal (2018): 'Janasankhik Sitkalin' aru Onagoto Pratahban, Amar Asom, Guwahati, June 14, p. 5.

In such a situation, it becomes very interesting to understand why the neo-Assamese have been leaving the Assamese language for Bengali language. There has always been a continuous conspiracy, particularly in post-Assam movement period, from a section of Muslim politicians in Assam to alienate the neo-Assamese Muslims from the Assamese language.

The formation of the United Minority Front (UMF) in 1985 can be considered as a mobilization of neo-Assamese Muslims from Brahmaputra valley, Bengali Muslims from Barak valley and Hindu Bengalis of the entire Assam against the Assam Accord. The process of the formation of UMF was led by Citizens' Right Preservation Committee (CRPC), a Bengali organization from Barak valley. On the

other hand, A.F. Golam Osmani, a Bengali Muslim from Silchar, Barak valley, played a crucial role to form the alliance between the immigrant Muslims and Hindu Bengalis under UMF. Osmani remained the most powerful leader of UMF till he joined the Congress in 1998. Although Osmani was a Bengali Muslim from Silchar, his political constituency was from lower Assam of Brahmaputra valley. In 1985 Assam Assembly elections, he won from Jania constituency of Barpeta district on a UMF ticket. Even after joining the Congress, he contested and won the Lok Sabha elections in 1999 and 2004 from Barpeta constituency. Osmani was a Bengali Muslim politician who tried to create a divisive politics among the neo-Assamese Muslims of Brahmaputra valley in the name of language and religion. Osmani established himself also as a religious leader of high esteem among the common Muslims in Brahmaputra valley through the help of a section of Baskandi educated Maulavis. The stature of religious leader of high esteem helped Osmani to influence a section of neo-Assamese Muslims from Brahmaputra valley. And on the eve of 1991 and 2001 census enumerations, a section of Muslim political leaders under Osmani encouraged the neo-Assamese living in remote areas and chars of Brahmaputra valley to identify themselves as Bengali, instead of Assamese and to record Bengali as their mother tongue in census, instead of Assamese. Osmani even created a huge controversy in Assam by appealing to the neo-Assamese Muslims to use 'Bengali Gamusa' instead of 'Assamese Gamusa' (Hossain 2015: 354-356). As a consequence of such divisive politics, 1991 census recorded high rise of Bengali speakers and 1991-2001 showed almost six per cent rise of Bengali speakers.

In 1991 and 2001 census enumerations, a large section of neo-Assamese Muslims left Assamese language and joined Bengali language, as a consequence of divisive politics led by a section of Bengali Muslims. However, on the eve of 2011 census, a new controversy emerged in politics of Assam in relation to the mother tongue of neo-Assamese Muslims. Abdul Khalek, Congress MLA from Jania constituency, the same constituency represented by Golam Osmani after 1985 Assam Assembly elections, proposed that Miyan should be recorded as the mother tongue by the entire immigrant Muslims of Assam and he claimed that the same has been identified as the mother tongue by him in census. This has created big controversy and many argued that Miyan is not a language but a dialect. However, Miyan language became an issue in immigrant Muslim dominated areas and a section of immigrant Muslims in Brahmaputra valley, who identified

Assamese as their mother tongue in previous censuses, identified Miyan as their mother tongue for the first time in 2011 census (Nath 2015: 282). This means, that the neo-Assamese Muslims were divided into three categories in respect to their mother tongue in 2011 census: Assamese, Bengali and Miyan.

It becomes clear from the above discussion that in post-Assam movement period, the language of neo-Assamese Muslims has become a tool of politics at the hands of a section of Muslim politicians. This politics of language has in turn created a situation of distrust between the indigenous communities and the neo-Assamese Muslims in Brahmaputra valley. The political class from the neo-Assamese Muslims has realized the importance of neo-Assamese Muslims vis-à-vis the majority status of Assamese language in Assam. So, they have started to use the language as a political bargaining tool in the Assamese dominated politics of Assam.

Because of the fast decline of the Assamese speakers, in recent times, there is a growing impression among the indigenous Assamese towards the neo-Assamese Muslims that their acceptance of Assamese as mother tongue in successive censuses during 1951-1971 was a temporary strategy of an immigrant community to avoid any conflict with the local communities. By now, the neo-Assamese Muslims have become sizeable in number who can influence the electoral equations in the State to a large extent. Now the community does not need to show such gesture to indigenous Assamese for their survival and security.

However, the acceptance of Assamese language by the immigrant Muslims of Brahmaputra valley after Independence cannot be termed only as a political opportunism. Immigrant Muslims, on their part, set up many Assamese medium primary and secondary schools in their areas even before the independence. For example, in Alitangani, an area near Nagaon town, Immigrant Muslims established LP school in 1902 and brought teachers from neighbouring Dhing to teach Assamese there. These Muslims established Assamese medium ME school in 1924 which became the first High school in the entire Alitangani area. In that period when these immigrant Muslims established Assamese medium ME/High schools, many ethnic Assamese dominated areas of Nagaon districts did not have such educational institutions. This proves, the immigrant Muslims in Brahmaputra valley tried to become Assamese just after they immigrated to the valley. There was a widespread feeling among the immigrant Muslims in Brahmaputra valley that they should accept the language and culture of that land which has given them shelter and livelihood.

The growing alienation of neo-Assamese Muslims from the Assamese language in post-Assam movement period is a consequence of Assam movement and the derogatory comments and insults meted out to the community by a section of so-called mainstream Assamese political and student leaders. We have already mentioned about the meeting at Hazi Musafirkhana on the eve of 1991 census. This meeting clearly showed how the Assam movement brought about, for the first time after Independence, a psychological barrier between the indigenous Assamese communities and the neo-Assamese Muslims. And this barrier created by the Assam movement has been widened in the last three decades after the movement by a section of indigenous Assamese political and non-political students' leaders. This section of leaders, most often, labels the whole neo-Assamese Muslim community as 'Bangladeshis'. Such irresponsible public comments from a section of so-called mainstream Assamese political and non-political leaders towards the entire neo-Assamese community has contributed, in the post-Assam movement period, significantly to alienate a section of neo-Assamese Muslims from Assamese language.

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Bhagavad Gita: From Mind to Supermind

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The Bhagavad Gita is very close to the hearts of all Indians, even more than other scriptures, and Krishna is the most loved of all *avatars*. In the courts of law in India, all witnesses are required to take an oath, by placing their hands on the Bhagavad Gita. Bhagavad Gita is part of the great epic Mahabharata, a widely popular mythological story in Hindu philosophy; part of Bhishma Parva, Gita is almost in its entirety the dialogue between two individuals, Lord Krishna (considered as the incarnation of Bhagawan Vishnu, Narayana) and Arjuna (the Pandava prince, Nara) in the battle field (war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas, the cousins, for control of the kingdom of Hasthinapura) of Kurukshetra. It has 18 yogas (chapters), with about 701 slokas (short poems), the first one being “Arjuna Vishada Yoga” (Sorrow of Arjuna) and the last one “Moksha Sanyasa Yoga” (Nirvana and Renunciation).

Bhagavad Gita is also known as Gitopnishad, it is the essence of Vedic knowledge and one of the most important Upanishads in Vedic literature. Bhagavad Gita is self-contained scripture of 700 Sanskrit verses, appearing in Shantiparva of the Mahabharata. The Bhagavad Gita is divided into 18 Chapters (called Adhyayas) and the number of sutras in each of the chapters vary. Each of the Adhyayas corresponds to a **Yoga, a spiritual path**. It presents a holistic synthesis of the various philosophical paths to salvation (moksha) of human beings, of the doctrine of knowledge (jnana), devotion (bhakti), and action (karma), and the paths of renunciation of action (Sannyasa) and action as duty without attachment to the fruit of action (karmayoga).

Aldous Huxley, in his introduction to the Gita rendering by Prabhananda and Christopher Isherwood, called this ancient work “**Perhaps the most systematic statement of the Perennial Philosophy.**”

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The *Gita's* teaching of the eternal love that flows from the Divine Person to the devotee and to all creation is one of the most momentous innovations in the history of Indian Philosophy. The Yoga taught by Krishna, the *avatara* (divine descent), infused Hinduism with a rare emotionality that had until then been absent from the largely ascetic efforts of the Hindu seers and sages. Suddenly the spiritual seeker was empowered to relate to the Divine in personal terms, from the heart and not merely through the exercise of the will. This had, in fact, been the teaching of the ancient Vedic *rishis*, but it became gradually eclipsed by the tradition of fierce asceticism (*tapas*) both within and outside the orthodox brahmanical priesthood. Consequently, the Lord has to speak it again, this time to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra. The *Gita*, in fact, introduces Krishna not so much as an innovator but as a reviver of ancient teachings that had been lost. Tentative expressions of the same teaching can be found in the early *Upanishads*, but with the *Gita* the gospel of theistic devotion entered the popular consciousness and became a vehicle for the simple spiritual aspirations of countless millions.

Perhaps the Great War of the Mahabharata was a historical fact. But the author has taken this war as only a starting point to develop the theme of the great Battle of Life itself. The *Gita* provided a direction and a solution for every problem. The description of the war does give a picturesque background to the consideration of the complex theme of the fierce battle of life. So the *Gita* and its message become meaningful only when they are seen, not so much with reference to the physical war, as with reference to the inner war raging within the psyche of man. In my view, *Avatara* acts are symbolic and we are passing from outer to the inner planes, and looking in the fight of Kurukshetra, the battle field of soul and Duryodhna enemies it meets in its progress.

The Bhagavad *Gita* is a dialogue between Sri Krishna, the Divinity Incarnate, and Arjuna, the representative of mankind. Though Arjuna was eager to fight in the battle, when he saw that he had to fight with his dear ones, he became nervous and began arguing against war. Finally, Arjuna confessed to Sri Krishna his weakness and lack of mental preparedness. Thus, begins the dialogue and the *Gita* is the result. Not only does Sri Krishna counsel and encourage Arjuna to fight the righteous war, he also outlines through his *Gita*-discourse, a whole philosophy of life—dealing with **work ethics, education, service, stress, charity and so on**, and how to reach ultimate freedom.

Bhagavad Gita is not just a conversation between **Lord Krishna** and **Arjuna** But It's a **type of psychiatric counselling between the Counsellor (Krishna)** and a **patient (Arjuna)**.

The secret lies in the human mind as the primary source of all actions. If the mind is pure, without attachment to deeds, it cannot be defiled by them even as they are performed. Only attachment, not action as such, sets to motion the law of moral causation (or Karma) by which a person is bound to the wheel of existence in ever new re-embodiments. The mind that is polished like a mirror, freed entirely of the stain of attachment, spotlessly reveals things as they truly are. And what they truly are is the Divine, the Self. The perfected *yogis* always enjoy that divine vision Whose self is yoked in Yoga and who beholds everywhere the same, he sees the self abiding in all beings and all beings in the self.

In the Bhagavad Gita the word Yoga has not attained any definite technical sense, as it did in the subsequent *Maitrayaniya-Upanishad* and the *Yoga-Sutra*, but all the principal elements of the path are present. For Krishna the word Yoga is used in the sense of fixing one's mind either on self (atman) or on God. Everything that is done should be done in the light of Divine. One's whole life must become a continual Yoga. By seeing in everything the presence of divine and by casting off all mundane attachments, yogis purify their life and no longer take flight from it. With their mind immersed in the Supreme, they are active in the world, guided by the pure desire to promote the welfare of all beings. This, well-known Hindu ideal of loka-sangraha, which literally means "*drawing together of the world.*" It is difficult to give this Yoga an appropriate label. It is not only Jnan-Yoga and Karma-Yoga but also Bhakti-Yoga. It seeks to integrate all aspects of the human being and then to employ them in the great enterprise to reach enlightenment in this very life.

Humans are ever engaged in action as it almost impossible to live without action. In life, we play many different roles like being a teacher, student, daughter, father, son, mother, spouse, citizen and so on. We are generally guided by our family value system in our actions. Karma means prescribed duties. But today, an average human being goes about his life for the sole purpose of meeting material ends, be it towards material wellbeing, prosperity or professional excellence and list can be endless. Karma includes all desire based actions.

The problem of life is becoming deeper day by day with rapid advances in science and technology. We live today in a global village

with every uncertainty. Every moment we face cross-currents of culture. Even we can not speculate about the things to come. There is challenge of the unknown future, of the “future shock” as termed by Arvin Toffler. Science and technology have enabled us to know much about the stars far away in the sky but we have known little about ourselves, our inner most being. This is the greatest paradox as well as tragedy of our age. We search the outer sky, but we never make a quest in the sky of our mind. Actually this is a social as well as a spiritual malady of this age of science and technology, of our modern age. Here lies the challenge to the human being. Let us think of what is our task ahead.

What indeed is the problem of the modern man? The new advances in science and technology have brought about an utter confusion of values in the life of men and women living in the present-day civilization. There is increasing stress on quantitative rather than qualitative values. His inner life is poor, and he is striving to free himself from the thralldom of this poverty by acquiring more and more of the material things that science and technology have made available. Man is seeking a physical solution to a problem which is fundamentally psychological. He thinks that science, being so powerful, can solve all problems. But he forgets that while science can solve the problem of speed, it can give no guidance as to the direction that one must follow. He has lost sight of the fact that while science can give comfort, it cannot give happiness; for happiness consists not in the possession of things, but in freeing the mind of all its inhibitions so that it is rendered pure and innocent. While the modern age has known the conquest over matter, it has yet to learn the secrets of conquering the mind—and without the latter the former is not only meaningless but positively dangerous. Man may have gained in knowledge, but he lacks wisdom. Unless he can transform knowledge into wisdom, his future and the future of the entire race is dark and dismal. In other words, man needs today, above everything else, a **Right Philosophy of Life**.

It is this right philosophy of life which the *Bhagavad Gita* provides through its priceless message. It points to a way of life which will help the modern man to find a solution to the baffling problems of existence. The *Bhagavad Gita* not only enunciates the Gospel of Right Action, it also unmistakably points to the fact that Right Action is possible only if there is Right Perception. And Right Perception in terms of the *Gita* is that condition of the human mind in which it is capable of total and uninstructed attention, freed from confusion of thought, and not caught in the play of the opposites. The teaching of the *Gita* leads Arjuna, step by step, from distractions to illumination—from the mind that is caught

up in the pulls of desire to the mind that is illumined by the light of *Buddhi*. In other words, it leads him from Mind to Super-Mind.

Does the Gita ask man to renounce the world in pursuit of spiritual objectives? Does it suggest that man must give up action in order to explore the realms of the Super-Mind? The uniqueness of the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita lies in the fact that it asks man to seek his spiritual objectives in the daily avocations of life—it says that man can come to supreme enlightenment not by running away from action but by performing all actions in the right manner. How can man come to recognize Right Action? The Gita says that as he frees himself from Reaction (*Vikarma*), *Vikarma* is prohibited action, generally based on lesser qualities like greed, lust and anger for example, he comes to the deep and profound experience of Inaction (*Akarma*). *Akarma* is action performed without the notion of *akarta bhava*, doership and does not mean not doing work. Inaction or *Akarma* is indeed the right background for the performance of *Karma* or Action—action that is true, action that is free from all contamination of self.

नैवतस्यकृतेनार्थोनाकृतेनेहकश्चन ।

नचास्यसर्वभूतेषुकश्चिदर्थव्यपाश्रयः [3.18]

A self-realized man has no purpose to fulfil in the discharge of prescribed duties, nor has any reason not to perform such work. Nor has he any need to depend on any other living being.

In the three principal definitions of Yoga given in the Gita we perceive the path indicated by Sri Krishna to attain the point of Right Perception from where alone Right Action can emerge. Speaking about Yoga, the Gita says that it is ‘a dissociation from that which gives an association with sorrow.’ What is it that gives to man an association with sorrow? Surely it is the mind with its ability to compare and contrast which brings to the human individual a sense of sorrow. The problem of man’s suffering is fundamentally the problem of mind caught up in the process of comparison and contrast. All his reactions emanate from this process. In fact, it is this process which constitutes the ceaseless movement of the mind, the movement which conditions the perceptive activity of man. The Gita deals comprehensively with the conditioning factors of the mind. It calls them *tamas*, *rajas* and *sattva*—inertia, activity and harmony, respectively. One of the clear instructions of Sri Krishna to Arjuna is that he should transcend these three attributes of the mind so that he can come to a clear and undistorted perception of

men and things. To dissociate from that which gives an association with sorrow is indeed to be aware of these attributes and their functioning within one's own Psyche. It is in this averseness that one understands the meaning of the second definition of *Yoga* to be found in the Gita. It states that *Yoga* is Equilibrium. The state of equilibrium is indeed the poise of inaction, and it can be achieved only when the mind is purged of its three attributes. So long as the mind is caught up in the process of identification with, or a condemnation of, the movement of the three attributes, so long there can be no experience of equilibrium or silence. From the point of equilibrium whatever emerges is good and beneficent. The third definition of *Yoga* given by the Gita is: *Yoga* is skill in action. All actions become perfect when they emanate from the Ground of Inaction or the Ground of Equilibrium. The word *yoga* means harnessing or applying oneself to the discharge of social obligation.

Modern man is indeed besieged with great inner conflict, and it is this conflict which has caused the utter disintegration of his psychological life. The disintegration within has caused unhappiness without. He is verily in search of inner integration and perhaps, for this, there can be no better guide than the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita. The creation of an Integrated Individual—*Yukta*—is indeed the purpose of the intensely dynamic message of the Gita. The Poise of Inaction, where the opposites of the mind are transcended, is a state of psychological integration. The Gita deals with this problem in a very comprehensive manner, in discourse after discourse, until, in the last discourse, Arjuna sees the identity of the Individual and Cosmic Wills, and, with that perception, he arrives at the cessation of inner conflict and therefore to a state of perfect integration.

The message of the Gita has an immediate and practical bearing on the problems of the modern age. It shows a way out of the complexities of the mind, to a complete and unfettered freedom of the Super-Mind. The Gita says that this path is not meant only for the few; it can be trodden by all who seek freedom from life's entanglements. In an age where the individual is becoming more and more insignificant due to the impacts of political, economic and social forces, the Gita brings to man a message of hope and cheer, for it shows to him that way of life which leads to the regaining of his lost significance. It indicates to him the path of creative living.

The spiritual regeneration of man is indeed the way to the creation of a happy society—this is verily the refreshing and the revitalizing message of the Bhagavad Gita.

1. The Bhagavad Gita deals with the problems of the Human Mind—with the reconciliation between will of the Man and the Will of the Cosmos. Bhagavad Gita is a dialogue between Sri Krishna and Arjuna. Sri Krishna represents the Cosmic Will and Arjuna represents the individual Will. It is with the conflict between these two Wills that Gita is primarily concerned. The Kurukshetra war is only symbolical of this inner war of two Wills. The last discourse of Gita practically ends with Arjuna's declaration where he says to the Lord: 'I shall do Thy bidding' or 'I shall act according to Thy Word.' It is in this declaration that we see the perfect reconciliation.
2. Because Arjuna refuses to act—he would not fight his friends, relatives and Gurus—the epic story of the Mahabharata slides to a standstill. Without action, no narrative is possible, indeed, no life. Lord Krishna in the Gita bestows the kick start by surfacing the imperative need to act. Bhagavad Gita analyses three kinds of actions possible in human affairs, ritual action (for physically inclined), reasoned action (for the intellectual), and spiritual action (for those inspired by religious devotion)

Arjuna gives three reasons for his sudden discovered pacifism, i.e. one: sva-jana (one's own people) are to be respected and loved, not killed. Two: blinded by greed, may go in for Kula-Kshaya (family ruin), but mutually assured destruction is not the civilised way of responding to aggression. Three: killing is the ultimate crime; better to be killed *weapon less* than kill. The gist of Krishna's perennial teaching is given in the following stanza:

योगसंन्यस्तकर्माणं ज्ञानसंछिन्नसंशयम् ।
आत्मवन्तं न कर्माणि निबद्धन्ति धनञ्जय ॥ 41 ॥

Steadfast in Yoga perform actions, abandoning attachment and remaining the same in success and failure, O Dhananjay. Yoga is called "evenness" (4:41)

In order to win peace and enlightenment — so Krishna declares — one need not forsake the world or one's responsibilities, even when they oblige one to go into battle. Renunciation (Samnyasa) of action is good in itself, but better still is in action. This Hindu ideal of action-less action or inaction in action (naishkarmyakarman), which is the basis of karma – Yoga. Life in the world and spiritual life are not in principle inimical to each other; they can and should be cultivated simultaneously. Such is the essence of a whole or integrated life.

Mahatma Gandhi says: “This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man’s lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is supreme, the only ambition worth having. This self-realization is subject of the Gita, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the Gita appears to me to be that of showing the excellent way to attain self-realization. That, which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the Gita even at the risk of repitition.”¹

The discourses of the Bhagvad Gita as we see one yoga, the Integral Yoga, placed before us in all its various aspects. From *Vishada* Yoga to *Sanyasa* Yoga is Arjuna’s journey undertaken by him in company with Sri Krishna. There is *Vishada* or despondency because man believes he is an actor, but when he realizes that there is the Master-Actor whose instrument he can become then all despondency vanishes. But for this the disciple must come to the state of *Sanyasa* which represents the void of the Mind. Sri Krishna tells Arjuna to go to him with an unoccupied mind. When the whole existence has become selfless, then you are one with it

Selfless is the path

Selflessness is the real devotion

Selflessness is the authentic surrender.

This indicates the utter negativity of consciousness. In this negative consciousness takes birth of the Super-Mind, it is like the birth of Jesus through Virgin Mary. It is in the virgin consciousness of *Sanyasa* that the vision of the Transcendental is vouchsafed to man. The steady minded people cultivate selflessness and detachment. He discovers and cherishes the truth that something higher than matter pervades matter and transcends matter. The steady minded people cultivate selflessness and detachment. He discovers and cherishes the truth that something higher than matter pervades matter and transcends matter. And when such Vision comes, gone are sorrow and suffering, gone indeed are despondency and faintheartedness. It is only the innocent, the virgin consciousness that can meet the challenge of life is adequate then no problem is able to take root in one’s mind. In the very appearance of the problem, the problem is dissolved, for, when the response to the challenge is adequate then there remains no residue, thus life is freed from all burden of the past. It is thus that man lives truly from moment where each moment contains the richness of eternity.

The steady-minded person (sthit-prajna) who is able to say, truthfully, 'I do nothing at all, only my senses are busy', must be a very rare phenomenon. To dispel Arjuna's fear that he is not the candidate for such high class spiritual achievement, Krishna provides the key shloka 40 of Chapter VI. What matters in Yoga, he says, is not success but sincere effort. 'the struggle for virtue (kalyana) is never wasted.'

Peace of mind is not a goal but a process, Krishna goes into some detail on the nature of this process, especially the signs by which it can be recognised. To begin with, the aspirant must discipline desire, he must learn to respect his atman by using it to control his animal impulses; he must discover the pleasure of solitude and solitariness; he must perform daily whatever physical yoga is required to discipline his body. He must practice the principle of golden mean in every activity. He must look on delight and suffering everywhere as his own.

Such effort and empathy characterize the true Yogi, who is superior to the penance-doers, learned in theoretical knowledge, and the busily active. Such a person, explains Krishna, may not attain the supreme bliss (Sukhamuttamam), but 'he is never far from me, and I am never far from him.'

The supreme bliss is not a product of determined seeking after it, but a possible by-product of honest yogic effort to improve the quality of one's humanity.

Bhagavad Gita explains that with the self unattached to external contacts one finds happiness in the Self and with the self engaged in the meditation of Brahman one attains endless happiness. The narration discussed here has shown that such an experience of *ananda* is not just confined to the pages of philosophical texts but is very much within the experiential purview of the followers of different philosophies. People following different traditions all have experienced *ananda* which explains why concept of *ananda* has been widely discussed in most of the philosophical texts. In the words of Sri Aurobindo"A power leaned down, a happiness found its home. Over wide earth brooded the infinite bliss."²

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Assam Economy in a Scenario of Cautious Optimism

Amiya Sarma* & M.P. Bezbaruah**

Abstract

It is well known that the Assam economy had a run of high growth for about a century under the British *Raj* driven by investment of colonial capital. However, post-independence, the State encountered several setbacks in the forms of geographical isolation due to partition of India, internal strifes originating from ethno-cultural identity movements and insufficient support from the Central government to cope with these difficulties in the early planning era. As a result, the economy of the State remained sluggish for several decades. But following proactive affirmative policies of the Central government since the early 1990s, there was a revival of the growth process by the turn of the century. The per capita income of the State, after drifting apart from all India per capita income for decades, started closing the gap. The present paper is aimed at examining if the revival of growth in the first few years of this century has been sustained in the next decade. The paper also reviews the prospects and challenges of the economy of Assam in view of the recent changes, such as the award of the Fourteenth Finance Commission, invigoration of the Act East Policy and social concerns arising from National Register of Citizens (NRC) and Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), 2016.

1. The Background

At the time of independence, the Assam economy had a clear dualistic structure. There was a modern industrial sector comprised of tea

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plantation and manufacturing, coal mining, oil mining, refining and forest based units, which was developed through investment of colonial capital. Railways and waterways were also developed to facilitate colonial exploitation of the economy. This small modern sector generated relatively large income which was not distributed widely. The vast majority of people were, however, dependent on agriculture, whose growth in the pre-independent period came mainly from area expansion. Technological changes and institutional reforms which could have raised agricultural productivity were virtually absent (Ganguli 1986). Thus, at the time of independence, although Assam was one of the high per capita income States of India, it is debatable whether the living standard of the masses was proportionately as high.

In the aftermath of independence, the Assam economy faced serious setbacks originating from both exogenous and endogenous processes. Firstly, partition of the country virtually isolated the State by cutting its links from the rest of India and the world due to creation of East Pakistan. This led to increased cost of movement of men and materials to and from the State resulting in reduced profit prospects of investments in the State – a problem still plaguing the economy of Assam (Sarma 1966). Secondly, post-partition influx of refugees further stressed the already distressed economy (Bhattacharjya 2010). In the early Five Year Plans of India, the problems faced by the State did not receive adequate attention (Goswami 1981). It is therefore, hardly surprising that within a decade of the planning era, Assam slipped from ‘higher than all-India per capita income state’ to the ‘lower than all-India per capita income state.’ Internally meanwhile, the State suffered from a major social problem. The hill areas, inhabited predominantly by tribes were largely left out from the administration system of the colonial rule.¹ After independence, integration of such areas to the administration system of the country was felt necessary. However, the constitutional provisions, such as the district and the regional councils under the Sixth Schedule, designed to integrate such areas to the modern administrative system of India did not succeed to the desired extent. In fact, such provisions were found to be insufficient to meet identity aspiration of many a tribe. Most of the hill districts were shed from Assam to accommodate such identity aspiration (Bezbaruah 2010). This move, however, instead of settling the issue, encouraged other groups to mobilize themselves for demanding more autonomy. The movements for ‘autonomy’, ‘homeland’ or ‘self-determination’ have manifested in

agitations which have often disrupted normal life and even given rise to ethnic conflicts and insurgency in post-independence Assam. More recently as an offshoot of preparation of National Register of Citizens (NRC)² and introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB), 2016,³ some socio-political tensions have resurfaced in the State. Obviously, the volatility in social environments does not make the ecosystem conducive to robust economic expansion.

After decades of sluggish growth resulting from the above mentioned factors, things started to change for Assam and the rest of the Northeast region of India in the 1990s. With better appreciation of difficulties of the region, proactive affirmative actions were initiated by the Central government for the region in an unprecedented scale. As Assam was also inducted in the group of Special Category⁴ States and the State along with other States of the Northeast Region started receiving enhanced inflow of Central Development Funds to overcome backlogs in infrastructure and basic services (Bezbaruah *et. al.* 2016), there was step up in the rate of growth in the State in the first few years of the twenty-first century. With the goal of building on this resurgence, connectivity improvements in the State have been further enhanced as a component of the 'Act East Policy'. However, following elimination of Special Category Status by the 14th Finance Commission,⁵ the State received a setback in the fiscal front.

In view of these mixed experiences of the State in recent years, an examination of growth trends in the economy of Assam in the twenty-first century years was felt instructive. The present paper reports the findings of this examination. The study is based on data on State income collected from the Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Government of Assam and Economic Survey 2018-19, Government of India. Analysis has been carried on using graphs, ratios/percentages.

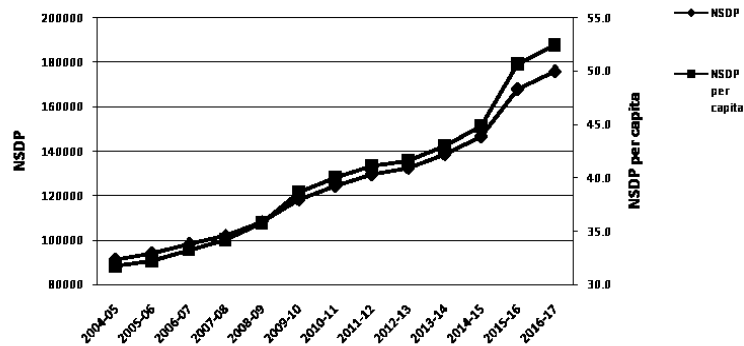
The paper has been organized in four sections. While section two analyses the growth trends of the economy of Assam, changing pattern of the sectoral composition of State income has been included in section three. The future prospects of the economy of Assam have been discussed in the concluding section.

2. The Growth Trends:

The NSDP and NSDP per capita of Assam at constant prices are depicted in figure 1 for the post-twentieth century years. The economy grew at a

steady average rate till the year 2012-13 beyond which the economy grew more rapidly.

Figure 1: NSDP (Rs. in crore) and NSDP per capita (Rs. in thousand) of Assam (at constant 2011-12 prices)

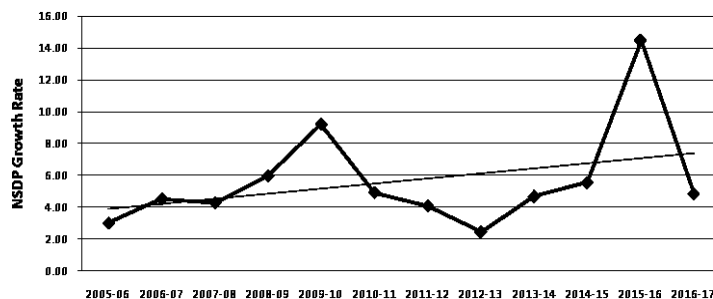


Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam (accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/portlets/state-income> on 21-08-2019)

Similar trend has also been observed in the per capita NSDP level of the State during the period 2004-05 to 2016-17. The per capita NSDP has increased at a steady average rate till 2012-13 but beyond this year, there is a step up in its level.

The annual NSDP growth rates and trend in the NSDP growth rate in the economy of Assam since 2004-05 are shown separately in figure 2. NSDP of the State grew at an increasing rate during 2004-05 to 2009-10 with an average annual growth rate of 5.4 per cent. But the growth rate decelerated thereafter up to 2012-13. This may be a fall out of the general slowdown following of the Global Financial Crisis of 2008. Fortunately, the State economy again caught up the increasing growth trend in NSDP since 2012-13. During 2010-11 to 2016-17, the economy grew at an average annual growth rate of 5.9 per cent. However, in the year 2015-16, the growth rate had a sharp decline.

Figure 2: Growth Rate of NSDP at Constant 2011-12 Prices, Assam

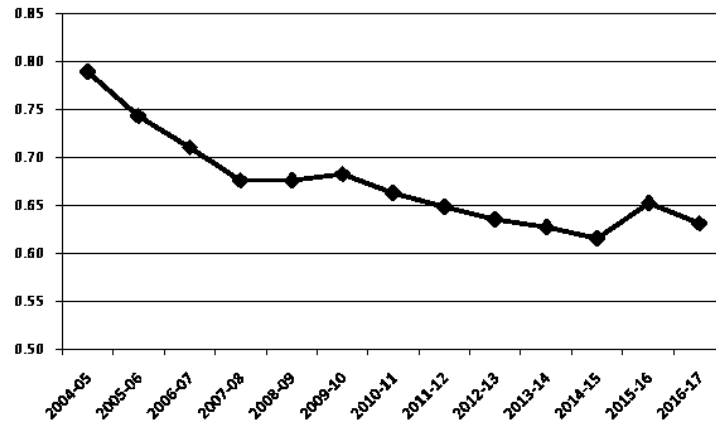


Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam (accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/portlets/state-income> on 21-08-2019)

While a step-up in the growth rate of NSDP and NSDP per capita in Assam in the reference period is commendable, the growth trends need to be evaluated in the overall growth trend in the country as a whole. Figure 3 clearly shows that NSDP per capita in Assam as a percentage of all-India per capita income. The ratio briefly improved in 2015-16 after steadily declining since 2004-05. But the upturn was very temporary and the downturn returned the very next year. On the whole the decline has been less sharp since 2007. But unless the ratio is turned up for a sustained period, the per capita income in the State will continue to languish behind that of the national average.

Apart from the relative backwardness of the State economy compared to the economy of the country as a whole, other statistical indicators reveal that, there is also a wide spread disparity in development attainment within the State.⁶ Some areas and communities are lagging further behind in terms of education, health and income etc. Moreover, the unemployment rate per thousand person/person days in the labour force was as high as 50 in usual status in the State compared to the national figure of 27 in this regard (Report of NSSO 68th Round 2014).

Figure 3: Ratio of per capita NSDP of Assam to per capita NNI of India



Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam (accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/portlets/state-income> on 21-08-2019) Government of India (2019): Economic Survey 2018-19

3. The Trend in Sectoral Composition:

3.1 Growth of Agriculture

In a situation when most of the Indian states are becoming industry or service-oriented economies away from their traditional agriculture dependent nature, the economy of Assam is still relying significantly on agriculture. The importance of agriculture in the economy of the State can be better understood from the fact that it has been the largest contributor to NSDP as an individual component of all the three broad sectors. As shown in Table 1, percentage share of agriculture and allied activities in gross state domestic product grew in between 2004-05 and 2005-06. Thereafter, share of this sector has been declining. Being a mineral rich State, mining and quarrying sector commands a substantial share of NSDP in Assam. During the reference period of the study, the share of this sector in NSDP has gone up and down without showing

a steady trend. Overall the share of the primary sector to GSDP has declined during the reference period of 2004-05 to 2015-16. However, share of the primary sector to GSDP is still much higher as compared to the share of this sector to GDP of the country as a whole which accounts for around 17 per cent in 2016-17. Thus compared to the national economy, the structural change in the economy of Assam has been taking place at a slower pace.

Table 1: Sectorwise Contribution to GSDP, Assam (Current Prices) (%)

Year	Primary Sector		Total	Secondary Sector			Tertiary Sector	Total
	Agriculture and Allied	Mining & Quarrying		Manu- facturing	Cons- truction	Gas, Electricity & Water Supply		
2004-05	25.57	8.76	34.33	10.53	6.41	1.84	18.78	46.89
2005-06	28.39	8.32	36.71	9.53	5.63	1.76	16.92	46.37
2006-07	26.63	7.73	34.36	9.53	5.86	1.53	16.92	48.72
2007-08	26.06	7.34	33.40	8.58	5.74	1.73	16.05	50.55
2008-09	25.51	7.16	32.67	7.50	8.41	1.75	17.66	49.67
2009-10	25.83	7.06	32.89	8.06	7.83	1.34	17.23	49.88
2010-11	25.50	6.31	31.81	9.07	8.70	1.18	18.95	49.24
2011-12	24.02	6.48	30.50	8.43	9.59	1.04	19.06	50.44
2012-13	22.82	9.75	32.57	10.31	8.55	1.41	20.27	47.16
2013-14	22.00	8.48	30.48	11.35	9.16	1.53	22.04	47.48
2014-15	21.48	8.04	29.52	11.35	9.11	1.87	22.33	48.15
2015-16	20.09	10.92	31.01	10.96	8.70	1.75	21.41	47.58

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam (accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/portlets/state-income> on 21-08-2019)

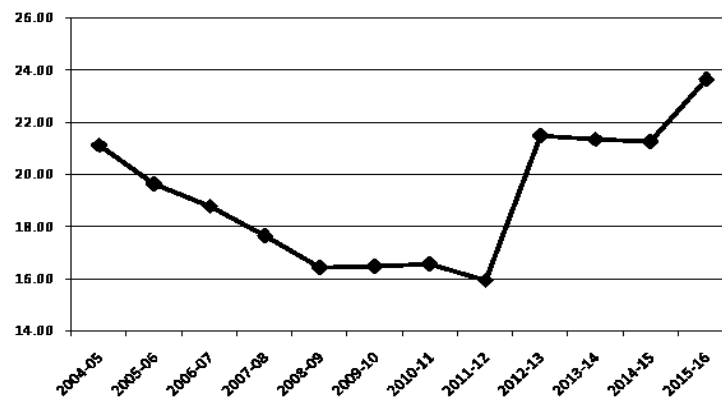
3.2 The Industrial Front

The share of the secondary sector in general and that of the manufacturing sector in particular in the GSDP were 19 per cent and 11 per cent respectively during 2004-05 (refer Table 1). But the contributive shares of these sectors to the State income declined in the subsequent years. The share of the secondary sector, along with the

share of manufacturing sector in it, had a revival in 2012-13 before declining a bit in 2015-16. Share of the secondary sector in GDSP of the State accounts for around 21 per cent in 2015-16 which is lower than the all-India share of 29 per cent, which itself is quite modest compared to China and even Bangladesh (Asian Development Bank 2019).

Besides manufacturing, industry sector also includes mining and electricity gas and water supply (Krishna 2008). As Figure 4 shows, after steadily declining for about a decade, the share of industry as a whole improved since 2011-12. This is because of a significant spurt in the contribution of the mining and quarrying to GSDP from 6.48 per cent in 2011-12 to almost 10 per cent in the following year which decelerated in the two subsequent years but revived again in 2015-16. The rising share of the manufacturing sector also helped in the increase in the contribution of the industrial sector to GSDP since 2012-13.

Figure 4: Contribution of Industrial Sector to GSDP of Assam at Current Prices



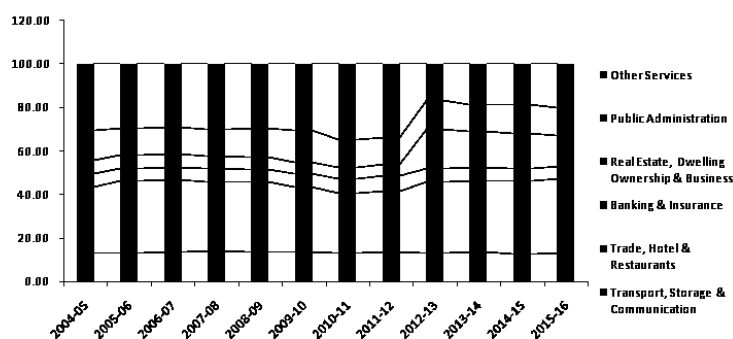
Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam (accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/portlets/state-income> on 21-08-2019)

3.3 Growth of the Service Sectors

As in the national economy, the service sector has become the dominant component of the economy of Assam. After comprising about half of the State economy in 2011-12, the services declined somewhat in terms of their share in State GSDP in the subsequent years.

Among the service sector ‘trade, hotel and restaurant services’ is the largest component. This component now constitutes one third of the service sector of the economy of Assam. Together with ‘transport, storage and communication services’, this component constitutes nearly a half of the service sector. This is a positive feature of the composition of services in the State as these two subsectors are relatively more employment intensive compared to the sub-sectors such as financial services. The other positive feature of the composition service sector in Assam is that the share of public administration has been more or less steady and significantly lower than in the other Northeastern States. Details are depicted in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Contribution of Service Sub-sectors to GSDP



Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Assam (accessed from <https://des.assam.gov.in/portlets/state-income> on 21-08-2019)

3.4 Summing Up

The structural change in the economy of Assam from primary sector to the tertiary sector in terms of their contributions to State income has contused in the reference period of the study. But the rate of structural transformation has been slower in Assam than in the national economy. Agriculture still remains as a significant contributor to the State income. But since 2011-12 the industry sector as a whole has been contributing a rising share in the state's economy, which is driven by rise in the shares of both manufacturing and mining. Within the service sectors, the employment intensive sub-sector 'trade, hotel and restaurant' and 'transport, storage and communication' have remained the mainstay.

4. Outlook for the Economy:

The Assam Economy has now acquired several positive features which belied the economy in the first fifty years after India's independence. Despite ups and downs, the growth rate of the economy has maintained an overall upward trend. The industrial sector has had a revival in the last few years. The service sector, which now comprises nearly a half of the economy, has a robust composition with employment intensive sub-sectors maintaining their dominance in it. The fact that 'transport and hotel and restaurant' now has a growing share in the services indirectly indicate that tourism potentials of Assam and its neighbouring States is now being better utilized. Agriculture, which has remained the mainstay of the rural economy, has shown signs of moving forward through evolution of market and non-market institutions (Das and Tamuli 2018), despite its inherent constraints of flood-proneness and small holding size. Diversification of the rural economy into non-farm activities has been making steady progress (Chakraborty 2014). Improvement of rural connectivity driven by penetrative implementation of Pradhan Mantri Gram Sarak Yojana (PMGSY), has had a catalytic role in this process of rural transformation.

The State government has been enjoying reasonable fiscal stability in the last couple of decades and the fiscal crisis of the late 1980s and the early 1990s seems to be a thing of the past. However, withdrawal of the Special Category Status as per the recommendation of the 14th Finance Commission has made a dent on the State's exchequer. As per estimate of the Government of Assam, the State has suffered a loss of

about Rs 8,400 crores (www.business-standard.com2018) because of loss of its special category status. In this context, it may be noted that all the neighbouring hill States of Assam have received higher devolutions due to award of the Commission. This can actually indirectly benefit Assam too. Because of its location at the central part of the Northeast Region, effect of expenditures in the neighbouring States usually spills over to Assam. Thus the net impact of the award of the 14th Finance Commission on the overall economy of Assam may actually be a lot smaller.

Perhaps the single most factor that brightens the prospect of the economy of Assam in the coming years is connectivity improvements being implemented with greater urgency in the present decade. Completion of broad-gauge rail link to the Barak Valley, the Dhola-Sadiya Bridge over Lohit and the Bogibeel Bridge over the Brahmaputra, projects that were languishing for a long time before being commissioned in the last few years, is expected to broaden and deepen economic opportunities by integrating markets within not only Assam but in the entire Northeast Region. There are several other connectivity improvement projects by rail, road and air which are being actively pursued in the State and the region. Further, there are active initiatives to mainstream Assam and the Northeast in India's invigorated Act East Policy by connecting the region to East and Southeast Asian economies.

With all these positive developments taking place endogenously and also inducted through thoughtful interventions, the outlook for the economy of Assam in the coming years appears bright. There are no doubts several areas which require further action. For instance, to complete the process of rural transformation in the State, strengthening of post harvest management of value chain (procurement-storage-processing and marketing) and increased deployment of financial services including credit will be necessary. Revival of industrial activities will have to be further nurtured by further strengthening and sustaining the favourable ecosystem. Government policy appears to be in place for this purpose.⁷

While appreciating the positive scenario for the economy of Assam, it will be imprudent to make light of the downside risk of social tensions resurfacing to queer the pitch. For the last few years, updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the proposal to amend the Citizenship Act have kept the minds of people of Assam occupied about the impending consequences of the twin steps. The issues have

received substantial space in civil society discourses too. Given that the steps are aimed at finding a permanent solution to the vexed issue of illegal immigration to the State, the steps should be welcomed. The misgivings among communities regarding these steps need to be addressed in a spirit of humanistic accommodation, so that a congenial social order is maintained. A conducive social atmosphere is essential for all sections of population of the State to profit from the emerging opportunities. Developments in the opposite direction, on the other hand, can jeopardize the ecosystem needed for forward march of the State in the twenty-first century.

Notes

- ¹ While the plains were under effective administration of the provincial government, the hills inhabited mostly by tribal people were virtually left out from that system of administration. In fact the hills were classified as 'excluded' or 'partially excluded' areas depending on 'whether the area was inhabited by a compact aboriginal population or the aboriginal population was mixed with the other communities.' Though the administration of these areas was vested on the Governor, in effect the tribal groups were left alone to continue with their traditional administrative arrangements. Moreover, most of the 'excluded' areas were subject to the 'inner line' restrictions, which restricted the entry of people from other areas to these areas. Thus, the British policy effectively kept the hill tribes isolated from socio-economic interaction with the population in the plains.
- ² NRC in Assam is prepared to identify the Indian citizens residing in Assam who acquired Indian citizenship prior to March 24, 1971. The exercise of preparing the NRC was started in 2013 following a Supreme Court order and the final NRC of the State has been released on 31 August, 2019.
- ³ This bill was introduced on July 19, 2016 which wants to provide Indian citizenship to a few illegal migrants from certain minority communities in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- ⁴ Special Category Status was given by the Government of India to certain States facing geographical and socio-economic disadvantages. The Central government provides special assistances to the States under this category for their development.
- ⁵ The Finance Commission of India is a constitutional body which is appointed every five years to recommend on the Centre-State financial relations and devolution of funds from the Centre to the States and

among the States. The Fourteenth Finance Commission has been appointed for the tenure 2015-2020 under the chairmanship of Y. V. Reddy.

6. Assam Human Development Report 2014 documents the disparities in overall and dimensional achievements in human development. The Scheduled Tribes as a group are lagging behind in terms of per capita income compared to the other social categories. The hill districts and the Barak valley are seriously deficient in access to safe drinking water. The Muslim population and the tea tribes are relatively backward in educational attainments.
7. The Central and State government agencies have in tandem been pursuing pro-manufacturing roles in Assam. Apart from organizing Global Investors' Summits, the State government has also implemented the Assam Ease of Doing Business Act of 2016 to promote new industries and service enterprises and to attract fresh investments into the industrial sector of the State. In order to enhance skill of the unemployed youth of Assam thereby making them more employable in the industrial sector, the State government has started the Assam Skill Development Mission, (ASDM), 2015.

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Tragedy of Farmers' Suicide in India

P Guha* & P Singh**

Abstract

Indebtedness, loss of livelihood and ultimately suicide by farmers are the multi-dimensional nature of agrarian distress in India. The debt waiver is only a transitory measure. The Centre and the State governments should adopt well thought out coordinated measures and the strategies to find out permanent solution for agrarian crisis in the country.

Key word: *Farmer's suicide, NCRB*

Despite the declining share of agriculture in GDP from about 50 per cent in early 1950s to 14 per cent in 2011-12, agriculture continues to be an important sector of Indian economy which has engaged 52 per cent of the country's total labour force (Arora, 2013). An alarming phenomena since the mid 1990s is the increasing number of reported suicide deaths amongst Indian farmers. As per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) report the number of farmers' suicides has registered sharp increase during the six years (2010- 2016), which is three times that of during the preceding decade (2000 to 2010). Low return and declining profitability in agriculture discourages public investments in agriculture. Livelihood threat of small, marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourer owing to agrarian crisis has been the twin cause of such phenomena (Government of India 2007). The tragic manifestation of the deteriorating condition of Indian farmers since late 90s, has been studied by several scholars. Limited access to formal sources of credit, greater dependency on loan from non-institutional sources like moneylenders at exploitative interest rate, terms and

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condition is considered responsible for the problem in the works of (Mishra, 2014; Narayanmoorthy, 2006; Parthasarathy and Shameem, 1998; Prasad, 1999; Satish, 2006). While Kalamkar and Narayanamoorthy (2003); Mohanakumar and Sharma (2006); Mishra (2006) expressed declining prices of agricultural product together with rising cost of cultivation in the post 90s economic environment contributed towards the problem. Mounting burden of debt and poverty added to the agony of farmers studied by Suri (2006); Sarma (2004); Assadi (1998); Jeromi (2007); Satish (2006); Sidhu et al., (2011); Mohanty and Shroff (2004); Verma (2011). Vaidyanathan (2006) stated that failure of expected return on investment in high value crop such as Bt Cotton and Spices out of borrowed fund to some extent was responsible for farmers' tragedy.

While withdrawal of State and free play of market forces with the initiation of economic reform in early 90s qualitatively added new dimension to the stress on peasantry in Andhra Pradesh (Sridhar, 2006). Increased import of domestically produced agricultural product leading to falling prices in the wake of liberalised economic environment post 90s brought challenges for farmers (Bandyopadhyay, 2004). Another study by Gill (2004) expressed rising prices of insecticides, pesticides together with freezing prices of wheat, paddy and sugarcane added to the sorrow of Punjab farmers during 2003. Singh (2006) mentioned that domestic discord, tension and use of intoxicants were the distant causes of farmers' suicide in Punjab. The major cause of farmers' suicide in Odhisa was crop loss resulting from drought as per the study of Baitarani Initiative (2017). The economic and political negligence of the Telengana region for decades besides the alienation of individuals from family and society were contributing factors of farmers' suicide in that region (Revathi, 1998). Agricultural distress, which is rooted in crop failure, depressing prices of agricultural products, rising cost of production, reduced returns of the Indian farmers, droughts, floods, pest attacks, spurious seeds and pesticides and policy paralysis compounded by indebtedness etc. is often mentioned as the major suicide causing factor in India. Present study attempted to make an interstate comparison of farmers' suicide in India using the data of 2014-15 as published by NCRB.

In between 2014 and 2015 the number of reported suicide by farmers in India has declined by 2,111 persons. The percentage share of farmers' suicide to that of total suicide has declined from 5.21 per

cent in 2014 to 3.51 per cent in 2015 (Appendix 1). Amongst the Indian States the number of farmers' suicide was highest (1436 persons) in Maharashtra, followed by 827 persons in Tamil Nadu and 700 persons in Kerala during 2014. Though there has been some decline in the number of farmers' suicide in Maharashtra, but the State continued to have most number of reported cases with a figure of 1261 persons followed by 709 persons in Madhya Pradesh and 604 in Tamil Nadu respectively during 2015. States like Goa, Manipur, and Nagaland was not having any reported case of farmers' suicide during 2014 and 2015 (Appendix 1).

A number of socio-economic suicides inducing factors have been emphasized in the literature. NCRB (2014) has emphasized bankruptcy or indebtedness as the major factor that accounted for the largest number of farmers' suicides in 2014 (1163 or 20.58 per cent of the total). Next comes family problems that accounted for 1135 or 20.08 per cent, the farming related issues (crop failure, natural calamities etc.) 969 or 17.51 per cent, illness 745 or 13.18 per cent and so on. In the latter cases too, the farmers ultimately become indebted and, in the event of inability to repay loans, lose their livelihood.

The farmers raise loans against the collateral of land and property from both Institutional and non-institutional sources. The NSSO (70th Round) has estimated that almost 40 per cent of the farmer households in India are indebted to non-institutional sources. A number of studies have concluded that incidence of suicides is high amongst the households that are more indebted to non-institutional than to institutional sources. In certain States, for example Punjab, APMC Acts have also facilitated money lending business of the commission agents and the indirect payment to farmers through them makes farmers vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of these usurious middlemen. The virtual mandatory sale of the produce through the commission agent who interlocks a number of professions, makes farmer dependent on the exploitative middlemen for all the needs, including loans. It is surprising that most of these moneylenders do not have a valid money lending license which is mandatory under law. According to one estimate, their share in total outstanding rural loans in Punjab was 24.3 per cent in 2002 (NSSO 59th Round). All this is not expected to go without the notice and knowledge of the State government and its functionaries. Several demands for direct payment to the farmers like the Direct

Beneficiary Transfers (DBT) have not found favour with the State government. It requires strong political will of the State government to amend the State APMC Act suitably.

High price variability of the non-procurement crops has also adversely affected farm earnings. The Central government in its latest budget (2018-19) has promised a minimum of 50 per cent above A2 cost of production for all the crops. But, its implementation requires cooperation by the State governments. In Madhya Pradesh, the State government has come out with the Chief Minister Bhavantar Bhugtan Scheme and has promised to compensate the farmer the difference amount in case the sales price is less than the model sales rate of Madhya Pradesh and two other States, that will be credited directly to the account of the farmer for which on-line registration is compulsory. Some advocate price stabilization fund for agricultural crops to be maintained by the States to ensure remunerative prices to the farmers. This brings in the issue of agri-marketing and agri-business. Closely associated is the issue of contract farming.

Fragmentation of land holdings with marginal and small farmers comprising 86 per cent of total landholdings in the country has further endangered their livelihood and has caused them vulnerable to suicides. It is this class of the farmers that suffers highest incidence of suicides though some medium farmer victims have also been reported (NCRB 2014). So the enormity of the issue lies in fragmenting holdings and reducing farmers' earnings. This together with the issue of absorbing farm workers raises the pertinent point whether agriculture alone is remunerative enough to provide adequate livelihood to both (farmer and the farm worker). Probably, the capacity of agriculture to absorb and to ensure adequate returns to them has saturated long ago. It is, therefore, sometimes argued that the solution for agriculture distress in the country lies in creating gainful employment opportunities in non-farm sector in rural areas. But in the absence of any inducement for private investment to accelerate and create employment opportunities in rural areas, the onus lies on public investment. Moreover, most of the farmers and rural workers are illiterate or lowly literate, and lack the required skills for their absorption in non-farm activities. But, identifying the avenues of employment in non-farm sector and providing illiterate and lowly literate farmers and the farm workers the relevant skills is the over-riding issue in this context. That is, the underlying

issue is that of reducing the population pressure on agriculture and providing them relevant skills for their sustainable livelihoods. The recent announcement to increase procurement price to 50 per cent plus A2 cost of production,¹ including with support of the State government for other crops, huge funds allocated for irrigation facilities, promoting farmers producer companies, e-NAM etc. are some such measures that highlight the government's concern to address the issue squarely.

Note.

1. As per Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP) Cost A2 = (Cost A1+ Rent paid for leased in land); where Cost A1 includes all actual expanses in cash and kind incurred in production by owners.

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Appendix 1: Statewise Incidence of Suicides by Agricultural Labourers (2014-2015)

State/UT	2014			2015		
	Total Number of Agricultural Labourer	Total Suicides of Labourer	Suicide Percentage of Agricultural Labourer	Total Number of Agricultural Labourer	Total Suicides of Agricultural Labourer	Suicide Percentage of Agricultural Labourer
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Andhra Pradesh	472	6101	7.74	400	6226	6.42
Arunachal Pradesh	3	156	1.92	3	135	2.22
Assam	38	3546	1.07	54	3231	1.67
Bihar	10	719	1.39	7	516	1.36
Chhattisgarh	312	5683	5.49	100	7118	1.40
Goa	0	291	0.00	0	302	0.00
Gujarat	555	7225	7.68	244	7246	3.37
Haryana	105	3203	3.28	134	3545	3.78
Himachal Pradesh	31	644	4.81	46	543	8.47
Jammu & Kashmir	25	258	9.69	21	372	5.65
Jharkhand	4	1300	0.31	21	835	2.51
Karnataka	447	10945	4.08	372	10786	3.45
Kerala	700	8446	8.29	207	7692	2.69
Madhya Pradesh	372	9039	4.12	709	10293	6.89
Maharashtra	1436	16307	8.81	1261	16970	7.43
Manipur	0	50	0.00	0	37	0.00
Meghalaya	2	99	2.02	1	172	0.58
Mizoram	5	116	4.31	1	123	0.81
Nagaland	0	13	0.00	0	21	0.00
Odisha	97	4160	2.33	27	4087	0.66

Punjab	40	943	4.24	24	1049	2.29
Rajasthan	373	4459	8.37	73	3457	2.11
Sikkim	0	244	0.00	3	241	1.24
Tamil Nadu	827	16122	5.13	604	15777	3.83
Telangana	449	9623	4.67	42	10140	0.41
Tripura	32	762	4.20	48	746	6.43
Uttar Pradesh	129	3590	3.59	179	3902	4.59
Uttarakhand	0	207	0.00	2	475	0.42
West Bengal	230	14310	1.61	0	14602	0.00
India	6694	128561	5.21	4583	130639	3.51

Source: Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India, National Crime Records Bureau, Govt. of India.

Swami Vivekananda: A Modern Saint and Prophet: Sankar Sen (2019)**

Ravi K. Mishra*

A delight for its readers, one that could stimulate many a pensive mind to engage in spiritual thought, the book by Sankar Sen is truly an absorbing, rather scintillating account of the life and times of Swami Vivekananda. That is not to say that the author has attempted yet another biography of the Swami. Rather, his is an attempt to come up with a critical appraisal of innumerable aspects of Vivekananda's life. The foremost feature of the book to be highlighted is its structure. Common experience goes on to show that most biographies, not least the biographies on as great a character as Vivekananda, appear more like either eulogy or hagiography. Differing from the ordinary lot in this sense, the book has been organized in two parts. The first seven chapters of the book trace the trajectory of Vivekananda's achievements through his life as a monk until his death, an event which is veritably called *Mahasamadhi* by the author. Following this biographical account are three concluding chapters that are more or less a textbook-like approach to fathoming the immeasurable length and breadth of Vivekananda's message to the world. In fact, chapter 8 entitled, *General Review* is a good summary of almost all the major facets of Vivekananda's thoughts that form the bulk of what an inquisitive mind would probably be looking out for in the process of understanding his thoughts on the divinity of man. However, the chapter summing up Vivekananda's opinions and teachings meant for the consumption of humanity as a

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** Swami Vivekananda a Modern Saint and Prophet by Sankar Sen, Published by: L.G. Publishers Distributors, 49 Street No. 14, Pratap Nagar, Mayur Vihar Phase-I, Delhi-110091, Phone: 011-22795505. e-mail: lgpdist@gmail.com; Price: 695/- Pages: 222.

whole is not the soul of the book. Instead what stands out in the book is the annotated portrayal of the deeds and programmes – both completed as well as incomplete –initiated by Swamiji during his lifetime. The book is replete with anecdotal accounts in the life of Vivekananda, every anecdote acting as a tiny window into his charismatic personality and thoughts.

Nonetheless, a discussion of Vivekananda's life seems inadequate without a mention of his one and only source of inspiration, his Guru, whom he, out of reverence, used to call Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. The indelible mark that Ramakrishna left on young Narendra's mind became the heart and soul of his Vedantic message for the world. The very idea that all religions, if practised with full devotion, lead to the same truth, is something that stood out as "the thought" in late nineteenth century, a time that was marked by unprecedented political and spiritual turmoil in the West. It is this mission that led Swami Vivekananda to hit the American coast in 1893. The author has rightly called it a "pilgrimage in the West" that lasted four months. During the course of his visit, Vivekananda won colossal fame and was well established both as a Vedantic scholar and a brilliant orator. But he did not miss the goal with which he set out for the West, which was to acquaint the world with what he described as the hidden treasures of Vedic wisdom. He made it a point that the image of Hinduism in the West should gain from his endeavours and thus he introduced Hinduism as the "Mother of all religions, a religion that taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance."¹

Having said that, one must acknowledge that this aspect of Vivekananda's exploits in the West has now been told and re-told umpteen times. Therefore, dwelling upon this part of his life may not seem as useful as on the anecdotes that shed invaluable light on some of the less discussed features of his highly eventful life. It must be said that the author has painstakingly prepared a rich compilation of the tours and journeys undertaken by Swami Vivekananda, which were both learning and teaching experience for the Swami. On his mission to preach the Vedanta as passed down to him by Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Vivekananda became a "Wandering Monk" and took up journeys to the Himalayas, making brief halts at Varanasi, Agra, and Vrindavan.

Two anecdotes *en route* this expedition stand out as flagship accounts of Vivekananda's life that reveal the author's take on the

subject. The hunger to learn and imbibe good thoughts from all corners led Vivekananda to hold Pavhari Baba of Ghazipur (U.P.) in great reverence, so much so that he made up his mind to become a disciple of his. According to the author, it is only due to some divine intervention in his dreams that he dropped the idea and stuck to his discipleship under Ramakrishna, though not without a lifelong reverence for Pavhari Baba. The second important anecdote cited by the author relates to his wandering life at Khetri where he accepted food from the hands of a low-caste cobbler, a truly astounding feat to have been achieved in those times. He made his opinion on the issue quite clear, when reminiscing about the cobbler many years later, he said to Girish Chandra Ghosh: “Thousands of such large-hearted men live in lowly huts and we despise them as low castes and untouchables.”²

As a *sanyasi*, Vivekananda was quite averse to any difference based on social categories and disabilities arising from it. His life was an epitome of selfless service with which he inspired millions to embrace the path of humanity over and above their own selfish ends. The author includes the incident that describes Sister Nivedita as cleaning the streets when a devastating plague broke out in Calcutta in 1898. Such was the spell that Swamiji cast on his followers. It was this that made him acceptable even to rival groups, an example of which is the closeness that both Arya Samajists and Sanatanis, the two competing strands within Hinduism, maintained with him on his tour to Punjab, owing to which he could convince them to come to a truce. However, that should not in the least lead one into believing that Vivekananda ever held Hinduism in low esteem. He rejected the materialist conception of the West when he said: “The people of France are mere intellectuals. They pursue worldly things and firmly believe God and souls to be merely superstitions; they are extremely loath to talk on such subjects. This truly is a materialistic country.”³ He aimed to counter what he saw as Western materialism with the spiritualism of Hinduism expressed through the philosophy of *Vedanta*.

However, the effort made by the author to encapsulate the towering persona of the Swami in a short space appears to be wanting in some respects. The book is largely a repetition of Vivekananda’s achievements in the West documented in some earlier works such as the one by Sister Gargi entitled *Swami Vivekananda in the West – New Discoveries* published in 1957. It could make the same impact on the reader’s mind as the book by Sister Gargi, if only it had managed to do away with

the brevity with which it tries to describe something that is immensely voluminous. What the author ends up doing is to rush through some of the important events in Vivekananda's life at the cost of leaving out some vital details that should have been highlighted. Also, his treatment of Vivekananda's stint with the role of the missionaries in India leaves a lot to be desired. Thus, in the end, it must be said that though the book is not as illuminating regarding the various shades of the magnetic personality of Swami Vivekananda as the classic on the written by Romain Rolland, it is a sincere and, of course successful, attempt to portray him as a human being *par excellence* which puts this book in a different league than many other biographical accounts of Swami Vivekananda.

Notes

- ¹ See p. 31.
- ² See p. 19.
- ³ See p. 80.

FORM IV
(See Rule 8)

1. Place of Publication : Delhi
2. Periodicity of Publication : Quarterly
3. Printer's Name : Dr. Lata Singh
Secretary, Astha Bharati
(Whether citizen of India? : Yes, Indian
Address : 27/201, East End Apartments,
Mayur Vihar Phase-I Extension,
Delhi-110 096.
4. Publisher's Name : Dr. Lata Singh
Secretary, Astha Bharati
(Whether citizen of India? : Yes, Indian
Address : 27/201, East End Apartments,
Mayur Vihar Phase-I Extension,
Delhi-110 096.
5. Editor's Name : J.N. Roy
Editor, Astha Bharati
(Whether citizen of India? : Yes, Indian
Address : 27/201, East End Apartments,
Mayur Vihar Phase-I Extension,
Delhi-110 096.
6. Name and address of : Astha Bharati,
Individuals who own the 27/201, East End Apartments,
Newspaper and partners Mayur Vihar Phase-I Extension,
or shareholders holding Delhi-110 096.
Total capital

I, Dr. Lata Singh, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

June 19, 2019

(Sd) Dr. Lata Singh
(Signature of Publisher)