

SOCIAL CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

A Journal of the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development

October 2002

Issues

Ethnicity: Issues and Approaches

Archana Upadhyay

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Society Synergy: Cases from Urban Areas of Assam**

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Saga of the Assamese Middle Class

Amalendu Guha

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Editor
Professor Atul Goswami

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Editorial

I am privileged to be the Editor of the first issue of the Institute's journal, *Social change and Development*.

The journal intends to provide an academic platform to scholars belonging to the North-eastern region of India as well as outside the region to project issues focused particularly on the region express their views and analysis the issues putting them in proper perspective, both historically and as guidelines for the future.

The unique diversity of the north-eastern region in terms of ethnicity, cultural practice, languages and social institutions makes it a challenging area of the study of the social science researchers. Noteworthy that although there has been a prolific growth of printed matters relating the area during the last few decades, most of these are devoid of solid academic contents. The ethods of the people inhabiting the region are seldom properly captured and the analysis of the problems are marked by the use of stereotype methods probably not suitable for explaining the field realities. It is therefore, strongly felt the social scientists having there base in the north-east should bear the responsibility of projecting the issues of the area and analyse them by adopting appropriate region-specific techniques. This alone can help in creating a better understanding of the people of the north-east and their problems among the social scientists and policy makers belonging to the rest of the country. The journal is to seen as a step in this direction. However, this must not be construed as an attempt at inbreeding. It is through the medium of this journal in particular and other publications that the Institute strives to build bridges, not walls. It will be an endeavour of the journal to initiate debate on relevant issues inviting participation of scholars of all hues and irrespective of their formal disciplines and area of specialisation. The geographical seclusion of the north-east from the rest of the country is sought to be broken through vibrant academic interacting.

The issue, incorporates paper written by well established senior as well as budding scholars, the contribution of the latter group outnumbering those of the former. This is in consonance with one of the major objectives of the Institute of capacity building.

It is hoped that the vary first issue of the journal will receive the attention of scholars at large, whose opinions, suggestions and even critical comments will be gratefully received.

I take : this opportunity of expressing thanks to my colleagues at the Institute for reposing their confidence in my ability to bring out the first issue of the journal.

Guwahati
October 3, 2002

Atul Goswami

ETHNICITY: ISSUES AND APPROACHES

Archana Upadhyay

Ethnicity has been variously expressed as assertion of cultures, communal upsurges, revivalism of religions, voices of marginalized peoples, regions and nationalities. It represents the affirmation of diversity, of indigenous authenticity, of organic as against televised or classicised cultures. At the present juncture of world history ethnicity takes on both dominating and liberating forms. Its more humane version includes other identities and thus respects plurality. Its more defiant version excludes other identities. What is more, the two versions are found to be caught in a strange partnership against the more secular drives of the modern state. In this paper an effort has been made to analyse the various issues and approaches that have emerged in the understanding of ethnicity as a socio-political phenomenon in modern civic societies.

The conceptual complexity involved in defining ethnicity has brought to the fore an ongoing definitional debate. Derived from the Greek word 'ethnikos', the word ethnic refers to: (a) nations not converted to Christianity: heathens, 'pagans'; (b) races or large groups of people having common traits and customs; or (c) groups 'in an exotic primitive culture'¹. Very often an ethnic group has been viewed as a substitute for a minority. Such a restrictive use of the term has been refuted by social scientists of various ideological persuasions who have rightly argued that it is neither size nor status but the group distinctiveness or the subjective-objective criteria which are critical for ethnic group identification.² A broad definition of ethnicity provided by a UNESCO team, INTERCOCTA (International Committee on Conceptual and Terminological Analysis) interpreted 'ethnic' as a subject that would 'include problems of minority groups, nationalities and race relations, at both the intra-state and inter-state levels'³. Broadly speaking, the discussion on ethnicity underlies three approaches : objective, subjective, and composite. The objectivists regard cultural markers like race, language and descent as closely connected with ethnic identity. In contrast, the subjectivists maintain that ethnic identity manifests itself through cultural markers. They stress on the self as well as group related feeling of identity distinctiveness and its recognition by others. The composite

perspective highlights the fact that it is not the pre-eminence of the subjective over the objective or vice versa but the linkage between the two, the complementarities of one with the other that facilitates an understanding of the processes of the evolution and growth of an ethnic group, characterized by continuity, adaptation or change⁴.

Approaches and Perspectives

The divergent explanatory approaches and perspectives on ethnicity can be categorized as: primordialist; cultural pluralist; modernization and development; and Marxist and neo-Marxist⁵. The major focus of the primordialist discourse is culture. Ethnic identities according to them are not 'chosen', but given. They lay emphasis on certain attachment in the cultural sphere as part of personality formation and development, which persist with them through life, consciously or unconsciously. However, the recognition of primordialist sentiments and differentiated character of ethnic groups does not explain why inter-ethnic group relationship has been harmonious at one time and conflictual at another.

The Cultural Pluralist approach emphasizes not merely on the ethnic distinctiveness of a group as such but also on the dominant – subordinate patterns of interaction among the different ethnic groups. It states that in a culturally divergent situation, the structural requisites of a political order lead to the subordination of one group by the other. Here again, the dominant subordinate syndrome does not take note of the intra-ethnic group cleavages. Nor does it explain as to why inter-ethnic group conflict has often been led by the segments of people who are culturally most similar among the 'Westernized' segment which have been engaged in the greatest amount of social and cultural interchange. Thus, while the cultural pluralist approach traces the source of conflict to mutually incompatible values of various groups, the development and communication theories have perceived ethnic affinities as residual phenomena. They argue that with the differentiation of the division of labour and extension of the capitalist market, ethnic attachments would be undermined, diffused and dissolved⁶. However, the continued assertion of ethnic pluralism in countries like the USA, Canada and erstwhile USSR has proved that the assumptions of the developmentalists are erroneous.

The process of 'modernization' and development generates dialectics of its own – stimulating ethnic consciousness on the one hand and combating ethnic loyalty on the other. Consequently, whatever the level of the development of the state, ethnic conflicts need to be viewed as parts of an ongoing process which have to be coped with and managed, but cannot be resolved once and for all except through the total assimilation or elimination of a particular group. As historically evidenced, while the former has not been a

large-scale success, the latter can only be genocidal and therefore an affront to human values and dignity. In the context of the general theory of political conflict, another noteworthy approach has been that of 'relative deprivation' which refers to a gap between the expectations and perceived capabilities of a person vis-à-vis his economic situation, political power, and social status in relation to others⁷. However, this approach fails to explain why economically worse off groups do not revolt, while there are cases of relatively better off groups doing it.

The Marxist-neo-Marxist approach explains ethnic conflict as emerging: (i) at a general level in which ethnicity is viewed as a device detracting from the consciousness of class interests and manipulated by political leadership and vested interests, and (ii) in a situation where there has been a 'cultural division of labour', when members of an ethnic group are placed in a subordinate position within a given state (internal colonialism). As for the former, ethnic identity is viewed by some Marxist writers as a reactionary impulse, antithetical to the development of class-consciousness and class solidarity. According to them, mobilization on an ethnic basis evokes, 'false consciousness'. However, ethnic consciousness may rest on rational choice. It is in this respect that the latter approach emphasizing the 'cultural division of labour' seems to be relatively closer to the empirical realities and brings out the ethnic contradictions forcefully. Though conceived within the broad gamut of the theory of imperialism and that of the dependency theorists the proponents of internal colonialism have attempted to place 'peoples rather than classes' as the central point of their approach. To some extent the combination of economy and culture in the analysis of internal colonialists may be a forward thrust in an understanding of politicized ethnicity. However, it implies a rather limited realm: an 'inter colony' must have a geographically defined area and its relationship with the center should be that of the dominant – subordinate, exploiting – subjugated one. However, the internal model has a limited salience, explanatory only in some places and in certain situations. Although in the evocation of ethnic conflict underdevelopment in economic terms has a strong emotive component but in reality it can only partially explain the ethnic conflictual phenomenon⁸.

In the overall context of the project of modernity, ethnicity has emerged as a strategy of purposive mobilization in a civic society. It has been argued that ethnicity represents a revolt against the excesses of the modern project of shaping the whole of humanity around the three pivots of modernity – the state system and a 'world culture' based on modern technology, a pervasive communications and information order and a 'universalizing education system'⁹. The project of modernity entails a new mode of homogenizing and straitjacketing the whole world and ethnicity is

thus both a response and reaction to it. The modern conception of universalisation has threefold claim. First it is the effort to project a particular into a universal, expecting the rest of the world to accept the world view and organizing principles of that particular. Second, it is the effort to universalize secular and temporal space. Third, the modernist perspective on universalisation takes upon itself the task of fragmenting and splintering all other social and ethical cohesions and imposing its globalising will and power on all others¹⁰.

Ethnicity has also been seen as a response to majoritarianism. The nations of majority and minority and the idea that both legitimacy and legality are based on numerical strength have been particularly baneful for plural societies. Plural societies have survived for centuries on two main grounds: respect for diversities and notions of multiplicity, co-existence and togetherness. Communities that are more numerous are internally plural and tolerant of a lot of ambiguity. Thus, the Hindus, or the Malays or the Sinhalese have always been large umbrella concepts encompassing a wide spectrum of distinct social, cultural and even religious identities. Often, as in the case of the Hindus, the concept itself is not indigenous. This is now sought to be reversed and the result is the transformation of the regenerative and holistic dimensions of ethnicity into negative and exclusivist ones, which takes the form of communalism.

Two meanings have been attributed to the notion of communalism. In the positive sense it means the consciousness of communal identities in culturally diverse contexts. This is by and large associated with two others characteristics: (i) a mutual respect for other identities and (ii) a possibility to live and celebrate diversity organically, as parts of a whole. It is this positive notion of communalism that has been the basis of stability and security for people in mixed villages and cities. As against this the negative sense of communalism is based on an exclusivist identity that denies respect for others identities and thinks of unity as something to be achieved by subjugating the other¹¹.

Secularism too has been attributed two opposite meanings – a typically Asian and a typically Western one. According to the former, there is no rejection of religious or cultural identities but equal respect for all of them. According to the latter more homogenizing and all-pervading meaning, religion and culture are to be pushed out of the domain of the state and civil society. This version of 'secularism' as a project of the modern state aims at removing diversities and undermining allegiances based on religion, language and race. Similarly, development and modernization of socio-economic structure are to be viewed as conditions, which will make people move into post-ethnic consciousness. However, the paradox of modernization is that instead of diluting religious,

linguistic and racial differences, it has actually hardened cultural and ethnic identities and provoked communal violence. Cultural survival has come to mean the removal and the exclusion of the other. The rise of negativised tendencies can be explained at two levels. Firstly, in the pockets of rapid economic growth, the homogenizing thrust of modernization has destroyed the positive roots of culture. Secondly, it is in these pockets that the real or perceived shrinkage of social space has taken place. Rapid economic change guided by market mechanisms involves massive dislocation and displacement of people from traditional means of livelihood. The new opportunities have a narrow social base. The culturally homogenizing, socially fragmenting and atomizing processes of modernization, induced largely through state intervention, thus, creates conditions of social and economic vulnerability and insecurity in which the state takes on the role of manager of those vulnerabilities and insecurities. When equality is a proclaimed social ideal, and inequality is the reality of what development and modernization results in, each individual and group interprets its loss as someone else's gain. In such a scenario, ethnic assertion becomes one way of bargaining with the state for economic survival. For instance, in India, the poor and marginalized strata of the Hindus resent the upward mobility of the Muslims and backward classes. The same is true in case of the Malays in Malaysia in regard to the economic success of the Chinese and the Sinhalese in relation to the Tamils in Sri Lanka. As electoral politics and government interventions respond to ethnic groupings, economic issues get transformed into issues of cultural survival¹².

The upsurge of negative identities has speedily eroded not just state authority but has also resulted in social breakdown. It has also legitimized a new brand of politics that combines communal crimes, fundamentalist slogans and pure terrorism. This has resulted in the destruction and decay of institutions; of erosion of legitimate; of the decline of civil society; and of the collapse of the democratic state that had given cohesion to civil society without undermining its pluralistic character. It is the growing convergence between a secular and technocratic vision of the state and the search for a chauvinist ideology that provides the new setting for a more exclusivist and negative thrust of ethnicity. Such a thrust is drawing its inspiration from new and unsuspected sources; from the state which is supposed to be secular; from the modernist national elite which is supposed to provide correctives to parochial tendencies; from the security establishment which is supposed to be committed to democratic values; from the science and technology elite which is supposed to breathe 'scientific temper'; from the votaries of 'high culture' who are supposed to be the custodians of humanism, compassion and catholicity¹³.

Impact of Government Policies on Ethnic Relations

Government policies almost always have significant effects on the course and trajectory of ethnic relations in the country in question. Misguided or malicious policies can aggravate ethnic problem and turn potentially violent situations into deadly confrontations. In Sri Lanka, for example, decades of discriminatory government policies with respect to citizenship, language, religion, education and government employment alienated and radicalized the country's Tamil minority, and ultimately led to open rebellion and civil war. In Pakistan, the government's favoured treatment of Punjabis in West Pakistan precipitated East Pakistan's secession in 1971. The Burmese government's assimilationist agenda, its refusal to grant real autonomy to minorities in outlying regions, its anti-democratic impulses, and its heavy reliance on military force are the main reasons why Burma has experienced ethnic violence throughout most of its post-colonial history. The Chinese government's often-brutal efforts to assimilate and subjugate Muslim and Tibetan minorities have radicalized ethnic relations in China in ways that will be difficult to erase.

In other cases, comparatively benign policies have helped to hold countries together under extraordinarily difficult circumstances. Perhaps the best example of this in Asia is India, a country with a large population and tremendous ethnic diversity. Although the policies of the Indian government have not always been well conceived, well executed, or non-violent in nature, the country's democratic traditions and the government's comparatively temperate policies with respect to religious issues, language issues, education and regional autonomy have undeniably played key roles in dampening ethnic tensions and keeping a potentially fragile country from disintegrating.

When thinking about how government policies influence ethnic relations, three sets of distinctions should be kept in mind. First, governments influence ethnic relations through both general policies aimed at the country as a whole and specific policy targeted at specific ethnic issues. The former include basic decisions about political structures as well as decisions about broad economic policies. The latter include citizenship policies, civil rights and minority rights policies, policies on religion and religious groups, language policies, education policies, and economic policies aimed at improving the lot of one group or another. Second, governments influence ethnic relations both by design and by accident. In some cases, governments make deliberate, well-intentioned efforts to address ethnic problems, improve the position of ethnic minorities, and promote better ethnic relations. In all too many cases however, leaders and governments make deliberate efforts to promote the interests of some ethnic groups over others and to discriminate

politically and economically against ethnic minorities. This often grows out of a political need to take care of ethnic constituencies, which can be the key to getting in or staying in power. This has been one of the driving forces behind pernicious ethnic policies in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, for example. Third, governments influence ethnic relations through inaction. Here, a distinction will have to be made between inaction caused by neglect and inaction caused by insufficient governmental capacities. Governments often neglect ethnic problems, in some cases believing the problems are trivial, in others believing that the groups in question are politically unimportant, in still others hoping or believing that ethnic problems will eventually go away¹⁴.

As governments do have effects on ethnic problems one has to look at how problems and policies evolve over time, and the interactions between the two. Three inter-connected sets of factors: policy settings, policy parameters and policy areas will have to be considered.

The starting point for analyzing government policies has to be a consideration of policy settings – the array of ethnic problems and challenges with which governments have to contend. Policies are not formulated or implemented in vacuums. Different governments have to contend with different kinds of ethnic problems and challenges, and these problems change over time, both in response to whatever governments do and do not do, and in response to other domestic, regional and international developments. Five main set of factors frame the ethnic setting in any given country: demographic patterns and ethnic geography; pre-colonial and colonial legacies; group histories, fears, and goals; economic factors and trends; and regional and international influences¹⁵. It is beyond doubt that ethnic settings are shaped by a range of regional and international factors. Regional influences are generally disruptive¹⁶. Ethnic groups often straddle international borders, which means that ethnic groups in borderlands can be agitated by developments in neighbouring states. In addition, problems in neighbouring states can generate refugee flows and trigger military incursions, which in turn can destabilize border regions.

Against this situational background, four broad parameters frame government policies with respect to ethnic issues: policy goals, policy instruments, policy patterns and generic policy problems. However, government policies with respect to ethnic issues are often plagued by three sets of generic problems: timing problems, implementation problems, and political dilemmas that undercut the effectiveness of government action. Implementation problems are common in all policy areas. As far as ethnic issues are concerned, three main implementation problems stand out. First, leaders and governments are often insincere when they

express concern about ethnic problems. Often rhetorical flourishes and grandiose pronouncements substitute for real action. Second, even when intentions are sincere, policy initiatives often fail to receive sustained, high level attention. Without sustained engagement on the part of top officials, policy initiatives usually flounder. Third, even when high-level attention is focused on the issue at hand, limited institutional capacities and resource constraints can undercut implementation efforts. In short, political dilemmas inherent in multiethnic societies – the tension between the need to serve ethnic constituents and the need to address the problems of other ethnic groups; the tension between the appeal of short-term solutions and the requirement to address ethnic problems through sustained, long-term action – help to explain why governments often fail to address ethnic problems effectively¹⁷.

Three different strains can be identified in the evolution of ethnicity as both a political and an intellectual movement. First, the more genuine assertion of human diversity against the homogenizing thrust of the modern state and modern technology. This takes the form both of countering recent tendencies and of recovering lost spaces before their powerful onslaughts, as well as freshly conceiving human arrangements and their cultural, ecological and gender underpinnings. There is, second, the opposite tendency among the opponents of the modern project, of a monotheistic and militarist type. There is, third, an even more clearly secular distortion and exploitation of ethnic and communal identities by governments and dominant political parties that are out to retain state power by moving away from socio-economic and political issues and focusing public attention and emotions on communal claims and counter claims.

It is imperative that governments try and dampen ethnic tensions by trying to depoliticize ethnicity. In practical terms, this means establishing and maintaining rule of law; favouring civic over ethnic conceptions of nationalism and citizenship, favouring broad civil rights protections over specific minority rights initiatives; supporting secularism over the establishment of official state religion; respecting linguistic diversity and promoting multilingualism; and building broad based consensus for preferential and affirmative action policies in the educational and economic arenas. The track record of democracies in dealing with ethnic problems is quite good in important respects. Democracies provide mechanisms for ethnic groups, large and small to participate in the formation of governments, be represented in decision-making circles, and to have influence over policy. Democracies also provide mechanisms for people to express their displeasure with policies that are failing and to chart new, more constructive policy courses. In this context two additional issues merit attention: the importance of constitutional framework, and

the relative merits of consociational and integrative institutions in multiethnic, democratic settings. Constitutions can make a difference. Countries with strong constitutional and rule-of-law traditions have generally done a good job of maintaining ethnic peace and harmony. However, constitutions should be based on extensive negotiations involving representatives of all major political and ethnic groups. Consociational and integrative approaches start from the premise that, in multiethnic, democratic countries, political power must be shared between and among ethnic groups. This is the key to creating political systems that are just, effective, stable and durable. The great strength of consociationalism is that it ensures minority participation in governmental deliberations. The crucial test of ethnicity as a civilisational process lies in redefining the individual; roles and positions in community spaces. This can provide alternative sources of security and democratic participation in which the individual good derives its authenticity from a common good, and individual freedom is seen as freedom for all and not freedom at the cost of others. The positive promise of ethnicity lies in the building of a social order, which celebrates diversity and organic unity, and is organized around principles of equity, justice, peace and dignity. It is only through a clear and coherent identification with the new social consciousness being thrown up by social movements like the human rights movements, the survival movements, the ecology movements, the peace movements, etc. that ethnicity can regenerate and recover spaces in civil society.

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URBAN BASIC SERVICES AND THE ISSUE OF STATE SOCIETY SYNERGY: CASES FROM URBAN AREAS OF ASSAM

Kalyan Das

I. Prologue

Public utility is usually the domain of local government. Article 243W in the twelfth schedule of the Constitution of India fixes the responsibility of water supply, sanitation and solid waste management on the municipalities along with other responsibilities of urban and town planning, land use, construction of buildings, roads and bridges, fire services, urban forestry, slum improvement, urban poverty alleviation, safeguarding the interest of weaker sections of the society, provision of urban amenities etc. Further Article 243Y of the Constitution's Seventy Fourth Amendment makes it mandatory to set up for the Governor a State Finance Commission to review the financial position of the municipalities at five year interval. The setting up of State Finance Commissions with tasks as wide ranging as embodied in Article 243Y and the addition of Article 243 W to the Constitution open up a new chapter in state-municipal fiscal relations. With this provision, stage has been set for initiating reform measures in the functioning of the municipalities. The key question here is, should the municipalities continue to be concerned with the provision of civic services - such as water supply, conservancy, street lighting, preventive health, public safety and public works or assume responsibility for larger tasks such as urban forestry, poverty alleviation and social and economic development which are within the domain of the state governments or carry out these responsibilities concurrently with the state government¹.

Though it may not be possible to provide all the services, water supply and conservancy are generally administered by the local authorities. Solid waste management (SWM) is a mandatory function of the municipalities. Based on the Barman Committee Report, on SWM, 1999, the Municipal Solid Wastes (management and handling) rules, 2000 were issued by the Central Government. The rules have made an attempt to delineate responsibilities and

fix duties on the citizens as well as the municipalities for SWM. However, in contrast to the this, at present many important traditional functions, like water supply and sanitation, have been taken away by the states from the municipal authorities in the states of Tamil Nadu, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh².

Now the question arises is it possible for the municipalities to handle larger responsibilities? What is the state of affairs of these local bodies? How appropriate or feasible to follow macro regulatory mechanisms (Constitution assigned) at a local context? Does local authority have enough resources to take up all the activities as indicated by the Article 243 W? Or is it possible to delineate a plan in which some responsibilities are fixed on citizens? The ultimate aim is to have a better environmental management. Against this backdrop this paper intends to look at the state of affairs of few urban basic services of Assam.

II. The state of sanitation and SWD in urban areas of Assam

Just 12.7 per cent of the total population live in urban areas of Assam. Still the issues of water supply, sanitation and solid waste disposal are taking serious turn in the urban areas of the state, particularly in the city of Guwahati. The local newspapers often come up with such issues attacking the indifferent attitude of the Municipality Corporation. It is often found that the heart and commercial hubs of the city are stinking with garbage dumps, which are not regularly cleared by the municipal authorities, not to say about the residential areas of the city. Apprehension that Surat like epidemic might strike the city any day has also been expressed by some. However, the Guwahati Municipality Corporation (GMC) which is blamed for such state of affairs alleged to remain inactive.

What is the reason for such indifferent attitude of GMC? It is often said that the resource crunched GMC is unable to handle the situation. It is reported that most of the functions listed in the 12th schedule of the Constitution are now beyond the capability of the GMC. The area of the GMC in last few decades expanded so rapidly that GMC is now finding difficult it to cope with. The population of the city also has increased by 230233 persons during the decade 1991-2001. The area of GMC has increased from 89.8 sq. km in 1961 to 259 sq. km in 1991.

A look at the status of the municipal finance in the state will help us to assess the situation better.

The state of Municipal Finance in the State

Table 1 shows that development expenditure on capital account of water and sanitation in past five years has been nil in

the state. It is also seen that the state has spent just about four per cent of its total revenue expenditure on water supply and sanitation (Table 2). The empirical evidence suggests a decline in the financial health of the municipal bodies in the country³. The relative strength of municipal finance in a country is judged by the share of municipal expenditure in the total public expenditure. The accepted norm of municipal expenditure is stated to be in a range of 20-30 per cent of the total public expenditure⁴. On this ground municipal expenditure in Assam as well as in India is significantly low and shows a declining trend (Table 3).

There is also physical gap in the urban basic services in Assam. The recent information shows that only 20.5 per cent urban household have access to water supply with inhouse connections, coverage of the sewerage system to the urban households is as low as one per cent. Even at present 35 per cent urban households depend on insanitary latrine (NSSO 54th round), which is not only unhygienic but also inhuman. The access to sewage system is particularly poor among small and medium sized towns and low income households. The installed capacity for garbage collection, provision of staff for garbage collection (should be 3-5, per thousand population), street cleaning, and other preventive health measures are significantly low. The disposal of most of the garbage through uncontrolled tipping is highly unscientific and leads to serious health problems⁵.

Table 1 : Municipal Expenditure of Government of Assam
(in Rs. lakh)

	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
State Govt. Expenditure	5022.1	5204.3	7086.2	10194.3	9667.6
Revenue expenditure	4038.6	4416.3	5845.7	7628.2	8331.6
Development expenditure	2480.3	2812.7	3377.1	4957.6	5170.7
Water supply & sanitation	108.7	123.1	146.5	231.0	196.7
Development expenditure on capital account of water and sanitation	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Source: Public Finance, CMIE, March, 2002

Table 2: Share of Municipal Expenditure in Assam
(percentage figures)

	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-20
State Govt. Expenditure	100	100	100	100	100
Revenue expenditure	80.41	84.86	82.49	74.83	86.18
Development expenditure	61.41	63.69	57.77	64.99	62.06
Water supply & sanitation	4.38	4.38	4.34	4.66	3.80
Development expenditure on capital account of water and sanitation	-	-	-	-	-

Source: Public Finance, CMIE, March, 2002

Table 3: Growth of Municipal Expenditure, Assam

	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02
State Govt. Expenditure	3.62	36.16	43.86	- 5.16
Revenue expenditure	9.35	32.37	30.49	9.22
Development expenditure	13.40	20.07	46.80	4.30
Water supply & sanitation	13.25	19.01	57.68	-14.85
Development expenditure on capital account of water and sanitation	-	-	-	-

Source: Public Finance, CMIE, March, 2002

An idea about revenue earned and expenditure pattern at the municipalities of Assam can be had by examining the finances of GMC.

Table 4 : Revenue receipt of municipalities in Assam (in Rs. lakh)

Total revenue	Source of revenue		External source of revenue		Others revenue	Expenditure financed by own source	
	Own Amount	Percent- age of total	Amount	Percent- age of total	Amount	Percent- age of total	
652.9	467.1	71.54	96.3	14.75	89.3	13.69	79.6 %

NIPFP data base, 1995

Table 5 : Pattern of municipality expenditure on services in Assam (in percentage)

Total expen. in lakh	General adm.	Public health	Public safety	Public works	Education	Recreation	Others
544.9	27.8	23.3	3.9	27.22	0.61	0.27	16.91

* NIPFP data base, 1995

Table 6 : Income of the Guwahati Municipality Corporation (in Rs. lakh)

Year	Property tax	Other	All tax	Grant in aid	Non-tax revenue	Loan from Govt.	Others	Total
1999-2000	587.57 (26.21)	1296.27 (57.83)	1883.84 (84.04)	140.54 (6.27)	185.15 (8.26)	23.00 (1.02)	9.12 (0.41)	241.67
2000-01	746.13 (29.6)	1335.68 (52.99)	2081.81 (82.59)	256.36 (10.17)	172.08 (6.83)	-	10.25 (0.41)	2520.52

· GMC budget, 2000-01

· Figures in brackets stand for percentage

Table 7 : Sources of GMC's Revenue, Own and External

	Own	External
1999-2000	92.73	6.23
2000-01	89.83	10.17

· GMC budget, 2000-01

· Figures are in percentage

Table 8 : Expenditure of Guwahati Municipality Corporation (in Rs. lakh)

Year	General adm.	Health and sanitation	Water chlorination and other water works	Public works	Recreation	Loan repayment	Others	Total	Per capita expenditure in Rs.
1999-2000	1884.28 (85.83)	0.6	54.8 (2.5)	252.01 (11.48)	1.71 (0.08)	2.3 (0.10)	0.9	2195.25	Rs. 269.5
2000-01	2189.0 (87.73)	-	104.0 (4.17)	190.69 (7.64)	-	6.56 (0.26)	5.01	2495.26	Rs. 306.32

· Source: GMC budget, 2000-01
Figures in brackets stand for percentage

Table 9: Per Capita Revenue of GMC (in Rs.)

	1999-2000	2000-01
Property tax	72.13	91.60
All tax	231.26	255.57
Non-tax	22.73	21.13
Grants	17.25	31.47
Others	3.96	1.26
All	275.200	309.42

· Source: GMC budget, 2000-01

The total annual income of GMC from all sources amounted to Rs. 2520.52 lakh in 2000-01 out of which Rs. 2189.00 lakh (87.73 percent) was spent on general administration mostly to pay salaries to its employees (Table 6 & 8). Thus the Corporation is left with just about 12 per cent of its revenue earning for various services and development works. However, the NIPFP data base of 1995 shows that unlike the present situation municipalities of Assam used to spend less on general administration and more on public health and public works (Table 5). The Planning Commission and Zakharia Committee estimated that the state of Assam requires Rs. 47 crore per annum additional investment for provision of core urban services at 1994-95 prices⁵. The per capita revenue generation is also very low in the state (Table 9). The NIUA, 1995 data base shows that even in 1992-93 municipalities of the states like Gujarat and Maharashtra had per capita revenue receipts of Rs. 543/ and Rs. 843/ respectively. The per capita expenditure of Guwahati municipality was just Rs. 306/ in 2000-01. Whereas the municipalities in state like Gujarat and Maharashtra used to spend Rs. 502 and Rs. 877 per capita even in 1992-93. From this one can assess the magnitude of deficiency of resources in maintaining urban basic services in the state and Guwahati in particular. Though all the public utility services in the urban areas are in the domain of municipal authority, with such resource constraints it is not possible to provide all the services. Still local authority must provide at least water supply and conservancy services which are generally administered by the local authorities

in the country. The GMC supplies water to certain wards from three water treatment plants. The urban water supply and sewerage board and PWD are other two agencies that supply water in the city. The water supply schemes operated by these three agencies generate 79 million litres of water every day. As per WHO norms a person needs 135 litres of protected water a day. Against this the quantum of water supplied by Guwahati City at present comes to 109 million litres. So, a large section of the residents has to depend on own sources.

The conservancy service in Guwahati City is still managed in a primitive way. It has a workforce of about 1500 workers (380 road sweepers and 1125 majdoors) to look after the sanitation of the city. According to norms it requires 3-5 person per thousand population for clearing the municipal garbage. So, it requires a workforce of minimum 2500 person to clear the garbage in the city. Thus the sanitation workforce is grossly inadequate in the city.

Now question arises is it possible to raise the source of revenue of the state municipalities? It is seen from the GMC budget that property tax constitute less than 30 per cent of revenue of the GMC (Table 6). Whereas in the state of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal property tax constitute 69 per cent and 65 per cent respectively of the total revenue generation of the municipalities. There is a proposal to raise the property tax in the city by three to four times. It is also seen that there is no loan from the external agencies to the GMC during the year 2000-01. Though in the budget of 2001-02, it is shown that an estimate of amount of borrow Rs. 724 lakh would come from borrowing in the open market or from financial institutions and government, this has not been realised yet. It is also reported that UNESCO did not respond to a request for a grant of Rs. 44461 lakh for a water supply scheme for the city which was assured to GMC. It is reported this is primarily for not maintaining a proper records of GMC's earlier activities⁷.

Considering the state of affairs the responsibilities as assigned in the Article 243W will be too much for the resource crunched GMC to perform effectively. How much a municipality can do - can be assessed from revenue earned by the municipalities, expenditure financed by own revenue and the grant received from the state. The present revenue generation pattern of GMC shows that there is hardly any scope for developmental work from its own revenue. Moreover its external source of revenue was as low as 10 per cent in 2000-01 (Table 7). Whereas in the state like Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal external source of revenue accounts for 41 and 55 per cent respectively⁸. Considering the above, it appears that urban environmental management lies in state-society synergy.

III. The Case of State- Society Synergy

The Municipal Solid Wastes (management and handling) rules, 2000 have made an attempt to fix responsibilities and cast duties on the citizens as well as the municipalities. Although the Constitution assigned the task of the municipalities, but keeping trend present in development strategy the orientation need to be more towards state-society synergy. Many of the responsibilities listed in the 12th schedule can be dealt with state society- synergy.

The concept of State-society synergy:

The relations between the state and civil society⁹ are more productively thought of in terms of mutual empowerment or synergy¹⁰. However Migdal's¹¹ work suggests that strong societies result in weak states and that one of the necessary conditions for the emergence of strong states is a massive societal dislocation. Putman¹² takes the issues raised by Migdal and based on the relationship between social capital¹³ and the efficacy of regional governments in Italy, argues that civic associations are powerfully associated with effective public institutions and strong society leads to a strong state. The idea of synergy implies that civic arrangement strengthens state institutions and effective state institutions create an environment in which civic arrangement is more likely to thrive. The actions of public agencies according to Putman facilitate forging norms of trust and networks of civic arrangement among ordinary citizens and many of these norms and networks support developmental ends¹⁴. In search for a general response to the question of what forms of state-society relations lend themselves to synergy, two contrasting conceptualisations help to frame the debate. The first builds on the conventional view of a healthy relationship between the public and private spheres. In this view synergy depends on complementarity. Possibilities of civic action are enhanced by the provision of public goods. A more radical view of synergy focuses on embeddedness. It connects citizens and public officials. It questions the assumption on distinct public and private spheres and sees trust and informal productive networks not only as a property of civil society but as spanning the public-private divide¹⁵, argues that complementarity creates objective grounds on which cooperation between government and citizens can be built. Embeddedness generates the normative and interactional basis for realising the potential joint gains. Through the possibility of state-society synergy active governments and mobilised associations¹⁶ can enhance each other's development efforts. Endowment of social capital is crucial to synergy. Social capital accumulated over longer periods of time is crucial in creating a virtuous circle. Civic engagements nurtured good government and good government in turns fostered civic engagement¹⁷. Creative action by government organisations can foster social capital. Linking mobilised citizens

to public agencies can enhance the efficiency of the government. Norms of trust built up from intimate interactions are not restricted to relations within civil society. People working in public agencies are also closely embedded in the communities they work with. This creates social capital that spans the public-private divide. Putman's perspective suggests that civic engagement flourishes more easily among private citizens and organised groups when they have a competent public sector as an interlocutor¹⁸. Studies scattered throughout the developing world find evidence for state-society synergy¹⁹.

A state-society synergy view implies that a move towards less capable and involved states will make it more difficult for civic associations to achieve their goals, thereby diminishing incentives for civic engagement. A positive association between a more vibrant civil society and more capable state institutions necessarily prevent both from disappearing²⁰. Engaging the energy and imagination of citizens and communities in the co-production of services is a way of enhancing the state's ability to deliver services without having to claim more scarce material resources from society. The increases social approbation that come with more effective, responsive service become in turn an important intangible reward for those who work within the state. Since such a strategy rewards and reinvigorates the civil society, thereby augmenting the reservoir of potential participants in co-production. Unfortunately, the kind of capacity necessary to make the state a dependable partner in a strategy of state-society synergy is likely to be attracted to strategies of mutual empowerment that involve state agencies²¹. State, market and civil society can increase their effectiveness by contributing jointly to the provision of welfare and economic development. The success of this synergy is based on complementary rather than substitutable inputs, trust, freedom of choice and incentives of parties to cooperate²².

The key to public private partnership for urban environmental management lies in the ability of local participants to induce and sustain a collaborative process involving a wide variety of organisations, groups and individuals in pursuit of a common goal. Ability in this sense is harnessed and developed in a virtuous cycle of personal and organisational development. Efforts also need to be made to limit the impact of politicisation on such arrangement. Effective public-private partnerships need to be designed and managed to achieve two objectives. First, they must balance the need to produce both public value and private gain if they are to be sustainable. Second, they must serve a learning function, which allows participants and stakeholders to build the collaborative and technical skills, which the wider community needs. Such partnership should be seen as a space and an opportunity to create

new meanings and engage in collective inquiry rather than simply as a technique to use existing skills or to fix old problems²³.

State-society synergy creates a ground to work towards development ends. Norms and trust are created among the public agencies and citizens to work towards development ends. The effort of both the agencies need to complement each other. The embeddedness generates normative and interactional basis for realising the potential joint gains. It is good for good governance. The linking of mobilised association can enhance the effectiveness of the government. Based on the issues and arguments on the concept of synergy, it may be imperative to know the society's mindset in our country as well as in the urban areas of Assam. The study looks at some empirical evidence at the country level and then comes down to the findings at micro level.

The case of urban environment and evidence of synergy

The NSSO data indicate that the urban environment is deteriorating in the country. In Assam more than 75 per cent urban households expressed concern about flies and mosquitoes and about 60 per cent households showed concerned about foul odour (Table 10). The concern about flies and foul odour, the data indicate, is more in the case of Assam than the country as a whole. The concern for mosquitoes is expressed more by the households in the country as a whole. More that 50 per cent urban household in the state as well as in the country reported that the incidence of flies and mosquitoes is increasing in the past five years. The percentage of urban household reporting increase in foul odour is however less than 25 in the state as well as in the country (Table 11).

Table 10 : Urban Household expressing concern about flies, mosquitoes and foul odour

	Flies	Mosquitoes	Foul odour
Assam	77.2	83.5	58.1
India	65.8	89.6	50.1

Source: NSS 54th Round, January-June 1998, Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in India

Table 11 : Urban Household reporting increase/decrease during last 5 years the problem of flies, mosquitoes and foul odour

	Flies		Mosquitoes		Foul odour	
	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Decrease	Increase	Decrease
Assam	52.4	1.8	62.5	1.0	24.3	2.5
India	48.3	5.2	62.9	3.8	22.4	7.0

Source: NSS 54th Round, January-June 1998, Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in India

Against such indications we also found from the data on municipal finance in Assam that there is a passive role of the state in urban environmental management. What is expected from the people or society in this context? The Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules of 2000 stressed the participation of citizens in urban environmental management. Towards this the citizens have two responsibilities (a) avoid littering and ensure the delivery of wastes in accordance with the delivery system notified by the local bodies and (b) segregation of waste at source. Though a citizen has right to claim that urban environmental management is the mandatory function of the municipalities, many of the things can be handled by the society at local level not only by better sanitation and environmental practices but also by resource mobilisation. The data on NSSO 54th round show that the proportion of people in urban areas of Assam willing to contribute either by money or physical labour towards improvement of sanitation in their neighbourhood is about 63 per cent which is less than the country average of 70 per cent. Noteworthy that the underdeveloped state of Bihar more than 85 per cent people in urban areas showed their willingness to contribute. The percentage of such people is significantly low in the developed state like Karnataka (15 per cent) (Table 12). However if we look at the urban areas with population more than 2 lakh, it is seen that the situation is worst in Assam where just about 31 per cent people showed their willingness to contribute. The NSSO data show that in the state of Haryana more than 90 per cent people in urban areas with population of more than 2 lakh showed their willingness to contribute (Table 13). In the case of small town the situation is however better in Assam, about 75 per cent of households showing their willingness to contribute either physically or by money (Table 14).

Table 12 : Households willing to contribute money and/or labour towards improvement of sanitation in their neighbourhood in urban areas of India

	Money and labour	Money only	Labour only	Neither	No response
Assam	19.2	19.3	19.6	37.5	4.4
India	18.2	21.3	30.7	29.5	0.1
Bihar	14.9	14.4	56.3	13.7	0.7
Karnataka	4.7	22.4	8.2	64.7	

* Source: NSS 54th Round, January-June 1998, Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in India

Table 13 : Households willing to contribute money and/or labour towards improvement of sanitation in their neighbourhood in class of town with population more than 200,000 in India

	Money and labour	Money only	Labour only	Neither	No response
Assam	10.3	2.4	18.7	68.6	-
India	19.3	25.5	26.6	28.5	0.1
Haryana	86.6		3.8	9.6	-

* Source: NSS 54th Round, January-June 1998, Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in India

Table 14 : Households willing to contribute money and/or labour towards improvement of sanitation in their neighbourhood in towns with population less than 50,000 in India

	Money and labour	Money only	Labour only	Neither	No response
Assam	24.6	27.5	14.4	25.9	7.7
India	18.0	17.0	36.7	27.9	0.2
Maharashtra	15.5	17.4	54.5	12.3	0.4
Karnataka	9.2	17.9	12.5	60.4	-

* Source: NSS 54th Round, January-June 1998, Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in India

Can we link the attitude of people in the state with literacy and their economic conditions? Is it true that with high literacy and income people become more concerned about the rights and provision and show less initiative in society's development, though it is not obligatory? Though it is not universal the data on literacy and PCNDP indicate, such association in the states of Karnataka and Bihar.

Table 15 : Literacy and Per capita net domestic product in states

	Literacy rate 2001	PCNDP 1997-98
Assam	64.28	1673
Bihar	47.53	1073
Karnataka	67.04	2761
Haryana	68.95	3997
Maharashtra	77.27	4791

* Sources: Census of India, 2001 & Manpower Profile India, 2000, IAMR

The evidence of synergy at micro context in urban areas of Assam

We had taken two towns for our study. One is the Guwahati City which has population of more than 8 lakh and other is a small town of Mangaldai with population less than 25 thousand. The purpose of selecting these two towns is to know whether the attitude

of people varies with the size of urban centres. The city of Guwahati has expanded rapidly with a growth rate of 38.28 per cent during the decade 1991-2001. The town of Mangaldai shows a relatively slower growth rate during the same period. The per capita budgetary allocation of Mangaldai municipality board is just Rs. 241 during 2001-02, which is even less than GMC.

Table 16 : Budget of GMC and Mangaldai municipal board (in Rs.)

	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02
GMC	219,525,000	249,525,000	635,900,000
MMB	5,214,166	5,325,481	5,756,194

Source: GMC and MMB, 2001

We had interaction with 160 households in the city of Guwahati and 50 households in the town of Mangaldai. The 160 household in the Guwahati City were selected randomly from four localities; two of them are relatively newly settled areas. The households in the Mangaldai town were selected randomly from the entire town.

Table 17: Respondents in Monthly Income Group

	Guwahati				Mangaldai	
	Total	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti	
< Rs. 5000/	23	6	4	7	6	3
Rs. 5000 - 10,000/	86	24	14	28	20	17
Rs. 10,000 - 15,000/	38	5	18	4	11	17
Rs. 15,000 - 20,000/	5	2	2	-	1	4
Rs. 20,000 +	1	1	-	-	-	8
N.A.	7	2	2	1	2	1
Sample size	160	40	40	40	40	50

Source: Field work, 2002

We found majority of the respondents (about 78 per cent) in monthly income group of Rs. 5,000/ to 15,000/ in the Guwahati city. In Mangaldai we found 68 per cent households in this income group. The proportion people in high income group was found more in our sample in Mangaldai town (Table 17). It was found that in Guwahati 37 households (23 per cent) out of the total 160 had no drains in their houses. Whereas in Mangaldai we found 18 (36 per cent) households out of 50 having no drains. From their household income it is reflected that it was not due to the fact that they could not afford to construct even a katcha drain, rather it is reflective of their attitude (Table 18 & 19).

Table 18 : Drains surrounding the home

	Guwahati				Mangaldai	
	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti		
Pucca	18	16	28	31	18	14
Katcha	6	17	5	2	7	18
No drainage	16	7	7	7	7	18
Sample size	40	40	40	40	40	50

Source: Field work, 2002

Table 19 : Monthly income level of the households with no drainage

	Guwahati				Mangaldai	
	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti		
< Rs. 5000/	4	2	4	2	2	2
Rs. 5000 - 10,000/	8	3	3	4	4	6
Rs. 10,000 - 15,000/	2	2	-	1	1	7
Rs. 15,000 - 20,000/	1	-	-	-	-	1
Rs. 20,000 +	1	-	-	-	-	1
N.A.	-	-	-	-	-	1
Sample size	16	7	7	7	7	18

* Source: Field work, 2002

It is found that in the relatively old localities of Guwahati, Gandhibasti and Jyotinagar a good section of people depends on municipality for water supply. The dependency on municipality for water supply is virtually absent in the other two localities of Guwahati.

Most of the households have made their own provision of either tubewell or dugwell. Quite a number of them have installed their own pumpsets to draw water from tubewell. In Mangaldai it was found that more than 50 per cent of the households besides having access to urban water supply make their own arrangement of dugwell and pumpsets (Table 20). It shows that people in the urban areas are depending less on government supply and make their own provision for drinking water.

Table 20 : Sources of Drinking Water

	Guwahati				Mangaldai	
	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti		
Tubewell	6	8	1	-	20	-
Dugwell	15	6	7	1	-	-
Urban supply	-	-	11	15	-	-
Own pumpset and supply	18	26	16	1	4	-
Dugwell & urban supply	1	-	4	16	16	-
Urban and own piped	-	-	1	7	10	-
Sample size	40	40	40	40	40	50

* Source: Field work, 2002

Almost all the households were found treating their drinking water (Table 21). It is the indication that water quality is not good. Even people have no faith on the treated supplied water supplied by the municipalities. It was also reported that about 70 per cent of the households in the in our sample in Guwahati face drinking water crisis during the year (Table 22). The sanitation practice is found to be good as most of the households in our sample in both urban centres use sanitary latrine (Table 23). The few households without sanitary latrine belong to low income group. So, it is seen

that at individual level households in urban areas are making their own provision for good living.

Table 21 : Treating Drinking Water

	Guwahati				Mangaldai
	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti	
Filtering	16	17	9	13	19
Boiling	-	-	-	-	-
Filter and boiling	18	18	26	26	22
Chemically	-	-	-	1	-
Filter and chemically	5	2	2	-	-
Filter, boil and treat chemically	-	3	3	-	8
Not treated	1 y-a)	-	-	-	1
Sample size	40	40	40	40	50

* Source: Field work, 2002

Table 22 : Facing Scarcity of Drinking Water

	Guwahati					Mangaldai
	Total	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti	
Yes	110	21	35	26	28	3
No	50	19	5	14	12	47
Sample size	160	40	40	40	40	50

* Source: Field work, 2002

Table 23: Place of Defecation

	Guwahati				Mangaldai
	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti	
Sanitary latrine	39	39	39	40	48
Insanitary latrine	1	1	1	-	2
Sample size	40	40	40	40	50

* Source: Field work, 2002

The case of drinking water, however, does not bring the issue of synergy specifically. Though the responsibility of making provision of drinking water is solely entrusted to the municipalities, it is not fair that people in some locality get the services of the municipality which others do not. People have made their own provision due to lack of adequate public services.

The issue of state society synergy is however, more apparent in the case of solid waste disposal. Most of the households were found making their own arrangement of SWD (Table 24). A few have engaged private operators to remove their daily household waste and very few depend on municipal workers to remove their garbage. Does this show that the state is not capable of handing their duties or support the people in SWM?

Table 24 : Arrangement of Removal of Garbage

	Guwahati				Mangaldai
	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti	
Individual arrangement	39	37	32	39	44
Community arrangement	1	-	2	-	1
Removed by private operator	-	3	-	1	2
Removed by municipal bodies	-	-	6	-	3
Sample size	40	40	40	40	50

* Source: Field work, 2002

Most of the localities of the city have no place for garbage disposal. The civic sense of the people is not reflected as many households throw the garbage on the nearby open space or road (Table 25). Lack of provision of public disposal ground or dustbin is the main cause of this. Some households have made their own provision of disposal in their own compound. For example, people of Mangaldai dump their garbage in their own compound. This is however, becoming increasingly more difficult due to increase in the density of population in the city. In the newly settled area still there are open space where people throw or dump their garbage. In the old localities people throw the garbage on the road. Most of the households in both urban centres had reported that they clear their garbage regularly (Table 26). However not a single household in both urban centres reported that municipal workers come to clear the garbage regularly (Table 27). It is also not to blame the municipalities as at present they are understaffed in case of sanitation workers. The GMC has just less than two sanitation workers per thousand population whereas in the town of Mangaldai it is just over two (Table 28). However, the norms lay down that it requires 3 to 5 workers per thousand population to handle the system efficiently. The possible path of synergy here is that people contribute and make common provision for disposal of garbage.

Table 25 : Disposal of garbage by place of disposal

	Guwahati				Mangaldai
	Total	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	
Own compound	49	10	17	7	15
Public dustbin	31	2	-	25	4
Open space	76	28	20	8	20
Sample size	156	40	37	40	39

* Source: Field work, 2002

Table 26 : Frequency of Garbage Removal

	Guwahati			Mangaldai	
	Hatigaon	Sixmile	Jyotinagar	Gandhibasti	
Daily	35	27	32	36	25
Weekly	3	4	5	3	13
Monthly	-	3	2	-	3
Occasionally	2	6	1	1	7
Sample size	40	40	40	40	50

* Source: Field work, 2002

Table 27 : Municipality workers coming for cleaning drive

	Sample size	Regularly	Occasionally	Never	N.A.
Guwahati	160	-	85	74	1
Hatigaon	40	-	5	35	-
Six mile	40	-	20	20	-
Jyoti nagar	40	-	27	13	-
Gandhi basti	40	-	33	6	1
Mangaldai	50	-	32	18	-

Source: Field work, 2002

Table 28 : Provision of sanitation staff

	Safai-karmacharis	Majdoors	Total	Workers per thousand population
Guwahati municipality corporation	380	1125	1505	1.84
Mangaldai municipality board	37	19	56	2.35

* Source: GMC and MMB, 2002

Table 29 tends evidence that urban environment is deteriorating in the two urban areas of our study. Majority of the households reported rising incidence of flies in their households and all households reported rising incidence of mosquitoes. However, unlike Guwahati very few households in Mangaldai town reported low incidence of foul odour.

Table 29 : Fly, Mosquito and Foul Odour Menaces

	Guwahati					Mangaldai
	Total	Hatigaon	Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Gandhi basti	
Flies	141	32	38	35	36	37
Mosquitoes	160	40	40	40	40	50
Foul odour	101	20	21	23	37	8
Sample size	160	40	40	40	40	50

* Source: Field work, 2002

Considering the state of affair of municipal services in the towns and to explore the possibility of state-society synergy, it was inquired whether people were interested to collaborate and make public provisions of environmental management. It was seen that more than two-thirds of the households were interested to cooperate either by making monetary or volunteering own labour (Table 30). However, there were variations at local level. As against more than 80 per cent households in Gandhi basti area of Guwahati and 30 per cent households in the Six-mile locality were willing to cooperate in urban environmental management. As against this in Mangaldai about 50 per cent households showed their willingness. Again it is not because of the financial burden that one-third of the households was not willing to cooperate. Among them we found less than 30 per cent households having monthly income of less than Rs. 5000/ and facing financial hardships (Table 31). Most of these households not willing to contribute reported that urban

environmental management is the duty of the concerned authority and the tax payers have no role to play.

Table 30 : Willing to contribute towards improvement of sanitation in your neighbourhood

	Sample size	Money and labour	Money only	Labour only	Neither	
Guwahati	160	12	85	4	59	36.9%
Hatigaon	40	5	23	1	10	25%
Six mile	40	2	8	3	28	70%
Jyoti nagar	40	5	21	-	14	35%
Gandhi basti	40	-	33	-	7	17.5%
Mangaldai	50	11	15	-	24	48%

* Source: Field work, 2002

Table 31 : Income group of the households not willing to contribute

	Guwahati		Six mile	Jyoti nagar	Mangaldai	
	Hatigaon	Gandhi basti			Gandhi basti	
< Rs. 5000/	3		4	5	4	3
Rs. 5000 - 10,000/	5		10	8	3	13
Rs. 10,000 - 15,000/	1		12	1	-	6
Rs. 15,000 - 20,000/	1		-	-	-	1
Rs. 20,000 +	-		-	-	-	1
N.A.	-		2	-	-	-
Sample size	10		28	14	7	24

* Source: Field work, 2002

IV. Epilogue

With such a meagre budget, low per capita expenditure it is not possible to provide adequate service to the people by the municipalities, unless a drastic revenue augmenting measures are launched. The other alternative is on state-society synergy. People need to play an equal role in urban environmental management. The study has attempted to have an understanding of people on their willingness to cooperate in such ventures. The question also arises whether such efforts will be well supported and complemented by the concerned authority, and such efforts will be sustainable.

There are examples of such voluntary effort of people in urban areas of Guwahati. Abhiyatri, a voluntary organisation was formed by a group of women in Guwahati in 1998. Its activities largely reflect the provision made in the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling rules) of 2000. They had appealed and put emphasis the citizens at least to clean their neighbourhood's environment. However, it is complained that no support was received from the municipality in its venture²⁴. What is expected from the municipal authority in the context of the Municipal Solid Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000? Apart from the organisational efficiency and financial discipline of the municipal

authorities, there should be a standard mechanism for the segregation, collection and safe transportation of the waste to the facility of resource recycling. Towards this the citizens have responsibilities like avoiding littering and ensuring the delivery of wastes in accordance with the delivery system notified by the local bodies and segregation of waste at source. Organisation like Abhiyatri is exactly doing this. Such action of the people will make the task easier for the municipalities in urban environmental management. However, the support from the municipality is not reflected, as there are inadequate provision of dustbins and occasional clearance of the garbage. Though fund crunched, this is possible for the GMC through better organisational efficiency. There are also examples that people of certain locality are going beyond the roles to be played by people as indicated by the MSW (Management and Handling) Rule, 2000. They even have contributed financially to make provisions for basis urban infrastructure²⁵. Now the sustainability of such efforts is only possible only through effective state-society synergy. The potential and evidence of synergy among people is largely reflected in this present study. In such initiative people lose their interest if their effort is not supplemented by those of the concerned authorities.

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VIOLENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

Vandana Upadhyay

A stark reality of Indian politics and civil society is that both are characterized by an increasing level of violence. Increasingly, ethnic groups and social classes are negotiating with the state in the idiom of violence as a means of articulating their demands. The rise of this phenomenon is largely an outcome of socio-political and economic processes. In a situation of scarce resources of state becomes the principal means of access to and control of resources. This results in a scenario where the state and its resources become objects of considerable political attention. When the politicized social groups fail to maneuver, negotiate and bargain within the political space, they resort to violence. The politics of identity formation and assertion are enmeshed in secular economic interests. Violence has emerged as a complex issue of political inquiry. Analysts invariably take recourse to socio-psychological, cultural and anthropological explanations to understand this phenomenon¹. The treatment of this phenomenon has been mainly normative, despite the increasing use of violence as a dominant mode of political action.

While the very development process may have engendered violence, in a paradoxical way violence in turn tends to be dysfunctional in the development process thereby retarding the pace of economic growth. This happens in two ways. Firstly, by a deliberate strategy of economic disruption. This strategy involves damaging state and private property, disrupting the public sector economy and disorganizing public transport and other essential services and militarily targeting development projects. Secondly, the state is compelled to divert limited resources to counter these kinds of challenges. The environment created due to the use of violent means acts as a major constraint on the growth of the economy. This process tends to further retard socio-economic development. In a cyclical way thus one process makes way for the other.

Development and its connotations

Development is a multidimensional process which may be interpreted as a change from a less to a more desirable state.

The concerns of development are social, political and economic transformation. Development involves change in the structure of society and in its capacity to respond effectively to stress imposed upon the system. The central principle of the concept of development is that social and political change occurs according to pre-established pattern, the logic and direction of which are known². It is a unilinear movement from the traditional to the modern. It involves the shift from a predominantly rural, agricultural society to an increasingly urban industrial society characterized by a cash and market economy, economic growth, high literacy, greater social and occupational differentiation and mobility.

The process of development has been attributed extensive and diverse connotations. Within social sciences, there has been a tendency to take an all encompassing view of political development. According to Lucian Pye, there are about ten ways in which political development can be understood. These are :

- (i) Political Developments as the Political Requisite of Economic Development;
- (ii) Political Development as the Politics Typical of Industrial societies;
- (iii) Political Development as Political Modernization;
- (iv) Political Development as the Operation of a Nation State;
- (v) Political Development as Administrative and Legal Development;
- (vi) Political Development as Mass Mobilization and Participation;
- (vii) Political Development as the Building of Democracy;
- (viii) Political Development as stability and orderly change;
- (ix) Political Development as Mobilization and Power
- (x) Political Development as one Aspect of Multi-Dimensional process of social change³.

Pye's elaboration of political development is an all-embracing in nature. But it also highlights the difficulties in conceptualizing the concept of development. Although development as a concept revolves around political modernization, economic development and social change, the normative priorities of the concept seem to stress stability.

The propensity to violence is inherent in the process of development itself. As the principal political contest in every society involves a polarization of social groups around distributional issue, the process of development invariably results in the continuous disturbance of the prevailing social

balance, in the emergence of new social classes that threaten the existing distribution of power. The dynamics of development, therefore, acquires a pervasive character of instability, disequilibrium and conflict. This very often results in the use of violence as a means to effect socio-economic and political change. As a process of change, development results in serious dislocations in the society. The dynamics of change creates serious disruptions in the process of development and by its very nature breeds instability⁴. The character and direction of change is a product of a dialectical interaction between tradition and modernity, each transforming the other⁵. The relationship between tradition and modernity – the degree to which tradition is accommodated in the process of change, the way it responds to the challenge of modernization – is a critical determinant of stability and development. Change often involves higher levels of disruption, conflict and violence. This makes political stability one of the primary goals of development. There are two important elements in political stability – order and continuity. While order involves relative absence of violence, coercion and disruption from the political system, continuity means a relative absence of change in the critical components of the political system. The evidence of political stability is infrequent changes in political institutions and relative lack of political violence.

However, there is an intrinsic linkage between political violence and development. The dislocations which are the result of the development process generate conflicts of various kinds. A large number of these conflicts arise over the distribution of scarce resources, most notably power. The ultimate source of conflict continues to remain inequality. Among the various perspectives on conflict, the most noteworthy are functional and dialectical perspective. According to the functional perspective conflicts arise when the deprived members of a system withdraw legitimacy from the system. Conflicts are a struggle over values, entailing behaviour that is initiated with the intent of inflicting harm, damage or injury on the other party⁶. The functional theorists have however focused on less severe and violent conflicts and their consequences for promoting integration within and between the conflicting parties and for increasing overall system adaptability.

The dialectical theory of conflict has emerged out of the concern to end capitalism and change society. The inherent contradictions in social relations make conflict inevitable. According to this theory, the economic organization of the society and consequent class formation resulting from ownership and non-ownership of property leads to a revolutionary class conflict. Dialectical conflict envisages severe and violent conflicts causing redistribution of resources into a new pattern of inequality which,

in turn will result in a new wave of conflict and resource distribution. This conception of conflict was not only narrow but also teleological as it essentially arose from Marx's desire to not only interpret the social world but also how to change it. But in reality, conflicts are rarely bipolarized across an entire society. Also, class conflict was supposed to have been more acute in capitalist societies in which the major classes are much more clearly differentiated. On the contrary, in transitional societies polarization has taken place across a whole range of primordial identities resulting in multiple levels of conflict⁷.

Political violence and its manifestations

As opposed to other forms of violence, political violence is a group phenomenon carried out with the intent of having an impact on the political system. It is the use of force for the resolution of conflicts in society that mainly originate from sociopolitical, economic, ethnic and cultural causes and that find expression in various forms of collective action. Political violence need not always be over physical armed violence. Violence may be in-built into the structure – characterized as structural violence – violence that is implicit in the structures of domination and inequality in a society. This kind of violence is exerted by situations, institutions, social, political and economic structures which are legitimized by the prevailing juridical order and sociopolitical and economic institutions⁸.

Political violence emerges within a certain socio-political and economic context. It is generally designated for a reordering purpose which may be to realize justice and equity, to achieve territorial autonomy or to impose one's religious and doctrinal beliefs. In democratic societies, political violence suggests institutional weaknesses. In the words of David Apter, "Political violence, although a fluctuating phenomenon within democracy, has at every step accompanied its evolution, and with ... the whole improving results which is why we have argued that in some respects democracy is violence-driven"⁹. One of the most comprehensive definitions of political violence has been provided by H. L. Nieburg. According to him, "political violence is acts of disruption, destruction, injury whose purpose, choice of targets or victims, surrounding circumstances, implementation, and/or effects have political significance, that is, tend to modify the behaviour of others in a bargaining situations, that has consequences for the social system"¹⁰.

In the context of the Third World countries, political violence is largely an outcome of the nation – state building process. The developing societies are fragmented with too many ethnic, religious and linguistic differences. Most of these developing states are of a multi-ethnic character, consisting of several

nations. Hence, ethnicity as a category of conflict exists not only at the level of consciousness, but it is also a reflection in consciousness of very real, concrete and material circumstances. Some view ethnic conflict as inherent in the capitalist model of development as it is competitive. The capitalist form of development is uneven and accentuates exploitation as some ethnic groups benefit disproportionately and others lose disproportionately¹¹. In all ethnic conflict there is an economic factor of varying importance but there is no uniform economic cause. The range of economic factors that may influence ethnic relations can be diverse – struggle for scarce resources, regional imbalances, infrastructural investments with a great impact on the local economic systems, labour market conflict and distributional conflicts. Thus, growth and modernization can go against what is known as ethnodevelopment – a development process appropriate for a particular ethnic group¹².

There are various manifestations of political violence. But five basic types of political violence particularly stand out. These are : (i) Primordial; (ii) Separatist; (iii) Revolutionary and counter-revolutionary; (iv) Coup oriented, and (v) Political or personality oriented¹³. In systemic terms, political violence can be categorized into anti-systemic and extra-systemic. The objective of anti-systemic violence is a revolutionary transformation in the social and political order. Extra systemic violence is unleashed by secessionist insurgencies by ethnic, religious or ethno-religious minorities, which affirm their right of self-determination and question the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state.

Some analysts have tried to explain the causes of political violence as product of unresponsive governments. However, in reality political violence is attendant even in those states, which are not repressive or unresponsive. This makes it imperative to seek explanations in the socio-political and material bases of society. Samuel P. Huntington has given primacy to political and institutional factors and emphasized disequilibrium within the political sector as the primary cause of violence. According to him if a country's institutional procedures for political participation are inadequate in comparison to the people's expectations for participation, this could lead to unrest and anti-regime activity. As a result of mobilization, new social forces enter the political arena, but the political structure does not provide channels for their participation in politics, thereby leading to civil strife¹⁴. Violence and instability were "in large part the product of rapid social change and the rapid mobilization of new groups into politics coupled with the slow development of political institutions", and the primary problem of politics was "the lag in the development of political institutions behind social and economic change"¹⁵.

The relative deprivation theory and the resource mobilization theory are some other influential theories on violence. According to the relative deprivation theory, when people perceive a discrepancy between their value expectations or what they believe they are entitled to and value capabilities or what they are able to get and keep, then this leads to alienation, deprivation and disillusionment. If members of a collectivity experience this relative deprivation simultaneously, the potential for political violence increases¹⁶. Violence thus, is likely when aspirations and capabilities are changing and when the gap between them is increasing. This is exactly what takes place during the process of socio-economic modernization. Socioeconomic modernization also effects the forms of political violence and instability. In traditional societies, it may have limited impact. On the other hand, with the enhancement of the process of modernization, more groups become socially mobilized and start participating in politics. As a result the forms of violence and instability diversify the become broader in scope. Collective discontent tends to be politicized and then expressed in violent action against political objects and actors. Political violence is in the greatest magnitude if both a regime and those who oppose it exercise approximately the same degrees of political control and command similar high levels of institutional support in society. This theory however fails to explain as to why in similar socio-economic and political conditions, some groups resort to violence while others do not. Relative deprivation may exist yet the situation may not turn explosive. This scenario is sought be explained by the resource mobilization theory.

According to the resource mobilization school, conflict and violence are a product of a leader's capability to manipulate resources of power, to organize, to recruit members by providing incentives or coercion that motivates participation. It is argued that if a conflict arose between a regime and its opponents, whether that conflict would become violent depends on who fares better in terms of comparison over available options/abilities. The ability of groups to achieve power would be determined by the extent to which they are in control of : (i) normative resources which include the commitment of members to the group itself and its ideals; (ii) coercive resources or means of inflicting punishment on opponents, and (iii) utilitarian resources which basically mean rewards¹⁷. Thus conflict and violence are more a consequence of organized activity and not merely due to relative deprivation. Political action is motivated by people's deep-seated grievances, in combination with the capability of the group leaders to articulate these grievances. If grievances regarding differential treatment and a sense of group identity are strong, then these can be organized and articulated by group leaders¹⁸.

The role of the state in fostering violence has been critical factors in the expression of political violence. Excessive centralization of administration can threaten regional and cultural autonomy, which in turn results in the intensification of discontent and the deepening of conflict. Further, when ends are moderate and means non-violent, the regime may ignore the problem. This often leads to the exacerbation of the crisis which in turn results in the movement turning violent.

It is evident that there is a mutuality of violence and development. In developing societies, the uprooting nature of the development process results in the emergence of conflicts. In turn violent conflicts are highly disruptive for development prospects. The costs in human potential, social and productive capital and physical infrastructure can be very high, and tremendous amount of development effort is lost in vain. This results in further destabilizing. It goes without saying that peace and political stability are preconditions for development. Violence becomes a major factor in distracting the state from the developmental agenda. Violence therefore is considered to be dysfunctional in the development process of the civil society. But the larger question is that if violence is against the structural inequalities inherent in the existing socio-political and economic framework, then should it be viewed as mobilization efforts on the part of such groups for distributive justice and thereby functional in the development process? However, the inability to create a bottom-line on developmental needs, would suggest that even if developmental prospects improved, political violence would not necessarily subside. A much better sensitivity to peoples' need – social, cultural and economic – may probably ensure lesser levels of violence. But as long as violence can be justified ideologically, there can be no guarantee against violence.

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The Tea Industry of Assam : Its Linkages With the State's Economy

Atul Goswami

Coined by Hirschman¹, one of the foremost exponents of the doctrine of unbalanced growth, the terms 'forward linkages' and 'backward linkages' soon gained currency in development literature. A brief exposition of the two terms is, therefore, called for before proceeding with the theme of the paper.

I

Given a limited amount of investment resources and a series of proposed investment projects whose total cost exceeds the available resources, the investor (business firm or governmental agency) is confronted with two types of choices in selecting the projects that will make the greatest contribution to development relative to their cost. Hirschman calls these choices 'substitution choices' and 'postponement choices'. Between two projects, A and B, substitution choices involve a decision as to whether project A or B should be undertaken. In contrast, postponement choices are those, which involve a decision as to the sequence of projects A and B i.e., which should precede the other. Hirschman is mainly concerned with postponement choices or sequencing the projects on the basis of comparative appraisal of strength in terms of maximizing 'induced decision making'. Within the 'directly productive sector' in contrast to the 'social sector', Hirschman favours the application of the 'induced decision making' to the choice and sequence of projects. To him, inducements stem from 'backward' and 'forward' linkage effects.

Backward linkages measure the proportion of an activity's output that represents purchases from domestic activities. Forward linkages measure the proportion of an activity's output that does not go to meet the final demand but is used as inputs into other activities. With knowledge of inter-industry flows in an economy, from an input-output table, it is possible to rank activities according to the magnitude of their combined linkage effects. Hirschman suggests that within the directly productive sector, a useful development strategy will be to encourage those

activities with the potentially highest combined linkages, because this will provide the greatest inducement and incentive to other activities to develop².

Hirschman's concept of 'linkage effect' is similar to that of Mrydal's 'spread effect'³ of an investment activity. But a development strategy based on linkage or spread effects can be deliberately pursued only by a national government (and its constituents) embarking on attaining the objective of maximizing output and income on an enduring basis by making an optimal use of investible resources in areas (projects) having direct as well as induced expansionary effects. The induced expansionary effects are of little importance to a colonial ruler (or an agency set up and patronized by it), whose primary objective in making an investment decision in a colony is guided solely by maximization of profits, which mostly get remitted home in various forms. The behaviour of a domestic business firm in making an investment decision is unlikely to be very different from that of a non-domestic business firm with the only exception that the profits earned, if any, do not get remitted directly to other countries. In sum, Hirschman's linkage effects provide guidelines in making optimal resource allocation by a public authority based on prior knowledge of linkages of the selected projects with other activities.

Hirschman's linkage effects, besides being technically determined on the basis of inter-industry flows of the existing industries (from an input-output table) are incapable of taking into account many non-technical linkages of an industry, which may prove to be stronger stimuli to growth over a relatively longish period of time. Although employment, output (income), ancillarisation, expansion of domestic and foreign trade etc. can be indirectly derived from the linkage effects of an industry, there is no way to satisfactorily measure the industry's contribution to the economy in terms of an emergence of a local entrepreneurial class, increase in horizontal and vertical mobility of labour reducing ultimately the existing social dualism, enlargement of people's choices resulting from expansion of education, health and sanitation facilities under pressure from the industrial workers in particular and social and political activists in general. Moreover, unlike Mrydal, who considers the possible negative effects of setting up an industry in terms of 'backwash effects', Hirschman makes no exposition of the negative linkages.

II

Keeping the above in mind and interpreting Hirschman's 'linkage effects' more loosely so as to accommodate non-technical factors of growth also, let us briefly trace back the origin and

growth of the tea industry of Assam and analyse the industry's linkages with the State's economy. Soon after the discovery of tea plants growing wild in Assam in 1823 by Robert Bruce and consequent upon the loss of trading monopoly of East India Company with China in 1833, the growth of the tea industry in Assam was nurtured by the British rulers. (It is to be noted that the British had already annexed Lower Assam in 1826). Administration itself took the initiative of starting Government Experimental Tea Gardens in 1836 and after establishing their economic viability transferred these to the Assam Company set up in 1839, the first joint-stock company of India to be incorporated with limited liability under an Act of Parliament in August 1845. British private investors were allured to enter the industry by making Assam's wastelands, which were quite extensive at that time, for tea cultivation on very attractive terms, spelt out for the first time in 1838 by the Wasteland Rules (which were further liberalized subsequently to make them even more attractive to the prospective British investors. In 1861 the system of fee simple grants was introduced, which was replaced in 1876 by a new system of 30 years' leases). The lure was too tempting to be ignored and by 1870-71 about 0.7 million acres had been settled in Assam with the planters⁴. With some initial ups and downs caused partly by slump and partly by labour shortage and poor infrastructure, Assam's tea industry soon got established as the leading industry of the province. In 1859 there were only little over fifty tea gardens in Assam. In 1869, 24 tea plantations came up in the Kamrup district ; 110 in Sibsagar in 1870 ; 46 in Darrang in 1871 ; in Lakhimpur the number rose to 112 in 1874 ; and in 1872, 27 came up in Nowgong⁵. In order to overcome the problem of labour shortage in the province, the population of which had declined substantially owing to large-scale deaths from the Burmese invasion and Kalaazar epidemic, and failing to eject a sufficient number of local farmers despite a steep rise in land revenue rates, indentured labour was recruited from the tribal areas from other provinces. Although started as early as 1853, 'migration' of indentured tea garden labourers from other provinces on a large scale took place in the seventies of the nineteenth century. It continued till 1937, the number falling low after 1931, by which time the tea garden labourers numbered just under ten lakh in Assam⁶.

'Administration was successfully prevailed upon by the planters to build roads and bridges and to ply steamer services on the Brahmaputra. Traders and bankers from other Indian provinces flocked to Assam and, in the absence of local business acumen, they provided the economy with the necessary, yet exploitative services of trading and banking... The base of exploitation for British capital was ramified and expanded. Alongside of it, missionary and administrative activities led to

the founding of English schools and printing presses – an infrastructure, based on which a colonial bastard bourgeois culture could now germinate⁷. (One should probably hasten to add that most of the present-day intelligentsia are not only products of this culture but also willing partakers of the same).

Thus 'the period from 1826 to 1873 was a period of transition for Assam's pre-capitalist economy into its colonial phase. British capital penetrated the economy and started building an exotic capitalistic set up. Collaborating traders, bankers, lawyers and clerks from other Indian provinces came as camp followers. Bullock carts, a novelty for the region, were introduced. The economy was monetized. The closed economy was exposed to immigration of labour.. Marwari trader-cum-moneylenders monopolized the internal trade... Bengali clerks, doctors and lawyers, with the advantage of their early initiation to English education and the British-Indian administrative system, monopolized Government jobs and professions... The new-born, rickety Assamese intelligentsia of the period found itself to be an insignificant minority in the urban sector... Superimposed as it was on a semi-tribal , semi-feudal society of petty producers, the new plantation economy – subjugated to foreign capital and linked with immigrant usury and merchant capital – could not bring a radical transformation within the local society itself. The start in modernisation was indeed a false one... Links between the plantation economy and the surrounding peasant economy – both labour-short - remained tenuous and minimal... A dual economy ... began functioning⁸.

We will show that Guha was perhaps a little hasty in drawing the inference that the start in modernization was a false one, as he looked at modernization as an instantaneous phenomenon and not a process whose impact becomes apparent over a relatively longish period of time. Moreover, as Roy points out, 'while the historical root of underdevelopment is an interesting issue, debates about it can have a deceptive appeal. They can lead to two forms of shortsightedness. One is to read history in a narrow way, solely to find out what went wrong. The more serious bias is to read history in a pre-ordered way, to find support for what the reader had already decided, went wrong⁹.

The closing three decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a phenomenal growth of the tea industry of Assam in terms of area under the industry's possession, tea acreage, output and exports of made tea and capital invested directly in the industry and in activities/industries ancillary to it. The total land area in possession of the industry doubled during this period and it constituted one seventh of the settled area of Assam plains. The acreage increased from a little over 56 thousand acres in 1872 to 338 thousand acres in 1901, and the output of tea from

about 12 million lbs to 134 million lbs during the same period. The total amount of capital invested in the industry increased from nearly £1 million in 1872 to an estimated £14 million (Rs.210 million) by 1903. Tea imports from India constituted barely 4 per cent of Britain's total tea imports in 1866. This percentage shot up to 59 in 1903¹⁰. Construction of railways, for ensuring speedy and easy movement of both finished products and factor inputs, started in 1881, involved in Guha's estimate, an outlay of not less than Rs.95 million (roughly £6 million) in total till 1903, when the total railway mileage stood at 715 miles. For meeting the progressively rising demand from the tea factories and the railways, coal mining was intensified, resulting in continuous increase in coal output from less than 50 tons in 1872 to more than 2,77,000 tons by 1905-06. The oil fields developed by British capital during 1890s increased their annual production of crude oil from 882 thousand gallons in 1900-01 to 2733 thousand gallons in 1905-06. Similarly saw mills were set up to meet the demand for tea packing boxes. In Guha's estimate, British investment in coal, petroleum and saw mills amounted to Rs.5.4 million, Rs.4.6 million and Rs.1 million respectively at the close of the century¹¹.

Thus the total investment in the organized sector of the economy was no less than Rs.315 million (£21 million)... during the years 1874-1905... An average of a little over Rs.10 million a year for the province's population rising from 4.2 million souls to 5.8 million in thirty years was indeed considerable. But the big push in the Government and British sectors failed to induce a commensurate growth of the indigenous private sector. What was developing with an amazing tempo was the British-owned and British-managed part of the economy, with labour and middlemen services almost entirely recruited from other Indian provinces¹². In Hirschman's terminology, according to Guha, the tea industry had feeble linkages, both forward and backward, with the economy of the province as such. According to him, despite the modernising efforts of British rule of more than hundred years, literacy rate was no more than 18 per cent, urbanization rate 3 or 4 per cent and per capita annual electricity consumption as low as 0.58 kwh in 1951, as against 13.3 kwh for all-India. Besides, there were no engineering industries or even light consumption industries worth the name¹³.

The Department of Economics, Gauhati University, in collaboration with the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi centre has constructed the input-output table of Assam for the year 1982-83, dividing the economy into 64 sectors¹³. Deriving the forward and backward linkages from this table, the study groups the sectors into four categories : (1) sectors with high forward and backward linkages; (2) sectors with high backward

and low forward linkages; (3) sectors with low backward and high forward linkages; and (4) sectors with low backward and low forward linkages. This classification is in conformity with the ranking of priority sectors as suggested by Hirschman. Neither tea plantation nor tea manufacturing figures in the first group of 11 sectors. In the second group of 19 sectors, tea manufacturing ranks eighteenth. Tea plantation ranks twelfth in third group comprising 12 sectors. With an output multiplier value of 1.5151, tea plantation ranks fortieth. Tea manufacturing has an output multiplier of 2.0913 and it ranks thirtieth among the 64 sectors. The income multiplier values of tea plantation and tea manufacturing are found to be 1.4031 and 2.4907 respectively with the corresponding ranks of fortyfirst and twentyfirst.

The sector-wise distribution of input value (in percentage terms) of tea plantation was as follows : Fertilizers 49.01, Electricity 11.24, Banking and Insurance 9.39, Plantation (tea nursery) 7.72, Trade 7.68, Miscellaneous Coal and Petroleum 6.88, Plastic and Rubber Products 2.09, Transport (other than Railway) 1.88 and Wood products (other than Plywood) 1.46. In other words, purchases from nine sectors mentioned above accounted for 97.33 per cent of the input value. Similarly purchases from nine sectors given below accounted for 96.94 per cent of the input value of tea manufacturing. The nine sectors are : Plantation 77.82, Wood products (other than Plywood) 4.90, Trade 3.58, Petroleum products 2.74, Tea Machinery 2.18, Electricity 2.16, other non-electrical Equipment 1.33, Construction 1.13 and Coal 1.10. The very heavy dependence on a few sectors for inputs in case of both tea plantation and tea manufacturing is indicative of the low value of spread effects. Table 1 at the end of the paper presents the sectors with their linkage effects.

A micro study¹⁴ based on four tea gardens of Sibsagar district, one garden taken from each of the four ownership classes (public limited company, private limited company, corporation and proprietary) and representing the three size-classes (big, medium and small) tries to ascertain the linkages of the sample gardens with the local economy by applying a simple technique (analyzing proportion of the input expenditure incurred by the sample gardens on (a) goods produced and purchased within the State, (b) goods produced and purchased outside the State and (c) goods produced outside the State but purchased within it). Obviously, the expenditure incurred by the tea gardens on the purchase of goods produced within the State has the maximum expansionary effects; on the local purchase of goods produced elsewhere has some expansionary income and employment effects in their trading. But the expenditure on goods

produced and purchased outside the State has the feeblest linkages with the State's economy. The researcher finds that the proportion of expenditure incurred on goods (a) produced and purchased within the State, (b) produced and purchased outside the state and (c) produced outside the State but purchased within the State stands at 29.86, 19.42 and 50.72 per cent respectively. Thus a little over 70 per cent of the input expenditure is incurred by the sample tea gardens on goods produced outside the State, which include, among others, jute bags and plywood boxes, in the production of which Assam has comparative advantage in production. Even items like small implements, bamboo baskets, apron, umbrella etc. are found to be imported from other States. Probing into the reason, he finds that most company gardens follow the practice of indenting their annual requirements with their head offices located mostly in Kolkata and the latter make a bulk purchase of the required items in Kolkata itself. He therefore believes that if the company garden management decides to shift the head offices to Guwahati or any other commercial centre of Assam, the tea industry will establish better linkages with the economy of Assam.

III

Admitting that (1) the tea industry in Assam was developed by a handful of British entrepreneurs with government patronage and support with the objective of maximizing the returns on capital invested; (2) the infrastructure developed by the British rulers was tailored to the needs of the industry rather than the larger interest of the people; (3) the indentured labour recruited by the planters was very shabbily treated and exploited in the initial period; (4) tea industry created an enclave economy, superimposed as it was on a semi-feudal, semi-tribal society of that time, with little links even with the adjoining locality; (5) despite the big push from tea, railways and oil, there was no commensurate growth of an indigenous private sector; and (6) tea industry, particularly during the initial period, had very poor linkages with the local economy, it is still difficult to agree with the contention that the start in modernization was a false one. Noteworthy that the process of modernization for its start and sustenance presupposes the emergence of a class, the middle class, the members of which because of a number of reasons (such as exposure to education, contact with more enterprising people and other external stimuli) hold a wider world view and develop scientific temperament. Consequently, they are not only quick to grab opportunities as they come by but also create opportunities. One of the greatest contributions of the tea industry, which does not get reflected in the 'linkage effects', has been to the emergence of this class. Although the Assamese middle class in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries

was the compound product of colonial bureaucracy, English education and the tea industry (and not an offshoot of the early British revenue officers, more particularly mauzadars and the social institution of vaishnava satras, as believed by some scholars), without the tea industry a stable middle class would not have come into existence in Upper Assam. Quite a few Assamese took to growing tea and some of them made a considerable fortune from it. In fact, tea produced the richest Assamese of the time. 'Along with the tea planters we must take into account the large number of supervisory and clerical staff employed in the gardens both by the British and native planters... Their exposure to a world of industry, labour, capital, competition, order, punctuality and discipline brought about a metamorphosis in them, they set before them some idealism of life. They acquired new social values... Tea industry offered the middle class a channel for professional self-expression. It kept on swelling the ranks of the middle class, some of them were employed in the clerical establishments, a few were involved in the growing, trading and sales of tea'.¹⁶

'Tea industry was the main economic force behind urbanization in Upper Assam. In the absence of such a force the urbanization process in Lower Assam districts was slow... The district headquarters towns of Dhubri and Guwahati could not stand in comparison to the resourceful towns of Dibrugarh and Jorhat. Nor Barpeta could be compared with Sibsagar as sub-divisional towns... As the main social force behind urbanization the middle class developed residential areas of their own in every town. Traders and professional men like lawyers and doctors coming from Bengal constituted a major chunk of urban population'.¹⁷ The seeds of modernization not only germinated, but the plants also struck roots, nourished by spread of education and increasing intercourse with Kolkata and other places.

Another notable instance of private initiative emanating from the tea industry is to be noticed in the phenomenal growth of small tea growers in the State in more recent times. Till the seventies of the last century, the size of the tea gardens was quite big, averaging 243.1 hectares in 1971. But starting from early 1970s, attracted by the success of the industry, a number of youths, whose number went on steadily increasing, began producing green tea leaves on very small plots. The number of such small growers increased from 4028 in 1993 to 24930 in 1999. The All-Assam Small Tea Growers' Association (AASGA) estimated that these growers were producing 230458 thousand kg of green leaves cultivated over an area of 193399 bighas (7.5 bighas make a hectare) and employing about 45535 labourers

and 5087 workers in 1999.¹⁸ These young people represent a breed of local entrepreneurs, inspired by the tea industry.

Not less important is the fact that although initially jungles had to be cleared for starting tea plantation, the area put to tea cultivation provided green coverage on a permanent basis. Without tea plantation what would have been the manner of utilization of these so-called wastelands, particularly in the context of persistent onslaught by the land-hungry peasants from the then East Bengal/East Pakistan, is not difficult to conjecture.

Tea industry is now an integral part of the economy and society of Assam. Without it, Assam will be obviously poorer. Yet conscious and deliberate actions are needed both from the civil society and the government in order to forge all probable linkages of the industry with the State's economy. In the long run, this will be mutually beneficial to the planters and the people of Assam.

Table 1 : Classification of sectors according to their linkage effects

(I) Sectors with both high forward, and high backward linkages

<i>Sector number</i>	<i>Name of the sector</i>
44	Nonferrous metal products
45	Other metal products
43	Iron and Steel
29	Other wood products
23	Cotton textiles
47	Other non-electrical equipments
30	Paper and paper products
53	Construction
54	Electricity
34	Petroleum products
38	Chemical products

(II) Sectors with high backward and low forward linkage effects

<i>Sector number</i>	<i>Name of the sector</i>
32	Leather and leather products
42	Non-metallic mineral products
48	Electrical equipments
46	Tea machinery
36	Fertilizers and pesticides
41	Cement
35	Misc. products of coal and petroleum
27	Misc. textiles
31	Printing and publishing
17	Grain mill products
18	Edible oil
39	Drugs and pharmaceuticals
19	Sugar manufacturing
26	Jute textiles

52	Misc. manufacturing
28	Plywood
24	Silk textiles
20	Tea manufacturing
37	Soap and toilet products

(III) Sectors with low backward and high forward linkage effects

<i>Sector number</i>	<i>Name of the sector</i>
14	Crude oil and natural gas
10	Animal husbandry
58	Trade, storage and warehousing
57	Other transport
08	Other crops
12	Forestry
01	Paddy
63	Other services
05	Sugar cane
59	Banking, insurance and communication
06	Oilseeds
09	Plantation

(IV) Sectors with low backward and low forward linkage effects

<i>Sector number</i>	<i>Name of the sector</i>
07	Jute (raw)
15	Coal
33	Plastic and rubber products
56	Railways
11	Sericulture
16	Other mining and quarrying
02	Wheat
50	Rail equipments
13	Fishery
40	Refractories
04	Pulses
51	Other transport equipments
22	Tobacco manufacturing
60	Real estate and ownership of dwellings
49	Ships and boat building
03	Other cereals
55	Water supply
62	Medical and health
61	Education
25	Readymade garments
64	Public administration

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE GROWTH OF DEPOSIT AND CREDIT OF COMMERCIAL BANKS IN ASSAM

Saswati Choudhury

INTRODUCTION

The banking system forms a crucial part of Assam's economic infrastructure. At the time of nationalisation, Assam had 74 bank offices out of a total of 90 bank offices in the North East (N.E) Region, constituting approximately 82% of the region's total. However, the region as a whole shared only 1.35% of the total bank branches of the country. Assam's share in the country's total bank offices stood at a meagre 1.00%. The share of deposits of the commercial banks in the State out of the country's total was 0.72% and the share of credit was only 0.42%. From the given statistics, one can easily infer the state of banking habit and business existing in Assam at the time of nationalisation. It may be noted here that at the time of bank nationalisation, the entire N.E. Region was not only under-banked but there also existed high level of intra-regional disparity in spread of bank coverage. Within the N.E. Region Assam enjoyed a place of privilege with a share of 82% of bank branches and 64% of deposit and 63% credit of the region's total.

Twenty-seven years after nationalisation, the banking network has undergone vast changes. Apart from expansion of branches, both mobilisation of deposits and disbursement of credit have increased. The population coverage of branches too have improved since then. For example, from a coverage of 188,000 persons per bank office in the State against all-India coverage of 65,000 persons per bank office in 1969, the population coverage per bank office in 1998 stood at 18,049 persons for Assam against the all-India figure of 13,169 persons.

AIM OF THE ANALYSIS

With wider geographical coverage by the commercial banks, lines of supervision and control lengthened. The need for flexibility in operations was felt and consequently several changes were

brought about in the deposit mobilisation policy as also in the credit policy by the Government of India in 1982. This paper seeks to analyse how effectively the expansion of branches in the State resulted in increasing the deposit mobilisation and credit flow by taking 1982 as the initial year of reference vis-à-vis 1998. The year 1998 has been chosen as the comparable year because it was since 1998 again significant changes were affected on the credit delivery system for the agricultural and Small Scale Industry (SSI) sector following the recommendations of the R.V. Gupta Committee and S.L. Kapoor Committee respectively. The present analysis aspires to capture the changes in the growth of deposits and credit of commercial banks during this seventeen years. The analysis had been based on the secondary data compiled from the various publications of Reserve Bank of India (R.B.I).

I. EXPANSION OF BANK BRANCHES :

The socio-economic life of Assam is basically rural in character with about 89% of the total population living in rural areas. The main economic activity of the State centres round agriculture and approximately 63% of the State's main workers depends on agriculture. Consequently, 68% of the commercial bank branches in Assam are located in rural areas keeping in mind the desired social objectives of bank nationalisation. Also the spread of bank offices in rural areas was almost proportional in Assam with the national trend in 1982, (Table-I), but by 1998, the proportion of rural branches in the State rose to 67.6% whereas at the national level the same remained unchanged at 51% (1982 level). While proportionate share of bank branches with respect to population group remained the same at the national level, at the State level in Assam there was a marked decrease in the opening of branches in the urban areas. This change made significant impact on the deposit mobilisation as also in credit flow with respect to population group.

TABLE - I : NUMBER OF BANK OFFICES : INDIA & ASSAM

YEAR (1)	RURAL (2)	S.U. (3)	URBAN (4)	TOTAL (5)
1982 (ASSAM)	331 (57%)	187 (32%)	60 (11%)	578
1998 (ASSAM)	837 (67%)	249 (20%)	152 (13%)	1238
1982 (INDIA)	20310 (51%)	9240 (23%)	10630 (26%)	40180
1998 (INDIA)	32860 (51%)	13967 (22%)	17720 (27%)	64547

Source: BSR Statistics & Quarterly Handout, RBI.

II. CREDIT-DEPOSIT RATIO :

Despite the absolute increase in both deposit and credit of commercial banks in the State, the flow of credit in the State have been very meagre. An approximate estimation of the credit flow

vis-à-vis the deposit mobilisation is the credit- deposit ratio or the CD ratio. The credit-deposit ratio in the State has decreased from what it was in 1969 (Table-II). The credit deposit ratio in Assam has not only been consistently below the national average but is also having a declining trend. Compared to the national benchmark of 60% stipulated by the RBI, the credit -deposit ratio for Assam was 31.83% against the all India figure of 54.47% in 1998. However, it needs to be mentioned that the CD ratio is only a rough approximation and do not speak clearly of the health of banking performance.

TABLE -II: CREDIT-DEPOSIT (CD) RATIO :ASSAM & INDIA

YEAR (1)	(ASSAM) (2)	C D RATIO (INDIA) (3)
1969	41.67	76.09
1982	42.29	67.13
1986	51.39	63.02
1990	53.09	65.95
1994	39.85	57.91
1998	32.85	55.51

Source: Same as in Table- I

III. TRENDS IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF DEPOSITS OF ALL SCHEDULED COMMERCIAL BANKS (ASCBs) IN ASSAM & INDIA:

Since the time of nationalisation the per capita deposits in Assam has been much lower than the national average. Theories of economic development argue that higher the level of income, higher is the propensity to save; one reflection of this high level of savings is the high deposit component in the economy. Compared to other developing countries of the South-East Asia, the bank deposits which form a major component of savings in these countries, the figure is much lower in India. However, in developed States like Punjab, Maharashtra the per capita availability of deposits is higher than the national average. The per capita deposit in Assam which was only Rs. 286.40 in 1982, as against the national average of Rs. 762.53, rose to Rs.2430.17 by 1998. The corresponding figure for India during 1998 was Rs.6252.19. The discrepancy in respect of per capita availability of deposits between Assam and India has widened over the years. Table-III gives an estimate of the per capita deposit in Assam and the All-India.

**TABLE-III : PER CAPITA DEPOSIT OF ASCBS : ASSAM & INDIA
(In Rs.)**

YEAR (1)	PER CAPITA DEPOSIT (A) (2)	PER CAPITA DEPOSIT (I) (3)	DIFFERENCE (4)
1982	286.4	762.53	476.13
1991	1039.03	2594.14	1555.11
1998	2430.17	6252.19	3822.02

Figures have been calculated based on the total deposits and total population.

Not only that the per capita availability of deposits in the State is lower than the national level, there exists wide spread discrepancy in the rural urban distribution of deposits (Table-IV). The share of rural deposit which was 19% in 1982 increased to only 24% in 1998. Also share of the semi-urban areas in total deposits showed a marked decrease from 47% in 1982 to 34% in 1998, as against the urban areas where the share increased from 34% in 1982 to 42% by 1998.

TABLE - IV: POPULATION GROUP WISE DISTRIBUTION OF DEPOSITS

YEAR (1)	DEPOSITS (Rs. In Lakhs)			
	RURAL (2)	S.U. (3)	URBAN (4)	TOTAL (5)
1982 (ASSAM)	9282 (19%)	22877 (47%)	16098 (34%)	48257
1998 (ASSAM)	144603 (24%)	211180 (34%)	255332 (42%)	611115
1982 (INDIA)	631343 (14%)	1050016 (23%)	2901139 (63%)	4582498
1998 (INDIA)	8759415 (14%)	11739591 (19%)	40537331 (67%)	61036337

Source: Same as in Table-I

Going further into the deposit composition by types (Table-V) in the State, the data reveal that, the trend in composition by types, had remained the same in both the years under reference. Thus, term deposit had the highest share followed by the savings and current deposit. However, there were marked changes in the percentage share of these deposits in the total deposits of the State. The savings deposit which accounted for 30% of the total deposits increased to 35% by 1998, while at the same time the share of current deposit decreased to 16% in 1998, from 23% in 1982. In respect of term deposit there was a marginal increase from 47% in 1982 to 49% in 1998.

In so far as proportionate shares of different types of deposit in the total deposits by population groups were concerned, it was revealed from the data that there was a marked decrease in the share of current deposit in all the three population groups in the year 1998 vis-à-vis 1982. In rural areas the proportionate share decreased from 15% in 1982, to 7% in 1998, while in the semi-urban areas it was 13.49% in 1998 as against 19.68% in 1982. In the urban areas, the share decreased from 32.08% in 1982 to 21.88% in 1998. Further, in the urban and semi-urban areas as observed from the data, there was a marginal increase in the share of term deposit from 49.02% in 1982 to 49.33% by 1998. In the semi-urban areas and for the urban areas the increase was from 46.89% in 1982 to 47.69% in 1998. While in the rural areas the share of term deposits increased significantly from 39.27% in 1982 to 52.18% by 1998. The share of savings deposit in the total deposit

by population group revealed that in 1982, 45.76% of the total rural deposits of ASCBs in the State were in the form of savings deposit while the same for semi urban and urban areas were 30.90% and 21.03% respectively. By 1998, while the share of savings deposit in the total deposit decreased to 40.80%, there was an increase in the proportionate share of this deposit in the total deposit of semi urban areas (37.19%) and urban areas (30.44%).

The percentage share of different population group in the total deposits by types in the State revealed that it was the semi-urban areas that contributed the maximum percentage share to the total savings deposit in the State, 48.09% in 1982. However, by 1998, the share decreased to 36.48%. The share of the rural areas in the total savings deposit of the ASCBs in Assam decreased from 28.89% to 27.41% while in the urban areas it increased from 23.03% to 30.44%. In respect of term deposit, it was the semi-urban areas which accounted for half of the term deposits of commercial banks in the State in 1982, while the rural areas and urban areas accounted for 16.2% and 33.55% respectively. However by 1998, the trend was reversed and the share of urban areas was the highest (40.40%), the rural areas too increased their share to 25.03% while in case of semi urban areas the proportionate share decreased to 34.56%. Further, in respect of current deposit it was observed that the urban areas in Assam had the highest share (46.71%), while the semi-urban areas accounted for 40.71% and the rural areas only 12.57% in 1982. The proportionate share of current account deposits decreased significantly for the rural and semi-urban areas. For the rural areas it was estimated to be

TABLE - V: POPULATION GROUP WISE DISTRIBUTION OF DEPOSITS BY TYPES: ASSAM

YEAR (1)	(Rs. In Lakhs)			
	SAVINGS (2)	CURRENT (3)	TERM (4)	ROW TOTAL (5)
1982(R)	4247 (45.76) ((28.89))	1390 (14.98) ((12.57))	3645 (39.27) ((16.20))	9282
1982(S.U)	7069 (30.90) ((48.09))	4502 (19.68) ((40.71))	11306 (49.42) ((50.25))	22877
1982(U)	3385 (21.03) ((23.03))	5164 (32.08) ((46.71))	7549 (46.89) ((33.55))	16098
COLUMN TOTAL	14701 (30)*	11056 (23)*	22500 (47)*	GRAND TOTAL* 48257
1998(R)	59003 (40.80) ((27.41))	10150 (7.72) ((10.74))	75450 (52.18) ((25.03))	144603
1998(S.U.)	78529 (37.19) ((36.48))	28485 (13.49) ((30.15))	104166 (49.33) ((34.56))	211180

Contd...

1998(U)	77714 (30.44) (36.10)	55857 (59.11) (21.88)	121761 (47.69) (40.40)	
COLUMN TOTAL	215246 (35)*	94492 (15)*	301377 (49)*	255332 GRAND TOTAL 611115

Source: Same as Table-1

- Note:
1. Figures in the (...) express percentage to Row Total.
 2. Figures in (...) express percentage to Column Total.
 3. Figures in (...) express percentage to Grand Total*
 4. FIGURES IN (...) express percentage to Grand Total*

10.74% and for the semi-urban areas it was 30.15%. At the same time the urban areas witnessed a gradual increase in current deposit and by 1998, it was 59.11% of the total current deposit in the State. The reasons for this trend of development leading to gradual shrinkage in the commercial business environment in the semi-urban and rural areas are two fold, increasing urbanisation in the State and deteriorating law and order situation in the State which had a greater impact in these areas. On the other hand, the rise in the commercial activities in the urban areas of the State since the late 1980's has accentuated the increase in the current account deposits in these areas of the State. This diversity in respect of current deposits in the rural, semi-urban and urban areas of the State speaks of absence of immediate business investment in rural and semi-urban areas vis-à-vis the urban areas.

However, it needs to be noted that despite the fact that deposit in rural areas has been gradually increasing, this share of rural deposit when compared to the total rural population of the State a rather dismal picture emerges, where 11% of the urban population of the State owned 76% of the total bank deposits of the State in 1998 while only 24% of the bank deposits were owned by 89% of the rural population.

The reasons attributed time and again for this trend of deposit composition between urban and rural areas are:

- * A skewed distribution of income between the rural and urban areas of the State.
- * Absence of thrift on the part of the poor men owing to the pressure of meeting their consumption requirements
- * Non familiarity with the banking system
- * Inability of the banking sector to intrude the rural savings potential due to operational impediments.

While it is argued that, unless income levels increase, the savings potential of the economy cannot increase; it needs to be emphasised that both savings and income are complementary to each other in their role of economic development. In Assam, the

per capita income (Rs.290.00) which was higher than the national level (Rs. 246.00) at the start of the Five Year Plan (1951) has been sliding down over the years. Therefore the discrepancy between the rural and urban income had widened over the years, while the rural income had increased at an annual compounded growth rate of 1.20% for the period 1981-1991, the urban income grew at the rate of almost 6 times that of rural incomes. In 1981, the rural incomes were almost half of the urban incomes, 10 years later it had come down to around one third of the urban incomes.¹ Under the circumstances one can easily infer the saving potentiality or thrift of rural household. Consequently the per capita deposit as a proportion of per capita income has also been low and less than the national average. In 1982, the per capita deposit as percentage of per capita income of the State was only 19 % as against 31% at the all-India level. After a period of 16 years in 1998, the figure stood at 29% for Assam against the all-India level of 55%.

**TABLE - VI: PER CAPITA DEPOSIT & PER CAPITA INCOME:
(ASSAM & INDIA)**

YEAR	PER CAPITA DEPOSIT (ASSAM) (In Rs.)	PER CAPITA INCOME' (ASSAM) (In Rs.)	(2) as % of (3)	PER CAPITA DEPOSIT (INDIA) (In Rs.)	PER CAPITA INCOME' (INDIA) (In Rs.)	(5) as % of (6)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
1981-82	196.46	1625	12.09	585.44	1861	31.46
1985-86	440.48	2612	16.86	1144.31	2749	41.63
1989-90	751.74	3723	20.19	1995.96	4416	45.20
1994-95	1466.52	5999	24.45	3959.78	8399	47.15
1997-98	2096.86	7335	28.59	5313.26	9660	55.00

Note : * Figures are taken at current prices.

Source : Currency & Finance, Statistical Statements, VOL-II, RBI Different Issues.

IV. TRENDS IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF CREDIT OF ASCBs IN ASSAM AND INDIA:

While savings supply the investible resources, they lead to generation of income and further savings potential. Hence what assumes more importance is the investment of these mobilised deposits by the banking institutions. Here comes the importance of credit supply by the commercial banks which are the main purveyors of investible resources in a developing economy like Assam. One of the basic issues in India today in the realm of monetary and banking economics is: how can the monetary authorities -the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) and the Government - effectively promote plans of investment and output without inflation on the one hand and credit bottlenecks on the other. The most important impediment in the process of effective formulation and implementation of these credit plans is the existence of a substantial size of non- monetised sector in the economy.

In Assam, the flow of credit has been much lower compared to the national level. For example, at the time of nationalisation the percentage share of the State's total credit to the all-India total was only 0.39% which had increased to only 0.64% by 1998. In respect of per capita availability of credit (Table- VII), the performance of the commercial banks is worse still. In 1982, the Per Capita credit in the State was a meagre sum of Rs.89.50 as against the national figure of Rs.392.02. At the end of June 1998, it stood at Rs.773.52 for Assam against the all-India figure of Rs.3405.28.

TABLE - VII: PER CAPITA CREDIT OF ASCB IN ASSAM & INDIA
(In Rs.)

YEAR (1)	PER CAPITA CREDIT (I) (2)	PER CAPITA CREDIT (A) (3)	(3) as % of (2) (4)
1982	511.92	121.12	23.66
1991	1580.35	514.15	32.53
1998	3405.28	773.52	22.72

Figures have been calculated based on the total credit and total population in the respective years.

In so far as the rural, semi-urban and urban distribution of credit was concerned, the rural areas of the State received 20% of the total bank credit in 1982 as against 80% going to the semi-urban and urban areas (Table- VIII). After a span of 16 years the trend in percentage share revealed that while rural areas accounted for 36%, the semi-urban and urban areas accounted for 64% of the total credit flow in the State.

Interestingly, within the urban areas again almost 50% of the credit got distributed to only 5 towns in Assam viz. Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Jorhat and Sibsagar with a population of less than 4% (Table- IX). The rest 50% of the credit was shared by 96% of the population of the State.

TABLE - VIII: POPULATION GROUPWISE DISTRIBUTION OF CREDIT

YEAR	CREDIT (IN LAKHS)			
	RURAL	S.U.	URBAN	TOTAL
1982 (ASSAM)	4341 (20%)	8514 (39%)	8809 (41%)	21664
1998 (ASSAM)	67583 (36%)	51304 (27%)	77532 (37%)	196419
1982 (INDIA)	374902 (12%)	532364 (18%)	2183347 (70%)	3090613
1998 (INDIA)	5679315 (11%)	4079397 (13%)	25484965 (76%)	33243677

Source: Same as Table- I

TABLE - IX : SPATIAL DISTRIBUTION OF CREDIT

(In percentage)

TOWNS (1)	YEAR		
	1982 (2)	1990 (3)	1997 (4)
GUWAHATI	40.66	33.57	27.82
OTHER 4 TOWNS	21.82	14.63	N.A.
REST OF THE STATE	37.50	51.8	N.A.

Source: An Enquiry Into Institutional Credit Flow In Assam: A Project Report, NEIBM, Guwahati, (1998).

Note: Other Towns are Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Jorhat, Sibsagar

In so far as sectoral credit share is concerned (Table-X) it has been observed that the share of agricultural credit in the state economy has come down from 19% in 1982 to 13% in 1998. The agriculture which forms the back bone of the State economy, accounting for 50 % of the economy's output and employing three fourths of the workforce, today receives no more than 13% of its annual credit requirements from the efficiently organised banking sector. Under such a condition serious credit bottlenecks are likely to arise.

Table - X : Trends of Distribution of Advances in Assam

(In percentage)

YEAR (1)	AGRICULTURE (2)	INDUSTRY (3)	TRANSPORT (4)	PL&PS (5)	TRADE (6)	F.I. (7)	OTHERS (8)
1982	19.44	40.44	6.03	4.06	26.53	2.16	3.50
1986	13.87	47.38	10.41	7.02	16.09	-	5.23
1990	17.72	43.51	10.27	7.20	14.60	0.57	6.13
1994	15.72	44.83	4.54	11.76	16.44	0.79	5.91
1998	13.31	31.85	5.81	18.57	21.56	0.75	8.16

Source : BSR Statistics, RBI.

Desegregating the data further in to Direct & Indirect finance to agriculture (Table-XI), it is found that the figures reveal a fluctuating trend, despite that direct credit to the sector has been still high. Indirect finance to agriculture is generally meant for trading, Agriculture Warehousing etc. On the contrary, loans meant for direct production activities in this sector have been decreasing. Direct finance can be further divided into short term credit (generally for crop loans, also referred as production loans) and term credit (also referred as investment credit) generally extending from (3 to 10 years and meant for development of irrigation potential, purchase of tractor, etc.). Here too the disbursement of term credit is higher than the short-term credit. This trend in the State's agricultural credit sector is opposite to the trend at the national level where disbursement of crop loans is higher. One reason for this could be that the crop loans are usually with little security and the branch manager would want to play it safe by

only disbursing to the totally risk free cases with adequate security as in case of term loans.

Table - XI : PERCENTAGE SHARE OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT FINANCE IN AGRICULTURAL CREDIT IN ASSAM

YEAR (1)	DIRECT FINANCE (2)	INDIRECT FINANCE (3)
1982	89.28	10.72
1986	85.23	14.77
1992	80.97	19.03
1996	72.35	27.65
1998	84.26	15.74

Source : BSR Statistics, RBI.

So far as the industrial credit flow was concerned, it can be observed from the data in Table- X, that while the sector accounted for 45% of the total credit flow in the State in 1994, however by 1998, the share of this sector showed a significant decline to 32%. However, this high share of credit flow to the industrial sector of the State, did not portray a happy trend because most of the credit within this sector had gone to 'other industries' composed mostly of service oriented industries. While on one hand the industrial credit flow has been increasing, on the other hand the industrial output & productivity of workers have been coming down over the years in the State economy.

Given the condition that, both work force participation and production level in the industrial sector has been showing a declining trend, the increase in the flow of credit to this sector has not been influenced by the growth of the sector. Further given the fact that industrial growth presupposes flow of investment funds and if the flow of credit to industry has been increasing (which again is for working capital requirement), investment credit from term lending institutions like the IDBI, IFCI and SIDBI has been falling sharply.

This flow of credit to the industrial sector perhaps also bespeaks of a situation where most of the loans under the sector has gone to service related industries falling under government sponsored programmes which also constitute a significant proportion of NPA accounts with the banks. This in itself do not lead to real growth and development of the industrial sector.

Interestingly enough, the Personal Loan & Professional Services (PL&PS) has emerged as one of the fastest growing sector in respect of credit flow which also has a high rate of recovery.

One of the reasons cited for the present trend of sectoral credit flow is the poor recovery of loans. Given that the recovery is high in case of PL&PS the credit flow to the sector has been

increasing gradually. On the other hand poor recovery in agriculture is often cited as a reason for poor credit dispensation to the sector by the banks. Low rate of recovery has been one of the major problems of the formal credit institutions. There are a host of factors which are said to be at play starting from the inception of the project to the disbursement and final investment. Not to blame the system always, there are also cases of willful defaulters with the formal agencies. In fact the overall recovery percentage for the banking sector hovers around 25% in the State.

Further as part of the ongoing reforms process in the financial sector, the commercial banks had been asked to classify their assets and also make provisions for Non performing assets (NPA) in order to ensure viability and profitability of bank branches. This had led to certain pruning of lending by the banks. Findings from the NEIBM study² in which the author was also involved lends weight to the argument. The bankers had expressed the view that the present asset classification and NPA norms would almost affect 50% of their credit disbursement. In the light of this what assumes importance is the recovery of loans by the commercial banks which can be ensured only when the credit so disbursed, leads to sufficient generation of income for the borrower so as to make repayment possible.

Against this backdrop of the commercial banks in Assam, one also comes across an informal credit arrangement in the State under the aegis of traditional money lenders who have a thriving business in the rural areas of the State. A study conducted by the author at NEIBM (1996)³, in four blocks of Mirza, Boko, Hajo and Sualkuchi on a sample of money lenders to understand the basic features of this traditional informal credit system came up with a few significant findings:

- * A typical money lender in a village in Assam today is either a wholesale trader called mahajan, a relatively well-off large farmer, a contractor (who is a facilitator) and a school teacher. The source of finance for all these different types of lenders are diverse and is generally the surplus generated from their primary profession. The credit extended by the money lenders can be broadly divided into two groups- production oriented uses and non production oriented uses.
- * The credit needs for non production purposes are meant for meeting the expenses for sickness, marriage, shradhha, travelling costs to towns and cities for the job seekers etc. The quantum of borrowing in such cases varies from as low as Rs.200.00 to a maximum of Rs.15000.00 with the rate of interest ranging between 10% to 12% per month. The

periodicity of these loans varies from one month to twelve months.

- * In respect of production purposes, the quantum of loan varies with the purpose of activities for which the loan is incurred. Thus in case of retail trades and business, the amount varies from Rs.1000.00 to Rs.2500.00 and extended all at a time with the rate of interest varying between 10% and 12% per month. The repayments are collected on a weekly or fortnightly basis. In case of farm activities the farmers in these areas borrowed from a paltry sum of Rs.200.00 to approximately around Rs.6000.00 with the interest payable at the rate of 10% to 13% per month. The periodicity of the loans ranged from twelve months to eighteen months. Such borrowings of small and marginal farmers are usually met by the large farmers. Incidentally it was mentioned by these money lenders (large farmers) that the source of funds for lending was none other than the loans taken by them from the banks for medium term investments.
- * Against all these borrowings no collateral security is generally not required, the mutual trust and confidence of the borrower and the lender acting as the security. As the borrower and the lenders are from the same village area or a nearby one both the parties work on mutual interest. The easy accessibility in the absence of stringent formal regulations is yet another factor which draws a villager to a money lender.
- * In so far as recovery for the money lenders is concerned, it was revealed from the study that the rate was higher in case of production loans, 98% to 100%, while in case of consumption loans it varied between 95% and 98%. Further, there were no cases of willful defaulters with the sampled money lenders.

In the existing situation where rural deposit share in the states total bank deposit is only 24% it is only natural that a resourceless villager would turn to a money lender in times of his need.

Despite the fact that commercial banks have expanded their network of functioning in vast rural areas of the State, the banking service continues to be a matter of great intrigue for the rural man and the questions that perhaps arise are :

- * When such large markets do exist for credit absorption in rural Assam why cannot the formal agency find any takers ?
- * When recovery is 100% for the money lenders why are bankers not able to recover their amount and burdened with NPAs ?
- * Why is it that banker is still a difficult proposition for the village man while a money lender is not, even though the latter charges a higher rate of interest ?

CONCLUSION:

All these questions address to the demand side of the story as well as on the operational aspect of the formal agencies like banks and co-operatives which need to be probed further. The issues have been raised here as a matter of constructive argument for re-focusing our approach to the banking business from administrative banking to field banking because the general claim that repayment habit in rural Assam has been a major hindrance for credit dispensation leaves a question in one's mind against the findings of the sample study.

And hence the pertinent questions that need to be addressed are :

- * Is our approach to banking business user responsive ?
or else
- * Why is it that a rural borrower remains prompt in his repayment to the money lender and be quite content to be termed a defaulter by the formal banking system ?

However, despite the fact that much remains to be done, it is worth noting that commercial banks have been instrumental in the development process of the State bringing vast areas under their business coverage. Also in an effort to ensure better flow of credit to the rural areas group lending schemes through the Self Help Groups (SHG) in different parts of the State has been a very significant development in that the SHGs also take care of repayments. In fact it is the wide geographical spread of branches that has been the mainstay of banks in financial intermediation process in the State and thereby playing a major role in the development process.

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WOMEN IN CONFLICT SITUATION : A CASE STUDY OF ASSAM

Anuradha Dutta

[I]

Assam and indeed other states of the country's north-east are beset with myriad of problems covering, as it were, almost all the years of the existence of the Republic of India. The continued extension of the Centre's authority to the point of erosion of the state's rights and powers naturally affected the quality of our political life giving rise, at the same time, to a number of problems out of which at present a violence ridden atmosphere is the dominant reality. All this did not erupt all of a sudden. There had been an increasing phenomenon of alienation, the result of building a 'monument of misdirected energy' by neglect and alienation. Congress had been the ruling party for over four decades in the country and most of the states in the north-east including Assam. Even the Congress leadership in the north-east had to acknowledge its responsibility for such a sorry pass. Thus, the Congress(I) leadership in the north-east including Chief Ministers, Union Ministers, PCC(I) Presidents, AICC(I) members and Congress(I) Working Committee members concluded in a unanimously adopted resolution in July 1994, according to a widely publicized press report that : half a century after Independence, the north-east remains isolated and backward, spawning unrest and alienation; 'precious little has been done to end or even lessen the sense of alienation'.¹

Manifest alienation has been particularly so in the 1990s. According to a very apposite comment by a political analyst, increased alienation has been caused 'due to a variety of factors like state violence, unabated continuance of engineered violence in areas peopled by different ethnic communities, politicking by the administration, continued imposition of Black laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act and the Disturbed Areas Act, Severe curtailment of citizens' basic democratic rights, perceived identity crisis due to unabated influx of foreign nationals, the politics of corruption, non-implementation of the Assam Accord ever since the AGP regime since 1985 and thereafter, etc. Further, excesses

committed by the Army gave rise to situations of guerrilla warfare, besides acts of individual terrorism and retaliatory violence. Lack of a federal political culture led to such a mess'.²

But people have become tired of violence and among them women most importantly, because they are particularly vulnerable to systematic violence in all conflict situations. Violence inflicted by all agencies – the state, militant and terrorist organisations, groups or individuals included – resulting in deaths and killings of human beings as killings of human beings have now been widely acknowledged as violation of human rights. A most important human rights NGO, the Amnesty International (AI), had to amend its mandate in 1991 'to unconditionally oppose hostage-taking, torture and deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians or those taking no part in the hostilities by armed opposition groups'.³ AI Report 2001 also reported such violations of human rights by armed groups.⁴

It is necessary to understand as to how the conflict situation arose in Assam in order to understand better the plight of women vis-à-vis an atmosphere of violence. The travails of India's federalism stood revealed by its tragic failure to establish desirable relationship between the state and the democratic process at various levels of national life. It was this failure which prevented so far in making India a nation-state in the real sense of the term : it is as yet a nation-state-in-the-making, as could be seen from a consideration of the north-eastern scene.

Clause 6 of the Assam Accord (15 August, 1985) promised to provide for 'constitutional, legislative and administrative safeguards as may be appropriate' to protect, preserve and promote the cultural, socio linguistic identity and heritage of the Assamese people. Nothing has been done for the last seventeen years to provide for the constitutional and other guarantees : such guarantees could have taken care in good time of the legitimate urges and aspirations of other communities like the Bodos (Boros) and other such communities. A constitutionally guaranteed autonomous status for Assam with residuary powers could have conceded regional and sub-regional area autonomy within Assam to ethnic communities within the framework of a composite culture. In the absence of all these, Bodos and other ethnic communities appeared to copy the Assam movement (1979-85) leading to assertion of ethnic identity by other smaller communities as well. Ethnic politics highlighting ethnic assertiveness even at the point of the gun led also to ethnic terrorism, and women became victims of senseless violence in all their hues. There were also inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic violent incidents involving at times mass dispersal of particular communities forcing them to become 'refugees' in their own homeland. While powerful elements in a society under this or the other label engineered conflicts, the victims were the innocent

citizens : in such a situation, children are orphaned, women widowed, and citizens are deprived of health care, education and employment. It is a truism that an environment that maintains peace, promotes and protects human rights and democracy itself; this is conducive to democracy wherein peaceful resolution of disputes is possible. Armed and other types of conflicts only bedevil the situation as it has done in Assam.

There are groups in Assam who either demand – and demands are often backed by peaceful and non-peaceful methods – autonomous status within Assam or clearly stand for either going out of Assam or out of India itself. The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) – recently faction-ridden – which is politically affiliated to Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation), stands for autonomous statehood for the Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts of Assam under Article 244-A of the Indian Constitution.⁵ While ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom) demands a 'sovereign independent Assam' – recently it expressed itself in favour of a plebiscite over the sovereignty issue – the Bodo militant outfits like the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) and Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) want independent state for the Bodo Tribal (traditional, indigenous) people; the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and their associates, dissatisfied as they have been with the BAC (Bodoland Autonomous Council under the Act of 1993), seek the creation of Bodoland outside Assam. Militancy has grown among other ethnic communities (like Rabhas, Mishings, etc.) also, dissatisfied in their turn with sham autonomous status accorded to them by an Assam which herself does not enjoy autonomous status under the Indian Constitution. When different ethnic communities seek homelands of their own separately, geographical Assam could very well turn out to be a mass of wreckage.

When a comprehensive view is taken of the situation in Assam and other areas of the north-east, it appears that the political leadership committed grave errors in confounding the political problems presented by the militant organisations with law and order problems. It was this mindset which led to Army operations in 1990 with the dismissal of the AGP Government of the day. There have been unimpeachable evidence of army atrocities on the civilian population : consider the Operation Bajrang (27 November 1990, 20 April 1991), Operation Rhino via Operation Cloudburst on 15 September 1991, and then the Unified Command Structure operations (since 1997) continuing through the present; during this period there have been three elected governments of different political complexions.

The Army can certainly be called upon to aid the civilian authorities in the matter of maintenance of law and order. The Army's basic role is in the defence of the country, a very patriotic

role. Similarly, the role of the police lies in protecting law and order and to deal with criminals. But the failure of the political leadership in addressing the political problems is sought to be passed on to the Army, paramilitary forces and the police with disastrous consequences for governance. To the various atrocities committed during the days of the operations under the Unified Command structure, additions have come in the form of the so-called 'secret killings' during the structure of the AGP-led 4-party regime (1996-2001).⁶

India is a Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic. But it has turned out to be a corrupt democracy. Witness the Vohra Committee Report (5/10/93) : 'The nexus between criminal gangs, police, bureaucracy and politicians has come out clearly in various parts of the country' (3.3); 'even the members of the Judicial system have not escaped the embrace of the Mafia' (6.2.(ii)); 'the network of the Mafia is virtually running a parallel Government, pushing the state apparatus into irrelevance' (6.3).⁷ Add to it the Tehelka expose between politicians, Army men and defence middlemen and ponder over the sorry state of affairs.

The conflict situation in Assam and other areas of the north-east arose principally from the failure of the political leadership in addressing problems in the right perspective. Such blunders led to deployment of the Army to deal with civilian unrest; a severely flawed approach led to flawed results resulting unhappily in the insurgency situation. Deployment of the Army and paramilitary forces has not led to any solution of the problems, rather there has been aggravation thereof with consequent human rights violations.

At the conceptual level, considerable progress has been made on women's rights as human rights and that violence against women is a violation of their human rights. In a situation of ongoing conflicts women's needs and rights are either grossly violated or marginalized. Armed conflict situations are increasing day by day. The UN Department of Disarmament Affairs has recorded over 150 armed conflicts in developing countries since 1945. There are many more unrecorded conflicts. While the entire community suffers the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their sex and their present status in the society. The impact of violence against women and violation of their human rights in situations of conflict is experienced by women of all age groups. Women suffer in various ways, such as, displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, torture, and sexual abuse as well; the impact of policies of 'ethnic cleansing' and other new and emerging forms of violence are also felt by women as women. It is known how women's lack of social and economic security has compounded their vulnerability to violence and sex discrimination. According to one estimate, women and children constitute 80% of

the world's millions of refugees and other displaced persons including internally displaced persons; this includes women in some refugee camps in Assam due to 'ethnic cleansing' operations. They are deprived of their dignity and property, and of their right to return to their home of origin, all due to violence and insecurity.

The link between militarism and violence against women is explicit. Militarism creates and perpetuates an entire culture of violence wherein problem-solving is sought to be done only through violence. Thus, violence serves the purpose of maintaining unequal power relations between men and women in the society. It has got to be seen as a reflection of deeper socio-economic process which is patriarchal in nature. It appears as though the 'protective' state targets women and uses violence against them as a means of suppression.

What is the nature of violence against women? There is a whole series of international standards defining violence against women thereby empowering them theoretically to deal with cases of violence as and when conflicts arise and also to equip them in defence of their human rights as women. An effort will be made in the next section to deal with women's concerns over violence against women in the light of UN documents. Thereafter, women's role vis-à-vis incidents that had taken place in Assam will be taken up only to highlight issues and women in conflict situation. We will round off our discussion with some suggestions, tentative in nature in view of the present lack of equal political power between male and female citizens in the present dispensation, with a view to promoting the cause of peace making and peace keeping.

[II]

Women's movement worldwide found in a way a significant recognition with the UN declaration of 1975 as the International Women's Year. The First World Conference on Women held in Mexico City in June-July 1975 adopted a Declaration on the equality of women and their contribution to development and peace. The UN General Assembly proclaimed the period 1976-85 as the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace. The mid-1980 World Conference on Women held in Copenhagen discussed, within the framework of equality, development and peace, problems relating to violence against women. Its conclusions held that domestic violence had serious social consequences and perpetuated itself from generation to generation, and that women must be protected from domestic violence and rape.⁸ The official report of the meeting clearly mentioned the problem of violence in the home. A women's publication defined rape in a succinct manner: 'Rape is a crime of violence which uses sex as a weapon'.⁹ I have been holding the view often enough that rape is a form of torture akin to political killings and death in custody.

The third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi (15-26 July 1985) went a long way in heightening international concern over violence against women. Following the Nairobi strategy ('Forward Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, the international blueprint for action until the year 2000'), the UN held (Resolution No. 40/36 of 29 November 1985) that the governments be urged to adopt specific criminal legislation 'to obtain an equitable and human response from judicial systems' to the victimization of women. It was a very significant recognition at the international level that violence against women is an issue which affected all countries and hence, it should be a priority for international and national action.¹⁰

Following the Nairobi meet, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) identified in 1989 five Articles relevant to violence in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). CEDAW brought gender-based violence to the focus. In 1993, the UN adopted the DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (December 1993). Article 1 of the declaration defined 'violence against women' to mean 'any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats or such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life'. Under Article 2, 'violence against women' shall be understood to encompass, but not limited to, the following (a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual and abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution; and (c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs. The 'violence against women' Declaration outlined a set of actions Governments and communities should take to prevent such acts. Earlier, in June 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna reaffirmed that women's rights are also human rights; and, a Special Rapporteur on violence against women was appointed. The Special Rapporteur in her third Report characterized impunity – the failure of governments to ensure accountability for violence against women – as the greatest cause of that violence.

Violence is a political issue and it is relevant to all. Both men and women are victims of violence. But patriarchy ordains that the female half of humanity suffers more in the process. During armed

conflicts or even in the normal course of civil life, women are always at the receiving end.

The Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing, China (4-15 September 1995) stated in the Report of the Main Committee Addendum relating to PLATFORM FOR ACTION : 'Gross and systematic violations and situations that constitute serious obstacles to the full enjoyment of human rights continue to occur in different parts of the world. Such violations and obstacles include, as well as torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or summary and arbitrary detention, all forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, denial of economic, social and cultural rights, and religious intolerance. Terrorism is a new and emerging global phenomenon'. The Main Committee report related to the item on 'Advance peace, promote conflict resolution and reduce the impact of armed or other conflict on women'.¹¹

The Beijing Conference 'Platform for Action' stated : Peace is a prerequisite for the attainment of equality between women and men. Unfortunately, armed and other types of conflict still persist in many parts of the world. Aggression, foreign occupation and ethnic and other conflicts are an ongoing reality affecting women and men in nearly every region, aided by excessive military expenditures and the arms trade. Though women rarely have any role in the decisions leading to armed conflicts, they work to preserve social order in the midst of conflicts. They also make an important contribution as peace educators and resolvers of conflicts. The Platform recognized that rape, which is common during armed conflicts, is a crime, and under certain circumstances is an act of genocide. It considered 'ethnic cleansing' as a strategy of war and rape as one of its consequences. It asserted that such practices must be stopped and their perpetrators punished. The Platform recommended action to increase the participation of women in conflict resolution at decision making levels.¹²

The 'Platform for Action' of the 4th World Conference on Women stated thuswise on violence : In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subject to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture, in both public and private life. They often face rape, sexual abuse, sexual and harassment and intimidation in the workplace. They are particularly vulnerable to systematic violence during war. Sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, sterilization and forced abortion, pre-natal sex selection and female infanticide are also acts of violence. All such acts of violence violate and impair or nullify women's enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Such groups of women as migrant workers require special attention because they are particularly vulnerable to violence. Lack of preventing and protective laws, and lack of access or ineffective enforcement by public authorities of such laws where they exist,

only perpetuate and increase violence against women. The Platform recommended actions to : adopt and implement legislation to end violence against women; work actively to ratify and implement all international agreements related to violence against women, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women; adopt new laws and enforce existing ones to punish members of security forces and police or any other state agents for acts of violence against women.¹³ Incidentally, India's National Human Rights Commission is not empowered under the 'Protection of Human Rights Act., 1993' to deal with human rights violations by members of the armed forces. Hence, then, is an agenda for human rights defenders, women and men, to see to it that the Act is amended to suit the needs of the situation.

Two years after the Beijing Conference, UN statistics revealed the following pictures concerning 'women and violence' :

- ✧ Each year an estimated two million girls suffer the practice of female genital mutilation.
- ✧ Worldwide, 20 to 50 per cent of women experience some degree of domestic violence during marriage.
- ✧ The primary victims of today's armed conflicts are civilian women and their children, not soldiers.
- ✧ The use of rape as a weapon of war has become more evident. In Rwanda from April 1994 to April 1995, estimates of the number of women and girls raped range from 15,700 to over 250,000.
- ✧ Rapes during recent conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda are being investigated with a view to prosecution by International Tribunals established by the United Nations.¹⁴

Violence against women, additionally, has many facets : violence by private actors, wartime violence and post-conflict abuse and custodial violence. A Women's Human Rights report of 1999 stated : in 1998 violence against women remained one of the most intractable violations of human rights. In various forms it persisted in times of peace as well as in times of conflict. The perpetrators were as likely to be private actors as public officials. Women were beaten in their homes by intimate partners; raped and otherwise sexually assaulted by law enforcement personnel while in their custody; raped in refugee camps by other refugees, local police, or the military; and targeted for sexual violence based on their low social status.¹⁵ It could as well read as a report in the situation in Assam and areas of the north-east in the ongoing conflict-ridden dystopia.

The UN Security Council in its meeting in October 2000 debated on the needs of women in all UN peace keeping operations. It recognized women's role in peace building and sustaining peace.

UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, said : 'Women are always better equipped than men to present or resolve conflict. For generations women have served as peace educators, both in their families and societies'. The point was also made that women have been instrumental in building bridges instead of walls, since most conflicts today are internal rather than international.¹⁶

The above discussion is by way of thinking globally in order that while acting locally, the perspective is held in the right manner.

While acting locally in the interest of peace, problems faced by women or forced upon them in armed conflict situations of the region may be looked into for appraisal while considering the conflict situation. The different roles may be categorized as follows :

1. Women relatives of armed activists – mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and also partners who are in the struggle silently or by choice or without choice but impacted upon the same way. They are usually targeted by the state.
2. Women relatives of state security forces – mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, partners of police, armed personnel and targeted state officials and others; they can have no choice to be part of the conflict this way or the other and hence, they often fill the 'invisible' or 'forgotten' category.
3. Women militants or combatants like their male counterparts. They could be involved by choice, coercion or by sheer force of circumstances.
4. Women as shelter providers. They provide food, shelter and labour to rebels or militants or terrorists either as sympathizers or by being coerced into providing help; in whatever way they help or have got to help, they are extremely vulnerable to unhelpful situations.
5. Women as victims of sexual abuse by state or non-state actors.
6. Women as peace negotiators and human rights activists. The community does not usually support women leaders who take the initiative. They are often victims of suspicion or actual assaults at the hands of state and non-state actors.

Further, a number of young girls are found to be involved in militancy or terrorism-related activities. Some may have been trained as messengers whether in the case of Bodos or Adivasis or ethnic Assamese. They might not have had any firm ideological commitment. It is also possible that many have joined such activities to escape poverty at home; members of the family could be supportive of the idea for economic necessity. At the same time, lack of access to political power and equal justice could also have led to desperation in the absence of a better option. Neither the

State Government or NGOs have been taken effective measures aimed at ameliorating the socio-economic status within the society.

[III]

In the north-east, conflict in the form of 'low intensity silent war' has been going on for decades. There is conflict between the state and the more marginalized communities within the geographical location of the state. Quite a few of such communities have been found to be not accepting prevailing governance as such; they seem to be wedded to the concept of self-determination as proclaimed in Article 1 of both the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to the effect that : 'All peoples have the right of self-determination'. But they, including the ULFA and other militant organisations seem to be blissfully unaware of the fact that the UN Human Rights Committee some time back held the view that the right of self-determination proclaimed in the international covenants 'is effectively non-justiciable in that the Human Rights Committee will not rule on an individual complaint about any alleged violation', and that 'given the absence of any clear rules of international law on how the right of self-determination is to be exercised and the essentially political nature of decisions on the issue, any resolution must remain a matter for political negotiation between the states and peoples directly involved'.¹⁷ Thus, the right to self-determination, a legitimate right, could only be addressed within the concept of a real federal polity.

Because of India's flawed federalism and onerous centralization, Assam that was a seemingly a stable democratic system suddenly became a cauldron of unrest for socio-economic-political reasons and manifest alienation. After five decades of the country's independence, Indian state authorities found themselves unable to fulfil the objectives laid down in the Constitution. India is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural state democracy. At the official level, in such democracies there is continuous effort to create homogenized identity of citizenship that support the central role of the ruling elite. In the north-east this has contributed to the growth of cleavages based on language, ethnicity, caste and gender thereby transforming these into newer inequities. According to an observer of South Asian democracies, state ideology is 'designed primarily to legitimize control' over diversities whether local or regional.¹⁸

In a situation like that in the north-east, there has been gross violation of civil and political rights. Like all societies, women in the north-east have limited opportunities to contribute to the political process. For the last three decades or so, Assam has been witnessing various forms of unrest, conflict and violence due mainly to the following reasons : demography; high rate of unemployment; lack of a strong civil society to mediate socially and politically; social

movements like the language movement, movement over the foreign nationals issue and ethnic identity movement; communal disharmony of a manipulative nature in a state which has been freer by far from the cancer of communalism; and, insurgency. Due to ethnological and geographical reasons, the region has not been drawn into the political economy of the Indian state, nor has it evolved any stable political, cultural or social identity of its own due to enforced difficulties. The conflicts in the constituent units of the north east have different origins and goals, but what was common was the general lack of development in the region.

In Assam in the last three decades various sections of the security forces created a veritable reign of terror under the pretended discharge of duties in maintaining law and order. It may be recalled that the Government of India felt compelled to bring into existence the National Human Rights Commission initially through an Ordinance in 1993 after the Amnesty International published in March 1992 its documented study recording the deaths of 415 people in the custody of the police and security forces since 1985.¹⁹ The AI book covered India's 25 states of the day, including Assam. The Report described in detail the pattern and practice of torture, including rape, and deaths in custody in India. 22 cases of deaths in custody, torture and rape in Assam during 1985-1991 were recorded in that book. As we will presently show, rape cases from Assam were much more, in 1991 and thereafter through the present. Since 1991, regional press and sections of the national press have been publishing reports and substantiated allegations of such crimes in free India.

The following is a partial list of a few recorded cases of rape by way of giving an idea of the extent of harassment to which women were subjected during the difficult times of the conflict situation :

- ✧ In January 1991 at Chakati village, located six km. from Lakhimpur town, military personnel on the pretext of raid, harassed women of all age groups. Nayanmoni Hazarika, mother of two children, was raped when she was breast-feeding her one-month old baby. The Army men came not to conduct any raid but to loot and rape women. Women felt insecure as the authorities merely carried out investigations without any concrete steps for their safety.
- ✧ In Madhya-Phulbari village two young girls, Rashmirekha and Jyotirekha Dutta were molested in front of their parents.
- ✧ Military personnel surrounded the house of Someswar Saikia for two successive nights leading to harassment of the inmates and molestation of the women in the house.

- ✧ Nijumoni Saikia, an 18-year old girl, was raped when the Army came in search of her brother who was suspected to be an ULFA activist. They arrested the other son of the family who was working as a Home Guard employee. The Army men dug up their compound in search of weapons.
- ✧ In Bihpuria subdivision of Lakhimpur district, Dongibill is an area inhabited by ex-tea garden labourers, two girls, one 15-year old by the name of Phulmoni Tapna, and the other, a 20-year old girl by the name of Karuna Tani, were raped for two consecutive days, on 4-5 December 1991 while the male members of the house were forcibly kept out of the hut.
- ✧ In Chamoia village, a student of the 12th standard, was a rape victim.
- ✧ 6 October 1991 - Ms. Raju Barua, aged 20, Part I TDC examinee of Chaiduar College, hailing from Sutargaon, Hawajan P.S. area of Sonitpur district, was gang-raped by about 6 Jawans at day time and then had thrown her to a nearby pond. She died.
- ✧ 10 October 1991 - Ms. Basanti Majhi, aged 12 D/o Etua Majhi, tea garden labourer from Naharjan T.E., Bokakhat, was disrobed and five Jawans attempted to rape her. She was saved only by her shrill cries when neighbours gathered. Some people were beaten by the Jawans when their heinous attempt (beyond molestation) was foiled; they threatened to come back at night to burn down the houses.
- ✧ 12 October 1991 - Ms. Dwijumani Nath, aged about 20, Village - Maripur - Anandapur of Bajali area, near Pathsala, Kamrup, was allegedly raped by two Jawans inside the house in the name of searching it. Later reports show that two other girls, Ms. Chitralekha Das (Pub Bajali Mouza's Bania Gaon) and Ms. Pabitri Bala Nath (of village Dakhinbala) were sexually harassed by some Jawans.
- ✧ 16 October 1991 - Ms. Bhanimai Dutta, aged 14 years, from village Fulbari, Naoboicha, Lakhimpur, met with her death due to Army atrocities.
- ✧ 22 October 1991 - Ms. Undhrubala Rai, aged 32 years, wife of Bhangaram Rai and mother of an 8-year old son, from Labdang-guri village, near Bijni, was subjected to sexual crime by two Jawans during day-time.

And on goes the list of reported cases till then only. The modus operandi in such cases was to keep the male members out of the residence by placing Jawans on guard outside while criminals took their turns.²⁰

After the Unified Command structure began operations, rape cases continued unabated, reported as these were in the press, it being noted that not all cases are reported due to understandable reasons of social stigma. Rape was used as a weapon of operations in more cases than one. Married women also did not escape the lust of the so-called protectors of law and order. Some rape cases came to light in the first half of 1998. In the context of rape cases at Paikarkuchi in Nalbari district of Assam – a married woman was a victim of the rage of rape – women's organisations launched a number of protest movements in a peaceful manner and when nothing materialized by way of remedial measures, young women from Nalbari launched a fast-unto-death programme demanding a public assurance from the Governor of the state that the heinous and cruel acts of rape by the security forces shall not recur. Indeed, the Governor had to give such a public assurance in June 1998. And, yet, since 'black will not take any other hue', rape cases continued to occur, around 44 cases or so, in the 50th anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.²¹

Paens of praise are showered on women as mothers and healers. They are called upon to help bring about normalcy in a conflict-ridden situation. But never ever they have been asked to be involved in the decision-making process, far less in the process to hold negotiations with the rebel opposition forces functioning as militants. When women themselves start the process of bringing about social harmony, they are often the targets of both the authorities and particular rebel outfits. A classic example is provided by the killing of Ms Golapi Basumatari, a 31-year old heroic Bodo woman on 22nd December 1996 at Kotoupara village near Barama in the Nalbari district. Formerly a school teacher, this heroic young Bodo girl served as Secretary of the Bodo Women Justice Forum from 20 February 1993; she was also associated with Nalbari District Tribal League, Bodo Sahitya Sabha, ABSU and other social organisations. When she was actively engaged in initiating dialogues on Assamese-Bodo peace, she was ruthlessly murdered along with three associates by suspected BLT killers on that fateful evening. Golapi's example was that of a woman peacemaker; herself a Bodo, she became a victim of fratricidal ethnicity related conflict. In her premature death she became a martyr in the cause of bringing about social harmony and peace.

But the peacekeeping world has to face a singularly warlike world wherein official military and non-official extremist world appear to have the upper hand, however temporarily but sufficiently long enough to cause havoc to social peace. During the army atrocities in Nalbari and North Lakhimpur during 1989-91, a number of women's groups for peacekeeping sprung up. Opposition from certain insurgent groups forced these women groups to give up their work. But there are still a number of such women's groups

for peacemaking and peacekeeping principally in rural areas and some in urban areas also. Further, there are women's groups in the interior villages that work for legal literacy, organize women against security raids in villages, etc.

Several women's organisations rendered yeomanly services in the efforts at restoration of the peace process in Assam. Among such organisations are : the *UMAIHATIYA MANCH* (a joint platform of many women's organisations), the Kasturba Gandhi Memorial Trust, various Anchalik (regional or local) Mahila Samitis, the Bodo Women's Justice Forum, the All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation having branches in 19 districts of Assam, etc. Several state level women's organisations having different party affiliations also undertake *ad hoc* peace initiatives. Women working for conflict resolution and peace process restoration as also engaged in humanitarian activities (as in relief camps at Kokrajhar and Gosaigaon after ethnic conflicts) could not, however, make it to the decision making process due to lack of initiative at the official level. Terrorism and insurgency made normal life unusually difficult. But in the gaps of time they manage to find, women have been successful in literacy programme, self-help group formations, etc. Further, representative women at Guwahati succeeded in organising a regional women's convention on peace and progress in 1977 : representatives from other states in the north-east also participated in the Convention. Thereafter also, in the last part of 2000 A.D., women at Guwahati and other towns and in rural areas also organised a number of peace rallies testifying to the alertness of the womenfolk in working for a peaceful way of life despite constraints. And, yet, for purposes of record, it has got to be stated that during all this period of turmoil and conflict, a sort of masterly inactivity marked the role of the State's Commission for Women. Gauhati University's Women's Studies Research Centre took the initiative of visiting victims of repression through deputed groups in 1990-91; thereafter also, it engaged itself in academic and activist works aimed at promoting the cause of peace in the society and women's progress.

Women's concerns over violence against women are understandable precisely because of the multidimensional effects of violence against women. Psychological trauma associated with sexual violation as also the loss and disappearance of members of the family last long even after formal peace returns. The conflict in various forms extends to every home, neighbourhood and the community. Secondly, normal social and economic life gets compromised. There is constant threat and anxiety of living in an atmosphere of aggressiveness and fear and terror. Over and above the direct impact, continued violence tends to have a lasting effect disturbing the family life is affected to such an extent that it may lead to disastrous consequences like starvation, prostitution, drug

addiction, etc. Violence is affecting livelihood in rural areas leading to lack of personal security, food, education and the like. Fourthly, disturbed conditions in the rural areas and these are in a majority – lead to enforced migration to urban centers : an example is provided by the migration of a large number of Bodo people from their rural areas to different towns in Assam. Even from place like Nalbari, scene of many a violence-prone situation, people have migrated to different places to escape atrocities on the part of the security forces.

[IV]

What could be the way out of the impasse ? Several short-term and long-term measures could be suggested. A number of strategies have been indicated in the relevant places above both to record what were gone through and also to find ways out of violence in different kinds of the situation.

Several measures are to be taken by the Government with speed and urgency and giving equal priority :

1. Initiate the process of dialogue and discussion with the militant organisations with a view to reaching a negotiated settlement of political issues raised by them.
2. Keeping in view the generality of the recommendations of the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, implement the recommendations on Violence and Armed Conflict with particular reference to adopting and implementing legislation to end violence against women, working actively to implement all international agreements relating to violence against women, and adopting new laws and enforcing existing ones to deal with violence against women by various wings of the security forces.
3. Since India has ratified the 1984 UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment on 14 October, 1997, implement it in fulfilment of the promise made at the time of signing the Convention that India would 'uphold the greatest values of Indian civilization and our policy to work with other members of the international community to promote and protect human rights'.
4. Educational programmes are to be introduced with NGOs' participation to foster a culture of peace and promotion of tolerance and working together for a better future.
5. The Government should review legislation and practices to eliminate discrimination on the basis of sex and end gender-based violence.

Then, the sovereign remedy appears to lie in the empowerment of women, empowerment in letter and practice. Women's

participation in the political process on a footing of equality with men cannot be withheld for any length of time by a male dominated society. Empowerment is basically concerned with recognition of a woman's individuality. The issue of empowerment has arisen precisely because in a male-dominated world women are subjected to subordination thereby denying equality of status and opportunities to women because they are women.

The empowerment of women is an integral part of the process of peace and development which should integrate economic, political, social, legal and cultural aspects. Such a process necessarily involves the democratization process. There cannot be, from the women's point of view, a socio-economic-political programme for women alone; the need arises for the development of a comprehensive programme for the society as a whole from women's perspectives. This is gender equity as a human development objective.

Meaningful equality between women and men everywhere could come only when women become equal participants in the decision-making processes at all levels of the country's governance. The empowerment of women could hopefully end in such a situation. Women should also be in positions of authority to handle problems of gender violence from positions of power and not as meek seekers of justice from a patriarchal social system. The goal is universalisation of human rights, peace, development, and progress in a violence-free atmosphere.

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THE QUESTION OF AUTONOMY FOR THE PLAIN TRIBES OF ASSAM

Bhupen Sarmah

The issue of autonomy for the plain tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley, more particularly for the Bodos, has undoubtedly been one of the most contentious for the political leadership of Assam and also the civil society, as the unresolved issue has caused much violence and bloodshed during last two decades. Emergence and growth of tribal identity consciousness among the plain tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley, the process which began in the early 20th century and had increasingly been politicized by the tribal leadership, finally culminated in a popular movement for a separate state for the plain tribes in the early 1970s under the leadership of the Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA). The Bodos, however, started their political assertion more forcefully under the leadership of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) and the Bodo People's Action Committee (BPAC) since the mid 1980s. The Government of Assam sought to resolve the issue through the Bodo Accord, which was accepted by both ABSU and BPCA in 1993.

The Bodo Accord envisaged an 'administrative authority within the State of Assam' to provide 'maximum autonomy within the framework of the Constitution to the Bodos for social, economic, education, ethnic and cultural advancement'. The Accord stated, 'There shall be formed, by an Act of Assam Legislative Assembly, a Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC) within the State of Assam comprising contiguous geographical areas between river Sankosh and Mazbat/river Pansoi. The land records authority of the State will scrutinize the list of the villages furnished by ABSU/BPAC having 50% and more tribal population which shall be included in the BAC. For the purpose of providing a contiguous area, even the villages having less than 50% tribal population shall be included. BAC will also include Reserve Forest as per the guidelines laid by Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Environment and Forest, Government of India, not otherwise required by the Government

for manning the international borders and tea gardens located completely within the BAC contiguous area'.

Accordingly, the BAC was formed in the same year by an Act of the Assam State Legislative Assembly, which *inter alia* made provision for a General Council to be constituted by 40 elected members including 30 seats reserved for the Schedule Tribes. The Act provided some amount of functional autonomy to the BAC over total 37 subjects. The BAC, however, could never exercise whatsoever limited autonomy was provided by the Act mainly because of insufficient financial powers and overwhelming domination of the State Government over most of the transferred subjects. And more importantly, ever since its inception, the BAC has always been under control of the members nominated by the Government of Assam in absence of elections for the dispute regarding the territorial jurisdiction of the BAC¹.

Allegedly, the Government of Assam unilaterally demarcated and declared the boundary of the BAC in 1993, and it excluded a major part of contiguous Bodo inhabited areas including some towns with less than 50% of Bodo population but encircled by Bodo dominated villages, and a sizeable number of tea gardens. The dispute regarding jurisdiction of the BAC soon became serious, which resulted in large scale violence in different parts of Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar and the gruesome massacre in Barpeta in 1994. A large number of people including women and children were butchered and nearly 70 thousand rendered homeless in the series of ethnic violence in lower Assam after declaration of the BAC area. The issue, nonetheless, remained unresolved till today.

When the accumulated discontent of the common Bodo people veered back to the demand for a separate state after the BAC fiasco, the Government of India in the wake of the last general elections to the State Assembly suddenly assured the Bodo political leadership to constitute a 'Bodo Territorial Council'(BTC) under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. Prior to the assurance, the Government of India should have addressed the question more carefully whether or not the Sixth Schedule as such could be a viable solution to the Bodo imbroglio in the present context. The assurance of BTC undoubtedly helped the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which had electoral alliance before the general elections to the State Assembly. However, the other implications of the assurance are more important in the present context. On the basis of an understanding that the panchayat bodies are not relevant for the BTC to be constituted under the Sixth Schedule, the Bodo political leadership decided to boycott the last elections to the panchayat bodies in the Bodo dominated areas. And more importantly, the dispute regarding territorial jurisdiction of the proposed BTC has culminated in a

situation of a probable civil war by dividing the common people into two antagonistic camps, placing the Bodos in one, and the other ethnic communities residing in the areas which are possibly be covered by the proposed BTC in the other.

With this backdrop, an attempt has been made in this paper to understand the historical context of the Sixth Schedule, the problems faced by the district councils, and the performance of the district councils during last five decades. Attempt has also been made to understand the opportunities provided by the 73rd Amendment to ensure economic development with social justice vis-à-vis the Sixth Schedule, and in this context, this paper examines the possibilities of providing an answer to the present tribal imbroglio through the panchayats

COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION IN THE HILLS

British colonialism gradually annexed and brought under the province of Assam a large number of contiguous hills inhabited by various autochthon tribes mainly for convenience of colonial administration. After annexation of Assam valley in 1826, British colonialism annexed Cachar Plains in 1830, Khasi Hills in 1833, Jaintia Plains in 1835, area under present Karbi Anglong and North Cachar in 1838 and 1854 respectively, Naga Hills during 1866-1904, Garo Hills in 1872-73, and Lushai Hills in 1890. The move to consolidate colonial power in the northeastern hills was of course, violently resisted by many tribes. Nevertheless, the British province that came to be known as Assam, took shape in the last quarter of the 19th century, and territorially, it included the entire present North East India except Manipur and Tripura.

The administrative arrangement in the British Province was also in a flux, and it kept changing almost till the end of colonialism in India. In 1853 district administration was introduced in the province, and in 1874 Assam was placed under a Chief Commissioner by taking away its control from the Lt. Governor of Bengal. In 1905 it became a part of the Lieutenant Governor's Province of East Bengal and Assam, and in 1912, it was separated and converted to Chief Commissionership with a legislature. Finally, in 1921, it became a Governor's province as per the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1919.

Creation of the Chief Commissioner's Province of Assam in 1874 was followed by certain very important steps. The Scheduled District Act was passed in 1974 to provide 'readier means than now exist for ascertaining the enactments' in force in the various parts of British India, which till then had not been under all the general Acts and Regulations². The Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation was issued 'to provide for removal of certain frontier tracts in Assam inhabited or frequented by barbarous or semi-civilized tribes from the operation of enactments in force therein'³.

The regulation empowered the Chief Commissioner to declare from time to time, that any enactment in force in a frontier tract, would cease to operate. And subsequently, the system of frontier administration was applied to most of the hills areas of the British Province of Assam⁴.

Following the suggestions made by the Montague-Chemsford Reforms of 1918, a sub-section (Sec.52A (2)) was inserted in the Government of India Act, 1915 by the Amending Act of 1919, which provide that the Governor-General-in-Council may declare any territory in British India to be a 'backward tract' and deny application of any Act of the Indian Legislature in the area such declared. Subsequently, exercising this power, the Governor General-in-Council declared the following areas of Assam as 'backward tracts': (a) the Garo Hills District, (b) the British portion of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills District excluding Shillong Municipality and Cantonment, (c) the Mikir Hills (in Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts), (d) the North Cachar Hills (in Cachar District), (e) the Naga Hills District, (f) the Lushai Hills District, (g) the Sadiya Frontier Tract, (h) the Balipara Frontier Tract and (i) the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract⁵. As a result, the 'backward tracts' of Assam were out of the reach of the general laws prevailing in rest of India without bringing about any change in the sphere of hitherto administration in area such declared.

After examining the administrative arrangements made for the backward tracts, the Indian Statutory Commission, 1930 (Simon Commission) felt that no legislature should be given powers to pass legislations on these areas, and the administration should be more centralized through the Governors. Considering certain recommendations of the Simon Commission, the Government of India Act, 1935 changed the nomenclature, and regrouped the backward tracts as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas. Subsequently, as per the Government of India (excluded and partially excluded area) Order, 1936 the Excluded Areas covered (a) the North East Frontier / Sadiya, Balipara and Lakhimpur Tract, (b) the Naga Hills District, (c) the Lushai Hills District, and (d) the North Cachar Hills Subdivision of Cachar District, while the Partially Excluded Areas included (a) the Garo Hills District, (b) the Mikir Hills (in Nowgong and Sibsagar Districts, and (c) the British portion of Khasi and Jaintia Hills District (other than Shillong Municipality area and Cantonment). In the new administrative arrangement, the Governor was to administer the excluded areas himself in his discretion, while administration of the partially excluded areas became his special responsibility. The powers of the provincial legislature, thus, were not to be extended to the excluded or partially excluded areas. All such provisions contained in the Government of India Act, 1935 more or less, were in force till the time of independence.

In the process of consolidation of colonial administration, therefore, conscious attempts were made to debar the tribal societies of the hills from any socio-political as well as economic integration with the rest of colonial India including the Assam plains. The administrative measures pertaining to the hill societies during more than half a century of colonial domination were essentially to ensure smooth administration conducive for colonial exploitation of the Assam plains. British colonialism was not in favour of any direct intervention in the hitherto socio-economic arrangement of the hill societies. With almost primitive tools of production and communal ownership of land, the jhumia societies, which were also free from the influences of casteism, neither could offer enough surplus to the colonial coffer nor resulted in emergence of a privileged class in a significant way. However, in order to locate and consolidate their allies in the hills, the colonialists identified the tribal chiefs and consolidated their position from outside by offering them certain concessions in exchange for their loyalty to the colonial flag⁶.

AUTONOMY FOR THE HILLS TRIBES

The level of political consciousness in the hill areas of Assam that grew in the socio-economic milieu of the colonial administration, on the whole, was inadequate to push the common tribal people to the National Freedom Struggle. The Congress was virtually denied entry into the educationally backward excluded areas. A number of factors, such as growing literacy, contact with the outsiders through trade and business during and after the Second World War, return of the ex-servicemen after the war with their experiences gathered outside the region, and also effect of the freedom movement in the neighbouring areas, however, contributed to a higher level of political consciousness in the partially excluded areas. Consequently, the partially excluded areas experienced emergence of certain political organizations since the late 1930s. The common political agenda was, nevertheless, concerned mainly with tribal autonomy for protection and preservation of their customs and consolidation of their identity.

At the same time, the understanding and knowledge of the Indian leadership in respect of colonial Assam, which epitomized India in terms of both demographic composition and multiplicity of problems, was insufficient to back a perspective to bring the tribal societies to the fold of pan-Indian nationalism. Chaube observes that the average member of the Constituent Assembly had for his or her guidance only one resolution of the Congress party that had been passed in 1936 at Faizpur, condemning the creation of excluded and partially excluded areas and the chief commissioner's provinces, under the 1935 Act, as 'yet another attempt to divide the people into different groups with unjustifiable and discriminatory treatment, and to obstruct the growth of uniform democratic institutions in the country'⁷.

Considering the need for adequate understanding of the situation of northeastern India as well as growing political aspirations of the tribal people, the Interim Government of India appointed one subcommittee of the Constituent Assembly known as the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas Subcommittee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi. The subcommittee, also known as Bordoloi Committee essentially sought to reconcile the aspirations of the hill people for political autonomy with the Assam government's drive to integrate them with the plains. In the wider context, the Committee attempted to accommodate the political aspirations for autonomy that got momentum in the hills of North East in the national political system characterised by centralized bias. The instrument for integration with a strong notion of democratic decentralisation of powers embodied in the 'Autonomous District Council' designed by the Bordoloi Committee was passed by the Constituent Assembly with certain modifications, and it constitutes the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.

Article 244 (2) of the Constitution states that the provisions of the Sixth Schedule shall apply to the administration of the tribal areas of the present States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. The tribal areas of the State of Assam include the (i) North Cachar Hills district and (ii) Karbi Anglong district; of the State of Meghalaya (i) the Khasi Hills district, (ii) the Jaintia Hills district and (iii) the Garo Hills district; of the State of Tripura, the Tripura Tribal Areas district and of the State of Mizoram (i) the Chkma district (ii) the Mara district and the Lai district. In addition, by an act of Parliament, the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act 1971, provides for constituting autonomous district councils in the hill areas of Manipur. For each autonomous district, the Sixth Schedule provides for district council consisting of not more than 30 members for a term of five years. The Governor is empowered to nominate not more than four members to the council, while the rest are elected on the basis of adult suffrage. The chief executive member, the chairman and the deputy chairman are elected from among the members. The chief executive member selects the other executive members.

Under provisions of the Sixth Schedule, the autonomous district councils are given legislative, judicial, executive and financial powers. The Legislative powers of the councils include allotment, occupation or use, of land other than reserved forest; the management of any forest not being a reserved forest; the use of any canal or water-course for the purpose of agriculture; the regulation of the practice of shifting cultivation; the establishment of village or town committees or councils; the appointment or succession of chiefs or headmen; the inheritance of property; regulation and control of money-lending and trading by persons other than the members of the schedule tribes. For administration

of justice, the judicial powers vested with the district councils include constitution of village councils and courts for the trial of suits and cases of the scheduled tribe communities. The district council or any court constituted on its behalf can exercise the powers of a Court of Appeal in respect of all suits and cases of trials by the village councils or courts so constituted. No other courts except the High Court of that province and the Supreme Court of India have jurisdiction over such suits and cases. However, the Governor may, for the trial of suits or cases arising out of any law in force in any autonomous district confer on the district council or on courts constituted by such council or any officer appointed in that behalf by the Governor, such powers under the code of civil and criminal procedures, as he deems appropriate and thereupon the said council, court or officer shall try the suits, cases or offences in exercise of the powers so conferred. The Governor is also authorised to withdraw or modify any of the powers conferred on district council, court or officer so far as the judicial matters are concerned.

The executive powers vested with the district councils mainly include establishment, construction and management of primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads, road transport and waterways in the district, and the district councils may make regulations with the approval of the Governor for their control. In addition, the Governor may, with the consent of the district council, entrust either conditionally or unconditionally to that council or to its officers functions in relation to agriculture, animal husbandry, community projects, co-operative societies, social welfare, village planning or any other matter to which the executive power of the state extends.

The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution provides for the constitution of a district fund for each autonomous district to which all the money received by the district council shall be credited. For the management of the district fund, and the Governor may make rules in respect of procedures of payment to the fund, withdrawal from the fund and other matters the Comptroller and Auditor General of India is authorised to conduct audit of the accounts and his reports on audits shall be placed before the council. The district councils in their respective territorial jurisdictions have the powers to assess and collect revenue on land in accordance with the principles followed by the Government of the State. In addition, The district councils in their respective territorial jurisdiction have the power to levy taxes on land and buildings and tolls on residents, and authorised to levy and collect taxes on professions, trades, callings and employments, on animals, vehicles and boats, entry of goods into a market for sale therein and tolls on passengers and goods carried in lorries, maintenance of schools, dispensaries and roads.

The Sixth Schedule provides that any act of the State Legislature or any act of the Parliament in respect of the subjects and powers vested with a district council shall not be applicable within the territorial jurisdiction of a district council unless the authority of such a council decides to accept them. However, the Governor has been empowered to appoint a commission to enquire into the report on administration of the autonomous district, and suspend an act or a resolution of a district council subject to the subsequent approval of the State Legislature if he is satisfied that the continuance of such an act or a resolution is detrimental to the national interest.

FROM DISTRICT COUNCILS TO SEPARATE STATES

With the set of provisions laid down in the Sixth Schedule and in accordance with the rules framed by the Government of Assam, district councils were constituted in 1952 in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District, the Garo Hills District, the Lushai (Mizo) Hills District, and the North Cachar and Mikir Hills Districts uniting both into an 'administrative district'. The district councils, however, had to confront with serious challenges immediately after their formation due to certain provisions made in the Sixth Schedule as well as lack of sincere efforts in the part of the political leadership to exploit the limited opportunities provided by the Constitution.

One of the major objectives of the Sixth Schedule was to allow the tribal people to administer themselves in all matters of vital local concern in the ethos of their customs and traditions. The functioning of the 'sub-state' (of the State of Assam) like structure that came into being in the form of autonomous district council, was however, under the hegemonic control of the centralized political institutions, which were alien to the common tribal people who used to be guided by a community approach. The hill societies, which shared a distinct history different from rest of the country, were attempted to 'integrate' with a political system that emerged after independence mainly through the Governor with his enormous powers pertaining to the functioning of the district councils, and the administrative hierarchy accountable to the State Government. For their 'autonomous' existence, the district councils were given a large number of legislative powers, but paradoxically, the Constitution made the provision that all laws made by the district council 'shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and until assented to by him, shall have no effect'. Another major constraint before the district councils was that they had no legislative or regulatory powers on the subjects over which they could exercise their executive powers. Similarly, the district councils were given very limited financial powers, for which, they could hardly plan for any development activity independent of the mercy of the State Government.

At the societal level, the functioning of the district councils had also suffered due to the contradiction between the traditional authorities that enjoyed official blessings during the colonial era, and the newly emerged tiny middle class which took over control of the district councils. The district councils provided some opportunities for fulfilling the political aspirations of the newly emerged middle class in the hill societies, but in turn, the political leadership had hardly made any sincere efforts to bring the councils nearer to the people at the grass-roots by adopting effective means of democratic decentralization as per the provisions made in the Sixth Schedule. Constitution of village councils and courts had never been in the agenda of the political leadership of the district councils. Contrary to the ethos of democratic decentralization by making the people decision makers, the district councils started expansion of the administrative staff to the extent that the government subsidy meant for development activities was diverted to meet the administrative expenses. As a result, the district councils with their frozen hierarchy became isolated from the traditional tribal leadership and institutions on one hand, and the common tribal people at large on the other.

The provisions of autonomy made in the Sixth Schedule, however, could never satisfy the political leaders who belonged to the incipient middle class of Naga Hills, and consequently, the Naga Hills experienced unprecedented political turmoil since independence. The plebiscite organized by the Naga National Council (NNC) in 1950 on the question of being independent or remaining in India, and the subsequent violent political upcharges in Naga Hills witnessed the political aspirations of the newly emerged middle class in the hill society. The secessionist tendency that was favored by most of the Naga tribes, nevertheless, could not significantly influence the political movements which got momentum in other hills. The leadership in the other hills Districts essentially strived for more power remaining within the Indian federal structure, and the vocal section of them started mobilizing the political forces with the demand of a separate Hills State comprising the district councils in the wake of the constitution of the States Reorganization Commission. The agitation for a separate Hills State enjoyed more popular support in the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, while the leadership of the other district councils were mainly in favour of more power to the district councils.

Consequent upon the political assertions by different hill tribes, either through violent or peaceful means, the process of disintegration of the State of Assam started since the early 1960s. The Parliament passed the Constitution (13th Amendment) Act, 1962 to provide for formation of Nagaland as a separate state. Similarly, the State of Meghalaya was carved out of Assam by the Constitution (22nd Amendment) Act, 1969, and Mizoram got statehood in 1986

after the Constitution (53rd Amendment) Act. The Mikir and North Cachar Hills Districts were given the option of joining Meghalaya, but the district councils overwhelmingly decided to stay with Assam.

MORE POWERS TO THE AUTONOMOUS COUNCILS OF ASSAM

Although the political leadership of Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills overwhelmingly decided to remain with Assam in 1969, the demand for creation of a separate state comprising the two hills districts started gaining popular support in the subsequent decades. The leadership of the two hills districts veered off and launched campaign that in 1969, the Government of Assam had dissuaded the leaders of Karbi Anglong and N.C. Hills from joining the State of Meghalaya on the unwritten understanding that the tribes of the two districts would be awarded with the greater autonomy possible within a State by transferring certain subjects of the State to the District Councils, the government's implementation of the understanding have fallen far short of the expectations of the hill people⁸. To translate the 'unwritten understanding' into practice, the Government of Assam transferred sixteen departments to the district councils in June 1970. And, the subjects were, (1) agriculture, (2) minor irrigation, (3) soil conservation, (4) animal husbandry, (5) dairying and milk supply, (6) forests, (7) fisheries, (8) roads and buildings, (9) general education, (10) cultural programme, (11) water supply, (12) health and family planning, (13) social welfare, (14) cottage industries, (15) community development, and (16) panchayat.

The subjects were transferred, nevertheless, the state government had a strong control over them. For instance, community development and panchayat were in the list of transferred subjects, but the centrally sponsored schemes were not given to the district councils for implementation. Similarly, education was transferred, but appointment of the teachers was done by the state government. Therefore, the state government continued to interfere with the departments, which were transferred to the district council. In reality, there was no devolution of powers and fund. There were instances where the money for development works was transferred to the district councils towards the end of the financial year with an oral instruction to the principal secretary to deposit the money back to the treasury as unspent balance.

In such a situation, the transfer of sixteen departments to the autonomous councils of the two hill districts of Assam could not essentially fulfil the political aspirations of the leadership, and the demand for creation of an Autonomous State within Assam got momentum under the leadership of the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) comprising the leaders and representatives of the students organisations of the two hill districts besides other groups and organisations. After a prolonged agitation under the

aegis of the ASDC, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Government of Assam and the representatives of the ASDC in the presence of the Union Home Minister on 1 April, 1995 granting more autonomy to the district councils. On the basis of the MoU, the state government transferred altogether thirty subjects/department (including the earlier sixteen subjects) to the autonomous councils. The subjects are (1) Industry, (2) Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, (3) Forest, (4) Agriculture, (5) P.W.D., (6) Sericulture, (7) Education (Primary, higher secondary and adult education), (8) Cultural affairs, (9) Soil conservation, (10) Co-operation, (11) Fisheries, (12) Panchayat and rural development including DRDA, (13) Handloom and textile, (14) Health and family welfare, (15) Public health engineering, (16) Irrigation, (17) Social welfare, (18) Flood control, (19) Sports and youth welfare, (20) Weights and measures, (21) Food and civil supplies, (22) Town and country planning, (23) College education including library, museum and archaeology, (24) Land reforms, (25) Publicity and public relations, (26) Printing and stationery, (27) Tourism, (28) Transport, (29) Excise, (30) Finance including sales tax, excise and professional tax.

Consequent upon the changes made, an office memorandum was issued providing details of the administrative changes and modalities adopted for the management of the above subjects. The salient features or the changes that have been brought forward through this office order are:

1. The money to be transferred by the State Government to the district council should be transferred in April and October.
2. Reappropriation of funds from one major head to the other by the council was to be allowed with intimation to the State Government.
3. A Principal Secretary is to be appointed to the district council who is in the rank of Commissioner and Secretary to the Government of Assam.
4. One of the secretaries is to be appointed from the technical departments.
5. All the officers below the rank of zonal heads and staff of the entrusted departments are to be placed under the administrative control of the council.
6. The departmental officers placed under the control of the council are to report directly to their heads of departments at the state headquarters in the matter of technical control and technical section.
7. The executive committee of the council is to prepare the budget estimates and the council has to pass the budget of the entrusted subjects and send it to the finance department of

the State Government for inclusion in the state budget generally without any change.

8. There shall be no common outlay (for both the districts). The existing schemes under 'common outlay' are to be transferred to the council as per their geographical locations.
9. All the centrally sponsored schemes/central sector schemes/ NEC schemes/ external aided schemes are to be implemented by the council.

It is therefore, clear that a positive development in entrustment and empowerment of the autonomous councils has taken place in Assam from the original provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the signing of the MoU on 1 April, 1995. Consequently, the two autonomous councils established for the hill tribes of Assam have become much more powerful in terms of their executive powers compared to the other autonomous councils created under the Sixth Schedule in other states of north east India.

PANCHAYATI RAJ AND THE AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCILS

The 73rd amendment of the Constitution has added the Eleventh Schedule, which lists 28 subjects as coming within jurisdiction of the panchayat bodies. Subject to the provision of the Constitution, the Legislature of a state may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority which may be necessary to enable them to function as institution of self-government and such law may contain provisions for the devolution of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level, subject to such conditions as may be specified therein, with respect to:

- (a) the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice;
- (b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted with them including those in relation to the matters listed in the Eleventh Schedule.

Broadly in conformity with the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, the State Legislature enacted the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994, which reintroduced a three tier system of Panchayati Raj consisting of the Gaon Panchayat, the Anchalik Panchayat and the Zila Parishad. The Act of 1994 provided for constitution of Gaon Sabha with a population in between six to ten thousand, and it has been given the responsibility of considering reports in respect of development programmes of the Gaon Panchayat. The Gaon Sabha is therefore, merely recommendatory body and it can only make recommendations and suggestions to the Gaon panchayat.

The Gaon Panchayat is constituted by the directly elected members, one third of whom must be women besides the seats

reserved for the SCs and STs, and it is vested with a number of development activities specific to the area of its jurisdiction. The fund for the Gaon Panchayat includes contributions and grants from the state as well as the central government, besides other receipts such as local tax, share of market, Ghat/Ferry etc.

The Anchalik Panchayats are coterminous with the development blocks, and the Act provided for the similar pattern of reservation of seats in the Anchalik Panchayats as in case of the Gaon Panchayats. Altogether twenty eight functions have been entrusted with the Anchalik Panchayats. The Anchalik Panchayat funds include contributions and grants, if any, made by the central and the state government, Zila Parishad grants, and other receipts including such part of the land revenue collected in the state as may be determined by the government. However, each Anchalik Panchayat is required to set apart annually such sums as may be required to meet the loss of its own administration including the payment of salary allowances, provident fund and other gratuity to officers and employees. The Act of 1994 provided for appointment of an ex-officio secretary to an Anchalik Panchayat.

The Act of 1994 provided for constitution of Zila Parishad having jurisdiction over the entire rural area of the district. Reservation of seats in the Zila Parishad for SCs/STs and women has also been the same with the Gaon Panchayat or the Anchalik Panchayat. The Act, however, further provided that if women from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes categories or even general category are not represented, the Government may by notification in the Official Gazette, nominate one member from such category.

According to the provisions of the Act of 1994, there will be a President and a Vice-President for each Zila Parishad, but its administration will be headed by the Chief Executive Officer. The government can appoint as officer not below the rank of the additional deputy commissioner of a district as chief executive officer of a Zila Parishad besides a chief accounts officer and a chief planning officer. The Act of 1994 also provided that the Zila Parishad shall be lawful for the government to issue directions to any Panchayat in matters relating to state and national policies and such directions shall be binding on the panchayat. The fund of the Zila Parishad comprises mainly the amount transferred to the Zila Parishad by appropriation from out of the consolidated fund of the state; grants, assignments, loans and contributions made by the government; fees and penalties paid or levied by or on behalf of the Zila Parishad, and fines imposed under the Act; rents from land or other properties of the Zila Parishad; interest, profits and other money acquired by gifts, grants, assignments or transfer from private individual or institutions.

The Act of 1994 provides for setting up of standing committees at all the three levels. At the Gaon Panchayat level, there are three standing committees. Development committee performing the functions relating to agricultural production, animal husbandry and rural industries and poverty alleviation programmes; social justice committee for performing functions relating to promotion of economic, social and educational reforms, etc. in respect of SC/ST and backward classes; and social welfare committee performing the functions of education, public health and other public works of the gaon panchayat. The Anchalik Panchayat has three standing committees, viz., general standing committee, finance audit and planning committee and social justice committee. The Zila Parishad, however, has got four standing committees - the general standing committee, the financial and audit committee, the social justice committee and the planning and development committee. The planning and development committee is in charge of education, public health and industrial development including cottage industries but it is not involved in district planning.

The Act also made provision for the district planning committee which is to be constituted at the district level to consolidate the plans prepared by Zila Parishad, Anchalik Panchayats, Gaon Panchayat, town committees, municipalities and municipal corporation in the district and prepare a draft development plan. The planning committee consists of MPs, MLAs, ZP president, and mayor / chairperson of municipal corporations/boards/town committees. Four-fifths of the total number are members of ZP/ municipal corporation etc. The deputy commissioner will be a permanent invitee. The president of the ZP shall be the ex-officio chairman and the chief executive officer of the Zila Parishad shall be the ex-officio secretary of the DPC.

As per provision of the Act of 1994, the state government has set-up a State Finance Commission to look into the financial aspects of the panchayat bodies and sharing of taxes duties, tolls and fees which may be assigned to and appropriate by the panchayats at different levels. The Finance Commission will also look into grants-in-aid to panchayats from the consolidated funds of the state. The Act of 1994 has been amended in April 1997, and under the Assam Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 1997, the minister-in-charge of the respective district has been made the chairman of the district planning committee in place of the President of the Zila Parishad. The Act was again amended in September, 1997. However, the amendments were regarding only some of the routine matters.

When the provisions of the 73rd amendment and the subsequent Assam Panchayat Act about the powers scope and functions of the Panchayat bodies are compared with those attached to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and the North Cachar Autonomous Council, it is found that the district councils are in a

more advantageous position particularly in respect of executive powers. Similarly, the sources of finance for the district councils are also more diversified although, both the councils are found to be crippled with financial crisis mainly due to the strong intervening role of the state government.

Moreover, many provisions laid down in the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 are also not in the true spirit of the 73rd Amendment. Although the panchayats have been empowered to prepare area plan for economic development and social justice, the Gaon Panchayats in Assam can take up execution of only those small works which are financed by its own resources. Similarly, unlike many other states, the Gaon Panchayats in Assam do not enjoy any functional control over the village level functionaries such as VLW, ANM, Primary School teachers etc., and as a result, the panchayat bodies at the grass roots level cannot assert their self-government status. More importantly, in the perception of the Assam State Finance Commission, panchayats are local bodies for performing activities of peripheral nature, and consequently, it recommends a very small portion of the available resources for functioning of the panchayat bodies.

Despite many other shortcomings besides the few indicated above, the provisions made in the 73rd Amendment and the subsequent Assam Panchayat Act are undoubtedly more democratic in the present context than the provisions laid down in the Sixth Schedule, because:

- a. As per the provisions made in the 73rd Amendment, the state is bound to constitute the institutions of local self-government through direct elections at a regular interval.
- b. The 73rd Amendment makes it mandatory to reserve 30 per cent of the total seats for women in the panchayat bodies at all the three levels.
- c. The Panchayat system provides scope for revitalizing the collective ethos for development with social justice by making the Gaon Sabha a vibrant constitutional body at the grass roots level despite its limited role in planning and implementation of development activities.
- d. The 73rd Amendment provides more opportunities for empowerment of women than ever before by making them an integral part in the decision making.

The Sixth Schedule, as noted earlier, provides a large number of judicial and executive functions to the district councils, but it is almost silent on the question of further devolution of such powers and functions to the institutions below the district level. As per the provision of the Sixth Schedule, the district council may constitute village councils or courts for the trial of certain suits and cases,

and may make rules regarding constitution of village councils or courts and the powers to be exercised by them. Nevertheless, in a sharp contrast to the 73rd Amendment, constitution of the village councils or courts through direct election has not been made mandatory by the Sixth Schedule. And more importantly, even if such bodies are constituted, they will enjoy very limited judicial powers at the mercy of the district councils without any development functions attached to them by the Constitution.

Even after gradual expansion of their powers, the district councils in the two hills districts of Assam have neither shown their interest in further devolution of powers to involve the people at the grass roots level in the decision making, nor made any provision to reserve 30 per cent of the total seats in the councils for women. Both the district councils conveniently ignored their power to constitute the village councils or courts during last fifty years. But at the same time, they have also refused to constitute the panchayat bodies as per the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 in the pretext that alternative arrangement for further devolution of powers is not required as there is a provision for constitution of village councils in the Sixth Schedule. It must also be mentioned in this context that the district councils accepted panchayats as one of the subjects transferred to them by the Government of Assam in 1970, but the Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 states that the Act shall extend to whole of Assam in the rural areas except the Autonomous Districts under the Sixth Schedule. Again in 1995, both the district councils signed the MoU with the Government of Assam and accepted the list of 30 subjects including panchayats transferred to them. But quite interestingly, neither the Assam Panchayat Act has so far been amended to include the rural areas under the district councils nor the district councils have shown their interest in the panchayat bodies.

CONCLUSION

The plain tribes of Assam are scattered unevenly in different districts of the state and they share, by and large, a common colonial history with their no-tribal counterparts. The process of tribal identity construction started in the early part of the 20th century in the lower Assam districts, which had a relatively higher tribal population. A very tiny middle class, which emerged in the tribal society of the Brahmaputra Valley particularly as a result of the expansion of modern education, made attempt to consolidate their tribal identity focusing mainly the issues of socio-economic backwardness of the plain tribes, and their socio-cultural distinctiveness vis-à-vis the caste Hindu society. The nascent tribal middle class, under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma attempted to explain the reasons behind over all backwardness of the plain tribes, and also initiated social reforms.

The socio-economic issues, which were initially sought to be resolved through social reforms, were gradually politicized, and the issue of socio-cultural as well as economic protection of the plain tribes became crucial in the wake of a large scale immigration of land hungry peasants from the East Bengal districts (present Bangladesh) who started grabbing land first in the lower Assam. The process of tribal identity construction, which began in the socio-political milieu of colonial Assam, culminated in formation of the Tribal League in 1933 to provide an organized political platform for all the plain tribes of Assam. The political leadership started mobilizing the common tribal people around the question of their rights of education, employment, and equality under the banner of the Tribal League, and demanded for separate electorates and reservation of seats for the plain tribes in the provincial assembly.

During the post-independence period, the State Government has remarkably failed to initiate any viable measure for socio-cultural and economic development of the tribal society. Alienation of tribal land has continued to be a serious problem mainly due to lack of political will to implement the existing protective policy. Similarly, the State Government which has always been under control of the non-tribal political leadership, by and large remained indifferent to the sensitive issues raised by various tribal communities at different point of time. To be precise, the accumulated discontent, as indicated earlier, finally culminated in violent movements, and the present political leadership finds a panacea in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

Taking cognizance of the historical processes in the hills and the geographical aspects, it can be safely said that the Sixth Schedule was a political necessity for the post-colonial Indian State, particularly for its nation-building project. The autonomy provided by the Constitution to the district councils, however, had failed to fulfil the political aspirations of the tribal leaders, and consequently, the small hills states were carved out of Assam. The remaining two autonomous district councils of Assam, despite progressive empowerment, have by and large failed to yield the desired results, nevertheless, they have over the years emerged as a distinct organ of the state with frozen hierarchy, increasing bureaucratization, and lack of initiative for further decentralization. The district councils, in their present form, are marked by over centralization of powers in the hands of their executive committees, and the scope for any initiative at the level below the districts has been marginalized by the political leadership. Therefore, with the structure and functions as envisaged in the 73rd Amendment, the panchayat system would definitely be a better alternative to ensure socio-economic development of the plain tribes of Assam by involving the people at large in the decision making and planning. However, the state has to take additional measures for promotion of their

language, culture, education and employment, and protection of tribal land, which are beyond the purview of the panchayats.

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ANOMIE ASSAM: THE PERILOUS PERSPECTIVES

Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed

North East India has earned a dubious reputation of economically backward, politically volatile but strategically sensitive region in the country. Surrounded from all sides except a narrow strip of land by four foreign countries, it is undoubtedly one of the most discussed regions in the country. Any serious work on India's national security cannot afford to ignore this region for its long history of political instability compounded by secessionist and other forms of violence including ethnic pogrom and internal displacement of hundred thousand people. Similarly, its strategic location seldom escapes from the attention of scholars as it shares a long international boundary of about 4800 km with Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar¹, while its fragile link with mainland of the country rests on a narrow bottle-neck of about 20 km wide constituting only 0.41% of its total boundary. All this exposes the region to external threat of grave import.

Table 1 North-Eastern states' shares in international border

NE States	Countries	Length of border in km
Arunachal Pradesh	China	1,175
	Myanmar	525
Assam	Bangladesh	200
	Bhutan	500
	Myanmar	425
Manipur	Bangladesh	400
	Myanmar	275
Meghalaya	Myanmar	475
	Myanmar	200
Mizoram	Myanmar	200
	Bangladesh	625
Nagaland	Myanmar	200
Tripura	Bangladesh	625
Total		4,800

(The Chinese came up to Bomdila of Arunachal Pradesh during India-China border war of 1962). Such a situation not only draws international attention but also creates more than enough actual and potential sources of troubles such as cross-border migration and crimes, and militants' escape routes to safe havens. The geographical isolation of the region from the rest of the country and the historical antecedents of its independent existence prior to the

British annexation and the economic backwardness with no sight of immediate improvement has complicated the prospects of nation-building and integration in the post-colonial era. The failure of the political process and the system since Independence to cultivate nationalism and to activate economic development had kept alive for two decades of 1950s and 1960s and then ignited the profound sense of neglect and deprivation in the mind of the people of the region, which eventually in recent times led to the creation of a serious frustration-aggression syndrome of an epic proportion.

Anomie situation in Assam:

Assam, the most advanced among the most backward states of the region, is a late comer in the series of civil strife so phenomenal in the region. The first salvo of militancy and secessionism was fired in 1953 when the Naga National Council headed by A. Z. Phizo began massive armed struggle against the Indian Union,² followed by armed insurgency in Mizoram led by Laldenga³ in the 1960s after the outbreak of a famine there. By the time the symptoms of national reconciliation surfaced in Mizoram leading eventually to signing of an accord in 1986⁴, Assam had fallen into the grip of an anomie situation starting with the Assam movement.⁵ Simultaneously, armed struggle was spearheaded by the ULFA (United Liberation Front, Asom)⁶ and the Bodos.⁷ Most of these armed movements contain certain common characteristics, such as violent struggle designed to make their point known by the rest of the people, systematic attack on the symbols of the Union and the State Governments, taking shelter in neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar for the purpose of organisation and training. The objectives of the Bodos of Assam and the Tripura militants, however, are different from those of the ULFA and the rival fractions of NSCN (National Socialist Council of Nagaland), because unlike the latter two organisations they do not aspire for a separate sovereign homeland for their people.

Table 2 portraying the resources of Assam suggests that there should have been high economic growth and industrial development in this resource-rich state. Assam's share of 55% of the tea production in the country is 15.6% of the world tea production. Besides, there are enormous forest and water resources, which are yet to be properly tapped and scientifically utilised. Paradoxically, economic development of the state is falling far behind the rest of the country. In 1950-51, its per capita income was 4% above the national average. In 1998-99 it was 41% below the national average. Its industrial position is now 14 (Confederation of India's Industries, 2000 rating). When the statistics of actual and potential resources are compared with the data confirming the state of backwardness, one finds an alarmingly wide gap between resources and development. The articulation of the palpable disparity in the late

1970s reinforced by the rationale of the Assam movement sets forth the symptoms of and then actual anomie situation in Assam.⁸

Judging from the point of low industrialisation and economic development, Assam is still in the fragile stage of transition between tradition and modernity, and therefore, is prone to an anomie situation. Scholars Emile Durkheim and Samuel P. Huntington agree that such a transitional phase is often characterised by anomie, political instability and decay.⁹ Out of the three best known models of deprivations - decremental, aspirational and relative - in

Table 2 : Reserve and annual production of natural resources in Assam

Items	Reserve	Annual production
Crude oil	1.3 billion tons	5.2 million tons
Natural gas	156 billion CMT	2.0 CMT
Coal	295 million tons	0.9 million tons

Source: Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, *Energy*, March 2000, pp. 20, 96 and 106, and also *Cooper Lybrand Report*, 1996

the context of Assam where expectations stemming out of abundance of resources are very high while the value capabilities are low, more particularly in the post-colonial era, a text-book-type anomie situation is inevitable more so when the transitional phase is inordinately long and painful.

Long back Aristotle attributed revolution to the aspiration for economic and political equality on the part of the common people who lacked it. A discrepancy could exist between what the people have political and economic goods relatively to what they think is justly theirs.¹⁰ Analogous concepts are applied by recent theorists like Lasswell and Kaplan who identify the roots of political instability in the discrepancy between expectations and degree of realisation of value position.¹¹ Scholars like Davies use terms like 'frustration' or 'deprivation' to represent relative deprivation and its fallout. Using the frustration-aggression concept as the core of revolutionary situation created by the decline in economic development following a long-term increase in expectation, Davies writes that high aspiration and low capability can generate profound frustration or dissatisfaction, a common element inspiring rebels to take up arms and disrupt the present order.¹² To quote Hoselitz and Willner:

Unrealized aspirations produce feeling of disappointment, but unrealized expectations result in feelings of deprivation. Disappointment is generally tolerable; deprivation is often intolerable. The deprived individual feels impelled to remedy, by whatever means available, the material and psychic frustrations produced in him. Whereas disappointment may breed the seeds of incipient revolution, deprivation serves as a catalyst for revolutionary action.¹³

Anomie is the result of relative deprivation. Anomie is a situation in which value expectations outstrip human means which remain constant or severely restricted. It is argued that anomie is present in a society, where normative values are often sequestered, common adherence to rules and regulations is weak, and individuals' feeling of isolation, loneliness and frustration are pronounced. These manifest themselves in social disorder and chaos.¹⁴ Durkheim's concept was popularised by Robert Merton in an essay entitled "Social Structure and Anomie". To Merton anomie is a breakdown of social standard or order, as existing social systems have been held responsible for causing deprivation.¹⁵ It is believed that anomie creates conflict and if not arrested or managed before it is too late might lead to violence and social disorder.

If one puts the situation obtaining in Assam in the last two decades of 1980s and 1990s within the framework of anomie one would find that the facade of democratic system had been operating in the state with institutional structures legitimised by periodic elections, marked by low voting turnout, and thus, low public mandate. The worst case was the 1983 election which was virtually imposed on Assam to avoid an 'inevitable constitutional crisis'.¹⁶ Even in the 1985 election, which witnessed a heavy turnout in the Brahmaputra valley as a result of the 'AGP wave', the AGP (Asom Gana Parishad) secured just 34.54% votes. Apparently, in legal language the 1985 poll reposed a sense of political legitimacy on the ruling elite, but the low or non-performance of the Government run by the young and inexperienced leaders of the Assam movement and the split in the party just on the eve of the 1991 election culminating the deep-rooted factionalism proved in unmistakable terms that there is a loss of legitimacy of the ruling party and hence a crisis in democracy.¹⁷ Although the Congress (I) came back to power in 1991 through a largely negative voting, the sudden demise of its Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia just before the 1996 poll left the party rudderless. The AGP was once again put back to power, to be overthrown by the Congress (I) five years later. An uneasy political vacuum, which continued to exist in the state in view of acute factionalism in the AGP, was filled up by the resurgent Congress, which captured the state power in the election of 2001 and repeated the same performance in the panchayat elections held after seven months. But in the face of insurmountable economic crisis, the state is unable to address properly the politically most volatile issues. In the midst of such a political uncertainty created by an inefficient government, a volatile militancy tries to win over the confused and frustrated rural youth, who constitutes the core of the ULFA cadre. At the same time, however, this militant outfit received a serious jolt started with the kidnapping and brutal killing of Sanjoy Ghosh, a social activist engaged in welfare works in Majuli, the world famous river island, and Rashmi Bora, a teen aged school girl of Nagaon

district of central Assam,¹⁸ and more recently its role during the Kargil operation in support of Pakistan and Kashmiri militants.

The process of the loss of political legitimacy of the ruling elite in Assam started with the proclamation of the internal emergency in 1975 compounded by the extension of the term of the state legislature for one more year. With the defeat of the Congress party in the 1977 parliamentary election, the very foundation of the state Congress was shaken, if not demolished. The installation of the Janata Government with the support of the PTCA (Plains Tribal Council of Assam) could hardly instil political stability and legitimacy as factionalism and intra-party conflict toppled the Government headed by Golap Borbarua, and the state was plunged into a major political crisis as evident from a series of changes of the Government, three times in a short span of three years. The massive Assam movement against the foreigners (at first against the *Bahiragata* or outsiders) further eroded the credibility all the successive Governments in the period from 1979-1983. The imposed election of 1983 election aggravated the situation. The movement leaders continued to agitate against the 'illegitimate' Government of Hiteswar Saikia on the ground that out of 126 Assembly constituencies, there was record low polling of less than 2% in 2, while in 29 it was less than 10%, in 25 it was between 30-10%. It was during this period of political instability, more precisely in April 1979, the ULFA emerged in the political scene of Assam with the declared objective of liberating the state from the 'colonial oppression' perpetuated by the Union Government of India.¹⁹ In the pursuit of this goal (*Swadhin Asom* or Independent Assam) the ULFA since its inception has been carrying on unmitigated violence not only against the symbols of the Indian Union but also against countless Assamese natives including political leaders, journalists and social activists. Like the Assam movement leaders, the ULFA too has not been able to sort out the contradictions inherent in a multi-ethnic state of Assam where the Karbis, the Dimasas, the Mishings too are demanding autonomies within the territorial jurisdiction of *Swadhin Asom*.²⁰ The Bodos have been spearheading a violent movement to get a separate homeland for them²¹.

In the midst of this confusion and contradiction, the authority of the state has significantly been eroded with the loss of credibility of the state Government of Assam. The autonomy of state politics of Assam within the constitutional structure of federalism is now under severe strain and is no better than what had been obtaining in the Congress-ruled states in the period of Indira Gandhi as the Prime Minister when the state politics was virtually brought under the total control of the Centre.²² Whatever freedom of action the state Government had once enjoyed to deal with the law and order situation has began to fade away and the state Government has become, in the recent times, increasingly dependent upon the

Centre for its survival in the context of growing militancy, dissidence within the ruling party and the reports of the involvement of the Chief Minister in the LOC (Letter of Credit) scam of embezzlement of Rs.400 crore.²³ It is ironical that the regional party, which had been vociferously campaigning for more power to the state, has now (during the second stint of power) subjugating itself to the Centre's domination by becoming a party to the institutionalisation of Unified Command Structure, which was commissioned to track down the militants in the state. In such a near military rule, the popularly elected Government minimises its role and responsibility to ensure law and order and remains satisfied with a low profile in the crisis management efforts in the trouble-torn state. Once again, the question of the state Government's legitimacy comes to the fore front.

The erosion of legitimacy of the ruling elite in Assam in the last two decades has had a contributory role at the onset of an anomie situation in the state. Simultaneously, there has been institutional decay too starting from 1975 with the imposition of internal emergency which created conditions susceptible to anomie behaviour manifested itself in the ethnic movement sponsored by the Assamese middle class,²⁴ eventually characterised by extreme form of political instability and sporadic but well-organised ethnic cleansing, Nellie and Gohpur in 1983, Barpeta in 1995 and Kokrajhar in 1998.²⁵ The loss of public confidence in the government machinery as a result of its ineffectual handling of such disturbed situation indirectly contributed to the rise of unconstitutional power structures whose dictates had to be followed by the unwilling and defenceless masses. The phenomenal attack on the national symbols, the boycott call of the national days for successive years and the senseless killings committed by the militants and the security forces testify to the prevalence of an anomie situation in Assam. The civil life has been frequently torn apart by the *bandh* calls, bombing of the passenger trains and the search operations conducted by the security forces to nab the militants. The defiance of the ULFA's curfew and boycott call on the golden jubilee celebration of 15th August by the leading citizens of Guwahati and the people of Majuli, where Sanjoy Ghosh had worked, is a determined but isolated challenge to the cult of intimidation and violence by the militants for a cause alien to the common man. Similarly, reports of killing and repression by the security forces have become a part of life in the state. In the midst of such an uneasy situation, there had been series of secret killings of the relatives of the ULFA accompanied by retaliatory killings by ULFA during the period of 1996 to 2001. All these have created an atmosphere where normal civil life cannot exist.

Politics of putative fear:

The roots of the Assam movement and the eventual anomie

situation are manifold. The economic and industrial backwardness, undoubtedly, might be the foremost. The backwardness of the state is attributed to the perpetual negligence by the Union Government and its exploitative approach to Assam's resources, and the sources of frustration and deprivation were found at first with the *Bahiragata* (outsiders who are not natives of Assam) and then with the *Bangladeshis* (foreign nationals from Bangladesh).²⁶ The frustration-aggression syndrome in a multi-ethnic heterogeneous society like that of the Assamese, which feels threatened by the unchecked influx, can breed a volatile situation shaking the very foundation of the process of national integration. The process of national integration in Assam in the pre-1979 period was evident but fragile. The situation in some other parts of India like Kashmir and the Punjab is more or less same, a natural phenomenon in a developing multi-national country like India.²⁷ The dominant section of the Assamese society faced a threat perception on demographic ground which propelled the mass movement in the state in the period of 1979-1985, and therefore, the detection and deportation of the foreigners constituted the core of the movement relegating the issues of underdevelopment to the periphery.²⁸ At any rate, the ethnic consciousness of the dominant section of the Assamese society had been articulated in the form of a protest action covering a multi-dimensional foci, i.e., Centre's acts of negligence and exploitation, the influx of the foreign nationals, and the failure of the successive governments to score a tangible economic development. The result was the six year long Assam movement accompanied by sporadic but widespread violence throughout the Assam valley, directed mainly against the immigrant Muslims. The culminating point was the conclusion of the Assam Accord in August 1985, which paved the way for the transfer of power from the Congress to the AGP.²⁹

The Assam Accord was not merely a culmination of the six year old movement which was not only characterised by unprecedented violence as well as state repression, it was a calculated strategy of conflict resolution through the transfer of power to those who spearheaded the movement against foreign nationals with the responsibility to accomplish the arduous task of detecting and deporting the illegal migrants. Logically it meant that with the formation of the AGP government the anomie situation would end as this government would take decisive steps not only to prevent the influx of immigrants but also free the state from foreigners and backwardness. Contrary to this popular belief, the old fear of being swayed by the foreigners and thus living perpetually under the scourge of backwardness continued to dominate the Assamese psyche.³⁰

It appears that the lack of goal coherence in the Assam movement, the interplay of incompatible goals as demands of the

movement leaders to detect and deport the foreigners, who had come to Assam since 1951, the absence of well-articulated strategies on economic and industrial development, together with the absence of a pragmatic approach to the foreign national issue, and particularly and awfully, the absence of a clear-cut and generally acceptable definition of the Assamese society (as a number of small nationalities like the Bodos, Karbis, Dimasas, Mishings have already launched their own identity movements against so called Assamese domination³¹) created an unbelievably confused and complex situation. Demographically, the Assamese society does stand on a fragile foundation which breeds a well-entrenched putative fear of being converted into minority by the non-Assamese, more particularly, by the foreign nationals. The fear is not unfounded. The 1961 census put Assamese speaking population at 73.2%, which came down to 60.9% ten years later. While there was no census in Assam in 1981 as it was not allowed to take place by the movement leaders, the 1991 census maintains a discreet silence on the language break up in the state leaving enough room for speculation as to whether the Assamese speaking people have been further reduced to the largest minority status. Census 2001 is yet to publish any data on this issue. Close on the heels of such a confused situation, a combination of language-cum-religious dimension has emerged which has once again fanned the fear psychosis of being reduced to a linguistic or religious minority. The million dollar question as to which dimension is more serious creates enormous scope for varied interpretation.³² The irony of the situation is that while a simmering concern at the rise of the Muslim population arguably due to the continuous influx of the Bangladeshis has been felt and well-focused³³ and in certain cases its over-projection carries the potentiality of a BARPETA-type massacre,³⁴ the AGP's hobnobbing with the immigrant Muslims to stage a come-back in 1996 remains to be explained.³⁵ It goes without saying that the bogey of the foreign national issue had been once used as a political instrument to steer a massive movement that led to the capture of power in the state is still kept alive to score political gains.

Just as the Assamese society as a whole is in a perilous position of confusion and conglomeration of backwardness and non-performance, its misunderstood segment, the Muslims, too, are often haunted by the issue of foreign nationals, the IMDT [Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunal)] Act, the communal backlash and persecution.³⁶ In the midst of the uncertain status of the Muslim a dangerous dimension has been surfacing in the wake of newspaper reports on growing militancy among a section of the Muslims in certain areas Assam.³⁷ Such a newly formed conflict situation, though not matched by acts of violence of grave import, so phenomenal in the North-East, is still in a formative stage, and

therefore, is not illusive to resolution. The Muslim militancy could do nothing more than a veil threat to the composite character of the Assamese society, but it could be a prescription to unmitigated disaster to the Muslims themselves.³⁸

The issue, which appears to have received the least attention of the policy-makers and the academia, is the unmanned international border of the region. Almost entire Indo-Bangladesh border is open and unprotected,³⁹ so is the Indo-Bhutan and Indo-Myanmar border. The open border not only facilitates easy access of the illegal migrants to Assam, the Chakma refugees to Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh but also provides similar routes to the militants to escape to Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar in search of shelter, arms and training. Although the conclusion of the Indo-Bangladesh agreement on sharing the Ganga water led to an understanding that Bangladesh would not allow the North-East militants to operate from that country, the situation has not improved so far,⁴⁰ more so after Begum Zia's return to power. The militants sneaked to Bhutan when the Bangladesh Government had initiated to close down the militants' camps and in recent time when the Bhutanese Government took measures to flush them out acting on the pressure of the Indian Government they once again reportedly escaped to Bangladesh.⁴¹ The shuttle crossing over the Indian territory by the militants speaks of the kind of security of arrangements the North-East region has on the international boundary. It is also a strong pointer to the future of internal security and the remoteness in the possibility of finding a sound and workable conflict resolution mechanism to end the ongoing crisis in the entire region.

It is evident that there is a lack of political will to arrest permanently the anomie situation in the state and its roots lie in the fact that the situation of unrest itself constitutes a source of rich dividend for the political parties which is harvested by them at the time of election. That is why the successive governments in Assam have not taken concrete steps towards conflict resolution. The initiatives taken by Hiteswar Saikia to handle the ULFA insurgency by encouraging them to surrender went half way because of their inherent contradictions. The top leaders of the outfit including the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman surrendered and pledged to be back to the national mainstream. More than four thousand of the rank and file surrendered afterwards. But these leaders and many others once again retreated to insurgency. The recent Unified Command Structure, a combination of civil, police and military establishment, now in operation has achieved little to track down militancy in the state.⁴² An atmosphere of terror created by state repression on one hand and by the militants on the other besides frequent reports of secret killings has become the order of the day. Consequently, Assam continues to bleed and alongside

this situation there exists a self-regarding politics centring around a putative fear psychosis stemming out of a multi-foci disturbing dimension.

In an article Rajni Kothari has stated that in the broader political canvas of India a paradoxical phenomenon exists in which "society, economy and polity move towards an increasingly destabilised state of affairs", and to deal with it the "leadership is fast becoming conspicuous by its absence".⁴² Assam does not stand as an exception, and therefore, there is no sight of the end of the perilous situation obtaining in the state for last two decades.

Notes:

1. Satis Kakati, "Geo-political Significance of the North-East Region" in Pankaj Thakur (ed), *India's North-East: A Multi-faceted View*, Tinsukia: Prakash Publishing, 1982 pp. 1-10. Also see Verghese Koithara, *Society, State and Security: The Indian Experience*, New Delhi: Sage, 1999, pp. 105. It appears that the figures given in these two works are tentative and not actual and hence differ from each other.
2. Udoyan Misra, *North-East India: Quest for Identity*, Guwahati: Omson, 1988, Chapter 1, V.K. Anand, *Conflict in Nagaland: A Study of Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency*, Delhi: Chankya, 1980 and S.K. Barpujari, "The Charismatic Angami Zapu Phizo", *Journal of North-East India Council for Social Science Research*, Shillong, October 1996, pp. 40-45
3. For some details see V. Venkata Rao, *et. al.*, *A Century of Government and Politics of North-East India*, Vol. III, Mizoram, New Delhi: S. Chand, 1987 Chapter XI, Insurgency, and also Aminesh Roy, *Mizoram: Dynamics of Change*, Calcutta: Pearl, 1982, Chapter 2, Insurgency and its Impact, and C. Nanthara, *Mizoram: Society and Polity*, New Delhi: Indus Publishing, 1996, Chapter 6, Identity Crisis and Separatism.
4. For details of the Mizoram Accord of 1986 see V. Venkata Rao, *ibid*, pp. 253-258
5. Monirul Hussain, *The Assam Movement: Class, Ideology and Identity*, Delhi: Manak, 1993, also Hiren Gohain, *Assam: A Burning Question*, Guwahati: Spectrum, 1985
6. Samir Kumar Das, *ULFA: A Political Analysis*, New Delhi: Ajanta, 1994, and Kamaroopi, "Enigma of ULFA", *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 27, 1991, pp 1786-87
7. Anuradha Dutta, "Bodo Movement in Assam: An Overview" in Girin Phukon and N.L. Dutta (eds), *Politics of Identity and Nation Building in North-East India*, New Delhi: South Asia Publishers, 1997, pp. 179-187.

8. The Assam movement began in 1979 and at that point of time Assam's share in Centre's financial aid was only 1.6% compared to 15.7% in Maharashtra and 10.0% in Uttar Pradesh. See K.P.G. Nair (ed), *Regional Disparities in India* (New Delhi: Agricole, 1981) pp. 98-99, also see A.K. Neog, "Regional Inequality in India with Reference to Assam" in Atul Goswami (ed), *Regional Disparities in India*, New Delhi: Akansha Publishing House, 2001, pp. 184-1999,
9. David Robertson, *Dictionary of Politics*, Penguin, 1993, pp. 15-16, Lucian W. Pye and Sydney Verba (eds), *Political Culture and Political Development*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1965, Richard A. Higgott, *Political Development Theory*, New York: St. Martin's, 1983, Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1968
10. *The Politics of Aristotle*, Translated by J.E.C. Welldon, New York: Macmillan, 1905, pp. 338-342.
11. Harold Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan, *Power and Society: A Framework for Political Inquiry*, New Haven: Yale UP, 1950, p. 264.
12. James C. Davies, "Toward a Theory of Revolution", *American Sociological Review*, February 1962, pp 5-19
13. Bert Hoselitz and Ann Willner, "Economic Development, Political Strategies and American Aid" in Morton A. Kaplan (ed), *The Revolution in World Politics*, New York: Wiley, 1962, p. 363
14. David Robertson, *Dictionary of Politics*, n. 9., p. 15
15. Robert K. Merton, "Social Structure and Anomie: Continuities", *Social Theory and Social Structure*, New Haven: Free Press, 1957, pp. 266-267, also Marshall B. Clinard (ed), *Anomie and Deviant Behavior: A Discussion and Critique*, New York: Free Press, 1964
16. Keya Dasgupta and Amalendu Guha, "1983 Assembly Poll in Assam: An Analysis of its Background and Implications", *Economic and Political Weekly*, May 11, 1985, pp. 843-853
17. Juan Linz argues that the loss of legitimacy breeds political crisis and hence breakdown of democracy see his *The Political Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1978
18. There was widespread condemnation of the killing of Sanjoy Ghosh, more particularly in the river island of Majuli, where he had rendered commendable service to this much neglected place, and the ULFA tasted for the first time an open hostility as demonstrated in Guwahati on August 15, 1997. For details see "Citizen March in Protest against Violence", *The Sentinel*, August

- 17, 1997; also "Black Day in Majuli" and the editorial "A Crime against Humanity", *The Sentinel*, August 8, 1997, "Ghosh killing turn tables on ULFA" and "Abduction that Boomeranged", *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), September 2 and 21, 1997. For a series of reports on the constructive activities of Sanjoy Ghosh and his organisation named Association of voluntary Agencies for Rural Development - North East (AVARD-NE) see *Amar Asom* (an Assamese daily from Guwahati), October 10, 15, 30, 31 and November 7, 1997. Also see Pankaj Thakur (ed), *Sanjoyar Diaryr Patar Pora*, Assamese translation from Sanjoy Ghosh's Diary (New Delhi: National Book Trust, 2000). It may be also noted that in a show of unprecedented courage more than 50% the people of Assam exercised their franchise in the parliamentary election of 1998 despite the boycott call of the ULFA, see Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed, "The implications of the Lok Sabha Poll", *North East Times*, March 3, 1998.
19. Sanjib Baruah, *India Against Itself: Assam and Politics of Nationality*, New York: Oxford, 2001, Chapter 7; Samir Kumar Das, *ULFA: A Political Analysis*, n. 6, also see Soumitra De, "Of Insurgency in North-East India: A Note on Theory and Practice", paper presented to the seminar on "Insurgency in North-Eastern India" organised by the NEISSR, Shillong, July 24-25, 1995 and R. Gopalkrishnan, *Insurgent North-Eastern Region of India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1997
20. For an excellent discussion see Jyotirindra Das Gupta, "Ethnicity, Democracy, and Development in Assam in a General Perspective" in Atul Kohli (ed), *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations*, New Delhi: Orient-Longman, 1991, pp. 144-168. Also P.S. Datta, *Ethnic Movements in Poly-Cultural Assam*, New Delhi: Har-Anand, 1990, and *Autonomy Movements in Assam* (Documents), New Delhi: Omson, 1993, Assam's Chief Minister Mahanta, in recent times, has been spearheading the attack on the ULFA raising the unresolved contradictions that plague the credibility of the militant outfit. Like the Congress, Sanjoy Hazarika too argues that the AGP was "hand-in-glove with" ULFA, *Strangers in the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India's Northeast*, New Delhi: Viking, 1994, p. 189
21. Sanjib Baruah, n.19, Chapter 8.
22. Paul R. Brass, "Pluralism, Regionalism and Decentralizing Tendencies in Indian Politics" in A.L. Wilson and Dennis Dalton (eds), *The States of South Asia; Problems of National Integration*, London: C. Hurst, 1982, pp. 246-255, also see Rajni Kothari, *State Against Democracy: In Search of Human Governance*, Delhi: Ajanta, 1989

23. The crisis in the ruling AGP, which had begun in 1991, once again surfaced after a temporary patch up. The former state Home Minister and a close associate of Prafulla Kumar Mahanta during the time the Assam agitation and now a vocal dissident Bhrigu Kumar Phukan demanded Mahanta's resignation in the wake of the newspaper reports on Mahanta's alleged involvement in the LOC scam, *The Telegraph*, November 19, 1997. Another powerful member of the AGP, Adip Phukan resigned from the party and asked the Chief Minister "to have courage to step down till you come clean in the scam", *The Telegraph*, November 20, 1997. For some details see a leading Assamese daily *Dainik Agradoot*, November 27, 1997 and another Assamese weekly *Asam Bani*, November 28, 1997. In 1998 two ministers resigned in the wake of the strong dissidence in the party on various issues.
24. For details on the role of the Assamese middle class in the articulation of the Assamese cause see Apurba Kumar Baruah, *Social Tensions in Assam: Middle Class Politics*, Guwahati: Purbachal, 1991, also see "Variety of Alienation", *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 2, 1980, pp. 997-1002.
25. Monirul Hussain, "Understanding Barpeta Massacre 1994: Ethnicity, Communalism and State", *Towards Secular India*, July-September 1995, pp. 39-43, and "Fear of Being Killed, Violated and Displaced: An Incomplete Dossier of Terrorism in Post-Colonial Assam", a paper presented to a seminar on "Dynamics of Identity and Intergroup in North-East India" organised by Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, November 12-14, 1996. The year 1998 witnessed a series of large scale violence against the Santal ethnic group living in the Kokrajhar district of western Assam tolling the life of several hundred people. Several thousands are displaced and are still languishing in temporary shelters for months together.
26. Hiren Gohain, *Assam: A Burning Question*, and Monirul Hussain, *The Assam Movement*, n. 5; also Amalendu Guha, "Little Nationalism Turn Chauvinistic", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Number, October 1990, pp. 1690-1720
27. Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religious, and Politics in North India*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1974, pp. 14-18 and "The Punjab Crisis and the Unity of India" in Atul Kohli (ed), *India's Democracy*, n. 20, also see Balraj Puri, *Kashmir towards Insurgency*, New Delhi: Orient-Longman, 1993, Chapter 4.
28. For some account on the threat perception created by the immigration see Amiya Kumar Das, *Assam's Agony: A Socio-Economic and Political Analysis*, New Delhi: Lancer, 1982, Chapter 11, Hostile Aliens, Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil:*

Migration and Ethnic Conflict in India, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978, Chapter Three, When Migrants Succeed the Natives Fail: Assam and its Migrants. Also see Monirul Hussain, *The Assam Movement*, n. 5.

29. B.P. Misra, *The Assam Agreement and its Likely Fall Out*, Guwahati: Omson, 1985
30. For some account of concern at the immigration see Jogesh Chandra Bhuyan, "Asomar Dharmiya Janagathani: Ati Alochana", an article in Assamese on Assam's religious demography, *Asam Bani*, August 11, 18 and 25, 1995; for a different perspective see Amalendu Guha, "Bideshi!, Bideshi!!, Bideshi!!!", and article entitled "Foreigners!, Foreigners!!, Foreigners!!!", *Dainik Agradoot*, September 19, 1996. B.G. Verghese, *India's Northeast Resurgent: Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*, New Delhi: Konark, 1997, Chapter 5, Assam Accord, Discord and Resurgence. Verghese writes: "...AGP Government was viewed with great expectations. These were belied. Social discipline and administrative drive has been major causalities over the preceding years." p. 54.
31. Hiren Gohain, "Assam and the Crisis in Indian Democracy", *The Telegraph*, February 7, 1991, also P.S. Datta, n. 20.
32. See Jogesh Chandra Bhuyan and Amalendu Guha, n. 29.
33. *The Assam Tribune*, (Guwahati), June 1, 1997.
34. Monirul Hussain, "Understanding Barpeta Massacre 1994", n. 24
35. In the 1996 elections the AGP secured the support of the immigrant Muslims, who had once been for long branded as the 'vote bank' of the Congress. Maulana Abdul Haq, a sectarian and dubious character, who was recently in news for his alleged sexual scandal of grave nature, played the most crucial role in turning the Congress vote bank to AGP's favour. For some interesting observation see Jaigeswar Bora, "A Study of Election Strategy of Asom Gana Parishad" in Girin Phukon and Adil-ul-Yasin (eds) *Working of Parliamentary Democracy and Election Politics in Northeast India*, New Delhi: South Asian Publishers, 1998, pp. 39-44
36. Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed and Adil-ul-Yasin, "Problems of identity, assimilation and nation-building: a case of the Muslims of Asam" in Girin Phukon and N.L. Dutta (eds), *Politics of Identity and Nation Building in Northeast India*, n. 7. pp.143-152
37. *The Telegraph*, January 4, 6, and 10, 1997. Recently three Inter Service Intelligence 'officers' were nabbed in Guwahati who were reportedly working in close collaboration with the ULFA to create

an Islamic state in the region. This was disclosed by the Chief Minister in a press conference on August 8, 1999. For details see *The Assam Tribune*, August 9, 1999

38. Abu Nasar Saied Ahmed, "The Muslim Question in Assam" in Girin Phukon (ed), *Political Dynamics in North-East India*, New Delhi: South Asia Publishers, 2000, pp.143-155
39. The only writing that merits attention is Shekhar Gupta, *Assam: A Valley Divided*, New Delhi: Vikas, 1984, Chapter 11, Bordering on Insecurity
40. Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral during his visit to Guwahati on December 6, 1997 stated that neighbouring states had been extending full cooperation in the fight against the insurgents, *The Assam Tribune*, December 8, 1997, but newspaper reports present a disturbing picture, "Bangla opposition aiding the rebels", *The Telegraph*, November 27, 1997
41. "ULFA shifting base to Bangladesh from Bhutan", *The Telegraph*, November 22, 1997, also see *The Assam Tribune*, August 28, 2002 for the latest position of ULFA camps in Bhutan now being shifted to Bangladesh in the face of the wrath of the Bhutanese Government.
42. The United Command Structure was created on January 7, 1997 amidst voice of protest within the AGP, for details see *The Sentinel*, January 7 and 8, 1997, also see Hiren Gohain, "Hopes of Peace Dashed: Business as Usual Despite Political Change", *Economic and Political Weekly*, November 2, 1996, pp. 2903-2905. In Nagaland the NSCN (I-M) has been adhering to cease fire and appears to be amenable to talks and the Church has been playing a constructive role to restore peace in the state. But peace is still illusive despite the newspaper reports on ULFA's desire to talk, of course on hard conditions, see *The Assam Tribune*, December 10, 1997. Contrary to general expectation, recently it gave a call for broad base struggle against the government rejecting the appeals to it by leading citizens and forum for national reconciliation, *The Assam Tribune*, April 7, 1998
43. Rajni Kothari, "More Divided than United" in V.N. Narayanan and Jyoti Sabharwal (eds), *India at 50: Bliss of Hope and Burden of Reality*, New Delhi: Sterling, 1997, pp. 19-30, quotation p. 30

Saga of the Assamese Middle Class : 1826-1921 a review article

Amalendu Guha

INTEREST in the role of the middle class in the socio-economic history of British Assam became a serious research concern since the early 1970s, following Hiren Gohain's two seminal articles – 'Asamiya Madhyabitta Samajar Itihas', *Natun Prithivi* (1972-73) and 'Origins of the Assamese Middle Class', *Social Scientist* (August 1973). Then followed our *Planter-Raj to Swaraj : Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, (1977) and *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam : Society Polity Economy* (1991). B. Datta Ray, ed., *The Emergence and Role of middle class in North-East India* (1983), Manorama Sharma's *Social and Economic Change in Assam : Middle Class Hegemony* (1990), Prafulla Mahanta's *Asamiya Madhyabitta Shrenir Itihas* (1991), Anil Raychaudhuri's *Namani Asamar Madhya Shreni* (1998) and Sailen Barkataki's *Asamiya Madhya Shreni* (2000) and the other contributions. The latest addition to this Assam-specific genre of socio-economic studies is Rajen Saikia's *Social and Economic History of Assam 1853-1921* (Manohar, Delhi, 2000) which is presently under review. All these contributions throw light on the origins, growth and role of the newborn Assamese middle class for whose safe delivery, Saikia gives credit of midwifery to the British rule.

Saikia's 258-page narrative is divided into six chapters followed by a Conclusion. His periodisation is sound. He discusses the collapse of the medieval aristocracy and the decline of old handicrafts – the latter for the sudden lack of patronage – in course of the first two chapters, with retrospect since 1826. In most cases, he convincingly argues that the decline of old handicrafts was not so much due to negligent foreign rule as due to their own inherent technological and market limitations. The discussion is not however on an even keel. For example, four-and-a-half pages have been devoted to relatively unimportant wood and ivory carving, while the still surviving bell-metal industry has received not even half-a-page space, though primary source materials throwing light on its

conditions are amply within easy access. Again, the chapter on the dying aristocracy is rather overburdened with monotonous details of pension petitions of, and pittance granted to erstwhile princes, potentates and their widows. The discussion on the survival of the handloom industry is also not very satisfactory. The reader misses the story of how, during 1903-1921, the introduction of fly-shuttle, mill-yarn and factory-type organization, in particular, helped such survival.

Much of Saikia's interest in anecdotes and trivialities is also reflected in the third chapter - 'Agriculture and Peasantry' as well as the fourth chapter - 'The Changing Social Spectrum'. "Racial memory has it that", he writes, "*juí, pani, ywin* (fire, water and white ants) were the three calamitous agents of undoing every single reserve of private wealth". However, for lack of records, he laments and then mentions only a few stray local incidents taking place from time to time. Such commonplace information give little scope - he admits - to the economic historian for generalization. So he takes his reader to the 1666 Great Fire of London and to Sarat Chandra's novel *Grihadaha* (House Burning, 1917) for a 'feel' of the gravity of such incidents. As to white ants, we are simply informed that in Assam it was a 'veritable plague' according to John M'Cosh (1837) and that according to a British lady of Lucknow. "The white ant is a cruel destroyer of goods..."

What is surprising is that, after listing such not so relevant details, Saikia concludes that of the three calamitous agents, fire was the most destructive. In the absence of aggregative quantitative data on estimated damages for comparison, how could he say so? Obviously he does transgress the historical method. May be, water (floods) was more destructive than fire - who knows ?

The new government institutions, western education and tea industry - all these factors led to a combined progressive impact upon the Assamese society, thus giving birth to a forward looking new Assamese middle class. The colonial rule, on the whole, came as a blessing. By collaborating with this rule consciously, the aforesaid class could seize the newly opened-up opportunities to grow further. Thus it served both its own as well as the people's interests. Inherently weak and underdeveloped though, it nevertheless was able to make a modest entry into the expanding tea industry. The development of Assamese language and literature, indeed a principal bourgeois task, was also hastened by this middle class. In many respects, thus it did provide competent leadership to the society it belonged to. This is, in a nutshell, the central thesis of Saikia.

We have reservations about this thesis. No doubt, the British rule was not an unmixed evil. It did play a dual role, destructive as well as regenerative. But British rule, Marx rightly said, was only

'an unconscious tool of history'. In the process of colonialisation a dependent colonial middle class was automatically and integrally created; sick and deformed though from its very birth. It was therefore incapable of growing into a mature bourgeois class and lead the mass struggles with courage and conviction against imperialism. In other words, colonial capitalist development was a distorted development. This naked truth does not come out of Saikia's analysis. On the contrary, it appears that he has swallowed the theory of progressive imperialism and its civilizing mission.

According to Saikia, it was through compromises with imperialism that the Assamese society could develop itself up to a point, wherefrom meaningful action-oriented struggle for freedom could begin in the Gandhian era. He exonerates the moderate/loyalist middle class leaders of the sin of collaborating with imperialism. He suggests that, in a critical situation, they were successful in preserving and strengthening the endangered Assamese identity.

Saikia has a point when he says (p. 232) that 19th century (and early twentieth century) middle class leaders should be judged not by present-day standards, but by those of their own times. Yet we cannot agree with him when he says that Assamese leaders played the same kind of role, as did their contemporary moderate congressmen of all-India stature. Dadabhai Naoroji, for example, sharpened the anti-imperialist ideology by showing how surplus extraction by the British impoverished India (Drain theory). R. C. Dutt also did the same thing through his historical/analytical writings. Later Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar's "*Deshar Katha*" (1909) containing these findings of Naoroji and Dutt in summary form became an ideological weapon indeed even in the hands of the 'fire-breathing' Bengal terrorists, contrary to Saikia's expectations. Nothing like this happened in Assam. Of course, moderate nationalists' tactical utterings of allegiance to the Raj need not be taken in their face value; they are to be judged by the intrinsic value of their deeds. A distinction has also to be made between genuine moderate nationalists and committed or opportunist loyalists when dealing with the 19th and pre-Gandhian 20th century history. In our view, even moderates ceased to qualify for being called nationalists during the Gandhian era. Saikia's 'creative minority' does not pass this test. This does not however mean that they were all necessarily devoid of local or any other kind of patriotism. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, and for that matter, also Kamalakanta Bhattacharya were exceptions.

Saikia commits yet another error of judgment while assessing the 19th century peasant struggles, particularly that of 1893-94. According to him, peasants' participation in the angry outbursts against the land revenue hike was "inspired, not spontaneous. It was more with bravado than conviction that they registered their

protest". "Mauzadars and landlords were also hard-pressed. They took advantage of the peasants' anger and directed it against the government" (Saikia, pp.107-8). This is not true.

The historical method demands that, for saying so, Saikia should have had enough evidence, A single reference – the opinion of M'Cabe (district magistrate) is not enough; it needs further corroboration. Such corroboration he seeks from a secondary source, again mainly based on the same M'Cabe. "A Guha writes, 'the non-cultivating land-owners Brahmins, Mahantas and Dolois apparently took the initiative and a leading role'" (emphasis added, *ibid*). We qualified our observation by the word 'apparently' and further stated that "it was the poor peasantry and other sections of the rural poor" who actually lent a militant character to the movement, Pusparam Kahar being one of them. We also referred to folk memory as depicted in *Dalipuram* which convinces one of the spontaneous mass character of the movement. Yet Saikia misconstrues our text (Guha : 1977, p.54) to suit his purpose. He denigrates the peasant movement. Later research by Hiren Gohain and others has revealed more names of peasant leaders, who also played a leading role. Saikia's finding is therefore unsound and awkward. Village-level and area-level *mels* (people's assemblies) provided the collective leadership. The movement represented a united front of all land revenue rate-paying ryots including the non-cultivating landowners against the common enemy – the tax-hiking alien government and, it was joined by thousands. By their sacrifices, they were able to force the government to reduce the proposed rates of land revenue substantially. Saikia's belaboured misinterpretation of facts is not only tendentious, it is also anti-people.

Contesting Manorama Sharma's conclusion that the social roots of the Assamese middle class can be traced back to early British revenue-officers including Mauzadars and Satra institutions, Saikia rightly argues that the social base was actually much wider. "The Assamese middle class was the compound product of colonial bureaucracy, English education and tea industry". No doubt, these factors played the key role in the new middle class's formation. But wherefrom, from which social class, did men come forward for entry into these fields ? This basic question remains unanswered.

Saikia refuses to drive his analysis deeper. He rather makes a sample survey perfunctorily only to discover that, out of some sixty or so of middle class personalities mentioned for their eminence in his book only three came from Satras and another three from Mauzadar families. This is an undercount. Ratneswar Mahanta, Debeswar Goswami, Padmahas Goswami and Amritabhushan Dev Adhikari, whose names too find mention in his book – they also hailed from Satras. So did unmentioned Simhadatta Dev Adhikari as well. On the other hand, Maniram Dewan, Harakanta Barua, Haribilas Agarwala, Bisturam Barua and Uttam Chandra Barua

too hailed from families holding *maujas*. Thus, we find that both Mauzadars and Satra institutions played a much larger role in the formation of the Assamese middle class, than Saikia concedes.

Saikia's failure to trace back the origins of the Assamese middle class to the feudal class of peasant-exploiting landowners seems to stem from his wrong observation that "Ahom Kings, as a matter of policy, did not favour the growth of feudalism in Assam as a distinct social system" (p.14) and that the old aristocratic elite underwent total destruction during early British rule (1826-53). It was only the secular/temporal part of the aristocratic elite that underwent total eclipse, affecting the Ahom feudal families. But the feudal properties of the high caste families and their influence mostly survived and they were quick to enter into early collaboration with the British. It is they, who, possessed of land resources and literacy, provided the seed-bed for the emergence of the new middle class. They did continue to carry a heavy baggage of some of the old values. Yet, while seeking the new opportunities, they also gradually picked up new values. This was thoroughly discussed in our essay "Agrarian structures in the late nineteenth century" included in my book (Guha : 1991, pp.219-79), but not consulted and considered by Saikia. Our conclusion therein was as follows.

"The big landholders (mostly of high caste origin) who had survived were quick to shift their loyalty to the new regime, and they tried to avail themselves of modern education and other opportunities brought by it. Mauzadars, government servants and men of professions rose mostly from families with a landholding and high caste background.Thus the class of big landholders was composed of two broad sections – one backward-looking with old roots and values, and another forward-looking striking new roots and acquiring new values. The difference was, of course, more of culture than of roots In a contemporary satirical poem, the former were called dangariyas (gentry) and the latter babus" (ibid, p. 242).

Despite best efforts, the new Assamese middle class could account for only 2 to 3 percent of the total acreage and investments in Assam tea during the seventy years under review or even thereafter. Assam's rate of urbanization remained as low as 2.4 per cent in 1901, 3.2 per cent in 1921 and 4.2 per cent in 1961. In fact, the railways under construction by-passed the then most populous town - Barpeta. Actually the so-called towns were nothing but glorified villages, still maintaining their vital direct links with agriculture. Yet Saikia exaggerates their importance in the formation of the new middle class as well as the importance of their urban roots.

By 'modernisation' he perhaps means only some development of communication, transport, literacy/education and a few extractive industries (all with very feeble linkage effects within the province) and not industrialization *per se*. He should have noted that the tea industry was more of agricultural than of industrial nature, and it served the imperial rather than local priorities. Its pre-capitalist labour practices, too, were not conducive to growth of free wage-labour. To an economist, the concept of modernization includes genuine industrialization, involving also the setting up of consumer goods industries with strong local linkage effects.

Saikia does a good job when he elaborately discusses the visionary role of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan as a modernizer. The latter's understanding of modernity was perfect. He made a significant point in his 1853 memorandum. "No permanent advancement in agriculture could be effected", he said, "until the people are relieved from the necessity of relying on a foreign country for the requisite implements of husbandry". He further stated -

"No nation can secure to itself the blessings and comforts of civilized life until it had manufactures of its own; and, in short, no country can rise to wealth or importance that is deficient or imperfectly versed in the art of manufacture".

Unfortunately, Saikia misses this very point while otherwise competently analyzing Dhekial Phukan's positivist thoughts. Throughout the British rule, more particularly during the period under review, Assamese society continued to remain deficient in the art of manufacturing, despite England's and the new middle class's 'good' work' (Guha : 1991, p.264).

We also do not agree with Saikia's suggestion that "he (Anandaram) was unable to perceive the negative impact of alien rule" (p.230). At its best, it is only a half-truth. Though formally he remained loyal to the government, he was not afraid to criticise it, as and when necessary. For example, in 1853 he boldly pointed out to Moffat Mills.

".....we still feel ourselves impressed with an idea, that notwithstanding the superiority of the British system of administration to any under which we have hitherto lived, it is not in its present form so well adapted to the peculiar condition and habits of the people as could reasonably be expected from the liberal and free constitution of England. It has hitherto failed in its effects to improve in any material degree the condition or prosperity of the country and although twenty-eight years have elapsed since the annexation of Assam to the British empire little perceptible change has been effected in the condition

of the people and the good government of the Province".
(Mills' Report, Reprint, p. 94).

After stating that "the general aspect of the Province indicates the administration of an Asiatic Government rather than that of enlightened England", he pinned his hopes on England, but these were never fulfilled. Science, technical education and manufacturing industries were conspicuous by their absence. In our view, Dhekial Phukan was, like Naoroji and Dutt, a moderate nationalist, not a loyalist *per se*. That is why, we presume, he was under watch of the British authorities, during the 1857 rebellion, as Gunabhiram informs us.

Saikia's "creative minority", that is the middle class elite, were a different genre. They were mostly down on their knees before the ruling authorities. Unlike Dhekial Phukan, they used abusive derogatory adjectives whenever they referred to the so-called 'low castes' and tribal people, as scholars (Indibar Deuri, Debabrata Sharma, Paramananda Mazumdar) have recently shown. While Dhekial Phukan believed in the peaceful co-existence of Assamese and Bengali languages side by side in multi-lingual Assam, the 'creative minority' invented the myth of Bengali clerks' conspiracy theory at the close of the 19th century to spite their rival, the resident Bengali middle class by identifying it as the villain responsible for harming the cause of the Assamese language. Yet another difference is to be noted. While Dhekial Phukan opposed the idea of introducing zamindari settlement in Assam, an ideology emerged later within the Assamese middle class that found merit in the system. This ideology was represented by the Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha in 1897 and also by Lakshminath Bezbarua (1864-1938) [Guha ; 1991, pp. 269-70, 279]. We need not forget that Jagannath Barua, Manik Chandra Barua and their other colleagues chose a big zamindar of then Goalpara district to be the founder-president of the Assam Association (1903-20).

All said, though the central thrust of Saikia's thesis is not acceptable to us, his book is nevertheless a serious academic work, marked with some originality and amply demonstrated erudition, raising old issues for a fresh debate. The empirical side of his research is somewhat weak, which he tries to make up by the use of imagination. His subjectivity (reflecting his point of view that individual heroes make history) does not produce the effect of impartial restructuring of the reality. In the use of the comparative method, he is eclectic, freely seeking ideological support from various thinkers like Carlyle, Toynbee, Braudel, H. G. Wells and even Karl Marx, quoting them in and out of context. The book is nevertheless readable, with all its anecdotes and rhetoric, clarity of expression and a captivating style of presentation. Best is his 'anatomy of the language dispute' whereby he demolishes the myth of Bengali-clerk-conspiracy as well as the bogey of Bengali expansionism. None before

him did provide us with such a comprehensive and balanced discussion on the Bengali-Assamese conflict of the period. His may be taken as the last word in this relevant debate.

Incidentally and lastly, while giving credit to Kefayat Ullah's book on agriculture in Bengali (1853) as "perhaps the first book on agriculture written in any Indian language by an Indian", he should have also mentioned that this 80-page book was an adaptation of Fenwick's book on gardening in Urdu. The bibliography indicates one A. Raychaudhury as the author of two Assamese books mentioned below the name. In fact one is the autobiography of Ambikagiri Raychaudhury, a renowned conservative regionalist while the other is written by Anil Raychaudhury, a well-known communist. This confusion amuses the reader.

Paper Contributors

Dr. (Ms) Archana Upadhyay is a Reader in Political Science at Dibrugarh University.

Dr. Kalyan Das is a Lecturer at the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati.

Dr. (Ms) Vandana Upadhyay is a Lecturer in Economics at Arunachal University, Itanagar.

Dr. Atul Goswami is a Professor at the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati.

Dr. (Ms) Saswati Choudhury is a Lecturer at the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati.

Dr. (Ms) Anuradha Dutta is a Professor of Political Science at Gauhati University, Guwahati.

Dr. Bhupen Sarmah is a Reader at the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati.

Dr. A.N.S. Ahmed is the Professor and Director of the Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati.

Dr. Amalendu Guha is a retired Professor of Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata.

journal

The journal intends to provide an academic platform to scholars belonging to the north-eastern region of India as well as outside the region to project issues focused particularly on the region, express their views and analyse the issues putting them in proper perspective, both historically and as guidelines for the future.

The unique diversity of the north-eastern region in terms of ethnicity, cultural practices, languages and social institutions makes it a challenging area of the study of the social science researchers. Noteworthy, that although there has been a prolific growth of printed matters relating the area during the last few decades, most of these are devoid of solid academic contents. The ethos of the people inhabiting the region is seldom properly captured and the analyses of the problems are marked by the use of stereotype methods probably not suitable for explaining the field realities. It is therefore, strongly felt the social scientists having their base in the north-east should bear the responsibility of projecting the issues of the area and analyse them by adopting appropriate regionspecific techniques. This alone can help in creating a better understanding of the people of the north-east and their problems among the social scientists and policy makers belonging to the rest of the country. The journal is to be seen as a step in this direction. However, this must not be construed as an attempt at inbreeding. It is through the medium of this journal in particular and other publications that the Institute strives to build bridges, not walls. It will be an endeavour of the journal to initiate debate on relevant issues inviting participation of scholars of all hues and irrespective of their formal disciplines and areas of specialisation. The geographical seclusion of the north-east from the rest of the