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From the Editor

Dear colleagues,

The humankind is going through a testing time today. The Covid 19 pandemic has already impacted our traditional social relations and norms in many ways and the future we are moving into is somewhat uncertain. Social scientists have a challenging responsibility ahead in analysing and conceptualising the changing social realities. We hope to see some insightful and illuminating research in the near future.

It is my pleasure to present the seventh issue of *Explorations*. The present issue consists of five papers published under the ‘Articles’ category and three papers under the ‘Research in Progress’ category.

The first article, titled *Politicisation of Ethnicity: A Study on the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam*, by Dipika Paul analyses politicisation of ethnicity as a discourse which looks into the process whereby ethnic groups based on their identity articulate their socio-political demands. The paper presents a discussion on the movement of identity assertion by the Bodos and the Koch Rajbongshis in Assam through the interplay of ethnicity and politics.

The second article, titled *Adivasis and Schooling: A Critical Reflection on Perspectives*, by Charles Varghese reflects on the ways in which the ideas like ‘adivasi’ and ‘education’ have been conceived in the Indian context and its implication on the policies and programmes related to the social transformation of the adivasi communities including schooling. The paper explores the contours of possible future course of action and argues that for comprehensive development the adivasi worldview should be a vantage point for the mainstream development discourse.

The next article, titled *Understanding State Sovereignty and Contestations around Land Governance in Guwahati City*, by Trishna Gogoi argues that in the context of the urbansphere, fragmented authority within the bureaucracy creates ambiguities and contestations over land leading to structural violence that governance grapples with. Discussing the governance of land in Guwahati city, the paper presents a disaggregated view of the institutional framework and power

hierarchy in analysing how sovereignty is interpreted in practice and how it impacts the urban fabric of the city.

The following article, titled *Two Leaves and a Bud: Revisiting the Colonial Spaces from Plantation to Bagan (garden)*, by Juri Baruah highlights the plantation landscape which has dynamic, complex and dialectical relations to capitalist process and becomes a unique site of work produced and reproduced by the colonial power structure. The paper emphasises on the belongingness to the bagan and how it is regarded as a contested space for the labourers in general and women labourers in particular.

The last article, titled *Internet Use among Tweens and Teens: Threats, Risks and Concerns*, by Kanika Panwar conducts a risk analysis of the threats faced by tweens and teens from internet use. Based on the concepts of 'risk society' and 'information security', the paper argues that to manage the risks and threats and to provide structural solutions for the same, an investigation into risk management of threats and risks among tween and teen internet use is highly required.

The first paper under Research in Progress by Shapna Medhi is titled *Conflict and Compensation in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Kaziranga National Park, Assam*. Based on empirical research conducted in the vicinity of Kaziranga, this paper deals with the dynamics of human-wildlife and park management-local community conflict. The paper questions the inadequacies of the present compensation policy and argues for an effective compensation policy and process for reducing conflict and building trust between the park management and the local communities.

The second paper under Research in Progress by Kunal Debnath is titled *Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation: A Study of the Naths of West Bengal and Assam*. The paper discusses the ambiguous nature of the Nath identity by historically situating the status of Naths and later arriving at an intra-community identity conflict and contention over OBC reservation. The paper highlights the debate between the 'radical' Naths on one hand who want to forsake the OBC status and the 'pragmatic' Naths on the other hand who want to retain the OBC status.

The third paper under Research in Progress by Draghima Basumatary is titled *Cross-Cultural Understanding of Witchcraft Accusations*. The paper explores the

genealogy of witchcraft accusations which shows that witchcraft accusations need not be limited only to the realm of rituals and superstitions; rather these are dramatic outbursts of latent issues particular to each culture in modern times. The paper highlights that witchcraft accusations bring into fore rising socio-economic inequality, signifying tribal communities as hierarchical and not egalitarian as assumed.

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

Stay safe.

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Article: Politicisation of Ethnicity: A Study on the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam

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**Politicisation of Ethnicity:
A Study on the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam**

--- Dipika Paul

Abstract

Politicisation of ethnicity as a discourse looks into the process whereby ethnic groups based on their identity articulate their socio-political demands. It looks into different dimensions of the interplay between ethnicity and politics. Such interplay is visible in Northeast India and in the state of Assam. The developing socio-political context of Assam and Northeast India since the colonial period led to the rise of ethnic mobilisation in the region. Bodos and Koch-Rajbongshis are the two ethnic groups of Assam who are associated with long drawn movement for identity assertion. Such movements raise questions about their distinct identity and the factors that led to such assertion. The present paper attempts to answer those questions by analysing their identity assertion movement within the framework of politicisation of ethnicity.

Key words: Assam, Bodos, Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, Koch-Rajbongshis, Politicisation of ethnicity

Introduction

The inter-relationship of ethnicity and politics which gained importance in the contemporary world led to the new discourse of the politicisation of ethnicity. The discourse tries to understand how ethnic groups get mobilised and articulate demands for improving their socio-economic and political status (Wani, 2013). Such interplay of ethnicity and politics is visible in Northeast India. Immediately after Independence, mobilisation among the *Naga*, the *Mizo* and the *Khasi* tribal groups led to the formation of new states. The formation of states motivated other ethnic groups for mobilisation in Assam. Among them, the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis are the ethnic groups in Assam associated with movements for identity assertion. Majority of the people of these two ethnic groups live in the western part of Assam in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri,

Bongaigaon and Goalpara districts. A large number of the Koch-Rajbongshis also live in the northern part of West Bengal – Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda districts. Their socio-political movements are an ideal representation of the process of the politicisation of ethnicity. This paper looks into different aspects of the politicisation of ethnicity by focusing on the identity assertion of the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis within a theoretical framework. It focused on the two groups due to their commonality in factors and methods of identity assertion. To analyse the process of identity assertion among these two groups within the framework of politicisation of ethnicity, the paper relies on review of relevant literatures and memorandum of organisations.

Ethnicity: A Conceptual Understanding

The term ethnicity, although entered into the academics in 1960s, it has been in use in different forms like *ethnikos* or *ethnic* since middle age. In this period, it was used to refer ‘others’ like non-Christians, non-Jews. However, by the middle of 19th century, the term was used for people sharing similar characteristics (Tonkin et al., 1996, p. 21). During 20th century, in America it was used for the immigrants from the western European nations (Green, 2006). Since 1960s the concept of ethnicity has been interpreted from different perspectives. Primordialism, the dominant perspective of ethnicity in 1960s, viewed ethnicity as a ‘given’ aspect of the society. The main advocate of primordialism, Clifford Geertz believed that primordial attachment emerges from blood ties and kinship relationship (Brown & Langer, 2010, pp. 412-413). Primordialism believes that ethnicity is the result of biological process and therefore, unique and unchanging. However, by 1970s primordialism started losing hold, for its inability to explain the changes that takes place among ethnic groups over the period of time (ibid., p. 413).

A major shift in the understanding of ethnicity came since 1970s with the emergence of constructivism and instrumentalism (Green, 2006). Instrumentalism argues that ethnicity is a socially constructed phenomenon, used by different interest and status groups as ‘a social, political and cultural resource’ (Cohen, 1996, p. 8). It gives importance to the role of elites in perpetuating differences based on ethnic identity. Instrumentalism believes that the elites help ‘to transfer potential hostility’ within their community, which emerges due to ‘inequalities and power disparities’, against ‘the elites and subjects of other communities’

(Brown & Langer, 2010, p. 413). However, instrumentalism was criticised for its inability to analyse the participants' sense of primordialism i.e., sense of the permanent element of their ethnic identity (Cohen, 1996, p. 9). In 1980s constructivism emerged, which viewed ethnic identities as both 'a cultural endowment' and 'malleable'. However, unlike primordialism, it tries to focus on the circumstances, which increases the significance of ethnic identity in modern society (Brown & Langer, 2010, pp. 413-414).

Although constructivism and instrumentalism became popular since 1970s, the prelude to such assumptions began much earlier in the work of Max Weber (1922). Weber opined that 'ethnic group does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere.' (Weber, 1996, p. 35). He believed that any collective feeling among the members is the result of political action and it is the pursuit of collective interest that instigates people to organise for 'ethnic identification' (Jenkins, 1997, p. 10). However, a concrete framework to instrumentalism and constructivism was forwarded by thinkers like F. Barth (1969), A. Cohen (1974), and P. Brass (1991). Barth believes that since ethnicity is a non-static phenomenon, it should not be studied only in terms of cultural traits. He observed that the participation and self-evaluation in terms of the group values helps individuals to continue their membership in the larger ethnic groups. For him ethnic identity is the result of human experience and therefore, more than the cultural traits, attention should be focussed on the process of 'the creation and the maintenance of the borders' (Barth, 1969, p. 16). Following instrumentalism, Cohen observed that ethnic group is constructed in order to 'help people pursue or defend their political or economic interests' (as cited in Sabharwal, 2006, p. 11). In this process, Cohen (1974) and Brass (1991) emphasised on the role of elites who in order to fulfil their political goals, manipulate ethnic symbols and identity to gain the support of the masses (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996, p. 8).

A well formulated analysis of instrumentalism and constructivism in the development of ethno-nationalism is forwarded by Ernest Gellner (1983), Benedict Anderson (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1983). Thinkers like Gellner (1983) and Baruah (1994) understand nationality as a synonym of ethnic group and nationalism as the politics of identity. Gellner (1983) used instrumentalist approach in conceptualisation of nationalism. He observed that nationalism is a product and necessary condition of industrial society. For him the notion of nation is a fabricated phenomenon, created and conceived by the elites. However, unlike

other instrumentalist theorists, he did not believe that creation of nation is to benefit the elite. He believed that the transition from agrarian to industrial society raised the need for homogenised culture (Finkel, 2013). Industrial society generates need of common language for standardised communication among people. Such common language creates the need for 'cultural identification'. In Gellner's words, 'modern people do not in general become nationalist from sentiments or sentimentality atavistic or not, well-based or myth-founded: they become nationalists, through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however, obscurely recognized' (as cited in Kumar, 2010, p. 397). Thus, ethnicity is viewed as the product of modern society.

Constructivism reached another level in Anderson's 'imagined communities', which argued that '...all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined' (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). For him, nation is imagined political community because the members of the nation 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (ibid.).

Hobsbawm's 'invented traditions' also helped the development of constructivism as a perspective. In his view, traditions are not necessarily permanent phenomena in modern period. He held that tradition many a time is of recent origins and sometimes it is 'invented' (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1). For him, invented traditions are the result of the novel environment but it is not completely detached from the old situation and often invented tradition uses ancient materials. He observed that often '...the customary traditional practices such as folksongs, physical contests, marksmanship were modified, ritualized and institutionalized for the new national purposes' (ibid., p. 6). These invented traditions are the result of social engineering, which enables the ruling elites to channel the energies of the newly enfranchised citizens for their own benefit (Kumar, 2010, p. 396). Therefore, in their common perception ethnic groups are visualised as artificially created and not an eternal phenomena. Hence, 'as they can be created, they can also be destroyed...' (Green, 2006).

The discourse of ethnicity is, further, developed with the contribution of other perspectives. Armstrong (1982) and Smith (1986), following ethno-symbolic approach, emphasised on the role of symbols and myths in unifying people and ensuring their persistence. Armstrong (1982) considers 'nostalgia for past lifestyles, religious civilisation and organisations, imperial mythomoteurs and

language fissure' helps in creating ethnic identities. For Smith (1991) ethnic is 'a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more common elements of culture, including an association with a homeland, and some degree of solidarity, at least among elites' (as cited in Sutherland, 2011, p. 26). Hechter (1975) and Nairn (1977) widened the discourse of ethnicity emphasising on the factor of relative deprivation. They held that capitalism with its unequal development provides advantage to some regions and puts some region in backward state. The groups living in these backward areas get mobilised ethnically because of the sense of relative deprivation (as cited in Kumar, 2010, p. 395). Therefore, since the advent of the concept of ethnicity in academics, ethnicity is understood in relation to different dimensions. In this discourse, ethnicity is also studied as 'a political phenomena'.

Ethnicity and Politics: A Theoretical Understanding

Scholars predicted years ago that ethnicity would disappear in modern society. In contrast, ethnic identity seems to be more clearly articulated than before (Anttonen, 2003, p. 53). One of the reasons for its persistence has been the practical applicability of it as an instrument in the competition for scarce resources (ibid., p. 54). Rothschild believes that ethnicity survives in the modern times because of the process of politicisation of ethnicity (Rothschild, 1981, p. 30). Therefore, ethnicity should not be ignored as epiphenomenal, rather should be viewed as 'a political phenomenon'. Such understanding of ethnicity since 1980s has led it to study not in terms of cultural traits, rather to analyse the circumstances under which culture, tradition and history are used as a political tool (Anttonen, 2003, p. 53). Such concern has given rise to the discourse of ethnopoltics as a new domain, which studies the process of the politicisation of ethnicity.

Politicisation of ethnicity refers to the process of ethnic groups being 'politically conscious and organized' (Garg, 2007). To politicise ethnicity, Rothschild viewed, is to render people aware of the relevance of politics on their ethnicity and vice versa; to develop their concern about the relationship between politics and ethnicity; their group consciousness and thereby, direct the behaviour in the political sphere (Rothschild, 1981, p. 6). Anttonen held that the ambiguity, which is inherent in the ethnic symbols leaves scope for manipulating it politically (Anttonen, 2003, p. 54). It is similar in the case of myths where different version of same myths can be created for different political purpose. Cohen (1996)

identified four features of the politicised ethnicity. Firstly, the present day ethnicity is the result of interaction between ethnic groups, which often takes the form of struggle for some 'strategic positions of power' in places of employment, development and education as such. The struggle becomes more intensified when accessibility to powers differs based on tribal identity, as tribal groups tend to organise politically to participate effectively. Secondly, the tribalism has both dynamic and continuity elements within it. Continuity of ethnic groups exists through customs and social formation, whereas change can be observed in its functions. Thirdly, various traditional customs of ethnic groups are used as an idiom and mechanism for political gain. Lastly, ethnic grouping remains informal as it is never incorporated into the formal framework of the economic and political power as a state or region. If any ethnic group is recognised as a region or state it will no longer remain within the framework of ethnicity, rather it will be a nation (Cohen, 1996, p. 84).

The work of prominent thinkers on ethnicity and politics such as Barth (1969), Cohen (1969), Rothschild (1981), D. Horowitz (1985), Brass (1985, 1991), Hechter (1975) and some others have showed the conditions, which instigated the politicisation of ethnicity. The reason for the increasing politicisation of ethnicity lies in the modern society. The process of modernisation and globalisation in a multi-ethnic society has generated inequality by conferring benefits to some groups and debarring some others. Under such situation politicised ethnicity becomes an effective instrument for those who wanted to maintain or change the existing unequal structure in the 'competition for power, status and wealth' (Rothschild, 1981, pp. 2-3; Brass, 1991, p. 25). The competition on ethnic lines creates greater consciousness among people about their identity (Chee-Beng, 2010, p. 443). Referring to the process of politicisation of ethnicity, Rothschild describes it as 'a dialectical process' (Rothschild, 1981, p. 3), which on one hand, emphasises in preserving the singularity of the ethnic groups and on the other hand, uses the modern skills and resources of the members of ethnic groups to transform them into political conflict groups. Broadcasting of sacred texts through modern innovation such as radio and television reinforces the sense of belonging to the unique collective identity (ibid., p. 30). The political scenario of modern society seem to emphasise more on diversity and differences giving rise to a new essentialism whereby all differences are considered as inherent and crucial (Anttonen, 2003, p. 55).

In this process of politicisation, the state's policies of positive discrimination on ethnic lines provide scope for the politicisation of ethnicity (Brass, 1985, p. 8). Such policies generate the need to manipulate identities to gain access to resources. Chee-Beng observed that such state policies always influence the formation of ethnic group, realignment and redefinition of identities (Chee-Beng, 2010, p. 443). Moreover, the existing cultural differences and objective inequality among groups do not necessarily develop them into mobilised groups (Rothschild, 1981, pp. 2, 27; Brass, 1991, p. 26). The elites, to win over the competition for resources, instigate the members that without solidarity their identity and culture is at stake (Rothschild, 1981, p. 27). Considering the significance of their role in ethnic identity formation, the elites are referred to as 'political entrepreneur', 'ethnic entrepreneurs' and local elites (Rothschild 1981, p. 2; Brass 1991, p. 26). Brass observed that when local elites rise in conflict against the external elites it leads to 'ethnic self-consciousness', 'ethnic demands' and ethnic conflict (Brass, 1991, p. 26). He argued that the elites play a major role in the transformation of the ethnic groups into ethnic nationalism. Chee-Beng (2010, p. 446) and Anttonen (2003, p. 60) observed the role of elite in ethnic mobilisation among Malay and Kven respectively. For Rothschild, the major condition for ethnic mobilisation along with primordial difference is the elite's capacity in the competition for scarce resources (Rothschild, 1981, p. 29). Therefore, he held that the formation, consolidation and politicisation of ethnic group is a mobilisation process led by elites and result of the challenges brought out by modernity in the form of competing group and alien values. Thus, ethnic groups cannot be termed as 'primordial tout court' (ibid., p. 30).

Politicisation of ethnicity, thus, is a process in which groups under certain conditions become conscious about the position of the group at societal level and thereby, use their identity to improve or maintain their position by gaining political power. Consciousness emerges as groups interact, which takes the form of struggle for resources such as political power, economic advancement or social status. Ethnicity is used because unlike other identity, it is relatively abstract and therefore, can be manipulated for political purposes. The cultural elements attached to an ethnic group such as myth, religion, language becomes a great source of unity in modern society. Moreover, when accessibility to power is based on identity, people organise more on ethnic line. Therefore, in the present day, nationalism and sub-nationalism emerge among people for fulfilment of practical and objective need. Ethnopolitics as a domain studies the conditions under which groups become conscious and use their culture, tradition and history as a political

tool. In the present paper, the identity assertions among the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis have been analysed within the framework of politicisation of ethnicity.

Identity Assertion among the Bodos

The Bodos are a plain tribal group settled in the northern part of Brahmaputra valley of Assam in the districts of Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri, Nalbari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Goalpara. The Bodos are a Tibeto-Burman speaking Mongoloid group. Sidney Endle, a British anthropologist held that the people 'known to (others) as Kacharis and to themselves as *Bada*', belongs to the Mongoloid group spread over a large territory covering the present day Assam, North-east Bengal Koch-Bihar and Hill Tippera (Tripura) (Endle, 1911, p. 4). Considering the huge number of population, Endle referred to them as a *Kachari* race which includes – *Bara (Kachari), Rabha, Mech, Dhimal, Koch, Solanimiyas, Mahaliyas, Phulgariyas, Saraniyas, Dimasas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, Haijongs, Hill Tippera, Morans* and *Chutiyas* (ibid., p. 5). In course of time, because of isolation these large groups emerged as separate communities. British scholars like S. Endle, E.A. Gates and Indian historians like K.L. Baruah agreed to the predominance of the Bodos in the large part of Assam until the advent of Ahoms (Saikia, 2009, pp. 106-107).

Although Bodos have distinct culture, in the initial phase they showed a tendency of assimilation with the Assamese society. In the religious sphere, under the influence of *Neo-Vaishnavism* large numbers of Bodos were converted (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 55). In the linguistic sphere, E.A. Gates who was in-charge of the 1891 census of Assam observed widespread assimilation of Bodos into Assamese linguistic fold (Baruah, 1999, p. 181).

However, religious assimilation received a set-back with the religious movement known as *Brahma* movement that began among the Bodos in the early part of the 20th century (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 56). The Brahma Movement under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma emerged due to the ongoing exploitation of the neo-vaishnavite preachers. Initially, Kalicharan's movement, preaching *Brahma Dharma*, tried to bring cultural and religious reforms among the Bodos. Later on, the movement turned multi-dimensional with its focus on social and economic reforms such as uplifting the educational status of the Bodos, organisation of mass meetings and adoption of new methods for agriculture (ibid., p. 58). Such multi-

dimensional effort helped in the development of an educated section of youths among the Bodos and made them conscious to revive their indigenous religion.

The linguistic assimilation was challenged by the Bodo educated middle class with the formation of socio-religious and literary organisations like *Habraghat Bodo Sonmiloni* (1912) and *Dakhinkul Sahitya Sanmiloni* (1918). These organisations published the first literatures in Bodo language in 1915-1924 written in Assamese and *Deodhai* scripts (Saikia, 2009, p. 110). Such pursuits for indigenous socio-cultural practices and literary activities created new aspiration among the educated sections of the Bodos to aspire for equal political rights.

By the later part of 1920s, while the political aspiration among the Bodos was growing, they were kept away from any discussion on the nationalist movement. Further, the negligence of the nationalist leaders towards their issue of land alienation, due to large-scale immigration, caused resentment among the Bodo youths (S. Choudhury, 2007, pp. 67-68). Such resentment was articulated when All Assam Kachari Association submitted a memorandum to the Simon commission in January 1929, demanding separate representation, reservation in education and employment for the Bodos. However, during this time although the Bodo leaders made demand based on 'their distinct civilisation' and backwardness, they did not assert their separation from greater Assamese identity. Paragraph six of the memorandum opposed the transfer of the then Goalpara district of Assam to West Bengal in which considerable number of population were Bodos. The memorandum stated that 'the habits and customs of the people of this district are more akin to Assamese than to Bangalees. We the Bodos can by no means call ourselves other than Assamese'¹. In 1933, All Assam Tribal League formed to articulate the interest of the Bodos and the plain tribes (Mahanta, 2013, p. 50). The League participated in the electoral politics of Assam in both pre and post-independence period. However, the League, being dominated by the middle class, focused on reservation in education and job and neglected the land alienation issue (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 82).

On the other hand, due to the state policy of encouraging immigration during the colonial and post-independence period, land alienation issue became rampant among the common plain tribes (Pathak, 2012, p. 22). In spite of that, in the decades immediately after Independence, the Bodo leaders showed the tendency to assimilate into the mainstream Assamese society. The Bodo leaders showed political support to the Assamese leaders at the time of reorganisation of the state

in 1954-55. On the literary front, the educated section of the Bodo leaders accepted Assamese language and extended their support during the formation of *Assam Sahitya Sabha* (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 94). Therefore, during that time mobilisation among the Bodos was not strong. It was the Assamese chauvinism, which again led to the growth of consciousness among other groups about their own identity.

Immediately after the Assam official language act of 1960, which made Assamese as the only official language of Assam, other linguistic groups of the region started a series of movements for the protection of their language. In 1962, Bodos under the leadership of *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* (BSS) (1952) raised the demand for making Bodo language as a medium of instruction in the schools of Bodo dominated areas (ibid., pp. 103-104, 107). The state government partially fulfilled their linguistic aspiration and completely neglected the ongoing land alienation process among them, which caused linguistic and economic marginalisation among Bodos. Such condition has ultimately, as Mahanta observed, led to the alienation of Bodos from the Assamese society (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51). The sentiment that grew out of such negligence provided the emotional base for the aspiration for more political power (ibid., pp. 107, 108). Therefore, by the later part of 1960s such aspiration took the form of organisations like Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) (Goswami, 2001, p. 134).

The immediate instigation for such organisational mobilisation came from the announcement made by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi about the re-organisation of Assam, which the Bodo leaders interpreted as a signal to launch autonomy movement (Misra, 1989, p. 1147). The three organisations BSS, ABSU and PTCA were able to create a 'politically conscious movement' of the Bodos in 1960s (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51). The successful participation of these organisations in the 1970s language movement helped them to emerge as a potent force. Simultaneously, script movement, which emerged in the late 1960s for separate script to Bodos, against its earlier preference for Assamese and Bengali script for Bodo language, gave impetus to the identity assertion among Bodos. The successful mobilisation during the script movement prepared the ground for homeland movement of the plain tribes.

The period 1970s signify an era of political movement of the Bodos for autonomy. At that time, PTCA led by Bodo leaders demanded for separate

homeland i.e., *Udayachal* for Bodos and other plain tribes of Assam, especially *Mishings* (ibid.). But soon after its launch two major events changed the course of the movement – firstly, the emergency period of 1975-77; and secondly, the emergence of Assam movement. After the emergency, when the senior leaders of the PTCA, in alliance with Janata Party, decided to abandon their movement for a separate state, a rift appeared in PTCA causing the formation of PTCA and PTCA (Progressive), renamed as United Liberation Nationalist Front (UTNLF). The movement for homeland was carried on by PTCA (P) (Misra, 1989, p. 1148). The rift continued during the Assam movement, while PTCA supported it, PTCA (P)/UTNLF considered Assam movement an attempt to ‘Assamise’ the tribal population (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 139).

Despite, the partial support of the Bodo leaders during the Assam movement, right after the movement resentment started growing among other tribal groups in Assam, including the Bodos. The Assam accord of 1985 made no provision for the protection of tribal groups in Assam. Moreover, the anti-tribal policy and Assamese chauvinism shown by AGP Government made the Bodos apprehensive of their identity. Criticising the AGP government’s decision of compulsory knowledge of Assamese language for government job, ABSU said that it is a way of depriving Bodo medium students from getting jobs (ibid., p. 141). This caused the identity assertion after Assam movement among the Bodos to become more emboldened. ABSU submitted several memorandums from 1985-87 with the demand to form Bodoland state for Bodos; two district councils on the southern bank of Brahmaputra river; and to enlist Bodo-Kachari of Karbi-Anglong as schedule tribes of hills (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51).

Under the leadership of ABSU a new era of homeland movement started, which shifted its focus from the pan tribals to protection and upliftment of the Bodos (Pathak, 2012, p. 20). The new era witnessed several new features such as fratricidal clash among the Bodos, emergence of militant organisations such as Bodo Security Force (BSF) and violence. This phase of the Bodoland movement came to an end with the formation of Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) after 1993 accord signed between ABSU and Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) on one side and Government of India and state government on the other (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51). But the institutional arrangement under the 1993 accord failed due to the limitations in its provisions and reluctance of the state government to implement it. Its failure not only aggravated the already operating BSF but also disappointed the ABSU (Nunthura, 2005, pp. 596-597). Such

disappointment led to the second phase of the autonomy movement for the Bodos, far more violent than the earlier phase. The rise of two extremist organisations, Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) and National Democratic Front Of Bodoland led to a process of ‘ethnic cleansing’ whereby the other ethnic groups sharing the same territory were attacked by the Bodo militants to create a territory of homogenous population (Goswami, 2001, p. 136). The severe violence ended when Government of India began peace talk with BLTF, and after a series of discussions the historic accord of 2003 was signed. Accordingly, as per the Accord, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was formed and for the first time 6th Schedule provisions of the Constitution was extended to cover the plain tribes of Assam.

Identity Assertion among the Koch-Rajbongshis

Koch-Rajbongshis are associated with the homeland movement known as Kamatapur movement since 1970s. British scholars like S. Endle (1911), G.A. Grierson (1903) mentioned that the Koches belong to the broader Bodo family (A.C. Choudhury, 2009, p. 46). In the 16th century, the community established its kingdom known as Koch or Kamatapur Kingdom having domination over large area of eastern India with its capital in Koch-Bihar (present Cooch Behar district in West Bengal). Presently, the Schedule Caste list of West Bengal mentions *Koch* and *Rajbanshi* separately and in Assam they are categorised in the OBC list as ‘Koch-Rajbongshi’ⁱⁱ. The mention of the term Koch in the ancient Indian text and their stone inscriptions in historical places indicates that the Koch identity was prevalent before any other identity. Interestingly, nowhere in the literary work of recent past the Koches were mentioned as Rajbanshi (Bhakat, 2000, p. 5). Colonial officials and some native scholars like C.C. Sanyal (1965) and S. Bandopadhyay (1998) viewed that some sections of Koch who adopted Hinduism, in course of time, came to be known as Rajbanshi. The census data until 1891 made Koch a wider category having Rajbanshi and *Paliya* people within it. But in 1901 census, Rajbanshi was formed as a wider category having all the sub-sections of Koches within it (Sanyal, 1965, p. 14). During *kshatriya* movement, because of mobilisation among the Rajbanshis, administrators attempted to separate the Koches and the Rajbanshis. However, due to ongoing assimilation the officials found it difficult to separate the people (ibid.). Thus, there can be Rajbanshis who may not be Koch and there are Koches who may not be Rajbanshi.

In the early 20th century, with the emergence of kshatriya movement, kshatriya identity was attached to the community. The assertion for such identity lies in the socio-political changes taking place in the north Bengal. The annexation of Koch kingdom in 1773 by the British ruler opened the region for large-scale immigration of upper caste Bengali-Hindus. Although the patronisation of Brahminism during the Koch kingdom brought changes in the indigenous practices among their subjects (Koches and Meches), in many aspects they continued their distinct aboriginal practices (Basu, 2003, p. 45). The upper caste Hindus used to practice untouchability with the Rajbanshis because of their distinct language and culture. Thus, humiliated Rajbanshi leaders aspired for higher status. Under such situation, the census conducted during the colonial rule was viewed by the Rajbanshis as means of getting recognition of the kshatriya status (ibid., pp. 63, 65). With the large-scale mobilisation, Rajbanshi leaders inscribed them as kshatriya in the 1911 census (ibid., p. 70). This was followed by the *kshatriyaisation* process among the Rajbanshis under the leadership of *Kshatriya Samiti*, a socio-cultural organisation of the community.

The identity assertion took a major turn in 1930s, when the Rajbanshi leader started claiming for Scheduled Caste status based on socio-economic backwardness (ibid., pp. 89-90). In 1933, due to mass mobilisation, Rajbanshis and Koches were enlisted as SC, in sharp contrast to their earlier claim for upper caste status. The movement for Scheduled Tribe status among the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam that began in 1967 with the demand for only en-scheduling them added another dimension to their identity (A.C. Choudhry, 2009, p. 20). But with *All Assam Koch-Rajbongshi Sanmilani* in 1980s the movement emerged with the demand for Scheduled Tribe status (Telegraph, 2002) and in 1990 All Assam Koch-Rajbongshis Students' Union (AKRASU) gave momentum to the movement for the ST status.

On the political front, by the end of the British period, the socio-religious organisations of Rajbanshis-Kshatriya Samiti and *Hita Sadhini Sabha* started aspiring for political power and became a potent force in the electoral politics in north Bengal, so far dominated by the upper caste (Basu, 2003, pp. 94-95). The socio-economic and political changes in the post-independence period had significant impact on the group. The transfer of Cooch Behar to West Bengal transformed Cooch Behar and its natives (Rajbanshis) into a periphery of West Bengal (Sen & Dutta, 2005, p. 2). In the post-independence period, due to the partition the immigration into the region got a boost, causing land dispossession

and marginalisation in the employment sector among the natives (ibid.). Culturally Rajbanshis were marginalised as their mother tongue was not recognised as language (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 76). The Rajbanshi leaders viewed such marginalisation as a threat to their identity, which led to the political movement for separate homeland in 1970s.

However, the seed for homeland was laid by Hita Sadhini Sabha (1946), which demanded 'to retain the independent status of Cooch Behar'. But due to the opposition of the non-Rajbanshi organisations and the conspiracy of the Kolkata leaders, the movement for independent state did not gain momentum (P. Barman, 2007, pp. 74, 76, 77). It regained strength in the early part of 1970s, when *Uttar Khanda Dal* (UKD) started mobilisation for the formation of separate *Kamatapur* state in north Bengal, emphasising the *Kamatapuri* identity of the Koch Rajbanshis (R.K. Barman, 2012, p. 231). However, the movement declined due to pro-people policy of the then Left Government in West Bengal and internal division in the leadership (Ghosh, 2013). Thereafter, *Uttar Banga Jati O Adivasi Sangathan* (UTJAS) demanded the protection of their *Kamatapuri* language. Simultaneously, the ethnic mobilisation among the Koch-Rajbongshi of Assam in 1960s and 1980s often raised the demand for separate state based on their *Kamatapuri* identity.

In 1990s the homeland movement in north Bengal entered a new phase with the emergence of *Kamatapur People's Party* (KPP) and *Kamatapur Liberation Organisation* (KLO). While KPP followed a moderate and democratic method of protest, KLO was an extremist organisation involved in several major militant activities in 1999-2002. But the movement suffered after the police force of Assam and West Bengal executed joint operation (Debnath, 2010, p. 247). At that time, the arrest of the moderate party leaders of KPP revealed the repressing strategy of the government towards ethnic movement (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 82). However, in subtle manner KPP continued its democratic way of protest and kept the movement alive.

Along with KPP and KLO, *Greater Cooch Behar People's Association* joined the political movement of the Koch-Rajbongshis (R.K. Barman, 2012, p. 235). In Assam, the political movement of the Koch-Rajbongshis was led by the young leaders of AKRASU. In September, 2003 in a memorandum submitted to the then Defence Minister, AKRASU raised the demand for separate *Kamatapur* state (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 23). With the arrival of the 21st century, the Koch-Rajbongshi

organisations in north Bengal and Assam jointly launched movement for separate state comprising the six districts of West Bengal – Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda; and the four districts of Assam – Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara (The Hindu, 2006). Thus, Koch-Rajbongshi movement, their issues and demands based on their identity helped in the development of a separate Koch-Rajbongshi identity and the Kamatapuri identity as an integral part of the group.

Identity Assertion within the Framework of Politicisation of Ethnicity

The movements of the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis are an ideal representation of the process of politicisation of ethnicity. Similar to Rothschild's (1981) analysis, in the case of these two ethnic groups too, their demand for homeland cannot be understood as separate from their identity. Such movement in Assam is described by Saikia (2009) as ethno-nationalism and Baruah (1999) as the rise of sub-nationalism. The groups being distinct from the other ethnic groups mobilised under certain circumstances. The historical overview suggests that both the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis assimilated into the dominant ethnic groups at different levels. However, such assimilation became one of the causes of their aspiration for separate identity.

Scholars like Prabhakara (1994) and Baruah (1999) regard the process of assimilation of the Bodos into the Assamese fold as unequal. Only those Bodos were accepted into the Assamese mainstream who gave up their native identity and accepted Hinduism and Assamese language. Thus, for Prabhakara, the Bodos were not accepted as a part of Assamese society 'while they remained Bodos' (Baruah, 1999, p. 180). Baruah opined that assertion for distinct identity is an attempt of the Bodos to come out of such unequal assimilation process (ibid., p. 183). Similarly, even after widespread adoption of Hinduism, the Koch-Rajbongshis were placed in the lower social strata by the neighbouring Hindu upper caste. The reluctance of the upper caste to accommodate the Koch-Rajbongshis into the Hindu caste system is observed in their opposition to the process kshatriyaisation in the 20th century among Rajbanshis of the Cooch Behar. Such attitude is reflected in a Rajbongshi publicist, A.K. Roy's statement that '...Hindus (who) were not prepared to accept these (Rajbanshi) men as Kshatriyas. Many Brahmins began to refuse to serve these people as their priests in religious and social ceremonies and some officials refused to record the caste of these people as Kshatriya' (Basu, 2003, p. 8). Such non-reciprocal attitude of

the dominant groups served as a factor for the groups to aspire for sub-nationalism.

Cultural chauvinism of dominant groups often leads to assertion for separate identity. The relationship between chauvinism and ethnic mobilisation can be understood in the light of Horowitz's analysis who observed that any disobedience to the language and culture of ethnic groups can emotionally mobilise them (Hashmi & Majeed, 2015, p. 325). Baruah observed that 'the practice of cultural chauvinism, insensitivity and exclusivism by the ethnic Assamese' in their everyday interaction with the Bodos created a sense of alienation among them (Baruah, 1999, p. 188). Imposition of the Assamese language through 1960s language policy and anti-tribal policy of the AGP government created resentment among the leaders of the Bodos. Therefore, identity assertion among the Bodos was an attempt to 'counter the effort of the Assamese to Assamize Assam' (George, 1994, p. 882). The cultural marginalisation became severe among Koch-Rajbongshis, because neither in Assam nor in West Bengal the mother tongue of Koch-Rajbongshis is recognised as a language. It remained as a dialect of Bengali and Assamese. Soumen Nag identified that cultural marginalisation among the Rajbanshis rose because of the politics of nomenclature, whereby all the indigenous Rajbongshi names of places in north Bengal, particularly in Siliguri town, were replaced with modern names (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 76).

At the macro level, Barth observed that the state politics creates scope for ethnic groups to organise to gain access to state distributed resources (Anttonen, 2003, p. 56). In the post-independence period, political autonomy granted to tribal groups created aspiration among those groups deprived from the positive discrimination policy. The formation of tribal state has made 'the idea of political separation from Assam both attractive and seemingly viable', especially among the Bodos (Baruah, 1999, p. 184). Such provisions, Dasgupta observed, gave an impetus to Bodo radicalism (Dasgupta, 1997, p. 358). Moreover, the state policy raised the sense of relative deprivation among others deprived of state's benefit.

Realisation of relative economic deprivation among the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis provided basis for their ethno-political demands, which is similar to the observation of Hechter (1975) and Nairn (1977). Economic deprivation occurred in land rights and employments due to the state policies in colonial and post-independence period. The land reform policy of colonial ruler emphasising

on recorded land rights caused land dispossession among the tribals including the Bodos who were practicing shifting cultivation (Baruah, 1999, pp. 189-191). In the post-independence period, while illegal transfer of land continued in tribal belts and blocks, simultaneously detribalisation of areas continued due to urbanisation and government projects. Bodo leaders claimed that almost 600 thousand acres of tribal land in Assam were engulfed in government projects. Thus, the Bodos asserted that they became 'homeless in their homeland' (J.K. Das, 1994, p. 419). Moreover, the language policy of AGP government, which proved beneficial for the Assamese-speaking people to get employment, posed disadvantage for Bodos and non-Assamese people to access education and employment (Saikia, 2009, p. 114; Dasgupta, 1997, p. 359). In case of the Koch-Rajbongshis of north Bengal, economic marginalisation occurred due to state reorganisation policy, which placed the Rajbanshi dominated areas into the periphery of West Bengal; and marginalisation in the employment and land dispossession occurred due to large-scale immigration of upper caste Bengalis in the post-independence period into Rajbanshi dominated areas of north Bengal (Sen & Dutta, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, inequality in terms of economic advancement and political benefits in the post-independence period has been one of the reasons for the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam to emerge into mobilised groups.

In the transformation of the marginalised Bodos and Koch-Rajbongshis into a mobilised ethnic group, the role of elites is visible since the initial phase of their mobilisation. Socio-economic reforms during the colonial and post-colonial period created circumstances for the formation of educated section among the two groups, who later on provided leadership to the movements. The multi-dimensional Brahma movement helped in the development of an educated section of youths among Bodos. Later on, the prominent leaders of the movements of the Bodos were drawn from the followers of Brahma Dharma. Similarly, the role of Rajbongshi leaders in the kshatriya movement was commendable in generating mobilisation. This is similar to Brass' (1991) observation on elite's role in ethno-nationalism.

In each stage of mobilisation, the active involvement of ethnic organisations of these two groups played major role in the articulation of their demands. The organisations like ABSU were able to harness the trust of the individual community members by educating them about their goals and activities (Saikia, 2009, pp. 139-140). Ethnic organisations seem to be a potent force in the electoral

politics as they view electoral politics as a means to materialise their socio-political goals. We can take into consideration Cohen's observation, who held that ethnic groups organise themselves in political groups because they visualise it as an effective means to participate (Cohen, 1996, p. 84).

Apart from these, the strong sense of solidarity among the groups, especially among the Bodos, as identified by Saikia (2009), helped organisations like ABSU to facilitate strong mobilisation. The existence of high level integration at the local level emerged from the pre-existing community affiliation (which Saikia termed as horizontal networks), made it easier for the organisation to mobilise the group members (Saikia, 2009, p. 146). Moreover, the Bodo leaders placed demands based on their historical domination and affiliation of other groups in Assam into the Bodo-Kachari family. Dasgupta rightly pointed out the advantage of the Bodos in his statement that 'credibility to recall a community's early historical accomplishments can offer valuable political capital for its political leaders' (Dasgupta, 1997, p. 357). Similarly, the Koch-Rajbongshis' demand for Kamatapur state is a representation of their nostalgia of their glorious past of Koch kingdom. Smith (1986) and Armstrong (1982) identified that cultural symbols and historical memories serve as a potent force in unifying the group. In the Koch-Rajbogshi and the Bodo ethno-national movement, such symbols are used to legitimise their political demands. Further, the 'geographical contiguous and close proximity of the Bodos' helped in their development as mobilised group by providing them a sense of a 'strong ethno-territoriality' (as cited in Saikia, 2009, p. 146). However, the Koch-Rajbongshis being more scattered geographically, the level of mobilisation and violence is not as strong as that of the Bodo movement.

Both the communities, in spite of common lineage, often come in contestation with each other. The Koch-Rajbongshis being one of the largest ethnic groups, their demand for ST status was not welcomed by the Bodos. Moreover, in 2003, when Bodoland Territorial Council was formed in the area where the Koch-Rajbongshis are inhabitants, they along with other ethnic groups rose to counter mobilisation. Such contestation can be understood in Baruah and Chandhokes' statement that state policies of providing self-government actually contributed to competitive mobilisation that increased contestation among groups and intensified conflict (Hassan, 2007, p. 3).

Conclusion

The discourse of the politicisation of ethnicity visualises ethnicity in contemporary times as ‘political phenomena’ and considers that it should not be studied separate from politics. The discussion on the movement of identity assertion by the Bodos and the Koch Rajbongshis in this paper has tried to analyse such interplay of ethnicity and politics. The study shows that multiple factors such as state policies, chauvinistic attitude of dominant groups, elites and ethnic organisations at different points of time led to the process of politicisation of ethnicity among these two ethnic groups. Therefore, the discourse of the politicisation of ethnicity can be considered as a significant approach to understand the present day ethnic movements.

Notes:

ⁱ All Assam Kachari Association submitted memorandum to Simon Commission consisting of 10 points.

ⁱⁱ In this paper, the author has used the word ‘Koch-Rajbongshi’ for the community because some of the prominent organisations of the community named it as ‘Koch-Rajbongshi’. But for the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, the author has followed the same word and spelling.

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Article: Adivasis and Schooling: A Critical Reflection on Perspectives

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Adivasis and Schooling: A Critical Reflection on Perspectives

--- Charles Varghese

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to reflect on the ways in which the ideas like ‘adivasi’ and ‘education’ have been conceived in the Indian context and its implication on the policies and programmes related to the social transformation of the adivasi communities including schooling. A critical reflection on the existing literature on these two themes in relation to the life context of adivasi communities is attempted in this paper. Inputs from the interventions in schooling, especially from the state of Kerala, have been used to demonstrate the arguments. This article explores the contours of possible future course of action especially in the context of a democratic education in a multicultural society.

Key words: Adivasi, Colonial Positivism, Critical Modernity, Rational Liberal Model, Schooling

Introduction

The *adivasi* question is not new to us. Academicians, policy planners, civil society organisations and state agencies have been deliberating on this theme ever since the colonial period and there have been divergent views since then. The debates continued even after Independence. However, the state adopted a policy of ‘integration’ as a desirable form of social change for the adivasi communities. The idea of integration was derived from the ‘Panchasheel Principles’ proposed by the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru himself. This means that the state neither wanted to isolate adivasis from the rest of the communities nor wanted to assimilate them. Integration was adopted as a middle path. This rejected the bipolar extremes like isolation or assimilation in the context of adivasi social change. Moreover, this position assured that adivasis will be allowed to develop according to their own genius. Many of the administrative measures for tribal development especially from the Fifth five-year plan were influenced by the Panchasheel Principles. Even before the Panchasheel Principles were proposed,

Indian Constitution granted special provisions for more autonomy and rights to the Scheduled Areasⁱ where privileged access was granted to the tribal people through reservation in educational and employment institutions. This special thrust was the result of two reasons: first, the distinctive and somewhat autonomous social, cultural and economic structure maintained by these communities despite relationship with the outside society; second, the deprived social conditions of these communities owing to a variety of historical injustice suffered by them at various points of history.

However, seven decades of our experience as an independent nation shows that many of these measures that we had were largely inadequate (if not a failure), not only in doing away with the inequality but also in preventing these communities from further deterioration. One can identify many reasons as to why positive discrimination and other protective measures failed to deliver the expected results. An important point that emerged from an enquiry hits at its very design, the manner in which it was primarily conceptualised and executed *by the state for the communities*.

In such a top down model, the conceptualisation of programmes and its execution was influenced by the way the state and its machinery understood who the adivasis are and what is desired for them. The developmental question of the adivasis was often posed in comparison to the ambient society. A yardstick of this sort automatically resulted in a deficit model in understanding inequality and the focus was to fill this deficit by bringing them into the standards of the ambient population. With such an orientation, measures to undo the historical inequality suffered by these communities or to develop the independent agency of the adivasis to deal with the larger social changes happening around them were never given priority. The focus was inexplicably centered around ‘developing’ them at par with the regional reference group.

Education is the foremost example of this failure. In education, integration was just understood in terms of access without a concrete plan to enrich the social, cultural and life skills brought in by the students of adivasi communities (or communities from the under privileged section for that matter). The ideals of education were shaped earlier by the nationalist state and of late by the liberal capitalist imaginations of the society. An inherent contradiction of such conceptualisation is that students from adivasi communities were looked down upon in these institutions. Their different cultural background and skills were

considered as a symbol of primitivism, underdevelopment and an obstruction to the 'modern'. Later, even when such education projects met with crisis, ironically most of the assessment studies in tribal education and development blamed the victim. The central understanding of these studies was framed around the question of 'why adivasis failed in attaining' specific goals. It was a question asked from the point of state and put the onus of failure on the subject.

On the political front, autonomy to decide on their affairs was very limited and availed only by a few. Most of these communities became estranged islands among regional linguistic societies in Post-Independent India, except in Northeastern regions (which account for only 13 percent of adivasis in India). This posed a challenge in protecting their rights and resources. In Northeastern communities, where considerable political autonomy was granted through 6th Schedule, they attempted to negotiate with the larger social changes in multiple ways. For example some of them adopted English as their official language. Roman scripts were employed to represent their languages including publishing of newspapers and books in those languages. However, Northeast witnessed violent ethnic conflicts, not just between tribals and non-tribals but among various tribal groups themselves. This means a broad identification of a collective identity as 'adivasis', beyond the specific group identities as in peninsular India, is limited at least in the Northeastern context. In its economy, the educated Northeasterners are finding scarce opportunities to accommodate them. An alternate economy which is rooted in the traditional philosophy of Northeastern communities or their social ecology is yet to evolve and shows no sign of one such full-fledged alternative in near future.

The current discourse of development is inclined towards intensifying the capitalist projects to resolve the issue. The experience of Jharkhand also gives similar signs. Despite having many chief ministers and a considerable number of legislative members from adivasi communities, the policies and programmes are adopted along a capitalist line, resulting in the displacement of large masses of adivasis from their own land in the name of development. The multinational capitalists indiscriminately invaded into the resource rich regions inhabited by the adivasi communities, and in the last twenty years in some states adivasis constituted around 40 percent among those who were displaced for various development projects (Government of India, 2002). This indicates the vulnerability of these communities and the need to uphold their political, social, economic and cultural life.

Therefore, it is evident that mere political autonomy is not enough to offer an alternative. To take the example of Kerala, one of the leading states in the development indices in the country, adivasi communities constitutes only 1.5 percent of the total population of the state. When compared to their counterparts especially from central Indian states, adivasis in Kerala fared better in many of the human development index parameters including access to school and literacy (Government of India, 2019). But their marginalisation, deprived social and economic conditions and vulnerability to exploitation continue even today. The dispossession of land of adivasis in Kerala is not associated with the present phase of neoliberalism. It is the result of colonial forest policies in the first place and peasant migration from plains to their tracts that put them in a disadvantageous position. Though Kerala has addressed the question of land to some extent, issues of adivasi's right over land and forest remain unresolved. This has accentuated over a period of time and systematically eroded their livelihood base with a lasting impact on their health, social organisation and their very existence itself. On the educational front, with the large network of schools along with many other supporting mechanisms, majority of them have got a 'potential opportunity' to access school. However, these communities are yet to make a meaningful gain out of schooling due to variety of reasons. Officially school dropout rate of adivasis is measured as 3-4 percent in Kerala. However, many field studies have raised question about this claim and some pointed out 20-22 percent of drop out/non-attendance among adivasi communities at primary and secondary levels combined (Rights Report, 2011). Besides this, in districts like Wayanad where 18.5 percent of the total population is adivasi, their participation in higher education is less than 2 percent. This happens despite the fact that many of the seats reserved for adivasis are left vacant in higher educational institutions. The serious mismatch between those who are coming out of the schools and those who are going for higher education or employment along with a considerably higher rate of drop out/absenteeism is indicative of a much deeper problem which demands a critical inquiry.

With the experience so far, in any further inquiry the questions that are posed needs to be qualitatively different from what have been asked so far. So, the focus of this paper is on the system and why it has failed to address the needs of the adivasis. In such an attempt the first point that struck my mind is the complex and divergent ideas existing among the functionaries and people at large about who is an adivasi and what kind of social change for them is desirable. With such complexity, what has been done so far for the 'best interest of adivasis' is often

done from the outsider's perceptions about the adivasi communities without bothering what these communities think about it. Thus, it is important to reflect on the 'basic assumptions' at work. Keeping this in mind, this paper tries to engage with some of the following questions especially in the context of the education of adivasis, such as: who is an adivasi?; what kind of education should be envisaged in the context of the adivasis?; what will be the implication of such an education on the adivasi communities?

'Tribe' or 'Adivasi'?

Usually we use the words tribe and adivasi interchangeably to represent the communities that are identified based on a set of criteria and listed under the 'Scheduled Tribe' category by the Indian Constitution. There are many other usages like *vanjati*, *girijan*, *janajati* with ontological reference to the communities categorised under the term tribe. However, from the time of Independence, official usage is categorised as 'Scheduled Tribe' for those tribal communities listed under article 342 of the Constitution. On the other hand, the activist groups and communities especially in the 5th schedule areas identify themselves as adivasisⁱⁱ. In the following section, I have briefly discussed some of the political, administrative and developmental significance of these usages. I am aware that these usages are highly contested among social scientists for empirical validity and coherence. However, by posing these usages in this way, I think it will certainly help us to address certain practical issues.

The idea of tribe, at least in the Indian context, was constructed by the British for their own administrative and political interests. Colonial Anthropology which is basically premised on the racial theories of 19th century was effectively used for this purpose. The earlier initiatives in this direction were taken by the British administrators themselves. For example, in 1901 as per the decision of Government of India, the then civil service officers Herbert Risley (1892) and Edgar Thurston (1909) carried out surveys in Bengal and Madras presidencies. The images of adivasis in these surveys were portrayed as primitive and uncivilised. Besides these official attempts, there were other studies that produced images about these communities with different interests. Bhangya Bhukya (2008) classified these early anthropological attempts into three categories: first, 'missionary anthropology' that emphasised on the 'primitiveness' of adivasi life and considered missionary activities as an important means in their civilising mission; second, 'romantic anthropology' that emphasised on the 'simplicity',

‘relative autonomy’ and ‘closeness to the nature’ as the way of life of these communities and wanted them to be protected from any external intervention; and the third, ‘Hindu nationalist anthropology’ that considered adivasi communities as backward Hindus, and wanted them to get assimilated in the Hindu society through the process of sanskritisationⁱⁱⁱ.

Later, Lokur committee (Government of India, 1965) who worked out the criteria for identifying a community to be declared as Scheduled Tribe in Post-Independent India was largely influenced by the imageries created by these studies. The criteria proposed by the committee were, i) Tribal origin, ii) Primitive way of life, iii) Remote habitation or geographical isolation, iv) Shyness of contact with other groups or communities, v) general backwardness in all respects. To identify tribal origin, traits like physical features, simple technology and living, tribal language and practice of animism were used. However, these criteria were not uniformly applied across the country (there were practical limitations for applying it in the strict sense). These criteria which are still in official use were created primarily out of the colonial-racial ideals and have deep rooted impact on the design of programmes and policies for the adivasis. In this perception, the adivasis were often understood in relation to the other communities, but never considered on their own right.

On the other hand, the usage of the term adivasi is rooted on a different set of assumptions about the communities in reference. The word adivasi originated from the region that belongs to the present state of Jharkhand and today is widely used as a functional equivalent to the word ‘indigenous people’ which is used by international bodies. However, this is also contested for academic and administrative reasons. Indigeneity is used to refer to those communities and state of affairs prior to the European colonisation. This may be true for countries like Australia or North America. But in Asian countries like India such a reference point is not possible as this may include many other communities including ‘Brahmins’ or ‘Syrian Christians’.

However, certain broad indicators are available for consideration as Benedict Kingsbury (2012) suggests. There are at least three sets of indications with different degree of emphasis to them: the first, ‘essential requirements’ that is constituted by the factors like ‘self-identification as a distinct group’, ‘historical experience of, contingent vulnerability to, severe disruption, dislocation or exploitation’, ‘long connection with the region’ and the ‘wish to retain distinct

identity'; the second, 'strong indicia' that is constituted by 'non dominance in the national or regional society', 'close cultural affinity with a particular area of land or territories' and 'historical continuity with the prior occupants of land in the region'; the third, 'other relevant indicia' which is constituted by 'socio-economic and socio-cultural differences from the ambient population', 'distinctive objective characteristics such as language, race, material or spiritual culture' and are regarded as 'indigenous by the ambient population or treated as such in legal and administrative arrangements'.

I am not suggesting that these are ideal set or non-problematic to be implemented, but for us what is important is the shift in 'basic assumptions' that constituted these criteria. Some of the notable features in these considerations are: i) it considers adivasis as communities on their own right, ii) understands their features in terms of the specific social-ecology they are rooted in, iii) they were taken out of the stigma attributed on them by the colonial racial theories and offered them a dignified self in the society. These considerations are important in liberating these communities from the burden of stigmatised identity attributed on them by the mainstream discourses.

Education

The aftermath of the 'tribal' conception in education is that, these communities were looked down upon by others, considered as primitive and under developed. Money was pumped in to bring them to the 'mainstream'. An appraisal of the developmental and educational programmes after Independence clearly shows that what was practiced in reality was assimilation which is a direct result of the way 'tribal' communities are perceived by the government and its machineries. This was close to an urge shown in other parts of the world like North America and Australia. In North America, the purpose of Indian American's education was considered to be a tool to kill the Indian in Indian American and to make them fully American. In Australia, the young aboriginals were taken to hostels in the cities to 'develop' them. Such aboriginal generations in Australia later came to be known as the 'stolen generation'. In a similar vein, in India, the adivasi students who were encouraged to attend classrooms met with severe estrangement with a system that urged to uproot them from their history, collective memory and every day experience. In other words, adivasi students found it difficult to survive in a relatively alienated system which considers their worldview irrelevant. So, the creation of a sense of inferiority in students was inherent in the design of our

educational system. Many studies have later pointed out that drop outs and absenteeism are in response to this estrangement in schools (Veerabhadranaika et al., 2012).

There may be different views on the nature and content of education, but everyone agrees on the need of education as a major tool of empowerment for any community or society. As it is widely recognised, there is nothing called an unbiased education. Every society imparts education with certain futuristic ideal in mind, i.e. an ideal which the society wants to achieve. It is this very ideal that makes the education project a field of power. It is important not just as a form of training, but also as a means to produce new knowledge. Colonialism used it in both ways during its reign over other societies. It used Anthropology to produce knowledge about other societies so that it could frame policies and programmes that will better facilitate their dominance. As Edward Said observed, 'Knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge' (Said, 1979, p. 36). At the level of training it also used its schools as an instrument to produce employees who are Indian in their blood and British in their thinking. Thus, the knowledge produced or the training imparted is not innocent but carries the political interest of those who are in power. The above discussion on the idea of 'tribe' clearly testifies this argument. In the following discussion, the focus is on the implication of the nature of education we envisage especially in a multicultural society like India.

Amita Sharma (2003) has traced the contemporary education models into two types of epistemologies. The first type is what she calls 'colonial positivism' which does not grant any room for human creativity and possibility of different interpretations. Such a knowledge building process makes some people subservient to those in power with the set of standards it creates. Under this system, equality is understood just in terms of access. In education it possesses a view that knowledge can be known equally by everyone, what we need to do is to create equal opportunities for everyone to get an education. A capitalist economy prefers this model as it cannot afford to tolerate an education which allows its takers to develop their own genius and imaginations or getting influenced by unpredictable results of numerous engagements of people from variety of social experience. Homogenisation of interests and straitjacketing of subjects to its pre-fixed models, based on the demands of market, is inevitable to capitalism. The second type she identifies as 'rational-liberal' and this considers knowledge as

something more than physical and the result of active and creative principles of human beings. In this position, education should be able to ‘facilitate the continuous development and expression of creativity’. This model enables human beings to discover their full potential and evolve a relationship with the world based on critical enquiry and empathy. In this approach, equality is not forcing everyone to be alike and accept what is given, but acknowledge the value of differences. It is an educational philosophy where students can only have a mere appreciation of differences and will not be able to change the system in which s/he is also a part of.

In plural societies like India, it is important to teach every member to critically appreciate one’s own experiences along with an exploration of differences of experiences out there in the society. Given the fact that the differences in society does not exist in isolation, education should also help these differences to co-exist, co-evolve and to negotiate with each other whilst keeping the respect for differences. Keeping such factors in mind, a brief reflection on some of the educational experiments in the context of Kerala has been presented in the following section.

Reflections on the Rational-Liberal model of Education in the context of Kerala

Education in a society is the indicator of the political and economic aspirations of that society. Kerala, with its long history of left political presence and anti-capitalist struggles, has always been a brewing ground for experiments in Rational-Liberal Educational model. In Kerala, this has two strands. One is the initiatives by civil society and progressive individuals. Kanavu in Wayanad and Mithra Nikethan in Thiruvananthapuram are institutions in this line. Second came from the government itself, as an initiative of Left Democratic Front in Kerala. The critical pedagogical experiment was launched in the state in 1997 which was later widely known as DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) model and this has been further developed with the introduction of State Curriculum Framework in 2008. In the following section, I will briefly reflect upon the potential of these models in addressing the question of education to the adivasis.

In the first variety, Kanavu was established in 1993 in the Wayand district of Kerala by a writer-activist KJ Baby, and Mithra Nikethan was started by a community-educationist Viswanathan in 1956 in Thiruvananthapuram. These

institutions basically tried to address the incongruence of curriculum and pedagogy of mainstream schooling with the life and experience of communities, especially marginalised social groups like the adivasis. They carved out an alternate curriculum and pedagogic model that can ensure a meaningful life worldview and engagement for students. These institutions definitely offered an experience which was qualitatively different from those who attended mainstream schools.

However, two major apprehensions can be raised about these models. First is about the replicability of the models due to the following reasons: i) it envisions a completely different societal model to build, and ii) it demands ‘teacher-philosophers’ as a key component in its functioning. Second and the most crucial one is its exclusionary emphasis on particular social groups like the adivasis though they are residing in a close relation with non-advansi communities in everyday life. I do not consider the first set of factors as a disqualifying factor for being an ‘ideal model’. But certainly the exclusionary social character of the school population will not help to address the needs of a multi-cultural society as discussed earlier. If we are emphasising on the need for education of the adivasis as an isolated and separate project, we are merely talking about an education for ‘training of certain skills’ at the cost of education as a process of socialisation for ‘complete citizenship’. However, this is not a suggestion about having an education where the adivasi students and non-advansi students are put together just to teach adivasi students about the life and ways of ambient population. It is equally or more important to teach the ambient population about the adivasi communities and their life. It is for the same reason special schools like Asram schools run by the government with a state syllabus may not be able to go beyond the level of a ‘training institute’ in a co-existing multicultural society from a sociological point.

In the second model, the government aided schools, which draw students from all communities and background, managed to create an ideal situation where students can bring their personal experience and knowledge as a resource to the school. Though there is a pressure from the ‘English medium private school’ models, these government and government aided schools, with its own curriculum and pedagogy, encourage their students to have a critical appraisal of other communities’ experiences and differences. This has been further strengthened with the increased participation of the local community in the school management. There is no doubt that this has redrawn the contours of power in

schools. But how this ‘potential opportunity’ in Kerala has benefited the marginalised groups including adivasis is a matter of inquiry.

A year-long ethnographic fieldwork^{iv} in one such government school in Kerala shows that the actual implementation of the curriculum and pedagogy in school is not upholding the spirit of rational-liberal philosophy of critical pedagogy. The new textbooks and other learning strategies provided ample opportunities for the adivasis to bring in their experiences and skills to the centre of the learning process. However, the perception among a large majority of teachers and students about the adivasis is determined by the colonial and racial imageries. Besides, the rat race for securing grades is re-surfacing in different manners due to continuing influence of the neo-liberal perception of education among a section of parents and teachers in school. They consider critical pedagogy as an impediment to achieve the neo-liberal aspirations which they wish to fulfill through education. There is a strong feeling and ‘innovation’ in schools to bring back ‘the good old days’ of ‘colonial-positivist’ model. As a result, text books with more ‘content orientation’ were brought back to Kerala schools with the support of United Democratic Front from 2014-15 academic year. If this trend continues, the re-launch of colonial-positivist model is not so distant. Such attempts will deepen inequality and marginalisation of communities, especially of the adivasis. The Left Democratic Front Government, which came in to power in 2016 in Kerala, tried a public participation model in pooling the resources for government and aided schools. More significantly the government also initiated developing school text books in the adivasi languages and appointed teachers from the adivasi communities, especially for the primary classes. Therefore the ideological disposition of the ruling government becomes so crucial in ensuring the continuity of education policies in the state of Kerala.

Conclusion

Uni-directional and dogmatic considerations of progress and primitivism have been seriously revisited by many scholars in recent times for its regressive effect on the life of the people. Though some of them completely rejected the legitimacy of progress and modernity from cultural relativist positions, some of them took a prudent approach and suggested for a ‘critical modernity’ (Peet & Hartwick, 2010) as an improvised form of modernity that can accommodate democratic politics and plurality of discourses. The conception of the adivasi as proposed by Kingsbury (2012) is actually an attempt in this direction. It establishes their right

to get back the land and forest from which they were uprooted, to rebuild a life which is rooted in their social ecology^v, to develop their course of life in relation with the world out there keeping their dignity of life. It repeals the racial imagery of ‘primitive’, or ‘uncivilised’ and establishes the fact that the backwardness they suffer is the product of centuries-long oppression they suffered under colonialism and its later incarnations including neo-liberal capitalism. A couple of state programmes of recent times like Forest Right Act (FRA) and Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) have imbibed this renewed understanding of the adivasi communities.

To further this trend, it is important to develop an independent agency of the adivasis to make their voice heard and to push their cases in the larger discourse of social change. This is nothing new because the adivasis had fought great battles with colonisers, they are fighting with the neo-liberal capitalists against occupying their land and resources, and they are also fighting with various other socially degenerating practices like abuse of alcohol, abusing their women and anything that degrade their dignity. The governance and popular perceptions have to be sensitised on this change of context. The political implication of such a conception may be that all oppressed classes will join their hands in fighting against larger forces of oppression like capitalism, but at the same time will also be aware of the nuanced difference in the forms of oppression and aspirations of different sections within the front. At the societal level, the co-existence of the adivasi communities with the ambient population and co-evolution within the society keeping the dignity and rights of their communitarian self needs to be given due space.

To come back to the questions with which we began, any programmes or policies on the adivasi communities should clarify the basic assumptions about these communities. These assumptions with an effect on the imagination of programmes and policies will have ramifications on the political, social, economic and cultural change of these communities. With the backdrop of the critical reflections on the experience of these communities in both colonial and post-colonial Indian society, there is a dire need for a shift from the ‘tribal’ imagery of these communities which is founded on the colonial and racial understandings. It should move ahead to an ‘adivasi’ imagery founded on more liberal and democratic ideals. This is suggested not just to root out the stigma created by the colonial depiction, but to redress the regressive actions it mooted in the policies and programmes for the adivasis. On the educational front, a rational-liberal

model of education would be a better alternative given our plural social context. In the context of development a comprehensive project that touches the economic, social and cultural aspects and stems from the adivasi worldview could be the vantage point for the mainstream development discourse.

Notes:

ⁱ Under the 5th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, in the areas with preponderance of Adivasi/tribal population, the President of India in consultation with the Governor of the concerned state declares an area as a Scheduled Area. This provision applies to states outside Northeast India. In the latter, the 6th Schedule applies.

ⁱⁱ Certain groups do not use the term adivasi to refer themselves, for e.g., those who are in Northeast India, i.e. the 6th Schedule Areas. However, it is proposed as a competent equivalent for 'indigenous people' in international forums. For details, see Uday Chandra (2014), Virginius Xaxa (1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ For a detailed discussion, see Bhangya Bhukya (2008).

^{iv} An ethnographic fieldwork was carried out from June, 2013 to March, 2014 in a government higher secondary school located in the Thirunelli Panchayat of Wayanad district in the state of Kerala. Along with the teaching and learning activities of the school, the school-community relationship was also studied in detail.

^v For a detailed reading on this, see Ramachandra Guha (2003).

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Article: Understanding State Sovereignty and Contestations around Land Governance in Guwahati City

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Understanding State Sovereignty and Contestations around Land Governance in Guwahati Cityⁱ

--- Trishna Gogoi

Abstract

Urban land as a scarce resource is a well-recognised phenomenon across the world which makes it a highly contested entity. Developing nations in the Global South are witnessing the highest rates of urbanisation, which finds countries like India struggling in governing land to make optimised and equitable use. The Indian states have constitutionally mandated powers of eminent domain over land, which by definition, makes it the sole authority over land administration. However urban land administration is found to be highly fragmented and urban planning is deemed to be a failure in Indian cities, bringing to the fore numerous incidences of state violence and public protests. Grounding my study on the governance of land in Guwahati city, I take a disaggregated view of the institutional framework and power hierarchy to analyse how sovereignty is interpreted in practice and how it impacts the urban fabric of the city. Through this article, I argue that fragmented authority within the bureaucracy *creates* the ambiguities and contestations that governance grapples with which in turn fuels contestations over land.

Key words: Contestations, Fragmented Authority, Guwahati, Land Governance, Sovereignty

Introduction

Assam's urbanisation can be summed up by using the term 'Guwahatisation'. With nearly 25 per cent of Assam's urban population in Guwahati city and its periphery, its population is the largest in the state as well as in the entire Northeast region of India. It is the recipient of the largest share of government funding amongst the urban areas of the state, along with receiving investments from national and international funding agencies. However, Guwahati is also situated within a fragile ecosystem of hills, wetlands, reserved forests and natural

channels. Evidently, it finds itself in a hotbed of tenure contestations, government-led evictions and violent protests.

The United Nation's Programme for Human Settlements and Sustainable Urban Development, UN-Habitat released its new Urban Agenda III in 2016, which reiterates a number of challenges around the scarcity of urban land. These range from rising poverty, inequality and vulnerability to issues of land market, health, natural hazards and violence. To address these issues, the urban agenda has upheld land administration, planning and governance as key to achieving 'peaceful, inclusive, safe, sustainable and resilient' cities (Wehrman, 2016, p. 6). In essence, the UN-Habitat's urban agenda of 2016 professes that formal authority over urban land shall manage the ground realities of metropolises. Contradicting such top-down models of development, social scientists researching on the post-colonial economies of the Global South find land governance to be a splintered entity. Land politics experts, Lund (2011) and Boone (2013) argue that no single entity takes all decisions regarding land, rather fragmented de facto powers within the state determine rights and control over land. Lund finds that sovereignty is held disjointedly and dominantly by those institutions which have managed to 'define and enforce collectively binding decisions on members of society' (Lund, 2011, pp. 886-887).

Studying Indian bureaucratic systems, Akhil Gupta states that the study of the 'state' itself is difficult as well as interesting because of the same reason: pluricenteredness (Gupta, 2012, pp. 64-65). He finds it difficult to encapsulate the state as a single entity due to the presence of various nodes of power, function and implementation. How does implementation reflect in the different levels of the state – say, between different departments or even within a single department the flow of power and functions amongst the state head office, district level and its ensuing towns and village administration?

Guwahati is the largest urban agglomeration and the 'primate city'ⁱⁱ of Northeast India. Guwahati has recorded an urban population of 9,57,352 in the 2011 Census, making it the top contender for the first million-plus city in the region. Naturally since the shift of India's development policies towards urban renewal and redevelopment in 2004, Guwahati has been leading the central government's urban agenda in the Northeast region. The city has been selected as the Mission City under Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Smart City Mission and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation

(AMRUT)ⁱⁱⁱ. It is also the recipient of funding from numerous other government and international financial institutions. Under the global neoliberal paradigm of development, there is a mounting pressure on cities to be self-reliant as well as to adhere to global standards of services and amenities. The state's compulsions of neoliberal, high-modernism ideals are reflected in the city's capital infrastructure – sports stadiums, five-star hotels, and numerous gated apartment complexes, towering over poor settlements spread across all hills and low-lying areas in the city, characterised by poor or non-existent basic services. Piles of garbage are strewn across the largest wetland in the city, as well as in natural channels and drains, clogging and polluting water bodies. Against this background, one needs to critically view the compulsions of 'good governance' in cities promoted by the World Bank in the 1990s. Cities must attract private investments into infrastructure building and developing revenue earning sources, which cannot be met from local tax collections. Providing free land is a proven yardstick for attracting global investors (Sathe, 2011). Thus, urban reforms and development schemes are based on market liberalisation and land commodification, alienating agricultural lands and forests into prime real estate in urban areas, pushing people to live in slums and poorer neighbourhoods around hills, water bodies and forest lands (Fernandes & Bharali, 2011; Fernandes, 2007). In Guwahati, land governance is characterised by contestations with public protests and dispossession remaining as recurring themes (Desai, Mahadevia & Mishra, 2014).

With this background, my research is an ethnographic study of the state apparatus, where I have studied procedures and tools of land administration by selecting those state departments which are predominantly involved in the allocation, reservation, sale and providing development permissions over land within Guwahati. Through my study, I intend to comment on the interpretation of authority in practice and how it impacts the urban fabric of the city. I argue that the ambiguities present in the procedural and legislative discourse of governing land by fragmented authorities are shaping and creating the contestations within Guwahati.

The paper is presented in four broad parts: firstly I present the institutional framework of land administration in Guwahati and their hierarchical set up. Secondly, I take a historical look at how Guwahati has evolved as a contested city and discuss legislations that have contributed to the land debates. Thirdly, by critically analysing documents and procedures employed by the authorities to govern, I discuss the ambiguities which perpetuate negotiations and contestations

between competing and mutually reinforcing alliances. This is followed by the conclusion.

Institutional Framework of Guwahati's Land Governance

Dispelling unified visions of the state as a sovereign authority, anthropologist Tania Murray Li posits that an image of the state as 'a unified source of intention, capable of devising coherent policies and plans' (Li, 2005, pp. 384-385) is problematic. Instead, she uses political theorist Timothy Mitchel's claims (1991, as cited in Li, 2005, p. 78) that state is actually an array of practices which enables the creation of a distinction between state and society. Such practices include surveys, censuses, data collection, planning, maps, etc. to produce the authority of the state (ibid., 2005). In this context, I shall discuss the institutional framework of the authorities involved in the governance of land in Guwahati.

As a precursory exercise to the study, I sought to understand how much land of the city came under the jurisdiction of each of the above departments to assess their scale of influence as well as to comprehend the issue of scarcity of urban land. Visits to the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) revealed that there are no ready maps available for forests as they were under preparation. On the other hand, the officials in the circle offices of Guwahati, Dispur and Azara have reported that government land is highly fragmented and they do not keep a track of land records of the whole district at any one place, neither do they have any record of the forest land under their circles^{iv}. So instead, by compiling different reports and primary data sources, I have tried to develop an approximate figure of the distribution of land under the various land authorities discussed above.

Table 1: Department-wise Approximation of Land Area in Kamrup Metro District

Government Department/ Competent Authority	Sub-classification	Land authority over
Revenue and Disaster Management Department	i) Dispur Revenue Circle (RC) ii) Guwahati RC iii) Sonapur RC iv) Azara RC v) Chandrapur RC vi) North Guwahati RC	246.6 sq.km*
Environment and Forest Department	16 reserved forests within Kamrup Metro, including Deeporbeel wild life	331.58 sq.km (approx.)**

	sanctuary and Amchang wildlife sanctuary	
Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority	i) area around DeeporBeel ii) Barsola, Sarusola, Silsakoo, Bondajaan <i>beels</i> (water bodies)	As per dag numbers given in the Guwahati Water Bodies (Preservation and Conservation) Act, 2008***

*Sources: *Calculated by author as discussed in body of text; **discussion at office of the PCCF, May 25, 2018 and Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2012;***area covered is not known as only the cadastral numbers are provided for the area covered by the water bodies.*

The total area of the Kamrup Metro district as per Census 2011 is 627.18 sq.kms. Within this, the Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2012 records reserved forests cover at approximately 331.58 sq.kms. It is pertinent to note that reserved forests cannot be easily taken up for urban expansion or development. Discussions in the office of the PCCF indicate that of the 16 reserved forests (RFs) in the district, 14 RFs^v are within the city or its immediate periphery. Within the greater Guwahati boundary, Brahmaputra river covers around 49 sq.kms. area which also remains completely out of developable limits. From these figures it can be deduced that about 246.6 sq.kms. of land within the Kamrup Metro district falls under the Revenue department for urban use. However, the Guwahati Municipal Corporation already covers 216 sq.kms. of the urban land, while the Guwahati Master Plan (GMDA, 1992) has delineated 328 sq.kms. of the district within its metropolitan area and extension. Moreover, this calculation does not include the area covered by the protected *beels* (wetlands) in the city under the Guwahati Water Bodies Act, 2008, for discounting from the land available for urban use^{vi}. Still, this exercise indicates the scale of land scarcity in Guwahati. The Revenue department has already saturated its share of land, while reserved forest and environmentally sensitive areas cover the major proportion of land falling within the metropolitan area. Guwahati High Court advocate S. Barthakur (2019) claims that at the heart of the land contestations in Guwahati lies the fact that much of the city is covered by forest land, while the government *khas*^{vii} land is already exhausted. From this approximated land distribution, I have followed the workings of these three departments to illustrate how negotiations, nexus and contestations are in-built in the governance measures.

The Indian Constitution attributes the function of urban planning and administration to urban local bodies (ULBs). Guwahati Municipal Corporation

(GMC) and the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) are the urban local bodies of Guwahati. The GMC as the third tier of government, collects taxes, fees and charges against service provision, building permissions and undertakes urban projects, amongst other urban functions and is governed by elected representatives, headed by an elected Chairman and government Commissioner. The GMDA, on the other hand is a para-statal agency, which leads urban planning for the city and prepares master plans defining the urban land uses and built-up, along with developing infrastructure projects. GMDA is headed by a Chairman who is selected by the state government and is supported by a Chief Executive Officer, who is a senior-level bureaucrat. These ULBs are harboured under the Guwahati Development Department (GDD), which is the only such department in the country established to administer just one city. This supports my earlier claim for rephrasing Assam's urbanisation as Guwahatisation. The ULBs are guided by the Guwahati master plan and the Guwahati building byelaws, along with their individual acts.

The Constitution has accorded the states with the eminent domain powers over land. The Revenue and Disaster Management Department (hereafter called the Revenue department) represents the state in matters of land and has authority over all land in the state, even private land. The land legislations of Assam are guided by the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, a pre-independence era law which is in practice even today, albeit with changes through orders and amendments over time. As per its rules, the Revenue department remain heavily dependent on the bureaucratic set-up at the district, headed by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) at the district-level. The DC at Kamrup Metro which covers Guwahati and its peripheries is supported by six Revenue Circle Offices (CO), namely Guwahati, Dispur, Azara, Chandrapur, Sonapur and North Guwahati. These COs are the field offices which hold the fragmented records of land – government land, village grazing reserves, private land, other government reservations, grant land, vacant land, etc. All changes to the land ownership and land use are recorded in land record registers called – the 'Chitha' and 'Jamabandi'^{viii}. The departure of Revenue department from urban governance is evident from its land classifications. The Revenue department does not engage with land as 'urban', and thus finds no common ground with urban land use proposals in master plans, which form the base document for the major activities of the GMDA and GMC.

Although Revenue department administers all land under the state, all forest lands remain under the jurisprudence of the Environment and Forest Department. The presence of 16 reserved forests within the vicinity of the city has huge political implications of the land rights movement of Guwahati, especially due to the fact that none of the forests have updated records of maps delineating the boundaries. Guwahati has seen regular instances of state violence on forest dwellers, peripheral settlements and encroachers on reserved forests, thereby putting forest land at the heart of state-people contestations (Fernandes & Bharali, 2011).

Thus the major land authorities are listed below in Table 2, with their powers/functions which impact the physical form and socio-political status of the city.

Table 2: The Fragmented Land Governance Structure

State-level	District-level	City-level	Broad functions/powers
Revenue and Disaster Management Department	DC Kamrup (M) with six Revenue Circle offices		Survey and mapping, Revenue assessment for taxation, Land allocation for public and semi-public uses, Settlement for private use, Administer protected belts and blocks
Environment and Forest Department	Division offices with multiple Range offices		Forest survey and mapping, Revenue assessment of forest resources and Allocation of sand quarries, timber lots Management of reserved forests, eco-sensitive zones, social forestry, forest villages
Guwahati Development Department	None	Guwahati Municipal Corporation with eight zonal offices	Municipal taxation, Development control over land parcel, Project development
		Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority	Development control over land parcel, Land use zoning, Project development Conservation of reserved water bodies

Source: Collated by author

Other infrastructure development departments like Public Works Department (PWD), Public Health and Engineering (PHE), Transport Department (TD), all have to approach the above departments to request for land within Guwahati – making these abovementioned departments (Table 2) the focus of my study.

Contingency and Chaos in Guwahati: Context of the City

Assam has been historically a site of mass migration and exodus. Steered by the British policies of settling uninhabited wastelands and opening up reserved lands and forests for tea estates and forest produce exploitation, waves of migrants have been encouraged to settle in Assam, mostly from East Bengal. Subsequently, settlement of vast tracts of land for tea estates ensued migrant labourers brought in by the colonial estate owners from surrounding states of Orissa, Bihar and Bengal. Consequently, migrants displacing the indigenous inhabitants from their own lands became such a major concern for the tribal and local communities that the practice of ‘Line system’ was initiated as a double edged sword in the early 1930s. The local communities were contained within the imaginary separation line or closed villages for protection and preservation, while the uninhabited wilderness and forests were opened up for occupation to the landless migrant farmers and cultivators. In 1946, this Line system was expanded to encompass villages or groups of villages inhabited largely (50 per cent or more) by tribal communities and other backward classes termed as ‘Protected belts and blocks’ to legislate these protected areas of Assam^{ix} under Chapter X ‘Protection of backward classes’. The current city of Guwahati was part of one such belt – the South Kamrup (Guwahati) Tribal Belt.

This tribal history of Guwahati indicates the presence of commonly held land, village grazing grounds and most importantly the non-existence of private property and documentation amongst the inhabitants of Guwahati tribal belt. Various studies (Guha, 2006 & 2015; Baruah, 2008; Daimary, 2012; Sarma, P., 2013; Mahadevia et al., 2016) indicate the existence of large concentration of tribal communities in and around Guwahati since historical times. The Bodos were concentrated in Pub Boragaon, Betkuchi, Saukuchi, Borsojai, etc., while the Karbi community was found in Kharguli, Narikal Basti, Hengrabari, etc. Other prominent groups recorded to be of significance in the city were the Rabha and the Garo. Nepali graziers were reported to have inhabited the upper reaches of the hills across the city. The purpose of these protected areas was to ensure that those communities living in the sub-montane regions of Assam, who were backward in

terms of education and opportunities and were largely dependent on primary modes of sustenance, would be protected within the areas they inhabit, without the fear of losing their land and sustenance to more resourceful local communities and landless migrants. However, when Dispur was established as the capital of Assam in 1972, more than 7 lakh bighas of land from the tribal belt was de-reserved from protected status in preparation for setting up the capital hub (Daimary, 2012). De-reservation made large swathes of land accessible in the market, undermining the claims of those inhabiting the area since generations. This led to major changes in the demographics of the city as the bureaucrats and office bearers of the capital administration shifted from Shillong to Guwahati, along with the businessmen, students, service providers, informal sector workers, fourth-grade employees, etc., looking to establish themselves in the capital. They challenged the claims of those without legal tenure and managed to formalise land holdings otherwise held commonly. In spite of its land policies of protecting the indigenous communities, the revenue administration has continued to ignore and criminalise those without tenure documents. Discussion with the staff of the Settlement Branch of the Kamrup Metro DC office revealed that even the protected persons staying within the protected belts and blocks cannot claim rights to their land if they do not have ‘*miyadi patta*’ or ownership tenure. The aged Superintendent, nearing retirement at the Settlement office commented, ‘Sob dekhisu. Jiye rule nathakok kiyo, miyadi nohole, eku nai’, translated as, notwithstanding the prevalent rules, in his experience there are no rights without formal tenure or the *miyadi patta*. This strengthens Gidwani and Baviskar’s observations of Delhi, where they find that state governance enforce such strict controls on commons as publicly used commodities, that it is impossible to have any common claims over common lands (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011, p. 43). Without land documents for the tribal belt, inhabitants had to shell out premiums for land ownership and taxation, leading to the alienation of the backward communities, who were either expelled from their land or forced to sell and to move out to the peripheral hills, waste lands and forests. Today, migrants looking for livelihood opportunities in the city are forced to settle on the hills, peripheral forests and waste lands which offer cheap and affordable housing, rather than the prime localities which are beyond their reach. However, in the drive for urban expansion, even these peripheral lands continue to remain vulnerable to evictions, elite capture and the land mafia (Mahadevia et al., 2017).

Assam has had five land policies post-independence – in 1958, 1968, 1972, 1989 and 2019. Since the first land policy, the focus of the policies remained

dichotomous – supplying more land to meet the demands of the landless people, while trying to safeguard the forests, village and professional grazing reserves (VGR and PGR) and forests from encroachers. Subsequently, each policy has reported the de-reservation of thousands of acres of reserved lands for settling the landless migrants over the years. Post the establishment of Dispur as capital, the Land Policy of 1989 formulated special conditions to provide urban land to indigenous people of the state. Occupiers can apply for ownership against payment of premium, after fulfilling the requirements of 15 years of occupation on any urban land, the main criteria being the applicant is an ‘indigenous person’. However, the term ‘indigenous’ is not defined officially, leaving Deputy Commissioners to interpret the term on their own. While talking to *mandals* (land record keepers) in Guwahati and Dispur Revenue Circle offices, some interpretations of an indigenous person used across Assam were collected, which included:

- protected persons as per definition in Chapter X of the ALRR, 1886^x,
- any SC/ST applicant from anywhere in India,
- any SC/ST applicant from communities belonging to Assam,
- any Indian citizen, etc.

Trying to get a better understanding of how the term is interpreted, I talked with an official at the Guwahati Revenue Circle about the procedure of settling land occupiers in Guwahati. On enquiring whether he feels that the term indigenous has been interpreted too broadly by the land officials, he answered in the negative, stating that ‘it is very simple; every administrator knows and there is no confusion’. He most probably wanted to establish that the knowledge and perception of the authority is unquestionable. The 2019 Land Policy, which came up after much furore over the land rights of the indigenous persons, has also refrained from defining who is an indigenous person. In his seminal ethnographic work on the working of the Indian bureaucracy, anthropologist Akhil Gupta (2012) argued that the Indian bureaucratic decision making was far from rationalised. Instead, the entire process is based on ‘contingency and barely controlled chaos’ (ibid., p. 14). He argues that such contingency leads to misinterpretation of bureaucratic processes taken in good faith which have serious social outcomes. Gupta stresses that such decisions can make the difference between life and death for the affected people.

The open-ended definition of ‘indigenous’ settlers and de-reservation of the South Kamrup (Guwahati) tribal belt in the early 1970s has had serious impact on the city’s hill settlements. Without the protection under the provisions of Chapter X, the hill dwellers have had to struggle for sharing the hills lands with migrants coming to the city over the years and looking for economic opportunities and cheap jobs. Benjamin (2008) has most eloquently presented the everyday struggles of the poor to hold on to their settlement in urban areas by coining the term ‘occupancy urbanism’. These are the development outside the planned spaces which provide the alternate narrative to the city. The difficult terrain and poor or non-existent municipal services ensure that the hill settlements can cater to the migrants. Thus the hills of Guwahati are populated with a mix of communities, settled mostly in informal settlements^{xi}.

However, all these hills are also covered by different categories of forests like reserved dense forest, open mixed forest, scattered forest and degraded forest, etc., which fall under the Assam Forest Regulation Act, 1891 and are thus regulated by the Forest department. The forest covered hills have witnessed the largest and most violent eviction drives in the city, most prominently in 2011 and 2017. Commenting on the struggle of hill settlements in Guwahati, advocate Barthakur explained that majority of the hill dwellers are not included under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act) 2006. This act protects the rights of two kinds of forest dwellers – firstly, those belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) of India and secondly, those qualifying under ‘other traditional forest dwellers’. In Guwahati, along with ST inhabitants, many belonging to non-ST communities have also settled on these hills. To be considered eligible under ‘other traditional forest dweller’, the resident has to be settled in the forest area for more than three generations (minimum period of 75 years). Since most of the migrants on these hills are single generation settlers, the law considers large section of the hill dwellers to be encroachers. Consequently, evictions on the hills have been a regular feature. Added to this issue remains the matter of the open-ended interpretation of a ‘forest’. Rather than any physical map or boundary, the forest land is administered based on the forest legislations. The famous writ petition no.202 of 1995 by T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad in the Supreme Court against the illegal timber operations in Nilgiri hills led to the restructuring of forestry management and conservation in India, largely affecting the Northeastern states. The Supreme Court for the first time defined forests as per the dictionary definition which ambiguously meant thickly wooded areas or large area covered with trees or

plants, etc., and as per such definition, forest conservation would be carried out regardless of ownership. Thus the Forest department has been in the process of demarcating and administering forests as per the dictionary definition.

Thus settlements which have managed to obtain security of tenure, have in some cases found to be established on forest land, bringing them under the demolition drives of the state, which is discussed through examples in a later section of this paper. Although there are many forests in Guwahati with numerous historically settled communities, government policies aimed at ensuring rights for the eligible communities are found to be either ambiguous or inadequate for addressing the ground realities. Thus settlers are found engaged in public-interest litigations (PILs) against the state, indirectly supported by political parties to ensure vote banks and making a living by negotiating through the rubric of land laws.

Sovereignty of the City – Evolving Ambiguity

The state's eminent domain over land and its sovereignty to take decisions is viewed as monopolistic. Sovereignty has been traditionally understood as unlimited power over a territory and its people by the state, propounded in the juridical apparatus and the government structures (Lund, 2011, p. 887). James C. Scott (1998) has criticised how the state is viewed to be an all-seeing powerful entity, assigned with the role of developing the nation. Likewise, Akhil Gupta (2012) argues that the failure of the government to actually undertake and positively implement its development visions is not due to corruption only, rather due to the impossible burdens of bureaucracy. Fragmented resources, information, policies and powers of the bureaucratic set-up have led to the violent contestations over urban land. In the following section, I want to illustrate how sovereignty of fragmented authorities is imposed and experienced through 'procedures, techniques, aesthetics, ideologies, cooperation, negotiation, and contestation' (Hull, 2012, p. 5).

Plans and Development Permits

Scott (1998) found states taking up top-down, exclusionary decisions on large-scale schemes and projects, which are envisioned by the state to bring about vast improvement in the city, which he termed as 'high modernism'. Master plan is a representation of such 'high modernism' of the states. Master plan is a British construct and has been in practice in Assam since 1960s. The master plan provides a 20-year vision of the development of the city by proposing land use

zones for the entire city and its urbanising periphery. It has been brought into practice in the state through the Assam Town & Country Planning Act 1959 and after the establishment of the GMDA Act 1975, streamlined for Guwahati. Although as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1994, the municipal body should be preparing the master plan, but when the GMC Act came into force in 1969, the power to prepare master plan was not included and was later incorporated in the GMDA Act of 1975^{xii}. The practice has remained unchanged since, and has remained a matter of constant debate between the two ULBs. GMC has been appealing to the state department to revise the law to allow GMC to prepare the master plan of Guwahati, but no action has fructified.

Guwahati has formalised three master plans till date – in 1965, 1986 and 1992, but their implementation has been largely confined to providing permissions for development and land sale. This is due to the fact that these permits are the largest sources of revenue for the GMDA. The development permits are of two types – planning permit and building permit. The Guwahati building byelaws, prepared in consonance with the master plan, govern the building permits; while the master plan informs the planning and land sale permits. GMDA has shared an ambiguous and contested history with GMC in providing building permissions in Guwahati. As per the GMDA Act of 1975 and the master plan, GMDA's jurisdiction included entire Guwahati city, North Guwahati Town Committee area, and some revenue villages. This gave GMDA the power to issue building permits for overlapping areas along with GMC. In the early 2000s, the state government through the GDD directed GMDA to prepare building byelaws for Guwahati to better formalise each agency's powers and functions. The Guwahati building rules published in 2006 continued the dichotomy power-struggle in issuing building permissions with GMC. Officials in GMC's planning section^{xiii} believe that applicants tried to manage officials in the agencies when denied permits. They informed that there are numerous court cases where applicants have alleged that their neighbour has obtained permission for the same kind of building and site conditions which GMC has denied to them. This indicated that as both GMC and GMDA were issuing building permits for overlapping areas at the same time, the denial from one authority gave applicants the scope to manipulate their applications in the other.

After much deliberation, the Guwahati Building Construction (Regulation) byelaws, 2014 was notified to address the duplicity of permissions and increase the transparency of the procedure. It introduced the concept of planning permit for

the first time. It segregated the already existing activity of verifying whether the proposed building was permissible in the proposed land zone. While GMDA would issue planning permit across the whole planning area, Guwahati Municipal Corporation, North Guwahati Municipal Board and the Panchayats of five mouzas/ villages within GMDA were given the power of issuing building permit within their own jurisdictions. However, the building byelaws were prepared by GMDA and the envisaged separation of functions are still found to be diluted as detailed out from the byelaws in Table 3 below.

Table 1: The Separation of Functions between GMDA and GMC regarding Development Permits in the Guwahati Building Construction (Regulation) Byelaws, 2014

GMDA's role for providing Planning permit	GMC/North Guwahati/Panchayat's role for providing Building permit
Verify and make necessary inspection of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - land use zone, - road width, - floor area ratio, - building coverage, - height of building, - parking norms, - layout and - requirement of external open spaces and functions 	Provide building permit after verifying the building plans and inspecting the building site (items are not specifically mentioned for GMC and others)
If satisfied, GMDA provides the planning permit within the 30-days limit and then forwards it with three sets of the drawings and maps, to GMC/North Guwahati/Panchayat as the case maybe	Building permit must be issued within 45 days from the date of sanction of Planning permit
Processing fees for planning permit is submitted at GMDA, of which 90 per cent is refundable, if the application is rejected	Building permit fees are submitted to the concerned authority of the jurisdiction. If Building permit is not approved, fees is not refundable, but adjusted if the building plan is submitted again within the validity period

Source: GMDA (2014, pp. 11-12)

From the above table, it is evident that both the checklist for planning permit and building permit are the same. Yet the byelaws are such that no permission applications can come to GMC without passing through the scrutiny and permission from the GMDA. The building permission procedure prior to the 2014 byelaws allowed both GMC and GMDA to provide the building permit, which also included the procedures segregated under the newly segregated planning permit. Thus, although as per the Indian Constitution, the GMC is the ‘third tier of government’, in Guwahati the para-statal agency has the upper hand in policy-making and administration. Discussions with town planners in both GMC and GMDA ^{xiv} revealed that to provide some disaggregation of functions in implementation, it was decided through subsequent orders that the town planner at GMDA would provide the planning permit without actually visiting the site, but on the basis of the building drawing and site map and in consultation with the master plan. On the other hand, the site engineers under the town planner at GMC would undertake site visits to verify the building feasibility as per the proposal after GMDA provides the planning permission. Thus, even though the government has targeted the implementation of ‘ease of doing business’ in the state, the 2014 building byelaws is found to have increased the layers of red tape, instead of simplifying the procedures. Presently, to ensure a single-window clearance of permissions, the building permission procedure has been taken online. Here again, it was GMDA who was provided the necessary funds to create the web-based single window for building permissions.

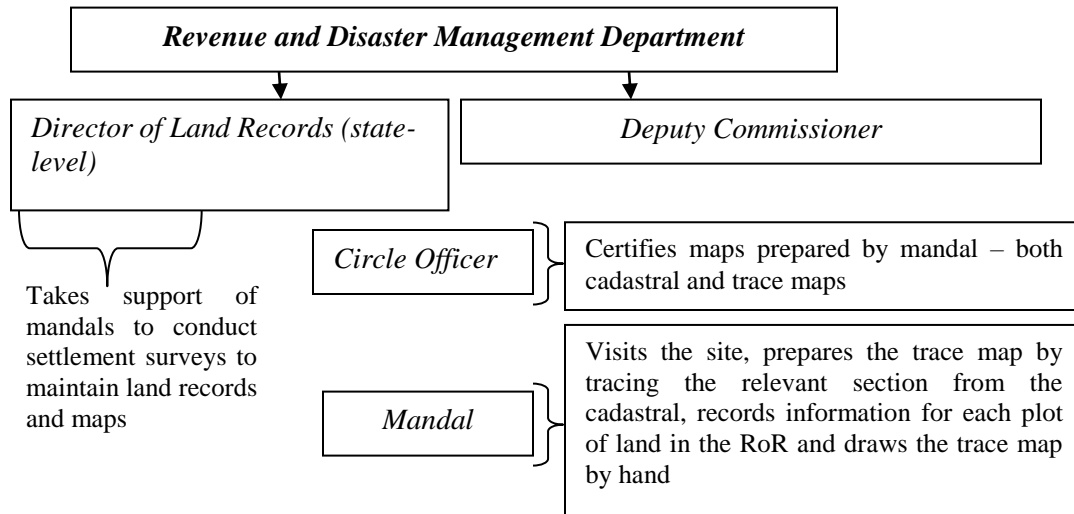
A serious failure of the permissions procedure is that numerous buildings have come up across the city without permission. Many settlers have avoided taking any permission from the government agencies, as they do not have legal tenure on their land. The ULBs cannot address development on non-tenured land, which on the contrary also means that these buildings and developments without permission are most vulnerable during evictions and land clearances. Large sections of the city fall under forest land or under other forms of government land like ceiling surplus land, eksoniya/annual tenure land, etc. on which occupiers can neither apply for miyadi patta, and consequently, nor for building permission. Instead settlers on such lands build incremental housing over the years by slowly developing the land and the house, aspiring to apply for formal tenure on the completion of 15 years as per the government’s land policy 1989 discussed earlier. Town planners in GMC and GMDA have guesstimated that about 30 per cent of all built-up in Guwahati do not have the requisite permissions.

Another issue worth noting in Guwahati's hierarchy of urban authorities is that the higher the authority with power, the newer has been its creation. The GMC was created first in 1969, GMDA in 1975 and GDD in 1994. Yet in practice, the power and money flows from GDD to GMDA to GMC. Also the practices discussed here indicates that the evolving trajectory of governance have led to greater complexities, increasing the levels of authorities, established for disciplining the people. Applicants now have to fulfil the eligibility criteria of both authorities instead of one, pay fees to both agencies as well as negotiate with officials to ensure that the field visits by the officials go smoothly. The reality of Guwahati's urban built-up is not represented in the maps; but as Hull puts, it is rather entangled in the 'prosaic practices through which the city is planned, constructed, regulated, and inhabited' (Hull, 2012, p. 212).

Mapping Land Ownership

Gupta terms every day practices and processes in the bureaucratic offices as 'cultural constitution' of the state that reveal the systematic negotiations within the framework of government rules which are informal and difficult to codify (Gupta, 2006, p. 11). One such negotiation in the Indian context is found in mapping land ownership. Land ownership in India is presumptive and based on notional documents because it is established primarily through registered sale deed^{xv}, and not through any government guaranteed title (Mishra & Suhag, 2017). One such notional document is the trace map. Trace maps are small hand drawn maps depicting a plot of land, their immediate boundaries, physical features and their legal enumerations. Although copied by hand from the original cadastral map prepared through settlement surveys by the Revenue department, the incremental changes on the ground are depicted on the trace maps by using a notional system of scale. Since it is extracted from a larger cadastral map, it is used as a true copy after verification by the Revenue Circle officer. The trace map is used for everyday office purposes like land sale, purchase, transfer, classification, mutation, etc., where using the full cadastral map may become too cumbersome. In spite of its widespread use, the trace map is not a formal instrument like the cadastral maps prepared by the office of Land Records or the topographical survey maps prepared by Survey of India^{xvi}; it is a product of quotidian practice. The institutional set up for the preparation, certification and maintenance of revenue records and maps is presented below:

Fig 1: Schematic Representation of the Institutional Set-Up for the Preparation of Trace Maps



Source: Collated by author

Mandal is the revenue circle official staff, the recorder who visits the site in the field and records the actual land ownership situation and the proposed changes of the site. The mandals note down everyday changes in the land ownership in their written records. These changes do not get reflected in the cadastral map as regularly as required, as a land settlement exercise for updating cadastral maps is supposed to be undertaken every 30 years. The mandal traces out the requisite section of land plots from the larger cadastral map and records all the field-level changes in the individual plots, occurring on a day to day basis. New subdivisions, mutation, sales along with reservations for road development, etc. are recorded by the mandal and reproduced as per need onto trace maps using a very notional scale. Mandals use a small ring worn on the finger called a *guniya*, to measure and hand-draw the changes on the trace maps. This in turn creates the situation whereby all the records in the trace maps have no real representation on the ground. Thus, the location of a plot of land depicted on the trace map is in reality found to be somewhere else on the ground – a scenario common across India.

Roy argues that such processes from which the ‘ownership, use or purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed set of regulations or the

law' reveal informality in quotidian practices (Roy, 2009, p. 80). Such practices weaken the sanctity of land ownership and use rights, creating complications. Yet, the trace maps continue to be used as certified copy of the land reality, and decision-making is dependent on the information on these maps. The practice of trace maps is found in other states of India too, where the trace maps are verified using satellite imageries and drone surveys, like in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. But in Assam, trace maps continue to be used to depict field level changes which are informal and without scale, making interpretation of land information dependent on the mandal.

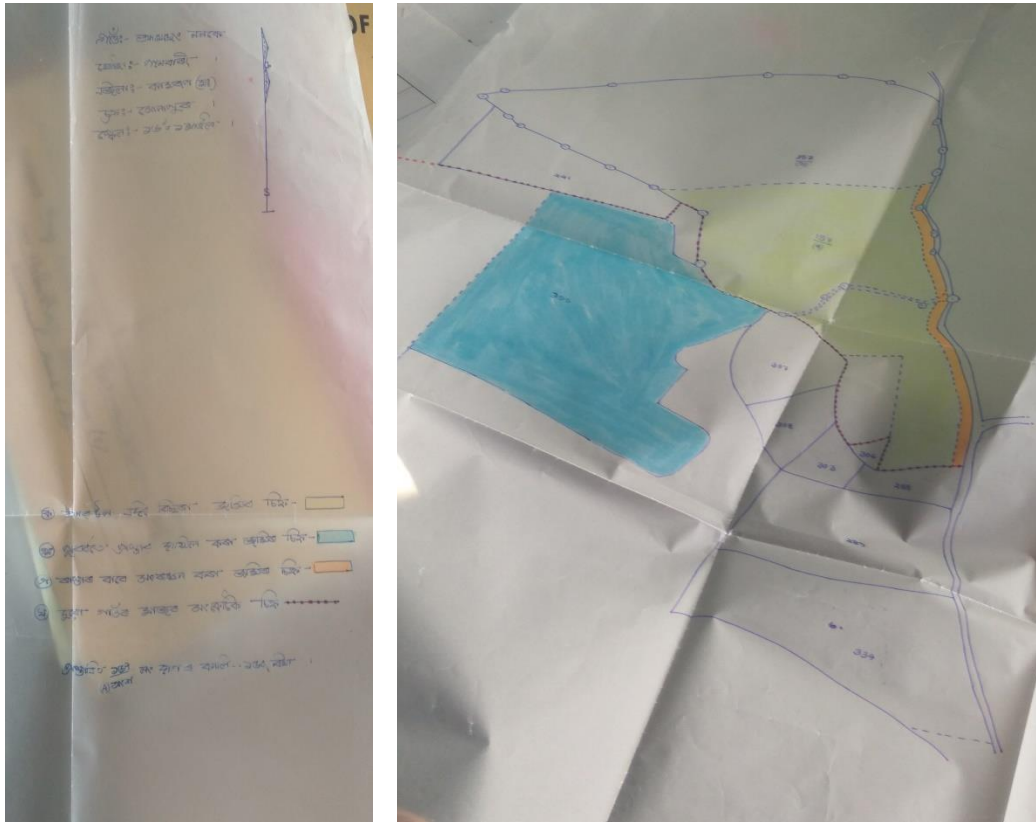


Figure 1: Trace map

Mandals are the storehouse of land related information. No land related decisions can be completed without field report from the mandal. The mandal is an important authority on land matters, and few can challenge the mandal's words. This gives mandals a very powerful position in land matters, where a line drawn by the mandal can determine whether a person shall be a citizen or not! Yet

within the bureaucratic system, mandals have very poor career progression. They start at one of the lowest rungs in the bureaucracy^{xvii} and in their entire career they can at best get one promotion. Bhogeswar Das, a Mandal in Dispur and later, Azara revenue circle^{xviii}, emphasised during our conversation that the pressure of work on mandals is extremely high, while their numbers and office resources are quite poor. Their work requires special training which is provided by the state government's Directorate of Land Records. Yet they have been fighting to get recognised in the grade pay category as technical employees. Mandals are often alleged to be at the centre of all major land corruptions. Das accepts that mandals are so infamous for corruption that there is a popular saying in Assamese, which goes as – *mandal manei kandal*, loosely translated as Mandal ensures contestations.

In a similar scenario, the Forest department in Assam has been governing their forest reserves without formal maps. Forest pillars are placed to demarcate forest boundaries and in most forests these pillars were placed mostly in reference to surveys done during the British administration. These pillars continue to guide most decision-making regarding the extent of forests and encroachments thereof. As discussed earlier, there are no maps available with the Forest department to confirm the boundary of the forest reserves, and this problem is enhanced after the Supreme Court judgement of 1998 in the famous Godavarman case to determine forests based on its dictionary definition (Rosencranz et al., 2007). In spite of this lacuna, by following a Supreme Court mandate^{xix} for removing encroachments on forest lands, the Forest department has been carrying out large scale evictions since 2002 across the hills of Guwahati.

As recently as 2017, Guwahati saw much furore due to the reservation of the area around the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary as Eco-sensitive zone by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF). It led to the demolition of homes and eviction of about 700 families considered as encroachers into forest land (Pisharoty, 2017; The Telegraph, 2017a and 2017b). The state government proposed an eco-sensitive zone covering an area of 109.99 sq.kms., with an extent of about 8 to 10 kms. around the present protected area of the sanctuary. Large-scale evictions and demolition were carried out in the extended areas of the proposed zone to clear, what the forest authorities called, encroachments. The eviction drive was stopped through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Guwahati High Court claiming that the eco-sensitive zone was overlapping 37 revenue villages which cannot be considered as encroachments. As per reports, the forest department stated in an

affidavit that the original pillars demarcating the boundary of the reserved forests constituting the Amchang Eco-sensitive zone were not found during the survey conducted in 2014, and as a consequence, the forest boundary was re-delineated by following the boundary pillars available in a topographical map as further back as 1978 (Pisharoty, 2017). In the government documents available in the interlocutory cases against the Amchang evictions, the minutes of meeting held on March 29, 2018 by Minister of Environment and Forest department regarding the rehabilitation of people evicted from Amchang revealed that this mistake was taken cognizance of and corrigendum was directed to be issued after conducting a joint survey of the area by forest and revenue officials, along with GMDA.

The Amchang demarcations illustrates, ‘a message of domination’ (Abrams, 1988, p. 81) by the state, because a closer reading of the rules of demarcating Eco-sensitive zone notified by the MoEF in 2017 states that the land use ban within eco-sensitive zones is on industrial, commercial and construction activities, etc., and not on existing settlements. Evicted families have shown records of land settlement in the evicted villages during various government benefit programs, and have been practicing their voting rights from these localities.

Conclusion: Disjointed Governance

The various practices discussed above and the ambiguities present in them regarding development permits, land records, forest delineation, etc. reveal a disjointedness in governance. My research brings to fore the inadequacies in the rules made and the complexities that result in following them. Land which is a basic need of every person for having a home continues to perplex the urban citizen. Even though these bureaucratic policies and practices have been undergoing evolution and changes over decades, one is faced with the disjuncture and crisis-ridden entity that it is and ‘how it engenders its own modes of resistance, and makes, meets, molds, or is contested by new subjects’ (Gupta, 2012, p. 239). The fact remains that authorities are struggling to establish control over the urbansphere – by optimising land use to earn revenue to ‘improve the conditions of the population’ – which is the hall mark of governmentality (Foucault, 2007 as cited in Gupta, 2012, p. 240), while also attempting to maintain equitable land rights through the policies and rules that the government mandates from time to time.

Yet the practices are ambiguous and the procedures and tools have rather been exercises in disciplining the public, resulting in structural violence against the people – evictions and loss of traditional spaces. Although this has created a false sense of authority over land for the authorities, they are often questioned and opposed by the public, revealing the many chinks in the notion of sovereignty of the state.

Notes:

ⁱ I acknowledge the insightful discussions with Dr. Sanjay Barbora, Dr. Yengkhom Jilangamba, Mrinal Gohain and Dr. Chandan Sharma in structuring the arguments of this paper.

ⁱⁱ Primate city concept given by geographer, Mark Jefferson in 1939, states that a primate city of a state/region, is exponentially larger in population than the next largest city. In case of Assam, Guwahati has almost 8 lakhs more population than the second largest town of Assam, Silchar. In fact, no other city in the Northeast region of India has more absolute number of urban population than Guwahati, as per the Census 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ These are centrally-funded urban renewal/redevelopment schemes, implemented in a mission-mode across selected cities of India. Guwahati has been selected in almost all of the central schemes as the model city for project implementation. Under JNNURM, Guwahati took up water supply project and urban poor housing; under Smart city mission, proposals are for reviving the water channels of Guwahati, including river front development; under AMRUT mission, projects for park development and non-motorised vehicular transport project are proposed.

^{iv} Interviews of mandals and senior kanungos in the Circle offices of Guwahati, Dispur and Azara through 2016, 2017 and 2018.

^v Reserved forests within Guwahati city and its immediate vicinity include Jalukbari, Hengrabari, Khanapara, Fatasil, Rani, Garbhanga, Amchang, Gotanagar, Sarania, South Kalapahar, Maliata, Athiaguri, South Amchang and parts of Garbhanga 1st addition.

^{vi} Guwahati Water Bodies Act, 2008 has declared five beels to be ecologically preserved sites, which include Deeporbeel, Sarusolabeel, Borsolabeel, Silsakoobeel and Bondajaanbeel. These beels have been entrusted to GMDA for development and conservation. As per the Guwahati Water Bodies Act, 2008, the water bodies have been assigned under the authority of GMDA for conservation and development, if any.

^{vii} *Khas* lands are vacant lands which have not been assigned for private ownership. Such lands are available with the government for allocating to any uses as deemed fit by the authorities.

^{viii} *Chitha* is the field index of land parcels and *Jamabandi* is the Record of rights with name of owners and their daag numbers.

^{ix} Under this provision, initially 17 belts and 30 blocks of tribal dominated areas were reserved as protected areas for the indigenous communities covered under these regulations. The major provision of this act of the Chapter X was that, ‘...no person shall acquire or possess by transfer, exchange, lease, agreement or settlement any land in any area or areas constituted into belts or blocks in contravention of the provisions’. The DC is the final adjudicator on who could buy and sell land in these protected areas.

^x The communities who were enumerated as protected persons in 1947 within the protected belts and blocks, included, (a).Scheduled tribes (Plains), (b).Scheduled tribes (Hills), (c).Tea garden and ex-Tea garden tribes, (d).Santhals, (e).Schedules Castes, (f).Nepali cultivator/graziers, (g). Koch-Rajbongshis of few districts (Revenue

Dept, 1990). The SC, ST communities not indigenous to the state of Assam were not considered as protected communities (refer to Chapter II of the *Land administration in protected belts and clocks of Assam*, Revenue Department, 1990).

^{xi} Informal settlements are characterised by lack of formal tenure, although they are not completely illegal. Such settlements are usually established on state lands, or private lands without claims, where the settlers have some form of formal recognition from the government through water or electricity connection, government roads, voter cards, etc.

^{xii} Prior to the notification of the GMDA Act in 1975, the Town and Country Planning Department through the Assam Town and Country Planning Act 1959 was entrusted to prepare the initial master plans of Guwahati. So, in practice GMDA has only prepared one Master plan for Guwahati till date.

^{xiii} Discussion with official staff at the Planning Division, GMC Uzan Bazaar in 2016, 2017 and 2019.

^{xiv} Interviews with GMC Town Planners, Dipak Das (2015-16) and D. Bezbaruah (2016-19), and GMDA Town Planners, D. Kalita (2016-17) and J.S. Kakoty (2017-19).

^{xv} The registered sale deed is a record of the property transaction between the buyer and seller. Other documents used for this purpose are record of rights (*jamabandi* in Assam), property tax receipts and survey documents (cadastral maps, trace map).

^{xvi} Cadastral maps depict the revenue details of each plot within a village or a town ward, demarcating location, boundary, physical features and ownership details. Topographic maps provide the graphical portrayal of a terrain and thus are very useful for engineering works and are prepared by the Survey of India.

^{xvii} Eligibility for applying to be a mandal is a higher secondary pass certificate. The All Assam Mandal Kanangu Sanmilan or the Association of Mandals and Kanungos of Assam are lobbying to raise the entry level eligibility to a graduate (Bhattacharya, 2018).

^{xviii} Discussions held with Bhogeswar Das, Mandal, Dispur and Azara Revenue Circle office between 2017-2019.

^{xix} In 1996, a landmark judgement known as the Godavarman case was given by the Supreme Court under which tree-felling in forests across India was banned. Through this judgement, it was also mandated to conserve forests by removing illegal encroachments. On January 15, 1998, the Supreme Court directed that for forest wealth to be safeguarded in the Northeastern States, forest officers in these States should be empowered to investigate, prosecute and confiscate – thereby prosecuting encroachers.

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Article: Two Leaves and a Bud: Revisiting the Colonial Spaces from Plantation to *Bagan* (garden)

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**Two Leaves and a Bud:
Revisiting the Colonial Spaces from Plantation to *Bagan* (garden)**

--- Juri Baruah

Abstract

Sah bagan (tea garden) is a unique space created through 19th century colonialism in Assam where plantations played a significant role in changing power relations. Tea plantation economy acts as a political power of the company where the superiority of saheb/babu segregates the labourers. This article seeks to emphasise the belongingness to the bagan and how it is regarded as a contested space for the labourers in general and women labourers in particular. The narratives of the labourers collected through fieldwork in a tea garden¹ in Sivasagar district of Assam helps to also look at the connection between the field and the factory.

Key words: Bagan, Colonialism, Plantation, Women labourer

From Plantation to *bagan*: a colonial metaphor

Tea plantation is historically a reflection of colonial intervention on the space through the division of field and factory. Space here is produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production and with the relations of production. The word 'plantation' originates from Euro-American agri-business. As explained by the social science literature on agriculture and labour, the plantation is dominated by colonial control and resource extraction. This form of extractive economy is in some ways distinct from agriculture. Literature from Asia, Africa, and Latin America reveal the painful and uncomfortable memories of the plantation, which starts from commodity crop production to the consumption of products in imperial metropolis. Despite common features and modes of production and management strategies, the plantation as a unit of analysis varied across time and space. Tea plantation dominates the districts of Upper Assam including Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, and Golaghat. Historically these districts have always had been the centre of attraction because of bagans (tea gardens) and tea garden communities. Lefebvre (1992) defined that space always

contains traces of the processes that produced it, and subsequently is acted upon by a variety of material and political processes to provide the context through which we can identify it. However, the 'tea estate', though it is public space for the labourers, it is a private property for the management where unauthorised admission is not allowedⁱⁱ.

Chatterjee (2011) explains that bagan represents a living metaphor to depict the civilised 'settling' of India's jungles. Indeed, bagan was to be worked 'through' the realpolitik of material historiesⁱⁱⁱ. The act of 'planting' is a transformation of wilderness, and it became a metaphor as *bari*^{iv}. Plantation could be imagined as a necessary 'Garden of Eden' through the lenses of cultivated order with the moral vision of imperial light. Consequently, the shift from bari to bagan is created as a colonial and post-colonial metaphor which reflects the old themes of civilising and civilisation. The frame of the bagan forced the labourers to be disciplined into work. It also creates the space of cultural, political and bodily meanings based on which social power is conducted through specific orders and disorders. Consequently, the term bagan is more familiar to the socio-political belongingness of the labourers rather than the term plantation. The specific nature of bagan confined to an enclave structure is typically associated with a 'total institution'. All the works of production, as well as, reproduction are done within its geographical boundary. The site of the bagan itself is indeed a distinct space, seemingly stuck in time and thereby seen as a remnant of a colonial past.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, plantation owners in other parts of India forcibly recruited labourers (Chatterjee, 2011; Griffiths, 1967; Sharma, 2011). The shared feudal peasant system thus inscribed with plantations are socially and historically different from the industrial farm. The Royal Commission on Labour in India of 1931 has four chapters on 'plantation' that defines the system as:

The plantation system connotes the acquisition of a limited but fairly extensive area for the cultivation of a particular crop, the actual cultivation being done under the direct supervision of a manager, who in some cases may himself be the actual proprietor. A considerable number of persons (the number may run as high as 4000) are employed under his control in the same way as the factory workers are under the control of the factory manager, but there is one important difference in that work is essentially agricultural and is not concentrated in large building. (p. 349)

Plantation ‘certainly contains elements of a seemingly bygone era of bonded sharecropping labour, but it also reminds us of the capitalist industrial agricultural system’ (Besky, 2014, p. 6). Indeed, it has the characteristics of large scale production of single crops in a geographically intensive and sociologically hierarchical manner. Edelman (1998) defines that plantation also has the elements of ‘peasant’ agriculture, which is characterised by small farmers working land owned by large holders linked with subsistence and large estates (Kearney, 1996; Silverman, 1979). The term plantation thus developed as a plot of ground set with plants. During the period of British colonisation of the West Indies and North America, it came to denote a group of settlers as well as the political unit constructed by such a group (Jain & Reddock, 1998, p. 2). Scott (1976) highlighted that ‘peasantry’ has two remarkable elements that differentiates it from the plantation system. A peasant is a ‘rural cultivator whose production is oriented largely toward family consumption... this defines his central economic goal’. In plantation, on the contrary, the labourers do not grow food for their own families, and this distinguishes them according to the analysis given by Scott about peasant (Besky, 2014, p. 7). Secondly, in the case of ‘peasantry’, a peasant ‘is a part of larger society including non-peasant elites and the state that makes claims upon him which also defines his potential human antagonists in attaining that goal’ (Scott, 1976, p. 157); on the contrary, the plantation labourers are permanent and lifelong members of the industry. Their representation in the system is not only as a labourer, but they live in that particular space and thereby also trace a sense of belonging. It, however, does not negate the space as also being a space of oppression. One can thus compare this to the notion of how we trace belongingness within the unit of a family.

Although plantations are usually located in tropical areas, ownership and investment traditionally come from the North. Plantations as a ‘total institution of residence and work where a large number of life-situated individuals, cut-off from the wider society for an appreciable period, together with lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life’ (Goffman, 1961, p. 13). Plantation such as sugar, cotton, tobacco, coffee, rubber, tea concentrates on strict profit and loss calculations. European colonisation started plantation as a new form of ‘colony’ for their economic and physical expansion into previously unexploited regions. Indeed, the plantation system is functionalised through a kind of capitalistic exploitation in tropical areas where it developed as a political-economic institution (Jain & Reddock, 1998, p. 2).

Thompson (1975) regards the historical geography of the plantation as an outcome of its requirements. He characterised the plantation as a landed estate specialising in the production of agricultural staples for export. The plantation, according to Thompson was sparked into life by the market relationship itself. As an economic institution, plantation responds to ‘an industrial dynamic exercised through agricultural rather than through manufacturing production’ (ibid., p. 34). As an agriculturalist, the planter has to master the technical knowledge and skill required for the cultivation of new types of crops and to organise the production. According to him, the most important role of a planter is to perform as a manager of the dependent labour force. In his words, ‘the planter can be no mere landlord or farmer; he is chief of state and head of government’ (ibid., p. 29). This reflects that a plantation is a unit of authority.

This conceptual thread turned my initial concern into what constituted the categories of ‘peasant’ and ‘proletarian/labour’ into the larger colonial discourse. The mix of colonial and capitalist taxonomies, representations, investments, and sentiments shaped the plantations. According to Stoler (1985), ‘colonial capitalism’ conveniently collapsed the colonial into a modifier of capitalism. Marxist interpretation is relevant here as Marx (1998) distinguishes between two stages in the capital’s domination of labour. In the first stage, there is merely ‘formal subsumption’ of labour under capital. In the second phase, the ‘real subsumption’ of labour under capital, the capitalist moves into the process of production itself. Marx (ibid.) while describing the relationship between ‘fixed’ and ‘circulating’ capital, primarily concentrates on specific locations and populations. In this way, the capitalist exploits the worker through his ownership of the means of production but does not extend his domination to the process of production. Marx connected colonialism to mercantilism through the development of industry:

Today industrial supremacy implies commercial supremacy. In the period of manufacture properly so called, it is, on the other hand, commercial supremacy that gives industrial predominance. Hence, the preponderant role that the colonial system plays at that time.
(ibid., p. 533)

Plantation production has indeed a contested relationship with capitalism. Graeber (2003) explained that it is neither a ‘traditional’ social relation nor a formally capitalist relation of production; it is rather a generalised form of commodity

production effected through specific relations of domination. Plantation as one of the early origin in the life cycle of capitalism, Croucher & Wesis stated that ‘as boundary drawing is attempted around what capitalism is, plantations occupy the borderlands’ (Croucher & Wesis, 2011, p. 7). Plantation spaces are typically zones designed to optimise production and profit while controlling and monitoring labourers (Delle, 1998; Hauser, 2011a; Lenik, 2012). However, the strategy of labour control in the plantation is gendered and to create a ‘stable’ labour force through ‘family formation’. So, immediately the private and domestic are at once public and political.

Before 1826, Assam was a semi-feudal society characterised by the predominant presence of a barter economy with a limited circulation of money (Guha, 1991, p. 142). The establishment of the Assam Tea Company^{vi} in 1839 and the rapid expansion of the acreage under tea brought about significant changes to the socio-economic life of the people, especially those of Upper Assam as a colonial space. The strategies of making Upper Assam as a ‘colonial space’ here means making relations of power, production, and reproduction theoretically charged and politically active. Moreover, no other crop could have created an equal demand for development of transport and communication in Assam like tea, and all developments in the state during 1840-59 centred around tea (ibid., p. 160).

Labour lines are not ‘villages’, quarters are not ‘homes’

Though there are cultural differences, different orders of hierarchy, separations, and borders, but the labourers regard the *bagan* as a ‘family’. ‘We want to engage with work in the garden rather than going outside it. Here, we are working as a family, and that is why we do not want to lose the bonding of work’, said Binita while plucking in the rainy season in the tea garden. Furthermore, *bagan* is not only a system of work but it is also a feeling of satisfaction for some of the pluckers. Rita Munda, who describes herself as a ‘permanent labour’^{vii} said, ‘if *bagan* gives us the facilities we cannot go outside to work’. For the approval and regulation of work, the labourers should be conscious of the work schedule. Logen Mirkha, who has sixteen years of experience as a labour of the garden, became the *sardar* (supervisor) two years back implied, ‘if we want to stay in the garden we have to follow the garden rules and regulations. We must work hard to sustain here’, he said. His comments implied that *bagan* is a site where ‘expectations of permanence’ emerged among workers, even as such expectations were systematically undermined by plantation workers (Ferguson, 1999, p. 46).

However, in many cases, the formal structure of the *bagan* is not easy to understand for the pluckers. Rewati, a permanent plucker, does not know where the tea will be supplied. 'Our wages come from the profit of the tea. That is why we love the *bagan*', she commented. Sumitra and her daughter are pluckers in the same group, although Sumitra is permanent and her daughter Uma is a *faltu* (temporary) labour. 'We love to work in the garden together rather than working outside it. Because we feel comfortable and secure inside the *bagan*', Sumitra said. Crossing out of the boundaries of a regular space is significant in terms of social security. Wallman (1978) noted that the social boundary 'marks the edge of a social system, the interface between that system and one of those contiguous upon it'. On the contrary, boundaries are also for the members of these systems and how it marks the members off from non-members as well as the role that they play based on their identity. So, plantation space can be characterised by an interface line between inside and outside with the identity line between 'us' and 'them'. It overlays the physical space by making symbolic use of its objects. Indeed, production of space and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas. Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 141).

Uma, on the contrary, commented 'we feel confident in plucking as we have learned this skill generation after generation despite the less *hazira* (wage)'. Spatial practices, which hold production and reproduction at some particular locations, also carry spatial features of each social formation. Spatial practices ensure continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of plantation space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a granted level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance* (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 33). The spatial practice of plantation thus have both the layers of competence and performance; competence in terms of regularisation of work from temporary to permanent where the skill of plucking is the primary performance for the pluckers. Rita Nagbangshi, a woman plucker from the tea garden, implied:

The women pluckers have to go for work after having domestic violence in the previous night. The psychological stress carried by the pluckers is very high inside the gardens. It is one of the primary reasons because of which the women pluckers start drinking. Most of them do not have time for recreational activities.

After the ban of sulai (the local liquor), the men labourers buy from the wine shops which is more costly than sulai. If a labourer receives the amount of hazira of 167 and buys a liquor of 120, how can he/she save money? Because of this, their children have to face the hardest burden of their families. They quit school and start to work either in the garden or manager's residence.

Nevertheless, the management tries to divide the working class by creating competition between men and women labourers. From the beginning men, as employers and co-workers, have accepted women only in jobs that correspond to familial roles. There is an argument that women's engagement in factory work lasts only for a short while. The faltu male members from a tea labour family try to search for jobs outside the bagan so that the extra cash helps in the construction and maintenance of the quarters. But it will again increase the burden of women labourers in the bagan as men hardly get employment opportunities of sustainable wage. The gendered economic precarity that had increased since India's Independence exemplifies how the progressive deterioration of colonial infrastructure parallels the deterioration of domestic stability (Jegathesan, 2015, p. 45; Willford, 2014, p. 36). However, the tea estates of public sector undertakings, proprietorship, partnership as well as Assam Tea Corporation Limited (ATCL) do not take the demand for hiking the wage to Rs 351.33 seriously. The current wage in these tea estates is Rs 167, except for the ATCL tea estates such as Cinnamara TE, Naginijan TE, Deepling TE, Messamara TE. The current hazira of ATCL tea estates is Rs 137 without the facility of quarters and the proper amount of rations. Behal (2006) stated that the tea industry never suffered from a complete stoppage of production during its long history and this feature differs in the Assam valley tea plantations from the other major industries such as jute, textiles, and mining in British India^{viii}. Because of that, it only employed arguably the most significant labour force at the lowest level of wages of any private capitalist enterprise in the history of colonial India. On the other hand, those industries except tea have transformed over time regarding labour structure and production.

Eli, another woman labourer from the tea garden implied, 'we meet different people here coming from different lines. We eat together, express our feelings with each other, even we sing together, and that is how we forget our pain'. The togetherness in the form of the informal grouping of friends reflects the kinship ties of the respective labour lines. The emotional connection with the garden is critical in the sense of being and belonging to a particular space and place.

Emotions not only define someone's relationships with others, but also with spaces and places. Bagan here is a space which is inscribed to the life of the labourers and their day to day experiences. Sara Ahmed (2001) argued that emotions move us but also connect us to what surrounds us. She described, '...what moves us, what makes us feel...is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place' (Ahmed, 2001, p. 11). There is a distinction between the discourse of family and household regarding its type and composition. Agarwal (1994) stated that family is the material structure which may contain several distinctly demarcated social groups, while household implies a certain sharing of budgeting and compensation. Indeed, there is a link between the ownership, production, consumption, and distribution as well as reproduction in a particular household system. The household 'dimension' of the family, as Shah (1973) defined is linked with the strictly crucial and co-resident group. The joint household is significant for tea industry because of the demand for labour. However, the bagan itself is a bigger family for the labourers which gives them residence and work. So, the value and norms of the bagan is a continuous process of recovering 'the family' with the guaranty of permanent employment. Bagan thus reflects a form of the structure of household to a process of labour.

Parsons wrote, 'as the occupational system develops and absorbs functions in society it must be at the expense of the relative prominence of kinship organisation as a structural component in one sense, and must also be at the expense of what previously have been functions of the kinship unit' (Parsons, 1955, p. 12). While discussing the Indian joint family system, Maine (1972) critically argued about the absolute power of the family controlled by a senior most male member. In an industrial and colonial set up, the family system is significant not only to control the labourers but to divide them physically and sexually. Chafetz states, 'undergirding all systems of gender stratification is a gender-based division of labour, by which women are chiefly responsible for different tasks than are men' (Chafetz, 1991, p. 77). The gendered division of labour and income of the family is indeed a factor of concern for the management of the tea industry (Beteille, 1991, p. 28). The entire process of *faltu* to permanent labour is functionalised in such a cycle so that the family cannot break down. There are two types of labour lines in the tea gardens, namely, the lines where the permanent labourers have the quarters and the *bastis* (villages) which are constructed by the labourers^{ix}. For the quarters provided by the management, one member of each family has to work in the garden as permanent labour. As the ITA records show, planters had committed themselves to allocating houses 'on

the basis of one family to one house' (ITA, 1955, p. 254). 'Family' in this case meant a nuclear unit, having neolocal residence. This means that a married couple who were both employed in a bagan could expect to share a single house. In this way, the household process is dependent on permanent labour and his/her continuation of work. Plantation houses are sites that labourers can access but can never own. Calvao (2016) explained that housing is also considered as a site where a sense of belonging and intergenerational connection emerges alongside exploitative and dehumanising labour regimes. The labourers have no property in plantation and they are merely temporary occupants (ITA, 1890, p. 28). Indeed, labour lines are not 'villages' and that quarters are not 'homes'^x.

The Company and *saheb/babu*

The Company manifested itself as a system in which the planter holds powers. Company is the word frequently used by the labour as a designation of the management. Most of the labourers did not know the name of the company though they used the word. The *saheb* is the symbol of legitimate rule, metamorphic, corporeal, and the cultural core around which the geographies of authority/power are mapped. The *saheb* is indeed superior representation in terms of social distance, inclusion and exclusion. The widespread use of the term *saheb* suggests that planters and labourers together define their social space as an extension of feudal rule.

Saheb/babu is reflective of the superiority for the planters while the labourers are ethnically and racially in an inferior position. Sydie (1987) saw women's dependent social position as fundamentally determined by 'the normal superiority of the physical and intellectual energies of the male'. 'Acceptance' of the patronage without any question is the Gramscian (1971) notion of hegemony. The hierarchical work regime is thus constituted through the legitimate authority to extract the labour power for the profit of tea. The company has twin arms of the dominant ideology of order and discipline to continue the efficiency, productivity as well as profit (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 170). The company thus controls plantation feudalism through the superior-inferior structure. This process consequently begins a colonisation of life by work.

Bhadra Mirkhaa, sardar as well as a former president of a trade union, shared that the company gives them fewer facilities. 'If the company provides the labourers with every facility, will they work for it?' The question is a reflection of the

relation between the management and the labourers. It also indicates about the lack of understanding about the idea of rights and connects to the point about the feudal order. He also said that the company only helps them to sustain in the garden. 'Even the company built such kind of houses where you can only live and not to dream more', Mirkha maintained. The house that does not let the labourers' dream embalms of a condition that makes one continue in a vicious cycle of being labour in the tea gardens. The company thus is not only a concrete structure; it is a virtual power of authority that is inscribed to every dimension of the life of the labourers.

Belongingness to the bagan

The imagination of bagan as an intimate space by the labourers reminds of the issue of belongingness. Tea garden, though is a private property for the company, its public nature defines how it is attached to the daily life of the labourers. The household is an automatic self-regulating administrative unit, whose individual members are identified in terms of their relations to the household 'head'. Similarly, the entire bagan is a household and the labourers follow the orders of the barasaheb, i.e. the General Manager of the company. In this regard, the economic and political role of the bagan as a household is an intermediary unit between the labourers and the management/company.

The belongingness to the space of bagan cannot be ignored while interpreting the division of field and factory. In many cases, the bagan is not a precarious site to the women labourers but a secure space of the more prominent family; negotiating belonging is a concern related to the feminised space of the field and masculine space of the factory. Bagan, in fact, is an intimate space for not only work, but it is also a familial space of security and ties of social relationships. The question of security here is linked with sexuality, the status of the women's marriage as well as belongingness to a known place rather than encountering an unknown one.

Tea plantation follows a cultivation scheme based on seasons. Therefore, there is a strong dependence on weather, which is also useful for the deployment of various labour tasks. The first flush occurs in March. The permanent field labourers are engaged in the morning shift of work during this season. From June, with the arrival of monsoons, the primary task of harvest which is plucking reaches the peak of its intensity. During this entire season the industry is dependent on women labourers. The second major season of cultivation begins at

the end of November, which is pruning. Both men and women labourers do this work. Though the field work is considered to comprise of massive manual works, plucking is generally described as a skill that women have achieved through their nimble fingers. Despite rationalisation, the tea industry is still heavily labour intensive. Plucking is provided by women that are crucial for producing high quality tea; yet labourers are not given any particular benefits as a reward for their exclusive contribution to the tea industry. Women workers imagine the plantation as a space of care. The recognition that plantation work is not only environmental work but also a form of social reproduction produces more complex moral expectations between labour, management, and the landscape (Besky, 2017, p. 86).

The *siren*: the connection between the field and the factory

The second phase of production is the factory, which is also the end point of plantation's productive logic. Chatterjee (2011) termed the factory as the 'plantation power'. The factory is a large white building lying adjacent to the managerial and staff office. The factory, though dependent on seasonal production of the leaf, is also a reflection of the industrial workplace. The space within the factory is arranged in such a manner that it defines the relation between machines and male bodies. Machines replace the tea bush as a site of human reference, and it is a shift that constructs different modalities of labour (ibid., p. 176).

The factory is primarily male dominated where the machines of manufacture create large internal spaces. Unlike the typical image of a crowded factory, tea factory is spacious and well organised. The factory space governs through planter's ideology of order. Within the management there are various work disciplines under the immediate surveillance of the senior manager. The management is also dependent on the cycles of the field season as well as the women workforce. The spaces within the factory and the management are a reflection of a masculine regime of plantation while the field is feminised. It is clear from this view that manufacturing is mostly regarded as masculine work.

There is virtually unlimited power of the planters over their workers along with the 'garden time'. The garden time is an indication of the industrial clock, which is put ahead by an hour from the standard time in the work schedule of the tea gardens. Harvey (1990) admitted that each social formation constructs objective conceptions of space and time sufficient unto its own needs and purposes of

material and social reproduction and organises its material practices following those conceptions. According to Harvey, there is parallel domination over nature and women as ‘natural beings’. For instance, Blake insisted that ‘time and space are real beings’, where ‘time is a man and space is a woman, and her masculine Portion is Death’ (as cited in Forman, 198, p. 4). In both of the field sites, the pluckers are conscious about the time of beginning their work and they maintain the schedule strictly with the presence of the sardars and field managers. Time here is an order constructed by the management while the field is regarded as natural. It indicates that the field is a female space but maintaining a work schedule clears that there is a domination of the male management. So, there is a contradiction and hierarchy between time-space which is historically produced and reproduced in tea estates.

Along with the machines, there is also a large clock which is synchronised with the factory siren. The clock thus marks the day of work with the siren’s sound which reaches into the field. So, the spaces of the field and the factory, though clearly segregated from each other, but are connected through the siren’s sound. The siren is a symbolic representation of colonial time schedules. There was a temporal schism between the garden times and the Indian Standard Time during the colonial period. The siren clock was advanced for half an hour. Thus when it was 5.30 in the morning by the Indian Standard Time, the siren would sound the beginning of the 6. However, with the postcolonial legal stipulations of six and eight hour’s day, garden time is strictly obsolete, and its earlier extractive objective cannot be met (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 176).

Labourers, nonetheless, continue to perceive this artefact of colonial schedule as somehow present within the contemporary regimes of work. The siren sounds five times during the day, beginning at four in the morning. It sounds again at 12 when the first phase of plucking is finished and the labourers receive lunch break. It sounds at 1 pm which is an indication to start the work again. The siren sounds at 5 pm which is directly related to *thika* (contractual) workers. The final siren is at 7 pm and it is for the factory as well as for the staff workers.

The image of the field and factories are not just the reflection of work structure. ‘To work’ means, as Donna Haraway (2010) explains, ‘to get on’- to get along in a relationship and to move forward, together, in time. To work also means to labour. In maintenance, ‘idioms that are not themselves determined by capital prove consequential for actors’ experiences of economic transformation and, in

turn, influence the continuity of capitalist cycles' (Hebert, 2015, p. 35). It is also a reflection of how a particular space is feminised for the benefits of the management. According to Custer (1997), despite modernisation and the spread of commodity production, the division of labour between men and women remains consistent. He divides the sexual division of labour as social in the domestic sphere, while sectoral refers to the hierarchal structure of tasks within a sector. So, the social division of labour has not only remained mostly intact but is combined with sectoral work.

Conclusion

In this way, the plantation landscape has dynamic, complex and dialectical relations to capitalist process and becomes a unique site of work produced and reproduced by the colonial power structure. The power structure is a combination of different elements, which virtually can control the labourers, especially women labourers. The bagans in upper Assam has depended on the continued, permanent settlements of labourers, yet it has yielded them the settlers' rights afforded by such sustained occupancy, according to Indian regulations such as post-independence land reforms. Having no property rights is an indication of domination and production to the qualitative experience of exploitative work (Calvao, 2016, p. 452). Although capitalism appears to be reaching its limits in tea gardens in Upper Assam, and domestic space appears to be decaying in terms of maintenance of quarters and security of land rights. To understand the tension of labourers in terms of land rights, it is essential to interpret the lived space between bondage and security of work.

It also follows a plantation ideology under which there is continuous oppression of labourers in general and women labourers in particular. Plantation ideology is based on capitalist production precisely linked to male power. Historically, colonialism develops a labour class which is the primary source of tea gardens, and it also maintains two layers of control. The first one is the management which can directly divide the workspaces for men and women labourers. However, Marx and Engels argued, 'by the action of modern industry, all family ties among proletarians are torn asunder' (Marx et al., 1998, p. 57). The gendered division of work indicates that the work burden of women is higher than the males in both the public and private spaces. The most powerful one is the companies which accumulate the capital and keep the colonial spaces in a hierarchical power structure. Bondage labour is an important quality to continue in the plantation

system, and the management imposes the division of gender in the work regime. For this, the entire industry is dependent on the continued bondage labourers to land complemented by the fact that the wages on plantations are too low to support independent livelihoods. The system demanded that the families have the facilities of food rations, housing and other non-monetary forms of compensation. From one point of view, the ration has a direct link to the success of the tea trade. On the other hand, the plantation workers are tied to such a vicious cycle that they can hardly protest against the exploitation.

However, while talking about the security of work in tea gardens one cannot ignore the tension in late capitalism between the private space (freedom) and work space (bondage). Revisiting the colonial spaces in the bagans thus certainly demands some structural changes in cash and non-cash benefits, but it also points towards the issue of belongingness to the garden space in terms of the growing resistance of the demands for Schedule Tribe status of the tea labourers community.

Notes:

ⁱ Due to ethical concern, the name of the tea garden is not mentioned here.

ⁱⁱ Soja (2001) makes the point that ‘space is never given’. It is never an ‘empty box’ to be filled, never ‘only a stage or a mere background’. Soja’s analysis helps to understand that space is politically constructed, and like any political entity, plantation space is either formed/changed, or accepted/rejected.

ⁱⁱⁱ Historian Jayeeta Sharma (2011) argues in her book *Empire’s Garden* that the British viewed the indigenous tea variety of Assam as ‘wild’ and ‘uncivilised’. Assam tea is always referred as ‘*jungli stock*’ where *jungli* means wild. It is also used by the British to refer to the native inhabitants of the region and later on to the plantation labourers. For the colonial botanists, the wild tea is problematic, and that is why they hypothesised that it would be wise to temper the Assam *jat* with the non-native, more civilised Chinese *jat*. Though the planters founded the industry in the image of Chinese tea production, gradually it lost the mode of production, not only because of its lack of mechanisation, but also in its organisation of labour. Chinese labourers refused to perform any labour not associated with the cultivation and manufacture of tea, including clearing forest, pottering tea and supplies. Then the British planters attempted to attract native people, particularly Nagas and Kacharis in Upper Assam who would perform such manual labour. By the 1850s, it became clear that the model of producing tea with an imported Chinese labour force was unsustainable.

^{iv} Mr. Charles Bruce, who was the Superintendent of tea culture and had to look after the government tea plantation in Assam, pioneered the term ‘garden’, which has the vernacular meaning *bari*. In pre-colonial Assam, *bari* and *basti* had particular denotation that referred to raised or highlands used for homestead and garden sites. Peasants used to have hereditary proprietary rights over these sites. The tea *baris* of the Assam Company and other planters thus owned it as their private property which was a significant claim, considering the vast area of land that the tea enterprise occupied from the state (Sarma, 2011, p. 40).

^v The first stage can be observed in the ‘putting-out’ system of early capitalism. In this phase, the capitalist provide a labour with raw materials and paid him a wage to transform them into a finished product. In this way, the labour is

reduced to an appendage. So, in the second phase, there is an additional form of domination in which the labour loses all autonomy.

^{vi} Tea Committees were formed in early 1834, the starting of the Government Experimental Tea Gardens in 1836 and the first successful manufacture of Assam Tea in December 1837. In 1840, two-thirds of the Government Experimental Gardens were transferred to the Assam Company (Guha, 1991, p. 13).

^{vii} Similar studies are reflected from Verena Stolcke's works on Sao Paola plantations, *Coffee Planters, Workers and Wives* (1988), in which she showed major shifts in labour recruitment strategies from 'permanent to casual' labour in the Sumatran estates in the 1970s by the exploitation of family labour and by manipulation of gender hierarchies within it.

^{viii} Because of that 'it employed arguably the largest labour force at the lowest level of wages of any private capitalist enterprise in the history of colonial India'. On the other hand, those industries except tea have transformed over time regarding labour structure or production.

^{ix} After Indian Independence in 1947, when ownership of the companies gradually began shifting to Indian companies, planters have consistently made licit and illicit efforts to reduce the plantation house to 'mere' infrastructure, a basic shelter for labour and nothing more.

^x The history of plantation housing, as mentioned in the Annual Bulletins of the Indian Tea Association (ITA) founded in 1881 and still going on. Across South and Southeast Asia, the maintenance of a feasible labour force has historically been entangled with households/quarters and identity formation (Breman, 1989; Daniel, 2008; Stoler, 1985).

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Article: Internet Use among Tweens and Teens: Threats, Risks and Concerns

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Internet Use among Tweens and Teens: Threats, Risks and Concerns

--- Kanika Panwar

Abstract

The 'second modernity' has created 'manufactured risks' that are unsolicited repercussions of technology backfiring on human society, forcing it to respond to them. No one is safe from globally emerging risks of technology that have turned boundaries irrelevant. The interactive capabilities of the Internet 2.0, through user-generated content and participatory culture, has brought the threats and risks like cyber bullying, cyber-stalking, online sexual solicitation, exposure to pornography, into the life of tweens (pre-teens) and teens. Based on the concepts of 'risk society' and 'information security', this paper presents the risks and threats faced by tweens and teens from internet use. Grounded on a systematic review of studies pertaining to different threats, this paper conducts a risk analysis of these threats. Endeavoring to contribute towards 'Cyber Sociology', it concludes with the concerns faced by the family, society and state.

Key words: Cyber-bullying, Cyber-stalking, Internet use, Risk Assessment Matrix, Risk Society

Introduction

India, having 560 million internet users and second largest online population in the world after China, is expected to reach 600 million by 2021, 32 per cent of which are estimated to be in the age group of 12 to 19 years in the year 2019 (Statista, 2020). India shares the global characteristics of increasing internet use by tweens and teens. An average internet using tween (pre-teen, 8-12 yrs) and teen (13-17 yrs) in India represents a child trying to strike a balance between high degree of parental aspirations, peer pressure and imaginations. The internet has opened up a world of opportunities for all ages, but at the same time, it is laced with enormous content deemed unfit for them.

Hannemyr argues, 'the adoption rate of the internet has exceeded that of earlier mass communication technologies by several magnitudes', making it an 'irreversible' innovation (Hannemyr, 2003, p. 111). Lenhart (2001) opined that an entire generation of youth growing up with the internet resulted in it gradually replacing television as the prime source of entertainment, communication and education. According to Tillman, development of more sophisticated searching tools on the internet resulted in increased likelihood of identifying information and answers to questions but, 'within the morass of networked data are both valuable nuggets and an incredible amount of junk' (Tillman, 2003, p. 1). This junk may be in the form of unsolicited information, advertisements, gaming sites or even pop-ups of pornographic nature.

The constant exposure of young minds to the unsuitable load of information and dangers has been studied by various researchers. Though there is a lack of multivariate studies on threats and risks of internet use by tweens and teens, various univariate studies have focused on the risks to tweens and teens in the form of internet addiction (Shapira et al., 2003; Young, 1998; Yen et al., 2007), exposure to pornography (Quadara et al., 2017; Flood, 2009, 2007), self-harm (Grandclerc et al., 2016; Lewis & Seko, 2016; O'Connor et al., 2014), effect on mental health and depression (Kraut et al., 1998; Bessièrè et al., 2010), cyber-bullying (Smith et al., 2008; Nixon, 2014; Litwiller & Brausch, 2013), cyber-stalking (Maple et al., 2011; Worsley et al., 2017), online sexual solicitation (Mitchell et al., 2007; Whitaker & Bushman, 2009) and trolling (Griffiths, 2014). These studies have elaborated various threats of internet use individually, but a holistic approach to the threat, impact and risk severity analysis is highly desirable.

The present study being exploratory in nature identifies and analyses threats and risks, explores vulnerabilities, likelihood and impacts associated with tween and teen internet use to compensate the research gap. The articles and research reports for the present study were extracted using keyword search technique through Google Scholar, Science Direct, PubMed, Web of Science and other publication houses. Articles reporting specific threats of internet use by tweens and teens were searched and studied thoroughly using a focused checklist.

The present study, aiming to contribute towards Cyber Sociology and Sociology of Risk, applied the qualitative technique of 'Risk assessment matrix' and 'Risk analysis of threat' using likelihood and impact to find out the severity of risks

associated with each threat. Risk and threat were the two major conceptual categories used in this paper which were drawn from the concept of ‘Risk society’ⁱ and ‘Information security studies’ⁱⁱ.

The modern-day ‘network society’ⁱⁱⁱ brings with it an unprecedented speed of processing information, great volume of information, the complexity of operations involved and speed of communication. This also brings with it the risks as mentioned by Beck (2002) in ‘risk society’. According to him, technology keeps on producing new risks and humans as members of the society are required to respond to them.

‘The difference being that risk is attributable to positive human intentionality, so that harms constitute “bads” that are tied up with the production of “goods”, while the threat is attributable to negative intentionality, the harm being deliberately produced by ill-intentioned actors’ (Beck, 2002, p. 44).

Beck defines risk as ‘a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced by modernisation itself’ and ‘in contrast to all earlier epochs (including industrial society), the risk society is characterised essentially by a lack: the impossibility of an external attribution of hazards. In other words, risks depend on decisions, they are industrially produced and in this sense politically reflexive’ (Leiss et al., 1994, pp. 545-546).

As per above discussion, the objectives of the paper are:

- i. Identification and profiling of threat and risk to the assets (tweens and teens).
- ii. To appraise the implications of internet use by assets and conduct risk analysis of threat.
- iii. To assess severity of risk to the assets through risk assessment matrix.

Internet Use Patterns and Online Behavior

Internet use among the assets is expanding as evident by a survey (McAfee, 2014) administered across India on tweens and teens. On a normal week, almost three-fourths of online teens spend more than 5 hours on the internet. Among the social networking sites used, Facebook is preferred (93 per cent), followed by YouTube (87 per cent) and WhatsApp (79 per cent). The tweens reported using social

accounts such as Snapchat, Pinterest, Tinder, Tumblr, and Vine daily, little higher than their teen counterparts (McAfee, 2014).

More than half of the teens hide their online behaviour from their parents and clear their browser history, almost one-third delete messages, one-fourth use privacy settings, almost one-fourth use a mobile device instead of laptop/desktop or minimise the browser when adults walk in, almost one-third teens do not worry about their parents finding out anything, they just need privacy (MacAfee, 2013). In 2017, one-third of internet users worldwide were children, showing 'children are accessing the internet at increasingly younger ages. In some countries, children under 15 are as likely to use the internet as adults over 25' (UNICEF, 2017, p. 9). A large number of teens are participating in dangerous and even illegal activities, such as hacking. In addition to putting themselves in risky situations, much of their online behaviour is also creating personal problems as well.

Risk, Threat and Vulnerabilities

The growth of the online industry has led to a transition from physical to virtual. Everything from marketplace to eateries, entertainment to education is available online. This rampant growth of cyber-world carries various potentially detrimental threats.

Operationalising the concept of risk, it can be deduced as a function of threats exploiting vulnerabilities to damage or destroy assets. Thus, threats (actual, conceptual, or inherent) may exist, but if there are no vulnerabilities then there is little/no risk. Similarly, one can have vulnerability, but if there is no threat, then there is little/no risk.

Threat is a statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done. In consonance with sociological notions of risk and uncertainty, this definition puts stress on the pro-active exposition of future damages in terms of 'staging of risk' (Beck, 1999). 'It conveys the meaning that there is necessarily a hostile actor out there, an intentional adversary whose aim is to cause harm to a valued object.' (Battistelli & Galantino, 2018, p. 6).

The principal ideas used in this paper are:

Threat as, anything that can exploit a vulnerability, intentionally or accidentally, and obtain, damage, or destroy an asset (tween and teen).

Risk as, the potential for loss, damage or destruction of an asset as a result of a threat exploiting a vulnerability.

Vulnerability is a weakness of an asset or a group of assets that can be exploited by one or more threats.

Impact is defined in terms of any long-term effect to the health and well-being of asset, whether intended, unintended, positive, negative, direct or indirect.

Likelihood is a chance that the threat can successfully exploit the relevant vulnerability related to internet use.

Social Concern is any issue, problem, or conflict that is a high priority for a society to solve or prevent.

A: Risk Analysis of Threat

For analysing threat, comprehending the impact, likelihood and risk involved are pertinent. For this purpose, 'impact' has been classified into low, moderate and high concerning health and well-being of assets. The health and well-being are positive factors which people perceive about life satisfaction and good living conditions. Well-being includes positive evaluation of people's life such as happiness, life satisfaction, healthy life, healthy behavior, emotional fulfillment, social capital, etc. Health refers to a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Gasper, 2007). A threat was categorised as high if it severely impacted health and well-being by being potentially detrimental or causing grievous hurt (Table 1). When it had ordinary impact on health and well-being, such as physical, social and/or mental pathologies, it was considered to be of a moderate impact. Low impact threats were considered similarly. Table 1 lists the impact faced by assets owing to different threats.

Table 1: Health and Well-Being Concerns and Impact of Threat

Threat	Major Health and Well-being concerns	Impact
T1 Internet addiction	Anxiety, stress, impact on physical health and social life, compulsive behavior	Low
T2 Poor physical health	Sedentary life-style, decline in physical fitness, irregular diet patterns, sleep deprivation	Low
T3 Negative social relations	Low social activities, weak social ties, negative impact on academics	Low
T4 Tendency of self-harm	Self-poisoning, self-injury, depressive thoughts, suicidal ideation	High
T5 Cyber-bullying	Depression, anxiety, delinquent behavior, suicidal ideation, self-harm	High
T6 Cyber-stalking	Intimidation, sleep deprivation, PTSD, risk of homicide, suicidal ideation	High
T7 Online sexual solicitation (OSS)	Anxiety, frustration on lack of control, risk of victimisation by pedophiles	High
T8 Exposure to online pornography	Sex addiction, acceptance to sexual violence and physical violence	Moderate
T9 Trolling	Annoyance, hurt, anger, threat of rape and violence in real life	Moderate

It is evident that the assets face various concerns due to different threats delineated. For example, internet addiction (T1) results in anxiety, stress, impact on physical health and social life, poor academic performance and compulsive behavior. These concerns may be harmful for the asset but may not lead to significant loss or disruption in life, thus termed as low impact. Same is observed

for all the threats examined. Correspondingly, the likelihood of a threat was determined as low, moderate and high depending on the probability of its occurrence in the life of an asset. To gauge the likelihood of its occurrence, several sources of information were used including the analysis of classical threat situations and research studies. This process is not expected to deliver the exact probability of a threat actually occurring, but rather to help prioritise those threats which can be deemed as imminent, requiring urgent attention.

The risk analysis of threat (Table 2) was drawn to assess the risk of threats based on impact (Table1) and likelihood of each threat. This analysis breaks down the likelihood of each threat to transpire and its impact on the asset facing the threat. Risk is the intersection of impact and likelihood.

Table 2: Risk Analysis of Threats

	Threat	Impact	Likelihood	Risk
T1	Internet addiction	Low	Moderate	Moderate
T2	Poor physical health	Low	Low	Low
T3	Negative social relations	Low	Moderate	Moderate
T4	Tendency of self-harm	High	Low	High
T5	Cyber-bullying	High	Moderate	High
T6	Cyber-stalking	High	Moderate	High
T7	Online sexual solicitation(OSS)	High	Moderate	High
T8	Exposure to online pornography	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
T9	Trolling	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Table 2 presents risk analysis of threat where poor physical health (T2) is the only low risk threat. Threats like internet addiction (T1), negative social relations (T3), exposure to online pornography (T8) and trolling (T9) are moderate risk threats. The tendency of self-harm (T4), cyber-bullying (T5), cyber-stalking (T6) and online sexual solicitation (OSS) (T7) are high risk threats.

The findings of Table 2 were further corroborated to compute risk severity assessment matrix in Table 3. Each threat was analysed (T1-T9) for the risk likelihood (R1-R3) and the impact of Risk (0-3) to determine the severity (S0-S2) of risk faced by the asset.

B: Risk Assessment Matrix

A risk assessment matrix is a qualitative visible representation of risk severity to ascertain the risk faced due to each threat based on examining the impact and likelihood of each correlate. In the present study, the risk assessment matrix has been calculated on the basis of two variables, i.e. likelihood probability and impact of a risk.

Table 3: Risk Assessment Matrix

RISK PROBABILITY		IMPACT		
		Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Likelihood	R3:Improbable (Unlikely)	Low	Low	Moderate
	R2:Possible (Likely to occur)	Low	Moderate	High
	R1:Probable (Highly likely)	Moderate	High	High

The impact has been termed as low, moderate and high as per consequences of impact associated (Table 1).

Risk probability, or likelihood, is the possibility of a risk occurring, which has been further divided into three categories based on the probability of occurrence (Table 2):

- R1 (Probable): High chances of occurrence
- R2 (Possible): Moderate chances of occurrence
- R3 (Improbable): Low chances of occurrence

Further, the impact was divided into three categories:

- Acceptable (0): Little to no effect on the health and well-being of the asset
- Tolerable (1): Effects on health and well-being are felt but cause no major harm to the asset
- Unacceptable (2): Cause major disruption to the life of the asset or may cause grievous hurt and/or death.

These variables were deduced from Table 2, i.e. risk analysis of threat. Based on the likelihood and impact of each risk, it was placed into the risk assessment matrix and level of severity was designated to each as: Low (S0), Moderate (S1) and High (S2).

The criteria of recognition of risk severity are as per the risk assessment matrix from Table 3. For example, Risk with acceptable impact and low probability would have low severity (NRC, 2005).

As per the risk assessment matrix (Table 3), the threat of internet addiction (T1) and negative social relations (T3) were low severity (S0) because there is a possible risk probability (R2) of an asset experiencing them and has acceptable level (0) impact associated. There is a possibility of these threats to take place in the life of an asset but the severity on health and well-being will be low. Threat of poor physical health (T2) has low severity (S0), indicating improbability (R3) and acceptable level (0) impact. It has low severity, as the impact is acceptable and likelihood improbable, indicating rare chance of occurrence.

The tendency of self-harm and/or suicide (T4) is moderate severity (S1) in spite of unacceptable impact (2) because there is improbable (R3) chance of occurrence. Although this threat is of high impact and may cause grave injury to the asset's health and well-being, but there is a low chance of it taking place. The exposure to online pornography (T8) has moderate severity (S1) risk with probable (R1) chance and tolerable (1) level of risk. The threat of trolling (T9) has a moderate severity (S1) due to some probability of occurrence (R2) and tolerable impact (1) of the threat.

The threat of cyber-bullying (T5), cyber-stalking (T6) and OSS (T7) have a high severity (S2) level because there is a probable (R2) likelihood of occurrence and unacceptable (2) impact associated.

This classification of risk severity as low, moderate and high can be done according to the priority of stakeholders on the basis of perceived loss.

C: Threats Faced by Tweens and Teens

In the following subsections, the threats are individually discussed vis-à-vis the concept, vulnerabilities, likelihood, impact and risk severity based on risk assessment matrix.

T1: Internet Addiction

The term ‘internet addiction’ introduced by Ivan Goldberg (Dalal & Basu, 2016), is defined as internet related, compulsive behavior interfering with regular life, causing a high level of stress on family, peer groups and colleagues. The internet becomes the ruling activity of addicts’ lives (Najar, 2015) as internet addiction is faced by 1.5-8.2 per cent of adolescents in US and Europe (Cash et al., 2012).

According to Liu and Luo (2015), this online behavior may result in the disruption of nerve wiring in the brains of adolescents. They found that a large proportion of individuals who overuse the internet shared the same characteristics with substance addicts such as, excessive use, tolerance, withdrawal, repeated unsuccessful attempts to cut back or quit, and interference in major areas of life functioning. This situation is exemplified by getting a ‘kick’ through the use of the internet and resultantly feeling normal by its usage and feeling of powerlessness and alienation due to inability to shun addiction (NetAddiction, <http://netaddiction.com/>). Pornography, sexting, cyber-sex addiction, addiction to video games, online role plays, online gambling, etc. are some of the most prevalent activities which grasp the attention of internet addicts online (Block, 2008; Cash et al., 2012).

As the excessive internet use is associated with some socio-psychologically dysfunctional variables such as deteriorating social circle, alienation (Yang, 2001), lower self-esteem and life satisfaction (Yen et al. 2007), seeking sensory pleasures (Lin & Tsai, 2002), degenerative mental health (Young & Roger, 1998), and low participation in family activities (Armstrong et al., 2000), it has been

indicated that the internet addiction may enhance internet anxiety. Ahmet and Murat (2011) indicate that the more internet addiction among teens, the more anxious the individual will be.

The threat of internet addiction (T1) multiplies when the vulnerabilities such as loneliness, lack of family attention, socially pathological family and/or living conditions, peer pressure and feeling of powerlessness are exploited to convert into risk. Its risk analysis indicated that it has low level impact and the moderate likelihood of occurrence among the assets. There are moderate chances of them becoming internet addict also with a low level of threat associated.

Evaluation through risk assessment matrix (Table 3) illustrates that there is a possible risk probability (R2) of an asset experiencing internet addiction (T1) and has acceptable level (0) impact associated, resulting in low severity (S0) risk to the asset. It can be deduced that if a tween or a teen is addicted to the internet there is some probability of her/him facing the risk of low level severity which might not lead to grave consequences. The likelihood depends on the co-prevalence of preconditions such as high level of time spent on the internet, perceived or real lack of affection in family, excessive freedom and/or excessive control by the parents, social maladjustment, lack of social capital, and inquisitive tendency.

T2: Poor Physical Health

Long hours spent over the internet result in a sedentary lifestyle of assets. Sitting at a place for long hours (using internet) results in obesity, decline in physical fitness, strain in eyes, migraine/headaches, backaches, pain in the neck, sleep deprivation, postural misalignment and peripheral muscle weakness (Zhen et al., 2016). Assets resort to unhealthy snacking and irregular diet patterns leading to nutritional deficiency resulting in stunted growth and development. In a study of health-related internet use, it was found to be associated with small but reliable increase in anxiety and depression (Bessièrè et al., 2010).

The threat of poor physical health (T2) multiplies with the vulnerabilities such as low physical fitness, weak eyesight and nutritional deficiency. Table 2 indicates T2 to have low impact and low likelihood depending on the already existing lifestyle and the amount of time spent on internet usage. Risk assessment matrix

(Table 3) shows that poor physical health (T2) being improbable (R3) and acceptable (0) impact.

T3: Negative Social Relations

Heavy internet usage is correlated with a decline in and replacement of social activities, as mostly assets like to spend more time in the cyberspace than in the real world, avoiding participation in social gatherings. In addition to this, another effect is observed which is the replacing of 'strong bonds' with weak superficial relations (Moody, 2001). Flaherty et al. (1998) indicated that when teenagers are involved in a large number of virtual relations, they might reduce the number of real-life interactions and relations, substituting their real friends with virtual ones. Kraut et al. (1998) argue that by using the internet, teens substitute poor quality social relationships for better relationships that are substituting weak ties for strong ones. The virtual relations are believed to be weak and single-dimensional lacking kindness, tenderness, sentiments and commitment to the relation. There is a negative relation between internet surfing and life satisfaction which can cause isolation from real-life social relations among teens.

Table 2 illustrates the negative social relations (T3) as a moderate likelihood and low impact correlate. Risk intensifies when the vulnerabilities such as superficial offline relations, loneliness, lack of social solidarity, resentment towards family and society start to take advantage of the threat.

Table 3 indicates that negative social relations (T3) have possible risk probability (R2) and acceptable level (0) impact of the threat, thus qualifying it as low severity (S0) risk. The likelihood of negative social relations (T3) rises with low-quality parent-child relations, low level of family integration, faulty socialisation and low level of social cohesiveness.

T4: Tendency of Self-Harm and/or Suicide

Self-harm is a term used to describe all intentional acts of self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the presence of suicidal intention. This phenomenon is important to understand because the repetition of self-harm is frequent and an independent risk factor for suicide, although many acts of self-harm begin with non-suicidal intentions (Grandclerc et al., 2016).

The tendency of self-harm can be defined as a non-cataclysmic act in which a person commits a particular behaviour or consumes a substance intentionally, causing harm to themselves (Jacob et al., 2017). Internet use may promote self-harm practices as found by O'Connor et al. (2014), where more than one-tenth respondents reported being influenced by self-harm and dangerous content on social networking sites. Oxford review (2013) suggests that moderate or severe internet addiction may be linked to an increased risk of self-harm, as well as enhanced levels of depressive thoughts about suicide. Use of blogs and forums in moderate to high severity was seen to be associated with increased risk of self-harm, rise in depressive thoughts and suicidal tendency (Lewis & Seko, 2016).

When tendency of self-harm and/or suicide (T4) is analysed in Table 2, high impact with low likelihood was observed. The vulnerabilities associated are internet addiction, depressive thoughts, loneliness, poor self-image and/or low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation.

The risk assessment matrix (Table 3) depicts that tendency of self-harm (T4) is improbable (R3) with unacceptable (2) impact, causing a risk to health and well-being of the asset. This locates the severity of risk as moderate severity (S1) because of improbable likelihood. This severity may accentuate with vulnerabilities outlined above. It has low probability likelihood, as it is not very common among the assets.

T5: Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of intimidating and threatening nature including texts or emails, embarrassing pictures, videos, websites or fake profiles posted on social networking sites, publishing/writing fake rumours on forum boards, damaging behaviours in online games such as abusive language and killing players gaming avatar (Smith et al., 2008).

A significant number of causal studies have depicted a conclusive relationship between teenagers' involvement in cyber-bullying and negative health indicators. Assets who are targeted via cyber-bullying report rise in depressive tendency, anxiety, stress, feeling of loneliness, suicidal and self-harm thoughts (Klomek et al., 2008), skipping classes, discontinued social media usage. They are more prone to be unwilling to attend social gatherings, may have low self-esteem and

stress-related health issues. Teens threatened of cyber-bullying are more likely to resort to increased substance use, aggression and delinquent behaviours (Nixon, 2014) and violent tendency as a coping mechanism (Litwiller & Brausch, 2013).

Cyber-bullying (T5) according to Table 2 is high impact threat with moderate likelihood. The vulnerabilities which put assets more in danger are inherent behaviour traits, feeling of isolation and loneliness, and low self-image. Table 3 indicates that the risk severity level of cyber-bullying (T6) is R2 (2), with a possible probability (R2) and unacceptable (2) impact and resultant high severity (S2) level. This level of severity is critical and requires attention to the risk due to the threatening consequences associated. The experiences of assets related to cyber-bullying (T5) range from offensive name-calling, spreading of false rumours, receiving explicit images they didn't ask for, constant asking of what they are doing and whom they are with by someone other than a parent, having explicit images shared without their consent and physical threats.

T6: Cyber-stalking

When a person is followed, tracked online, his/her privacy invaded, constantly watched and threatened using internet technology, it is referred to as cyber-stalking. As the internet is a rapidly expanding medium of technological advancement in 'risk society', it is evolving and providing additional tools for stalkers repository to heighten risk. The impact of cyber-stalking may range from fear, stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, low mood, feeling of helplessness, sleep deprivation, loss of appetite, alienation, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation (Short, 2014) to fear of being killed/physically harmed (Maple et al., 2011).

Table 2 makes it evident that cyber-stalking (T6) is a high impact threat with moderate likelihood of occurrence. The vulnerabilities such as weak password management, sharing private information on the internet and negative social relations may enhance the risk. The Risk assessment matrix (Table 3) depicts T6 as an R2 (2) level of risk with high severity (S2) level, showing a possible likelihood (R2) of its occurrence with unacceptable (2) impact. The high severity (S2) level indicates an urgency to address this threat for its efficient management. Its likelihood augments with real-life situations of the assets such as weak family support, low social capital, low perceived social support, real-life stalking and poor peer connectedness.

T7: Online Sexual Solicitation (OSS)/Online Grooming^{iv}

The OSS may be defined as online communication where one person attempts to coax another person to discuss sex or get involved in sexual activity (Worsley et al., 2017). Online grooming of children for sexual purposes is when an adult communicates online with a child under the age of 18 to establish an emotional connection or relationship with the child and gain their trust for sexual abuse or exploitation (NSPCC, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/grooming/>). This activity is likely to take place on various websites as well as through online video gaming, instant messaging or various social media platforms (Mitchell et al., 2007). OSS may include an asset being incited to engage in sexual activity; this can include sexual chat, generating sexual photos and/or generating sexual videos. They may also (but not necessarily) be encouraged to meet up offline. The behaviour and the purpose of OSS remain consistent across environments, despite potential variation in specific grooming techniques (Whittle et al., 2013).

Whitaker and Bushman (2009) found that assets who had experienced OSS felt extremely upset and felt extremely afraid afterwards. Other negative effects of OSS included uneasiness, embarrassment, distress, inability to stop pondering on it, anxiety, stress, being irritable and losing interest in things (Wolak et al., 2006). Additionally, significant links have been observed between OSS, experience of substance abuse and symptoms of depression (ibid.). Victims of OSS struggle with additional complexities (such as, the possibility of the images being distributed online and the permanence of this) when dealing with the impact of abuse, and there is a need to challenge the presumption that victims of non-contact internet abuse suffer less harm than those who experience contact abuse (Mitchell et al., 2007).

If OSS (T7) is examined for risk analysis of threat (Table 2), it can be observed that this threat is high impact with moderate likelihood. Table 3 indicates a possible likelihood (R2) and unacceptable (2) impact of threat, making it R2 (2) level risk with high severity (S2). The correlates such as easy, frequent, non-monitored access to the internet at an early age leave an asset vulnerable to the risk of OSS. The level of risk may rise to critical as they may accidentally be victimised by a pedophile and may put their lives in danger.

T8: Exposure to Online Pornography

For all the opportunities that the internet provides for education and communication, concerns about children's access to illegal or potentially harmful content such as pornography remain an area of high concern (Livingstone & Mason, 2015; Horvath et al., 2013). The studies about exposure and prevalence suggest a significant number of assets being exposed to pornography online, with the figures being slightly higher among boys (14-16 years) (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014). A survey reports that 30 per cent of 14-17 year olds claim to watch online pornography regularly (Stanley et al., 2018). Not only do teenagers watch sexual content but also exchange and reciprocate with similar content, also creating it using their smart phones and other electronic gadgets. Prevalence figures for sexting are also well studied but they vary widely (Przybylski & Nash, 2018), raising additional policy concerns relating to coercion, consent and illegal image creation (Klettke et al., 2014).

Exposure of assets to pornography leads to tolerance towards casual sex, unprotected sexual behaviour, legitimising myths about non-conventional sexual practices (Flood, 2013), permissive attitude towards multiple partners, indulging in early sex life, pornography addiction, sex addiction, intimacy disorder and sexual violence (Ross, 2012). It may leave a deep impact on the psyche of assets with them getting wrong messages, not only about sex but also gender, power, pleasure, dominance, etc. Watching physical aggression, like slapping, kicking, hair pulling, choking, impossible sexual practices, verbal aggression predominantly against female partners as widely presented over porn sites leaves a deep impact on the subconscious mind of teenagers (Sun et al., 2016). Physical violence and aggression in porn are mostly coupled with non-consensual and non-mutual sexual interaction, where consent is assumed rather than asked (Quadara et al., 2017).

When exposure to online pornography (T8) is examined through risk analysis of threat (Table 2), it is observed that T8 has moderate impact and moderate likelihood. Vulnerabilities like a high level of internet exposure, no supervision over internet access, the influence of peer group, low parent-child communication, faulty socialisation and early exposure to sexual activities may aggravate risk. As per the risk assessment matrix (Table 3), the exposure to online pornography (T8) is evaluated as probable risk (R1) with tolerable level (1) impact and moderate severity (S1).

T9: Trolling

Trolls are individuals who engage in provocative and offensive online behaviour intended to gain attention and create a negative emotional reaction. Morrissey (2010) expanded this further by saying, 'trolling is an utterer producing an intentionally false or incorrect utterance with high order intention [the plan] to elicit from recipient a particular response, generally negative or violent' (Griffiths, 2014, p. 85). Trolls severely disrupt flows of online civil conversations between people. They can be annoying or dangerous to public figures and celebrities. Many people troll out of annoyance, hurt, anger or amusement, and the act of trolling people addresses a need in them to vent anger, hate and sarcasm, or to get attention.

As online interaction becomes a part of postmodern life, internet trolls have become a cause of concern for everybody, especially tween and teen minds. It has become antisocial behaviour in lines with harassment and bullying, resulting in significant emotional distress and threats of violence and even rape in the real world.

Trolling (T9) is emerging as a threat to the virtual world due to the convenience of anonymity. The real-life equations of the power imbalance between genders and offline inequalities are being reflected in online space. When examined through risk analysis of threat (Table 2), it was observed that the impact, as well as the likelihood of occurrence of T9, is moderate. The vulnerabilities which may aggravate the threat by exploiting it are active on social media, blogs or micro blogs, expressing any opinion against the normative structure of society, sexuality and/or religion.

As far as the risk assessment matrix (Table 3) is concerned, the level of risk is R2 (1), i.e. possible risk (R2) and tolerable (1) impact with moderate (S1) level of severity of the risk. S1 is a moderate-severe risk which requires attention towards risk management. The consequences of trolling (T9) may range from anxiety, distress and a threat to harassment.

Emerging Social Concerns

The threats and risks associated with internet use of assets are a cause of concern, not only for the family but also the society and the policy makers.

Family:

Most parents feel unsafe at the prospect of their child using internet, especially those who are aware of its threats, risks and privacy concerns (Sorbing, 2012). In order to safeguard the assets, parents should supervise their online activities including the time spent. The assets should be taught to use customised privacy settings, privacy protection techniques, restriction on location sharing and importance of keeping personal information private. Also use of anti-virus and anti-spyware on the computers and smart phones should be encouraged in the family.

‘Children should be taught to use the internet in the same way we help teach them how to cross the road. They cannot be prevented from crossing the road just because it presents dangers; our role is to teach them how to cross the road safely and responsibly in all situations, and to teach them securely to do so.’ (UNICEF, 2019, p. 1)

Parents must guide the assets about internet usage in the same way as we socialise them about other aspects of society such as following rules, playing with peer group, etc. The assets must be educated to develop resilience and strength in the digital world in the same way as the real world, as virtual is the new reality.

Society:

All the threats, right from OSS to cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and trolling are inflicted by few members of the society over others. As a member of the society it is important to minimise the exposure and risk of the digital world by teaching safe practices to them. The research studies have been concentrating on time spent by them on online platforms, while it should be addressing problematic online content. Technology companies should actively watch and regulate any harmful content and/or restrict its circulation. Technology companies should provide tools that can help parents and educators to support children in learning digital safety and safe internet usage. The educational institutions should train educators to support and guide students for both internet use and avoid abuse. They must keep a watch on access of internet from schools and must internalise the habit of cyber safety and cyber hygiene^v among the students. The threats like cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking should be taken seriously and effective measures such as student-

teacher counseling, peer counseling, activities and workshops may be conducted for assets to understand the threat and give courage to those who are facing the threats.

Policymakers:

Policymakers hold a very important holistic role in the management of the risk by implementing appropriate policies and associated mechanisms, promote awareness, monitor and evaluate policy and control effectiveness. There is a lack of specific laws to address the threats associated with internet use in India. The IT Act Amendment 2008 has provisions dealing with cyber-bullying, but not all threats with high severity are addressed efficiently.

Conclusion

Technology keeps on producing new risks which the human society has to respond to and cope with. These risks are not spatial or time constrained, they are global and spread as technology itself. With Internet 2.0, the world is facing the challenges posed by this new advance in technology. As Beck (1992, 2002) opines, risk society is an inescapable structural condition of advanced industrialisation in a way that it produces the risks and then keeps occupied with managing them. The hazards produced by risk society threat everybody, they are not distributed according to wealth, social structure or stratification, and they affect society as a whole. This fact has been made clear by the present study.

Assessment of the risk severity through risk assessment matrix illustrates that threats such as internet addiction, poor physical health and negative social relations had low risk severity. The second group of threats was tendency of self-harm, exposure to pornography and trolling which were of moderate severity, having some effect on health and well-being. The high severity risks were found to be cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and online sexual solicitation, which leads us to concerns about the safe internet usage. Though the risks produced by the technology do not differentiate between individuals and societies, but the ability to avert the risk depends upon information, knowledge and education.

There is a need to further study the management of these risks in detail which was not the objective of the present study. To manage the risks and threats and to provide structural solutions for the same, an investigation into risk management of threats and risks among tween and teen internet use is highly required. Modern

society has developed into a risk society, increasingly engaged with assessing, averting and managing self-induced risks.

Notes:

ⁱ Ulrich Beck (1992) coined the term 'risk society', which is used to describe the type of risks that have primarily been created as a result of the industrialisation and modernisation processes.

ⁱⁱ Information security is a set of strategies for managing the processes, tools and policies necessary to prevent, detect, document and counter threats, risks and vulnerabilities to digital and non-digital information.

ⁱⁱⁱ The concept of the network society is closely associated with interpretation of the social implications of globalisation and the role of electronic communications technologies in society.

^{iv} The terms Online Sexual Solicitation and Online Grooming are used interchangeably.

^v Cyber hygiene refers to the practices and steps of maintaining system health and improves online security by users of computers and other devices.

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Research in Progress: Conflict and Compensation in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Kaziranga National Park, Assam

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Conflict and Compensation in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Kaziranga National Park, Assam

--- Shapna Medhi

Abstract

Protected Areas often share boundaries with local communities leading to frequent human-wildlife interactions, which result in conflicts. Though the Kaziranga National Park, located in the Indian state of Assam, is considered one of the most successful cases of conservation, it witnesses recurrent human-wildlife conflicts thereby leading to conflicts between park management and local communities. In such cases, compensation figures act as one of the most important conflict mitigation tools. Based on empirical research conducted in the vicinity of Kaziranga, this paper deals with the dynamics of human-wildlife and park management-local community conflict. It examines the process of compensation policy, along with the issues and challenges experienced by the local communities. It also raises the question as to whether the compensations offered to the victims have been able to fulfil its primary purpose of reducing conflict and building trust between the park management and the local communities.

Key words: Compensation, Human-wildlife conflict, Kaziranga National Park, Park management, Protected areas

Introduction

Conflict is pervasive and the theories essentially suggest that social interactions coupled with incompatible goals lead to conflict. In a dynamic world with rapid changes in bio-physical environment and socio-cultural systems, Protected Areas (PAs) are now at the core of many conflicts. These PAs are areas of conservation with varying degrees of laws and regulations, mostly managed by state agencies, more often than not surrounded by human population. The resultant human-wildlife interaction causes losses for both human and wildlife. Amidst this, the PA authority responsible for the management of PA is mandated to uphold

conservation objectives. In such areas of conservation, financial aid for losses incurred by local communities due to wildlife is often regarded as a means of conflict mitigation.

Against this backdrop, the focus of this study is on the compensation offered to people for the loss of livestock, crop depredation and damage of houses, etc. This paper focuses on the compensation policy, process and the experiences of the local communities regarding compensation in Kaziranga National Park (KNP) in Assam. The paper begins with a brief discussion of the major conflicts in PAs and progresses on to the debate of financial compensation as a conflict mitigation tool in the context of KNP.

Study Area and Methodology

This qualitative study has been conducted in two fringe villages bordering the southern boundary of the park, i.e., the Mori Difoloo river. These villages namely, Lukurakhaniya and Gosanibor are located 5 and 6 kms. respectively east from the central range, Kohora. The Lukurakhaniya village, dominated by Assamese community, also has a few tea tribal households. Gosanibor village is inhabited by the tea tribe, Assamese and Nepali communities. A majority of the respondents of these villages engage in agriculture.

In-depth interview with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire was conducted with the respondents belonging to different communities in the villages through repeated visits to the field between October, 2017 to May, 2018. Interviews were also conducted with forest officials. For conducting the study, snowball sampling was used as it was found that respondents were reluctant to participate in the study without proper reference.

Conflict in Protected Areas

PAs, or more precisely, national parks can be termed as institutional projects (Selby & Petajisto, 2008, p. 14). They are often located in the proximity of the rural population in developing countries that have become more marginalised with the establishment of PAs (Wells, 1994; Stone & Nyaupane, 2016). The traditional approach employed by conservationists was based on the idea that nature and man are separate. This idea was foregrounded on the premises that man's interaction with nature can only lead to its destruction, which overlooked human dependence on nature for sustenance and survival. Within this framework,

the conservationists fought for nature and wildlife protection, while it became a fight for survival for the forest-dependent local communities, thereby leading to conflict.

In India, the scientific management of forests began during the colonial rule, primarily for consolidating British control over the forests. Guha and Gadgil (1989) describe the plight of the hunter-gatherers, the shifting cultivators, and also the settled cultivators that were affected by the imperial forest policies throughout the Indian subcontinent. The people were oblivious of the notifications regarding reservation of forest areas, thus continuing their daily affairs in the forests that led to them being labelled as encroachers in their homestead (Nongbri, 1999). Protests and rebellions against colonial forest policies became the new norm. Even after Independence, the plight of the forest dependent communities received little attention, with acts and policies continuing to overlook the poor and tribal people's dependence on forests. In this context, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers Act or Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 is considered as a weapon against the historical injustices done to forest dependent communities.

With its initial inception as a game forest in 1905 to being declared a national park in 1974 and a tiger reserve in 2007, KNP has been a ground of conflict¹. One of the prominent forms of conflicts that can be witnessed in PAs is human-wildlife conflicts (Ogra & Badola, 2008; Johnson et al., 2018). When the conflict between the local communities and wildlife escalates and the PA management fails to address those issues, the conflict does not remain confined only between human and wildlife but transforms to conflict '*between humans about wildlife*' (Madden, 2004, p. 249).

Human-Wildlife Conflict in Protected Areas

Due to damage caused by wild animals to agricultural crops, human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is likely to have occurred ever since man resorted to agriculture. According to the World Parks Congress Recommendation, the human-wildlife conflicts occur when wildlife and humans adversely impact each other (Madden, 2004, p. 248). In areas adjacent to the PAs, conflicts also surface because local communities directly or indirectly often feel pressurised to assist with conservation, despite financial burden and personal risk (Nyhus et al., 2006). It has been noticed that whenever wildlife has caused damage or the possibility of causing damage to human life and livelihood has existed, they have been killed

leading to extermination of certain species in some cases (Woodroffe et al., 2005). HWC, which seems as an offset of direct loss caused to communities, is made more complex due to people's attitude towards nature that is determined by varied factors like religious affiliation, ethnicity and cultural belief (Dickman, 2010).

In KNP, the animals from the park often spill over the park boundaries destroying crops and property, threaten human life at times even causing human death. The resentment and animosity towards wildlife is apparently because the cost of conservation is largely borne by the communities residing on the fringes of the PAs (Brandon et al., 1998; Terborgh et al., 2002). However, with the highest degree of protection offered under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 to KNP, the people have little control on such situations. The enactment of strict rules and regulations prohibit the people from safeguarding their crops and livestock by traditional methods and practices like culling (Watve et al., 2016). Apart from the direct costs, they are also subjected to 'hidden costs' like diminished states of psychological and social well-being (Ogra & Badola, 2008). While narrating experiences of residing near KNP, a respondent confided that they lived in 'constant fear' of being rendered homeless by herds of elephants, a situation they had to encounter more than five years back. It has been observed that though there is an acceptance amidst them that they are disadvantaged due to the location, the dismay due to lack of a proper redressal of their grievances emerged simultaneously.

A retired forest officer expressed shock at the violenceⁱⁱ displayed by the people while chasing away stray wildlife. He added that such scare tactics distressed the animals and they 'wreaked havoc' causing further damage. This expression of violence might be an indication of the underlying resentment in the minds of the people or an opportunity for retaliation against the wildlife. In spite of the recurrent losses to fringe communities from wildlife in KNP, the communities show better tolerance than in other national parks like Sariskaⁱⁱⁱ. However, a proper understanding of the context branches out to another dimension of the conflict often visible in areas surrounding PAs.

Park Management-Local Community Conflict

It has been contended that the HWC in PAs might be a manifestation of human-human conflicts instead of being the other way round (Dickman, 2010). The human-human conflict referred to here can either imply conflict between the park

management authority and the local communities or amongst different communities residing in the vicinity of the PA. It is seen that the resentment of local communities towards wildlife becomes pronounced as they view the PA as an imposition by an external agency, i.e., the state, and the wildlife as being the property of the state (Naughton-Treves & Treves, 2005). A forest guard recalled that the staff under KNP authority was often made fun of as *chaprasis* (clerks). A forest officer said that sometimes when the local people were requested to inform of animal sightings in human-inhabited areas, they retorted by saying ‘why should we do your duty?’, or, ‘if you don’t come early and handle the situation, we will harm your animals’^{iv}. It is supplementary to the fact that the designation of PAs infuses a feeling of alienation in the fringe communities from the wildlife with whom they had cohabited. It has been observed that the feeling of imposition is dominant in the narratives of the local communities. Watve et al. (2016) used the term ‘your animal syndrome’ to signify this attitude of the local communities.

In 2007, a tigress along with her cubs was poisoned in the fringe areas for the repeated killing of livestock belonging to the fringe communities in KNP (Bora et al., 2015). The incident coincided with the notification of KNP as a tiger reserve. The local communities in the fringes of the park were agitated because of the notification and rumours spread that KNP authority had released tigers to get it declared as a tiger reserve. Thus, the poisoning of the tiger seemed to be an act of protest and a nuanced manifestation of the resentment of the local communities towards the park management. Such actions undermine conservation efforts and place park management and local community at warring ends. A respondent opined that the declaration of KNP as a tiger reserve while ignoring the local sentiments ‘worsened’ park management-local community relationship. Contrary to the common perception that the HWC is an act of revenge for loss caused to them, it is rooted in ‘historical wounds, cultural misunderstandings, socioeconomic needs, as well as gaps in trust and communication over how to conserve wildlife and ensure the well-being of the people at the same time’ (Madden, 2004, p. 250).

Studies have shown that such HWC and their untimely resolution by the PA management becomes the primary reason for conflict between management and local people. Therefore, conflict resolution mechanisms in PAs primarily focus on seeking to reconcile two objectives – biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development of the people inhabiting the surroundings of the park (Blomley, 2003). Offering compensation to the local people for losses incurred

due to their proximity with PAs have been reasoned as one of the tools to ensure their continued support to conservation (Dixon & Sherman, 1991; Lewis, 1996). On the contrary, the effectiveness of compensation in achieving the desired outcome is also debatable.

There has been a consistent effort of the PA management worldwide in providing the local communities with alternate sources of livelihood to reduce human dependence on forests. It is presumed that this approach would also ensure local community co-operation in conservation efforts. For example, the KNP management has constituted eco-development committees (EDCs) in line with the approach. However, a discussion on this conservation aligned developmental activities requires a detailed discussion which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Does Compensation Mitigate Conflict in Protected Areas?

The President of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Sir Sridath Ramphal, in his opening address of the fourth World Parks Congress in 2003 remarked that protected areas cannot co-exist with communities that are hostile to them (as cited in Mcneely, 1993). He further stressed that ‘protected area managers must develop a working relationship with the people who live in and around the areas which we value so highly’ (Ramphal, 1992, p. 57). Though assertions have been made that local support is not a necessity for the protection of protected areas (Brockington, 2004; Holmes, 2013), studies have found that direct compensation programmes have a significant relationship with local support and management effectiveness (Bruner et al., 2001; Nyhus et al., 2005).

The Government of India considers payment of ‘ex-gratia’^v or compensation to persons as a primary HWC mitigation tool. It is provided ‘with a view to reduce retaliatory killings’^{vi}. The States and Union Territories receive financial assistance from the Central Government under various schemes such as the ‘Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats’, ‘Project Tiger’ and ‘Project Elephant’ to make payment of ex-gratia relief in respect to damage of crops, and loss of human lives^{vii}. The State governments also pay ex-gratia relief to the victims of HWC as per their state policies along with the assistance received from the Central government. Though the Government of India has a strong mandate for offering compensation in cases of HWC, uniformity is lacking in its implementation across the states of the country (Karanth et al., 2018).

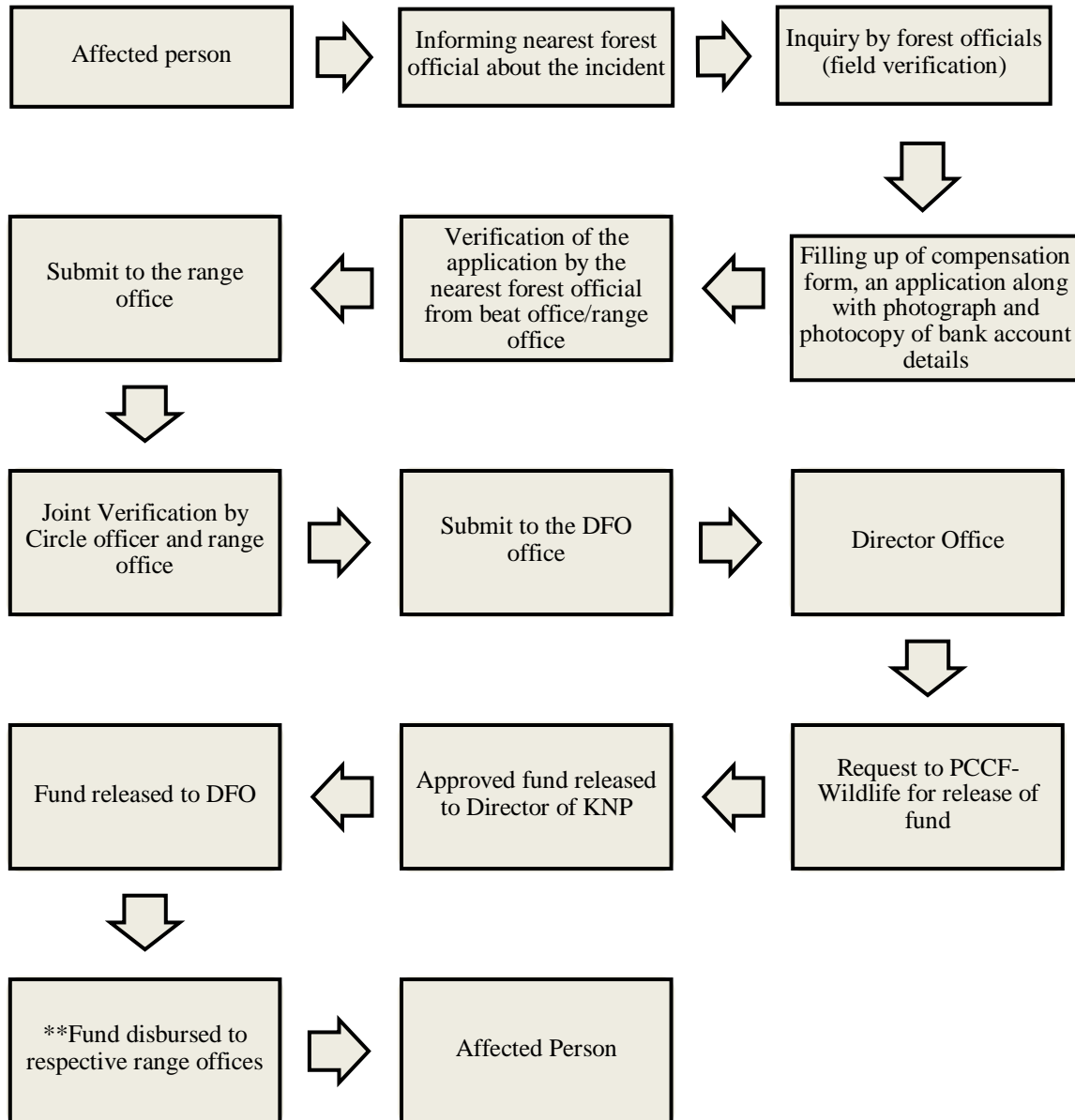
Compensation Process in Kaziranga National Park

The compensation process in KNP involves a lengthy procedure that proves to be a barrier for the local communities. A respondent was of the opinion that compensation process in KNP was a tedious one and it 'wasted' time as it might only materialise if claimants could go to the office at regular intervals to know about the status of the claim. This refers to the transaction costs that weigh significantly on the claimants and often acts as a deterrent, which has also been reflected in a study conducted by Ogra and Badola (2008) in the fringes of Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand. This also indicates that most of the losses faced by the fringe communities are not reported by the victims, which corroborates with the findings of Karanth et al. (2018) in Kanha National Park.

The process of compensation claim in KNP is initiated after an incident is reported to the nearest forest office, known as beat office or range office. The incident might be crop depredation, loss of livestock, injury caused to human by wild animals or death of a human. When such an occurrence is reported, it is verified by officials from the nearest forest office. In cases of depredation of livestock, crops and property damage, once the verification by a forest official is completed, the affected person is required to submit certain documents to the range office consisting of an application, a compensation form filled by the claimant, a photograph of the damage, a photocopy of the claimant's bank passbook^{viii}.

After the submission of the compensation claim to the nearest range office, the documents are sent to the Circle officer. A joint verification by the Circle officer along with a range official is required to ensure the validity of the claim – in case of crop depredation and damage of houses, the ownership of the land is required to be established. It is important to mention here that there is no fixed interval of time for forwarding claims to the Circle office from range office. They are sent only after a substantial number of claims have accumulated. With the final joint verification report, the claims are forwarded to the office of the DFO of KNP which are put up before the Director of KNP. The Director's office forwards the claims to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest-Wildlife (PCCF-Wildlife) for the release of fund. The fund, after being approved and released, is sent to the Director and the DFO of Kaziranga from where the compensation amounts are disbursed by cheque to the claimants. The entire process of claiming compensation has been represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Diagrammatic representation of the compensation process in Kaziranga National Park

Source: Author

**In some instances, the compensation cheques are handed over to the claimants directly from the DFO office instead of sending the fund to the respective range offices.

The complete procedure involves lengthy verification processes in different government offices due to which it becomes time-consuming and cumbersome. The local communities are, however, only aware of one third of the process (until the process of submitting the compensation at the range office). There is no timeframe within which compensation is likely to be received by the claimants. Karanth et al. (2018) found that a similar situation also existed in some other states of India^{ix}. A forest official admitted that it usually took a minimum of six months to a year for the claimants to receive the compensation. The delay in sending the claims immediately from the range offices for processing often leads to the claimants who suffered losses months apart to receive the compensation at the same time. This added to the negative image of the park authority as the local communities perceived the park authority to be biased. It has been found that due to the excessive delay in receiving compensation, the claimants tend to equate it with no compensation. Observations from the field suggest that these lacunae in the compensation process have further strained the volatile relationship between the park management and the local communities, which is similar to the findings of Ogra and Badola (2008).

In case of livestock depredation, when large cattle are killed by tiger, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) arranges for receipt of compensation by the afflicted people within a short span of time. The amount, same as stipulated by the Government of Assam, acts as an interim relief for the people till they receive the amount from the government. The study revealed that in case of human injury, the cost of treatment is borne by the KNP management according to the doctor's prescription. In case of human death, some part of the total compensation amount, decided by the management, is handed over to the family immediately and the rest of the amount is released later. However, it has been noted that the recurrent damage caused by the wildlife to the crop and the livestock draws more resentment from the local community.

Inadequate Compensation

Apart from the lengthy compensation process, narratives from the field strongly indicate people's dissatisfaction with the compensation amounts. Respondents expressed dismay at the lack of compensation for crop damage caused by wild boars or deers and damage of houses. As a majority of the claimants did not receive compensation, the people lacked the motivation to claim. Consistent with the findings of Ogra (2008; 2009), people attributed their conflict with wildlife

more to their destiny but expect the management to take cognizance of their situation. A farmer who lost his cows to tigers for two consecutive years did not claim compensation because he was 'certain of not receiving it'. He added,

We understand the forest department has not instigated the tigers to attack or kill our cows...it is our destiny because we stay here. If people get the compensation against the loss, we would have thought positive about the department. (Interview taken on 30.09.2017)

The Government of Assam fixed compensation for crop damage and livestock depredation (cows and bullocks only) at Rs. 7500 and Rs. 3750 respectively^x. Claimants confirmed of having received amounts in the range of Rs. 1000-1200 only for crop damage which depended on the assessment of a forest officer. Regarding the compensation amount for cow or bullock, a comparison with the market price of cattle showed an enormous gap. In an interview with a respondent it was said that the compensation policy 'is not designed to do justice' to the people and that it is 'removed from reality'^{xi}. They perceived that corruption in the department led to irregularity in compensation process and nominal amounts being disbursed as compensation. The local community exhibited lack of trust upon the park management.

The issue of insufficient and unavailability of timely compensation often directs the angst of the people from animals to the park management. It is well amplified in an incident narrated by a forest official in which a family whose bullock was killed by a tiger held two forest guards captive for a brief period of time. The guards had arrived at the spot to verify the killing of the cattle. An NGO personnel revealed that the local communities are highly dissatisfied with the inadequate compensation. As a case in point, he reveals about such an incident where a woman whose goat was killed had said, 'Why shouldn't I help the poachers then?' Though such extreme cases are rare, they give an understanding about the angst of the people against park management. The responses from the officials of the park management, to some extent, displayed an understanding of the hardship of the local community. Other responses included apathy and a feeling of helplessness about the situation of local communities regarding the compensation process. A forest official reflected on the issue of compensation saying,

The amount they receive as compensation against their loss is not sufficient and it also takes a lot of time for the compensation to reach them. If a tiger kills the cattle when it is time for the farmer to till the land, what will he do? The situation is unmanageable.
(Interview conducted on 01.05.2018)

Conclusion

An analysis of the compensation policy in the context of KNP sheds light on the discord in the park management-local community relationship. A compensation policy can be effective when it is characterised by fairness, quick disbursement of amount, involves scope for greater involvement by people to increase their agricultural productivity amongst others (Watve et al., 2016). Continuous engagement by the park management with the fringe communities under state direction to monitor the effectiveness of the schemes is required, along with reducing the HWC through simple damage prevention interventions (like improving crop safeguarding techniques, modified sheds for livestock, etc.) (Karanth et al., 2018).

It has been seen that the process of disbursing compensation to the claimants is delayed mostly because it depends on the approval and release of fund from the state level authority. As HWC adds to the park management conflict making the fringe areas around PAs sensitive, a designated fund amount can be released to the park authority from the state to compensate the victims at regular intervals. This can help in diminishing the feeling of loss of the fringe communities to some extent.

Another important fact associated with the compensation process that has emerged is the assessment made with respect to the crop depredation caused by the wildlife. As there is no scientific process of assessing the damage, the compensation hardly addresses the losses of the people. Therefore, a mechanism for assessment of damage can be put in place that might be able to counter the inadequacy of compensation amounts. The state, therefore, within its ambit, needs to do more in terms of designing a compensation policy and process that can be effective in addressing the various shortcomings and inadequacies of the present policy.

Notes:

ⁱ During the colonial times, when it came under legal protection, the peasants, grazer community and tea planters protested against its reservation. Later with stricter laws, with addition and proposed addition of more areas to the park in the 1980s and 90s, notification of No Development Zone, declaration of tiger reserve, notification of Eco-sensitive zone etc, the conflicts became regular feature.

ⁱⁱ People resort to use of fire torches and firecrackers, heavy beating of drums and creating loud noises causing distress to the animals.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shahabuddin (2019) writes about the poaching of the last remaining tigers in Sariska that happened with the connivance of the resident Gujjar villages. [Shahabuddin, G. (2019). The tiger's last stand: challenges for protected area management in Sariska. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(20), 15-18]

^{iv} Interview conducted on May 1, 2018 in fringe village of KNP.

^v The term ex-gratia is used in all government notifications and correspondences to denote the compensation.

^{vi} Lok Sabha, Starred Question No *62 answered on 07.02.2017 by Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Question asked by Shrimati P.K. Sreemathi Teacher.

^{vii} Starred Question No *328 answered on 16.12.2014 by Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Question asked by Tanwar Shri Kanwar Singh.

^{viii} The compensation money is transferred into the bank account of the claimant as cash transactions have been discontinued.

^{ix} The study found that there was no stipulated timeframe for the receipt of the compensation in case of crop and property loss in the states of Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kerela, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telengana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. In addition to these states, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan did not have specified timeframe for release of compensation for livestock depredation. In case of human injury, Jammu & Kashmir is an addition.

^x The Government of Assam declared a revised ex-gratia package for victims of human-wildlife conflict vide Govt. Notification No FRE.-3/2017/31 dated 6th March/2017. It fixed the amount for crop damage at a maximum of Rs. 7500 and for livestock depredation that consisted of killing of large cattle like cow, bullock etc. at Rs. 3750.

^{xi} Interview conducted on May 1, 2018 in fringe village of KNP.

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Research in Progress: Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation: A Study of the Naths of West Bengal and Assam

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Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation: A Study of the Naths of West Bengal and Assamⁱ

--- Kunal Debnath

Abstract

The Nath *sampradaya* (community), one of the ancient communities in India, comprises of two groups – the ascetics Yogis and the householders. The householders later formed an endogamous caste known as Yogi or Jogi in West Bengal and Assam and they commonly use their surname ‘Nath’ or ‘Debnath’. The Naths of these two states believe that they are the descendants of a priestly community, but, later degraded by the then king of medieval Bengal. The Naths have been showing their resistance against the brahmanical society since the late 20th century CE and projecting themselves as the Rudraja Brahmana having every right to be a priest. Inclusion of this caste in the OBC list led to an intra-community identity conflict and contention over the reservation. The ‘radical’ Naths want to forsake the OBC status, whereas the ‘pragmatic’ Naths want to retain the OBC status.

Key words: Caste association, Nath sampradaya, OBC, Rudraja Brahmana, Yogi

Introduction

The Nath *sampradaya* has been an age-old community of the Indian subcontinent. The householder Naths of West Bengal and Assam formed an endogamous caste known as Yogi or Jogiⁱⁱ. The Bengali householder Naths commonly use their surname ‘Nath’ or ‘Debnath’ indicating the direct lineage of Lord Siva who is regarded as the *adinatha*. Exclusion of this caste from the mainstream Bengal society occurred long back in the then medieval Bengal. Followers of this caste have undergone great hardships over the centuries. Even now some of the Naths ‘are highly educated, but in general, level of literacy is low’ (Chowdhury, 2008, p. 554). Owing to their socio-economic and educational backwardness, they are declared as Other Backward Class (OBC)ⁱⁱⁱ by the central government and the respective state governments of West Bengal and Assam.

However, a section of the Naths have been showing strong resistance, since mid of the 19th century CE, against the manner they are being looked down upon by other castes, especially by the *brahmanas*. They often cite some legends as well as literary works where their glorious past has been recorded as proof of their claim. It is widely believed by the Bengali Naths of these states that once the Yogis of Bengal were engaged in priesthood (Mallik, 1946; N.C. Nath, 1995; R.G. Nath, 2001; H. Nath, 2014; Nath Majumder, 2018). The Jogis of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) once claimed themselves as the descendants of the priest of King Gopi Chandra^{iv} (Wise, 1883; Mallik, 1946), but ‘the recent status of this community in contemporary social structure is really thought provoking and agonising too’ (Ghosh, 2011, p. 30). Theologically the Naths are followers of the Natha *panth* (cult) which is philosophically against the institution of caste (Ray, 2013). But ‘in Bengal, the Natha cult is practically dead’ (Sen, 1956, p. 280). Today, however, the householder Naths is quite distinct from that of the ascetic branch. The former branch maintains an endogamous caste framework called Yogi or Jogi, but the latter is beyond the *varna* system since the religious practices they observe do not conform to the Puranic version of Hinduism. Just a few decades ago, a large number of the householder Naths were engaged in weaving and cultivation. A small number of the Naths were engaged in small businesses, public or private sector offices, and in educational institutions. The OBC status indicates the community’s socio-economic and educational backwardness, but the attitude towards the OBC reservation is ‘surprisingly contested’ among the Naths in both West Bengal and Assam.

This paper will touch upon the history and identity of the Bangali Naths. The discussion on history and identity of the Bangali Naths is central because contentions over the reservation are consequences of the dichotomous nature of the Nath identity among the Naths themselves, which has largely been constituted by their past history. This paper will also try to trace the probable reasons that caused degradation of this community in the local caste hierarchy and the social resistance of the Naths against the age-old Hindu caste system. At the end of this paper, the ideological as well as action oriented contentions among the Naths over the OBC reservation will be dealt with.

Methodology

The present work is basically qualitative in nature. Historical analysis has been applied to analyse the historical specificity. In addition, ethnographic method has

been applied to understand the nuances and the discursive logic of the Nath. A questionnaire was prepared to collect data from the field. Information has also been collected from the interviews with some respondents and prominent activists of the Nath community. Snowball sampling has been employed as the data collection technique. The interpretations in this paper have been carried out through discourse analysis.

A Brief History of the Bengali Nath

There is no unanimous opinion on the origin of the Nath tradition in Bengal. Sen argues that the Yogic tradition is supposed to have existed in Bengal prior to the Aryan colonization (Sen, 1352 BS, p. 19). Ghosh has shown that Nathism was probably initiated and developed first in Bengal during 9th-13th centuries CE (Ghosh, 1950, p. 522). It is also held that Nathism was developed in Bengal approximately in the 3rd century CE (Nath, 2014) or in the 10th century CE (Dasgupta, 1969; Ghosh, 2011). Chakraborty (2014) argues that the Nath tradition, along with the Buddhist tradition, had a glorious history in Bengal during the Pala dynasty (mid-8th to mid-12th centuries CE). But Ghosh (1950) argues that the Nath tradition in Bengal can be traced back prior to the Pala dynasty and probably during the Gupta dynasty (mid-to-late 3rd to mid-5th centuries CE).

The Nath sampradaya comprises of two groups – ascetics and householders. Nath ascetic order has its first historical initiation made by Guru Matsyendranatha (probably lived in the 8th or 9th century CE) or Minanath^v, and Guru Goraksanatha (probably lived in the 11th or 12th century CE)^{vi}, a disciple of Matsyendranatha. Other Nathgurus were Cauranginatha, Jalandhari-pa or Hadi-pa, Bhartriharinatha or Bhartrharinatha. Yogi means the people who practiced yoga as a part of their daily ceremonies (Mallik, 1946; Dasgupta, 1969; Ghosh, 2011). The path of seeking *mokhsa* (salvation) in the Nath tradition is *kaya sadhana* (culture of the body) through the process of *hatha-yoga*. The ascetic Nath is the follower of Saivism and have several sects like Kanfat, Aoughar, Matysendri, Bhartrihari or Bhartrhari, Kanipa, etc. (Dutta, 1882, pp. 114-141). ‘Householder Nath’, Mallinson argues, ‘greatly outnumber ascetics and consist of a broad variety of mainly endogamous castes’, [but the householder Nath see] ‘themselves as descendants of Nath ascetics who broke their vows of celibacy and settled down as householders’ (Mallinson, 2011, pp. 409-410). They formed a caste known as Yogi or Jogi (Risley, 1892; Sen, 1956; Waligora, 2004), but ‘the origin of the

caste is extremely obscure' (Risley, 1892, p. 355), and the origin has still been a mystery and not unveiled properly (Dasgupta, 1969). The Yogis are often called as 'Jugi'. But Jugi is either a 'vernacular derivative' (Gold, 1993, p. 35) of Yogi or Jogi, or 'a term of contempt' (Waligora, 2004, p. 158). Besides after deviation from the original Natha cult, which was beyond the caste framework, some of the householder Nathas assert to be included in the brahmanical caste framework and claim themselves as Rudraja Brahmana^{vii} (Debnath Bhattacharyya, 1372 BS; Dasgupta, 1969; Nath, 1995). They belong to *Siva gotra* (Siva lineage) and they are the followers of Saivism (Mallik, 1946; Dasgupta, 1996; Nath Majumder, 2018). According to *Vallala-charita*^{viii} (Kaviratna, 1889), though it is mythological and hence there is no such concrete historical evidence, but it is widely believed by the Nathas that the Yogis originated from Rudra, another form of Lord Siva, so they are *rudraja*.

Some scholars argued that the Nath sampradaya had been in close proximity to Buddhism because of the many similarities between the two traditions (Sensarma, 2015). Ghosh identifies Nathism as a syncretism of the Saiva Tantrism, Buddhism, and the cult of Dharma Thakur (Ghosh, 1950, p. 522). Mallik, however, opined that despite many similarities between the Buddhist Siddhas and Nath Siddhas, the latter were not the Buddhists as such, rather they were the followers of Saivism (Mallik, as cited in Sensarma, 2015, p. 353).

Degradation of the Nathas in Bengal and their Resistance

Popular history says that during the reign of Vallalasena (a king of Bengal, who reigned from 1158 to 1179 CE), the Nath sampradaya was degraded and marginalised from the mainstream (Kaviratna, 1889; Nath, 2014; Nath Majumder, 2018). According to the popular oral history^{ix}, the Nathas were confronted by the *kanyakubja brahmana* (Brahmin of Kanouj) migrated from North India with the patronage of *Adisura*^x. Later they secured the favour of Vallalasena. Though the then *rajgurus* of Vallalasena were the Nathas (Nath, 2014; Nath Majumder, 2018), the position of the Nathas were downgraded due to the *kaulinya-pratha* (Kulinism) or the caste rules introduced by Vallalasena^{xi}. Description of castaway of the Nathas has been narrated in *Vallala-charita* (Kaviratna, 1889). *Vallala-charita* shows us how the state power was exercised for pushing a community down to the caste hierarchy. Though there has been a dubiety in the authenticity of *Vallala-charita*'s assertion that the degradation of the Yogi caste has been annexed to it later or not, but nearly similar incident might be traced out in the

statement of the archaeologist Hamilton-Buchanan. He wrote ‘...degradation [of the Yogis] may also have been due to the anathema of the ruling prince. Whose displeasure the leaders of the caste incurred; that is quite probable’ (as cited in Ghosh, 2011, p. 30). In the above-mentioned quote, the phrase ‘anathema of the ruling prince’ indicates that the exclusion of the Naths occurred due to the displeasure of the then ruling prince. It is also possible that Vallalasaena put effort to the resurgence of the *smarta* (according to *Smriti* literatures) tradition of Bengal that had been facing some difficulties since the Pala dynasty (Sensarma, 2015). Initiation of *kaulinya-pratha*, rejection of various *Puranas* that were supposed to have been affected by the Tantric rituals, and degradation of the Naths were part of that effort taken by Vallalasaena. Waligora indicates that the Naths are followers of non-brahmanical cult and they have no Brahmanas to minister their priestly works (Waligora, 2004, p. 158). For that reason, ‘this social group is generally looked down upon by brahmins’. Ray (2013) also acknowledges that the Natha cult and its community were marginalised by the brahmanical Tantric Saktism. There were several socio-political reasons which placed this community in a comparatively lower stratum of the brahmanical society.

After such marginalisation, the Naths had undergone several socio-economic crises as a corollary. Some of them had to engage themselves in weaving and cultivation. But during the colonial period, the Naths, who previously took the occupation of weaving particularly in Eastern Bengal, had undergone hardships caused by de-industrialisation of indigenous handloom sector. This sector faced further challenges from the competition of English piece-goods. Later the Naths engaged themselves in agriculture, goldsmith’s work, lime-burning, and some low grade of government services (Wise, 1883, p. 290; Risley, 1892, p. 355).

Available records indicate that since the mid-19th century CE, they started resistance against the caste hierarchy and it was contemporary to the Namasudra movement^{xii} in Bengal. Mukerji (1910) has shown that the Yogis did not acknowledge the superiority of the Brahmanas, and a section of the Namasudras followed the example of the Yogis. Krishna Chandra Nath Dalal of Howrah took the first initiative to earn a respectful position for the Naths in Bengal society in 1873 CE. At the same time Manimohan Nath of Calcutta (now Kolkata) also started elevating the community’s status (Nath, 2017). Later Bharat Chandra Nath of Noakhali (now in Bangladesh), Radhagobinda Nath of Comilla (now in Bangladesh), Suresh Chandra Nath Majumder, and Rajmohan Nath of Lala

(Assam) tried to consolidate the resistance against the existing hierarchy by unifying the hitherto scattered Nathas. The resistance had two strategies, first, at the intellectual level such as publication of books and journals^{xiii} for propagating and promoting ‘caste consciousness’; second, at practical level such as inculcating brahmana *samaskara* (rituals) among the Nathas, particularly by initiation of *upavita* (sacred threads), and making of *purahita* (priests) within the community through proper training. The first *upanayana* samaskara (sacred threads initiation ceremony) took place in 1284 BS or 1878 CE (Nath & Nath, 1985, pp. 24-27).

The Yogis have probably been the first caste to claim the brahmanic status in Bengal. After formation of several caste associations^{xiv} by the Nathas, the resistance had also been shifted from individual level to the collective level. The roles of caste associations and the leaders are crucially important to organise a movement – social or political – in three senses. First, in order to build up an ideological basis of the movement, their roles are of paramount importance. Second, they are pivotal in inculcating caste consciousness. Third, they are crucial in mobilising the common caste members. For the Nathas, however, the relations among these associations are hardly cooperative, rather sometimes are antagonistic. The claims for OBC status have been one of the many issues of disagreement.

Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation

Assam-Banga Yogi-Sammilani (ABYS) was constituted to counter the existing brahmanical hegemony in Bengali society through inculcating ‘caste consciousness’ and ‘mobilising’ the Nathas (Nath & Nath, 1985), creating a counter hegemony by the elite and intellectual sections of the Nath sampradaya. But ideological conflicts on two grounds led to a split in ABYS in 1979 and a new association, the Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, renamed later on as Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani (NBRBS) was formed (Debnath, 2009). The first ideological issue was centered on the question of the identity of the Nathas – whether they are close to the Yogis or Brahmanas; and another was what should be the stand of the Nathas on the question of OBC reservation. Some members, who tended to assert the Brahmana status as against their inclusion in the OBC list, joined Rudraja Brahman Sammilani in 1979. While ABYS officially promotes their ‘Yogi’ identity beyond the caste framework, NBRBS asserts the ‘Brahmana’ status within the caste framework (Debnath, 2009), and the latter regularly holds training camps for the priests^{xv}. The NBRBS, thus, on principle

does not accept the OBC status^{xvi}. Although at the early phases ABYS claimed that the Yogis fall under brahmana varna (Nath & Nath, 1985, p. 31) and demanded their status at par, or sometimes more prestigious position than that, now it prefers to identify the Nathas more as Yogis, than as Brahmanas^{xvii}. This ideological shift of ABYS creates a difficulty in conforming to the authenticity of the brahmanic claim of the Nathas.

In Assam some of the Nath associations, other than ABYS and NBRBS, have become prominent. ABYS, and, until recently, NBRBS hardly had any such influence. The pragmatic Nathas of Assam, who have been or likely to be benefitted from reservation do not accept the views of NBRBS. Recently the NBRBS, however, has been able to retain some of the Nathas in their association by promoting their pro-brahmanic identity. On August 17 and 18, 2019 four persons from this community of Assam, one from Barpeta and three from Cachar, participated in a priest training camp organised by NBRBS at its head quarter in Kolkata. Three out of these four persons have their OBC certificates, but now they speak against the OBC reservation because for them this status is derogatory.

Though Cachar Yogi Sammelani (CYS) does not convey any official stand on the OBC question, some of their members think that there is no conflict between Yogi status and OBC status. Asom Pradeshik Yogi Sanmilani (APYS) asserts that the Nath identity is based simultaneously on brahmanic legacy and OBC status. Contrarily, Barak Upotyaka Nath-Yogi Rudraja Brahman Sammilani (BUNYRBS) has been working in Assam in quite similar manner to NBRBS and are putting emphasis on inculcating Brahmana and upanayana samaskara, producing Nath priests, etc. They want to rescue the Nathas from the OBC 'trap' (Barak Upotyaka Nath-Yogi Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, 2016). In Assam, some of the Nathas voice their objections against the OBC status and they assert their identity as Rudraja Brahmana^{xviii}. During the field work, one school teacher had taken a stand against the OBC status of the Nathas, although all members of his family have been facilitated by OBC certificates^{xix}.

The attitude centred on the OBC status is 'surprisingly contested' among the Nathas in both the states. Unlike a section of the Nathas in West Bengal and Assam who do not support the OBC status for the Nathas, most of the Nathas of both the states support OBC reservation for getting special privileges in education and government services. Simultaneously the supporters of reservation wear sacred threads as a symbol of upper caste identity. They believe that OBC is merely

related to one's economic status and has nothing to do with caste position. The OBC status is likely to be changed as one reaches what is known as 'the creamy layer'. ABYS holds the similar opinion on this issue^{xx}. While sacred threads are the signs of their high social caste status and past pride, the OBC status is indicative of their economic and educational backwardness^{xxi}. They appeared to be pragmatic in terms of their caste and class identity. They do not consider OBC as derogatory in existing caste framework, but it is, rather, a means of escalating in higher class stratum through upward mobility.

The Yogi-Rudraja dichotomy is very prominent here. Thus, contemporary situation opens a cleavage between the 'radical' Naths who want to forsake the OBC status, and the 'pragmatic' Naths who want to retain the OBC status. It can be looked at as a 'radical-pragmatic debate'. In this debate, the NBRBS and BUNYRBS play the role of the 'radicals', whereas the ABYS, APYS and CYS appear as 'pragmatic' who accept the OBC status as a means of well-being of the community. NBRBS and BUNYRBS believe that their OBC status is derogatory and it is a conspiracy of the upper caste elites and also the government to pull down the Naths from higher strata to lower, from Brahmana to OBC^{xxii}. NBRBS and BUNYRBS are radicals in two senses. First, they are against any kind of reservation for the Naths that challenges their Brahmanic claims. Second, they always intend to alter their social position from lower to the *highest* stratum through internal reformations like accepting the brahmana samaskara (brahmin rituals). Giving up the OBC status is their primary agenda, despite knowing that the OBC reservation can bring well-being for the community, and, at the same time, this stand may diminish their popularity relating to the inter-associational politics. On the other hand, the ABYS, APYS and CYS are pragmatics because they know that OBC reservation can help them to realise upward mobility. It is quite true that most of the aspirant Naths are not keen to give up their OBC reservation due to various government facilities. The pragmatics know that it would be productive for their associations if their ideology has been fitted to be acceptable to the common Naths, since there is an inter-associational politics concerning which one among these associations is the real representative of the Naths.

Conclusion

Thus, the Naths bear an ambiguous identity. They are supposed to be considered as 'high caste but are placed in the Sudra varna by others' (Chowdhury, 2008, p.

551). Nevertheless, the OBC status of this community provides an opportunity from economic and educational points of view. It is also an opportunity to be empowered politically using reservation in the local bodies. The ‘pragmatic’ Nath opine that OBC reservation can ensure the well-being of the Nath, but the social status of the Nath is to be restored in society. The ‘radicals’ always highlight how the Nath priests have been recognised by some other castes including the Brahmanas^{xxiii} and change in this regard is only possible by taking a pro-brahmanic stance.

Notes:

ⁱ Here I used Assam not in its entirety, but my study is geographically limited to its three southern districts of Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj, commonly known as the Barak Valley, that are culturally and linguistically dominated by the Bengalis.

ⁱⁱ In this paper, I have used the word Nath, Yogi, and Jogi interchangeably.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reservation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) was introduced by the V. P. Singh government in 1990 as per recommendation of the Mandal Commission, named after its Chairman B. P. Mandal, which was constituted in 1978 and report submitted in 1979. Reservation of OBCs includes new beneficiaries from different religious communities other than Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Three criteria, such as social, economic, and educational backwardness, were taken into consideration for awarding OBC reservation. Many economically well-off castes were included, as the indicators of social backwardness had been given three times more weightage than those of economic and education backwardness. Many scholars argue that the reservation of OBCs was a politically driven state policy to ‘consolidate their votes’. See Jodhka (2011); Mahajan (2013).

^{iv} For the legend of King Gopicandra, see Grierson (1878). This legend is also popular in Rajasthan, see Gold (1993).

^v It is held that Matsyendranatha, Minanatha and Lui-pa were the same person, see Mallik (1946); Ray (2013, p. 492).

^{vi} For a detail research on Goraksanatha, see Briggs (1938).

^{vii} During the field study, I found that a large section of the Nath call themselves as rudraja brahmana both in West Bengal and Assam. A few Nath were also found who like to identify themselves as Yogi, not as brahmana, but who held that the Yogis are supposed to be placed above the brahmanas.

^{viii} Two versions of Vallala-charita are available, one has been edited by Kaviratna (1889) but was originally written jointly by Gopalbhatta in around 1300 CE and Anandabhatta in around 1500 CE. Another version has been edited by Sastri (1901) but was originally written by Anandabhatta in 1509-10 CE. It is still unsettled which one is the authentic version. The incident of Yogis has been depicted in Kaviratna (1889), but not in Sastri (1901). Sastri (1901, p. v) pronounced the Kaviratna’s edition to be ‘spurious and unreliable’, on the other hand, Sastri’s edition has been described by Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay as a fake. See Ray (2013). Ray (2013, p. 163), however, argues ‘that there is not much cause to regard either work as a fake’.

^{ix} This is a popular oral history of the Nath in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and Bangladesh.

^x Adisura was a king of Bengal, whose name is associated with the genealogical texts or *kulajis* of the brahmanas in Bengal. He brought five Vedic brahmanas from Kanauj to rule Bengal under brahmanical hegemony. However, the legends of Adisura are doubtful as there is no such concrete historical evidence. See Chakrabarti (2018).

^{xi} Some scholars opine that Vallalaseana did not initiate kulinism, rather it existed since prior to the Senadynasty. See Sensarma (2015). It is also argued that kulinism has been inherently linked with Vallalaseana since centuries. So it cannot be said that this popular history has been totally misleading. See Mitra (2000/1914).

^{xii} A prominent caste of Bengal and often synonymous with the Matuas, now under Scheduled Caste category, which has been showing a strong resistance against brahmanical caste system in Bengal since 1870s. For details, see Bandyopadhyay (1997).

^{xiii} Publication includes *Yogi Samaskar-Byabastha* (1876) by Krishna Ch. Nath Dalal; *Yogi Jatir Sankhipta Itihas* (1277-1293 BS) by Padma Chandra Nath; *The Yogis of Bengal* (1909) by Radhagobinda Nath; *Manimohan-Jibane* (Autobiography) (written in 1911, and published in 1922) by Manimohan Nath; *Rajguru Yogi Bangsha* (1923) by Suresh Ch. Nath Majumder; *Bangiyo Nath-Yogi Tattva* (1958) by Rajmohan Nath; and *Yogisakha* (since 1904 to present), later it became the official journal of Assam-BangaYogi-Sammilani in 1918.

^{xiv} Associations are Yogi Hitaishini Sabha (1901), later it became Assam-BangaYogi-Sammilani (1910); Adinath Siksha Bhandar (1908); Asom Pradesik Yogi Sanmilani (1919); Cachar Yogi Sammilani (1922); Paschim Banga Rudraja Brahman Sammilani (1949), renamed as Rudraja Brahman Sammilani in 1979, and again renamed as Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani in 2000.

^{xv} I witnessed one such priest training camp organised by NBRBS on 18 August, 2019 at the head quarter of Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, Kolkata.

^{xvi} Interview with Upendra Kumar Debnath was held on 18 August, 2019 at the head quarter of Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, Kolkata.

^{xvii} Interview with Tapas Kumar Nath was held on 10 November, 2019 at Nimta, West Bengal. He says that the Yogis are not brahmana, but they are superior to the brahmana, so they must use sacred threads.

^{xviii} Such as Bijoy Kr. Nath of Hailakandi; Jyotirmoy Nath, Bablu Nath, Ankit Nath and Sudip Nath Sastri of Karimganj; Bijan Debnath, Dibakar Nath and Gitesh Nath of Silchar, Cachar.

^{xix} Dibyajyoti Nath is a school teacher. Interview was held on 24 June, 2019 at Rangpur Part-I, Katlicherra, Hailakandi, Assam.

^{xx} Interview with Tapas Kr. Nath was held on 10 November, 2019 at Nimta, West Bengal. ABYS has not been against the OBC status if it brings community's well-being. Tapas Kr. Nath says that OBC denotes backward classes not the castes.

^{xxi} During field work in West Bengal and Assam, I found that 80 out 120 of the Nath's support this statement.

^{xxii} Interview with Barun Nath, Joint Secretary of NBRBS, was held on 29 April, 2018 at Howrah, West Bengal, and with Jyotirmoy Nath, President of BUNYRBS, was held on 22 December, 2019 at Karimganj, Assam.

^{xxiii} I have met some Nath priests who are often called for priestly work in the brahmana families such as Dhiren Debnath, Kolkata; Mithun Debnath, Nadia, W.B.; Monomangal Nath Sastri and Dibakar Nath, Silchar, Assam; Bablu Nath and Sudip Nath Sastri, Karimganj, Assam.

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Research in Progress: Cross-Cultural Understanding of Witchcraft Accusations

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Cross-Cultural Understanding of Witchcraft Accusations

--- Draghima Basumatary

Abstract

The paper explores the genealogy of witchcraft accusations which emerged centuries ago in countries like Europe, and in contemporary times in developing countries such as India and Africa. By tracing the genealogy, the paper highlights that witchcraft accusations are part of modernity. Due to different contexts, occurrence and causes behind every witchcraft accusation in communities are different. The aim of this paper is to examine witchcraft accusations beyond the realm of superstitions and how it is used as tool to ostracise a person in the community. It also attempts to highlight that witchcraft accusations reveal rising socio-economic inequality in the so called tribal egalitarian societies. In this context, the paper begins discussion on the European witch craze and witchcraft accusations in Africa and India in contemporary times, and lastly focuses on the analysis of witchcraft accusations among the tribal communities considering the increasing number of witch-hunting cases being reported in Assam.

Key words: Witchcraft, Witchcraft accusations, Witch-hunting, Tribal

Introduction

Beliefs in spirits and witches have been present since time immemorial in many communities across the world. It is believed that misfortune such as sickness, death, failure of crops and so on could be brought to the community by the spirits and witches. To deal with the misfortune, the angry spirits are appeased by performing rituals, but in case of witchcraft performed by the witch, ritual appeasement is not viable. It is believed that the witch brings harm through rituals, spells and medicines and is supposed to be done by using the victim's hair, nails, clothes (Daimari, 2012). In a community, whenever a crisis occurs, witchcraft is suspected, and accusations are directed against a person as the witch. According to Chaudhuri (2013), accusations are based on shared assumptions such as quarrelsome, physical traits such as hunch back and so on, and most of the times women are more often accused than men as the witch. It is the fear of the

witch's power to harm others using witchcraft which lead people to identify a person as the witch, punish or even kill the witch. In this context, witchcraft accusations have led to manifestations of witch-hunting. The manifestations of witch-hunt from witchcraft accusations have been found to be present across cultures during different time span, such as during the European Witch Craze. In the present times, witchcraft accusations are prevalent in Africa and India. However, not all witchcraft accusations lead to extreme manifestation of witch-hunting. It is in this context that witchcraft accusation occurring in different societies during different time periods raises a lot of questions which needs to be engaged with and may throw light in understanding witchcraft accusations occurring in many parts of Assam in the Northeastern region of India.

Witchcraft Accusations across Cultures

The paper attempts to historicise the witchcraft accusations across cultures from the past to the modern times. It begins with the anthropological study on witchcraft, as Evans-Pritchard (1976) says that witchcraft is not irrational to Azande as they look for witchcraft as the rational explanation to justify the misfortunes in their lives. It plays an important role in everyday activities like fishing, agriculture, etc. He discusses the significance of witchcraft among the Azande to settle suspicions between members of the society, thereby releasing tensions to regulate the smooth functioning of society.

In another context, in the village of Bisipara, Orissa, India, due to lack of medical facilities, any sudden illness or death is suspected to be the work of an angry spirit or witchcraft. However, a closer look at the events of the witch-hunt case studied by F. G. Bailey (1997) reflects the exercise of power on the marginalised individual to maintain caste hegemony in the village. By accusing Tuta, a washer man, for keeping a harmful *Devata*¹ in his house, the study shows that by forcing him to pay fines for crime which he did not commit, witch-hunt served as a reminder that the social order has to be maintained by the members of the village (ibid.). However, Alan Macfarlane's [1999 (1970)] study of the legal records on witch trials of Essex, England between 1560 and 1680, reveals the breakdown of the communal bond between people which was present during the medieval period. Therefore, 'witchcraft prosecutions may be seen as a means of effecting a deep social change; a change from a 'neighbourly', highly integrated and mutually interdependent village society, to a more individualistic one' (ibid., p. 197).

Witch-hunt also took place in societies which went through large scale socio-economic, religious and political changes, such as the European Witch Craze from 14th to 17th century where many women were persecuted as witches. Using the idea of Thomas J. Schoneman (1975), who contends that witch-hunt reflects the social change and is also an agent of socio-cultural change, one can say that European witch-hunting signified a period of crisis (Muchembled, 2002). The witch craze period was not just confined to religious persecutions of women, rather it was a period of anomie in Europe (Ben-Yehuda, 1980) and witch craze was created due to a crisis in the society (Trevor-Roper, 1967). According to Ben-Yehuda (1980), witch-hunting in Europe occurred due to the convergence of many factors like anomie, powerlessness, climate, plague, cholera, demographic changes, etc. In Europe, the feudal, hierarchical order legitimised by the Church, which had defined the moral boundaries, began to crumble. This order was threatened by rapid changes in society including economic changes which witnessed shift from production to cash economy. These changes increased witchcraft accusations as people could not comprehend the rapid changes which the societies were facing. The European society experienced crisis which finally ended in the 17th century.

Unlike Europe which witnessed European witch craze for a time period, in many regions of the world, especially in developing countries such as Africa and India, witchcraft accusations continue to the modern times. Witchcraft accusations are contextual as witch-hunting has manifested differently across cultures. Edward Miguel (2005) studied the poor rural areas of western Tanzania who are dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Extreme weather conditions lead to droughts or floods affecting the agricultural output. The Sukuma, an ethnic group of Tanzania, believe that extreme rainfall and epidemics are controlled by witches and only their killings can eliminate the causes of suffering of all the households. Therefore, a lot of witch-killings occurred during 1960s and 70s in Tanzania as the economic conditions became the driving force behind beliefs in witch-hunts.

Witchcraft accusations arose due to different reasons in India too. Shashank Sinha (2006) suggests that low literacy, economic backwardness and belief in witches also lead to the internalisation of the idea of witchcraft. Sinha says that 'colonialism and capitalism became unconscious precipitants in witch-hunts in India' (ibid., p. 145). The uncertainties brought by capitalism in colonial Chotanagpur brought pressure on the tribal economy. The incoming of market relations, land and forests legislations and commercial exploitation of forests lead

to deforestation, famines, etc. Capitalism led to unequal relations in production and distribution thereby weakening the traditional institutions. In such a scenario when a community undergoes huge changes, the fear and belief in witches in turn becomes instrumental in witch-hunts.

Therefore, in modern times, as Federici (2008) argues, witch-hunting is not just a historical phenomenon; and 'is not bound to a specific historic time. It has taken a life of its own, so that the same mechanisms can be applied to different societies whenever there are people in them that have to be ostracised and dehumanised' (ibid., p. 33). For instance, witchcraft accusations can be understood in the context of workers alienation and exploitation. Soma Chaudhuri (2013) studied witch-hunts in the tea plantations of Jalpaiguri area of North Bengal and viewed witch-hunts among the adivasisⁱⁱ, a migrant tribal community, as 'the products of alienation experienced by the workers within a capitalist mode of production' (ibid., p. 115). She draws a Marxist interpretation connecting witch, worker's alienation and plantation politics, and argues that witch-hunts represent a class struggle as devil represents misery. She situates witch-hunts within the context of gender, class, politics, wage struggles and epidemics which are instrumental in occurrence of witch-hunts among migrant adivasi workers (ibid.).

Witch-hunts can be understood in the context of workers alienation in tea plantations as they have no chance of social mobility. They are forced to work in coercive environment for survival and yet cannot afford to lose the work as new recruitments are plenty. The strained relationship due to class hierarchies and conflict between the management and workers in the tea plantation is visible in their continuous exploitation. In such an oppressed environment, they believe in witchcraft accusations which lead to witch-hunts to deal with stress, insecurity of wages and unemployment. As they are trapped in a coerced atmosphere, adivasis turn to the enemy within – the *dain*ⁱⁱⁱ. In their world of beliefs, the idea of the witch always existed. So, it was natural to blame their misfortunes onto a person as the witch. By blaming a person as the witch, the migrants are taking control over their lives. They eliminate the person accused as the witch, as they believe the witch is the only obstacle in their path to their happiness. 'It is out of feeling helplessness, in a culture of oppression and tyranny that witch hunts emerge as a normalcy or balancing factor in stressful times' (ibid., p. 130).

Peter Geschiere (1997) emphasises that modern witch-hunts reveal that witchcraft has been subjected to constant reinterpretations and change in the meaning which

can be used either as levelling or as accumulative force. In this context, he gives examples of levelling and accumulative force. The Zambian Chewa uses witchcraft as a leveling force to undermine inequalities in wealth and power. The deprived individuals use it as weapon of weak to level inequality, to blame for low economic productivity, for problems related to fertility. The other example of accumulative force is in areas of West and Northwest Cameroon, where the chief decides who is a witch and who is not a witch. Because of ambiguity of witchcraft as a concept, the chief can interpret to give meaning regarding whom to charge with witchcraft and whom not to.

Witchcraft accusations can be reinterpreted to look for imaginary enemies when the real motive of witch-hunt is political. Albert James Bergesen (1978) discusses modern-day political witch-hunts which occurred during the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966-69. The government periodically rejuvenates collective sentiments by creating deviants and punishes them as witches. Counter revolutionary, spies or whosoever stands against nation's ideology is seen as a threat. Similarly, James T. Siegel (2006) suggests that in Java, witchcraft accusations arose in the absence of a state control. Post Suharto regime, accusations were an attempt to reassert social control where the witch is the name given to the national menace, instability, a force affecting everyone, bringing a generalised catastrophe. During this period of political instability, anyone could be targeted as a witch. Even in Africa, witchcraft is intertwined with politics, for example, in Soweto, 'witchcraft is affecting the creation of new state as well as the ways in which the new state is understood as shaping the contexts within which witches work' (Ashforth, 1998, p. 506).

Despite the uncertainty brought by the political instability, few members among many communities sometimes take advantage of their social situation using witchcraft. James H. Smith (2005) discusses how Kenyans hired a witch-finder to find witches in Tanzania. The modern kind of witch-finder uses symbols of modernity, for example, technology to suppress witchcraft which had turned into a threat. They use shaving the head as cleansing ritual to remove the effects of witchcraft. In fact, the increase in practice of witchcraft reflect uncertainty among the local people on how to manage and control the set of socio-economic and political forces which came in their societies due to global market and polices (ibid.).

Globalisation processes assume concrete, localised forms but it has not reduced hierarchy or spatial inequalities (Sassen, 2005). As the local economy gets transformed due to international policies and the effect of global market, it becomes difficult for people to comprehend as to what brings about such sudden and abrupt economic changes in their society. People are not able to grasp why some people prosper whereas others are lagging (Federici, 2008). They cannot grasp because the real factor for disorder in society is breaking down of their old socio-economic institutions. All these changes bring suspicion of witchcraft at work or even re-emergence of Devil in indigenous communities. For example, Michael Taussig (1980) explores cultural reactions in pre-capitalist society to industrial capitalism in the sugar plantation of Columbia as well as in the Bolivia tin mines. The peasants who work as landless labourers are seen as having made a deal with the devil. So, whatever they earned from the labour is not seen legitimate. They are tempted to earn but at the same time, they resist it as they believe that if they buy goods or property from the money earned from the plantation, it will bring disastrous consequences to their lives.

Therefore, across cultures, witchcraft accusations have manifested differently due to different reasons. However, one thing is certain that witchcraft accusations are very much part of modernity. Whenever there is a general atmosphere of mistrust and fear, witchcraft accusations are used as a tool to ostracise or scapegoat someone as the witch, and most often it is the vulnerable or marginalised sections who are accused. This framework is used to analyse the data on witch-hunting collated through fieldwork conducted in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts of western Assam.

Study Area and Methodology

According to the literature and reports on witch-hunting cases, in Assam most of the witch-hunting cases occur among the tribal communities such as the Bodos, the Santhals, the Rabhas and the Mishings in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Goalpara, Majuli and so on. The witch-hunting cases have been on the rise according to the media. The Assam state even received the President's approval for the Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2015 which has been converted into an Act in the year 2018. The drafting of Assam Witch-hunting Act raises a lot of questions which needs to be investigated and answered.

Based on the reports by the media, for the study on witchcraft practices in Assam, I chose to study the tribal communities in the districts of Chirang and Kokrajhar in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) to analyse the prevalence of witchcraft practices in modern times. The district of Chirang has mostly Bodo, Koch Rajbongshi and other communities living in the district. The Kokrajhar district has Bodo as the dominant community besides the Santhal community. Regarding the witch-hunting cases, attempts were made to study equal number of cases from each district. However, it was not possible because it is a sensitive issue and people do not want to talk about it due to fear of getting arrested by the police. Regarding the collection of data for the study on witchcraft practices in Assam, newspaper reports were collected. The cases on witch-hunting cases were gathered from Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD), Guwahati. The most valuable data were the cases gathered and maintained by the Assam Police in every district. The maintenance of records on witch-hunting by the police highlights how the state is trying to understand the occurrences and patterns of the cases among the tribal communities in Assam.

The data was collected after official permission was granted by the authorities in the district. The maintenance of records of witch-hunting cases by the Assam Police also served a very important function. The data collection serves as the point of building information about the cases and gives a fair idea of accessing the area where the incidents occurred. Most of the time, the police officials have extended their help in visiting the area owing to its sensitive nature. However, sometimes, they themselves suggested not visiting certain areas where a fresh case of witch-hunting has occurred. According to the officials, the community is not ready to speak about the incident and it may not be safe to visit immediately. The sudden visit, even with police officials, could be threatening as it is a very sensitive matter for the community and violence might erupt which would be difficult to contain even by the police. Even approaching the victim induces panic in the victim fearing future attack by the villagers. The victim feels that the visit may reinforce among the villagers the suspicion of being the witch.

However, most of the cases are not reported to the police. So, the official records may not give a fair idea of the total number of cases which occurred in a district over a certain period of time. The cases are not reported as the community does not report to the authorities and resolves the matter within them. Most of the time, victims also do not report fearing future attack from the perpetrators. Lastly, most of the cases are not reported due to ignorance of the people about law.

Besides the help received from Police officials for the reported cases, I followed case studies through gossips and rumours. From there on, I used snowball sampling method to follow the rest of the unreported cases. Besides the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions were also conducted on witch-hunt cases. As a female researcher, I faced challenges in accessing the remote villages to follow the case studies. However, being a female researcher also helped in conducting in-depth interviews on the case studies as many people generally do not want to talk about a sensitive issue as witch-hunting. This paper discusses a reported case of Kokrajhar district and an unreported case of Chirang district to analyse the witchcraft accusations.

The Case Study of Rishab^{iv}

The reported case study is about Rishabh, a 65-year-old male *Ojha*^v, who belonged to the Bodo community and was accused of being a witch. The incident occurred in the rural area of Kokrajhar district in the year 2017. The area is near the reserve forest and the villagers mainly earn through selling agricultural products in the market. According to the accused, he was resting at his house after selling bags of mustard seeds at the weekly Sunday market. He was sleeping when suddenly few young men came and barged the door and beat him and his wife accusing him as a witch. They beat him up, ransacked his house and took the six hundred rupees which he had earned after selling the mustard seeds. The accused told them repeatedly that he is an *Ojha* and not witch. By profession, he is an *Ojha* who performs rituals at the village. He prepares medicines for ailments such as jaundice, smallpox. He also said that he has never done animal sacrifice in his rituals and he does not know the craft of harming people using rituals. After witchcraft accusations, he does not visit people's house for curing any ailments and does not prepare herbal medicines anymore.

The perpetrators beat him up accusing him as the witch because according to them they heard that a young bride fell ill suddenly, and in a delirious state saw Rishabh's face and took his name as the witch. After this incident, people started falling ill and this led to the spread of the rumour that Rishabh is a witch, so they beat him up. This matter was later reported to the police. The case was later resolved by the police, local organisations, village headman where they attended the meeting together in the village. In the meeting, the villagers were warned that in future no such accusations should occur in the village and Rishabh should be allowed to stay in the village.

When the case was probed further, the villagers said that Rishabh is an Ojha, but he brags a lot about his possession, that recently he bought a plot of land and his son is a member of village council. This boasting by the priest of his acquired property was not taken well by the villagers.

The Case Study of Matu^{vi}

Matu, a 70-year-old male Ojha, who belonged to a sub-tribe of the Koches^{vii} in Chirang district, was accused of being a witch ten years ago. Matu was a daily wage labourer who also practised traditional healing. He performed rituals and administered herbal medicines whenever there was sickness in the village. It is common in villages to visit a traditional healer for any kind of illness rather than visiting a medical doctor for diagnosis and medication. People from different communities visited him for healing. However, a member of the village who belonged to another community was not cured of sickness by his medicines. The person's condition aggravated and succumbed to the sickness. According to Stewart and Strathern (2004), gossips and rumours become instrumental in constructing a person as a witch. So, whenever there was sickness in the village or any kind of misfortune, he was suspected, which finally led to Matu being beaten up by the perpetrators. When the case was probed further, it seems that witchcraft accusations may have been used as a means to scapegoat Matu as he belonged to the marginalised section. Moreover, there were tensions within his own community too as he was earning well, both as a labourer as well as a healer. Economically, he fared better compared to his fellow members in his village, so, these could have been the reasons for witchcraft accusation.

In the two cases of witchcraft accusations, both Rishabh and Matu were Ojha who were made scapegoats as the witch. The cases are contextual as it occurred in different time periods, and due to different reasons. However, it points to the insecurity arising from socio-economic inequality within the so-called egalitarian tribal communities. This inequality, in an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, leads to exercise discrimination on the individual, especially on the vulnerable and the marginalised in the communities. The tribal societies are no exception to such discrimination. As Prathama Bannerjee (2016) explains how 'tribes' itself is a modern construction, and they are a stratified and gendered society. She adds that tribes 'were neither stateless peoples, nor peoples outside history, nor simple, non-hierarchical, egalitarian communities. Indeed, they were fully involved in kingships, in land and forest politics, in tributary relationships with other groups,

in particular occupational specialisations and even in commerce and war' (ibid., p. 132). Therefore, it highlights that the tribal societies have never been egalitarian societies as assumed to be.

Conclusion

The significance of prevalence of witchcraft accusations implies serving different ends across cultures. Its applicability should not be limited only to the realm of rituals and superstitions. Generally, rituals are performed to 'recognise the potency of disorder' (Douglas, 1966, p. 1). Rituals are performed to deal with misfortunes by pacifying the angry spirits. However, the witch cannot be appeased, so punishing and removal of the witch is believed to be the only solution during crisis (Chaudhuri, 2013). This idea of elimination of a person as a scapegoat, in the name of being a witch, has been used as a tool to achieve various ends historically across cultures. In the garb of superstition and in an atmosphere of mistrust and fear it has served different purposes, such as releasing tensions among the members of the community among the Azande (Evans-Pritchard, 1976), to maintain the caste hegemony (Bailey, 1997), it even signified the breakdown of the communal bond [MacFarlane, 1990 (1970)].

Even in the modern times, witchcraft accusations are present and has been used as a tool to reconstruct new meanings (Geschiere, 1997) so that people are made scapegoats and punished. It has been used as a means of exploitation in Jalpaiguri tea plantations (Chaudhuri, 2013), for climate disorders in Tanzania (Miguel, 2005). It has ushered in a new era of uncertainties due to the onset of capitalism in Chotanagpur, as it has broken down the traditional institutions (Sinha, 2006). Capitalism in pre-capitalist society of South America although does not bring out witchcraft accusations, rather it has brought out the re-emergence of Devil among the labourers of plantations (Taussig, 1980). The witchcraft accusations can also be reinterpreted to look for imaginary enemies when the real motive of witch-hunt is political (Bergesen, 1978). However, there are situations where people take advantage of this fear and mistrust, for example, in Africa there is a rise of new modern witch-finders who claim to cleanse a person of ill-effects of witchcraft through modern methods (Smith, 2005).

Therefore, witchcraft accusations across cultures do not display linearity; rather these are dramatic outbursts of latent issues particular to each culture in modern times. Similarly, the fieldwork in Chirang and Kokrajhar districts across the two

communities reveal that the cases are not linear, and the causes and occurrence of witchcraft accusations are also contextual. However, witchcraft accusations highlight rising socio-economic inequality, signifying tribal communities as hierarchical and not egalitarian at all.

Notes:

ⁱ Devata means deity. As per the beliefs in Bisipara, there are deities which represent different things. Some were considered benevolent deities, whereas some were considered harmful deities.

ⁱⁱ In this context, the term adivasi used by Chaudhuri (2013) here refers only to the migrant population in tea plantations of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Adivasis of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas experienced political and economic crisis due to British Permanent Settlement Act. These adivasis were displaced from their lands. Today adivasis such as Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Gond provide the much needed labour force for Jalpaiguri tea plantations.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dain means witch. The other local terms used for witch are Daina, Daini.

^{iv} Pseudonym. The interview was conducted in the month of June, 2017.

^v Traditional healer who uses rituals and medicines to heal people. Ojha is also known as medicine man.

^{vi} Pseudonym. The interview on the unreported case was conducted in the month of December, 2017.

^{vii} Tibeto-Burman ethno-linguistic group of Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal and Bangladesh. A small number of people belonging to this community live in Chirang district.

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Sociology as a discipline, like other social sciences, is passing through a transition. The developments in the contemporary world have opened up new areas of enquiry expanding the traditional frontiers of the discipline. Many sociologists are engaged in these new and emerging areas of study which is often informed by a multidisciplinary approach. Sociologists in India are also in increasing numbers engaged in such research (in areas which includes environment, minority rights, gender studies, sexuality studies, etc. to name a few). However, they have an additional challenge posed by the need to integrate the enormous regional, social and cultural multiplicities of India into the Indian sociological canvas. These diversities, especially those of the socially marginal and geographically peripheral societies, have remained somewhat out of the radar of Indian sociology. However, emerging discourses on caste, tribe, ethnicity, religion, region, nation and nation building in contemporary India have created new consciousness and imperatives to integrate the marginal regions and societies into the broad canvas of India Sociology. The journal is sensitive to such discourses and it aims to encourage scholarly publications focused on such identities and regions. While the major focus of the journal is societies, histories and cultures of India, it also welcomes publications of comparative studies with other countries as well as on societies and cultures of South Asia.

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- Articles should use non-sexist and non-racist language.

- Spell out numbers from one to ninety nine, 100 and above to remain in figures. However, for exact measurement (e.g., *China's GDP growth rate 9.8 per cent*) use numbers. Very large round numbers, especially sums of money, may be expressed by a mixture of numerals and spelled-out numbers (*India's population 1.2 billion*). Follow thousand, million, billion number metric system instead of lakhs and crores.
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- We do not encourage frequent use of capital letters. They should be used selectively and consistently. Only the first word of title and subtitle should start with capitals. Although proper names are capitalised, many words derived from or associated with proper names, as well as the names of significant offices are lowercased. While the names of ethnic, religious and national groups are capitalised (*the Muslims, the Gorkhas, the Germans*), designations based loosely on colour (*black people*) and terms denoting socio-economic classes or groups (*the middle class, the dalits, the adivasis, the african-american*) are lowercased. All caste, tribe and community names (*the Santhals, the Jatavs*) are to be capitalised but generic terms (*the kayasthas*) are to be lower cased. Civil, military, religious, and professional titles (*the president*) and institutions (*the parliament, the united nations*) are to be put in lower case, but names of organisations (*the Labour Party, the Students Federation of India*) are to be capitalised. The names of political tendencies (*the marxists, the socialists*) should remain in lower case.
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From the Editor

Dear colleagues,

The humankind is going through a testing time today. The Covid 19 pandemic has already impacted our traditional social relations and norms in many ways and the future we are moving into is somewhat uncertain. Social scientists have a challenging responsibility ahead in analysing and conceptualising the changing social realities. We hope to see some insightful and illuminating research in the near future.

It is my pleasure to present the seventh issue of *Explorations*. The present issue consists of five papers published under the ‘Articles’ category and three papers under the ‘Research in Progress’ category.

The first article, titled *Politicisation of Ethnicity: A Study on the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam*, by Dipika Paul analyses politicisation of ethnicity as a discourse which looks into the process whereby ethnic groups based on their identity articulate their socio-political demands. The paper presents a discussion on the movement of identity assertion by the Bodos and the Koch Rajbongshis in Assam through the interplay of ethnicity and politics.

The second article, titled *Adivasis and Schooling: A Critical Reflection on Perspectives*, by Charles Varghese reflects on the ways in which the ideas like ‘adivasi’ and ‘education’ have been conceived in the Indian context and its implication on the policies and programmes related to the social transformation of the adivasi communities including schooling. The paper explores the contours of possible future course of action and argues that for comprehensive development the adivasi worldview should be a vantage point for the mainstream development discourse.

The next article, titled *Understanding State Sovereignty and Contestations around Land Governance in Guwahati City*, by Trishna Gogoi argues that in the context of the urbansphere, fragmented authority within the bureaucracy creates ambiguities and contestations over land leading to structural violence that governance grapples with. Discussing the governance of land in Guwahati city, the paper presents a disaggregated view of the institutional framework and power

hierarchy in analysing how sovereignty is interpreted in practice and how it impacts the urban fabric of the city.

The following article, titled *Two Leaves and a Bud: Revisiting the Colonial Spaces from Plantation to Bagan (garden)*, by Juri Baruah highlights the plantation landscape which has dynamic, complex and dialectical relations to capitalist process and becomes a unique site of work produced and reproduced by the colonial power structure. The paper emphasises on the belongingness to the bagan and how it is regarded as a contested space for the labourers in general and women labourers in particular.

The last article, titled *Internet Use among Tweens and Teens: Threats, Risks and Concerns*, by Kanika Panwar conducts a risk analysis of the threats faced by tweens and teens from internet use. Based on the concepts of 'risk society' and 'information security', the paper argues that to manage the risks and threats and to provide structural solutions for the same, an investigation into risk management of threats and risks among tween and teen internet use is highly required.

The first paper under Research in Progress by Shapna Medhi is titled *Conflict and Compensation in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Kaziranga National Park, Assam*. Based on empirical research conducted in the vicinity of Kaziranga, this paper deals with the dynamics of human-wildlife and park management-local community conflict. The paper questions the inadequacies of the present compensation policy and argues for an effective compensation policy and process for reducing conflict and building trust between the park management and the local communities.

The second paper under Research in Progress by Kunal Debnath is titled *Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation: A Study of the Naths of West Bengal and Assam*. The paper discusses the ambiguous nature of the Nath identity by historically situating the status of Naths and later arriving at an intra-community identity conflict and contention over OBC reservation. The paper highlights the debate between the 'radical' Naths on one hand who want to forsake the OBC status and the 'pragmatic' Naths on the other hand who want to retain the OBC status.

The third paper under Research in Progress by Draghima Basumatary is titled *Cross-Cultural Understanding of Witchcraft Accusations*. The paper explores the

genealogy of witchcraft accusations which shows that witchcraft accusations need not be limited only to the realm of rituals and superstitions; rather these are dramatic outbursts of latent issues particular to each culture in modern times. The paper highlights that witchcraft accusations bring into fore rising socio-economic inequality, signifying tribal communities as hierarchical and not egalitarian as assumed.

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

Stay safe.

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Article: Politicisation of Ethnicity: A Study on the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam

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**Politicisation of Ethnicity:
A Study on the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam**

--- Dipika Paul

Abstract

Politicisation of ethnicity as a discourse looks into the process whereby ethnic groups based on their identity articulate their socio-political demands. It looks into different dimensions of the interplay between ethnicity and politics. Such interplay is visible in Northeast India and in the state of Assam. The developing socio-political context of Assam and Northeast India since the colonial period led to the rise of ethnic mobilisation in the region. Bodos and Koch-Rajbongshis are the two ethnic groups of Assam who are associated with long drawn movement for identity assertion. Such movements raise questions about their distinct identity and the factors that led to such assertion. The present paper attempts to answer those questions by analysing their identity assertion movement within the framework of politicisation of ethnicity.

Key words: Assam, Bodos, Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, Koch-Rajbongshis, Politicisation of ethnicity

Introduction

The inter-relationship of ethnicity and politics which gained importance in the contemporary world led to the new discourse of the politicisation of ethnicity. The discourse tries to understand how ethnic groups get mobilised and articulate demands for improving their socio-economic and political status (Wani, 2013). Such interplay of ethnicity and politics is visible in Northeast India. Immediately after Independence, mobilisation among the *Naga*, the *Mizo* and the *Khasi* tribal groups led to the formation of new states. The formation of states motivated other ethnic groups for mobilisation in Assam. Among them, the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis are the ethnic groups in Assam associated with movements for identity assertion. Majority of the people of these two ethnic groups live in the western part of Assam in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri,

Bongaigaon and Goalpara districts. A large number of the Koch-Rajbongshis also live in the northern part of West Bengal – Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, West Dinajpur, South Dinajpur and Malda districts. Their socio-political movements are an ideal representation of the process of the politicisation of ethnicity. This paper looks into different aspects of the politicisation of ethnicity by focusing on the identity assertion of the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis within a theoretical framework. It focused on the two groups due to their commonality in factors and methods of identity assertion. To analyse the process of identity assertion among these two groups within the framework of politicisation of ethnicity, the paper relies on review of relevant literatures and memorandum of organisations.

Ethnicity: A Conceptual Understanding

The term ethnicity, although entered into the academics in 1960s, it has been in use in different forms like *ethnikos* or *ethnic* since middle age. In this period, it was used to refer ‘others’ like non-Christians, non-Jews. However, by the middle of 19th century, the term was used for people sharing similar characteristics (Tonkin et al., 1996, p. 21). During 20th century, in America it was used for the immigrants from the western European nations (Green, 2006). Since 1960s the concept of ethnicity has been interpreted from different perspectives. Primordialism, the dominant perspective of ethnicity in 1960s, viewed ethnicity as a ‘given’ aspect of the society. The main advocate of primordialism, Clifford Geertz believed that primordial attachment emerges from blood ties and kinship relationship (Brown & Langer, 2010, pp. 412-413). Primordialism believes that ethnicity is the result of biological process and therefore, unique and unchanging. However, by 1970s primordialism started losing hold, for its inability to explain the changes that takes place among ethnic groups over the period of time (ibid., p. 413).

A major shift in the understanding of ethnicity came since 1970s with the emergence of constructivism and instrumentalism (Green, 2006). Instrumentalism argues that ethnicity is a socially constructed phenomenon, used by different interest and status groups as ‘a social, political and cultural resource’ (Cohen, 1996, p. 8). It gives importance to the role of elites in perpetuating differences based on ethnic identity. Instrumentalism believes that the elites help ‘to transfer potential hostility’ within their community, which emerges due to ‘inequalities and power disparities’, against ‘the elites and subjects of other communities’

(Brown & Langer, 2010, p. 413). However, instrumentalism was criticised for its inability to analyse the participants' sense of primordialism i.e., sense of the permanent element of their ethnic identity (Cohen, 1996, p. 9). In 1980s constructivism emerged, which viewed ethnic identities as both 'a cultural endowment' and 'malleable'. However, unlike primordialism, it tries to focus on the circumstances, which increases the significance of ethnic identity in modern society (Brown & Langer, 2010, pp. 413-414).

Although constructivism and instrumentalism became popular since 1970s, the prelude to such assumptions began much earlier in the work of Max Weber (1922). Weber opined that 'ethnic group does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere.' (Weber, 1996, p. 35). He believed that any collective feeling among the members is the result of political action and it is the pursuit of collective interest that instigates people to organise for 'ethnic identification' (Jenkins, 1997, p. 10). However, a concrete framework to instrumentalism and constructivism was forwarded by thinkers like F. Barth (1969), A. Cohen (1974), and P. Brass (1991). Barth believes that since ethnicity is a non-static phenomenon, it should not be studied only in terms of cultural traits. He observed that the participation and self-evaluation in terms of the group values helps individuals to continue their membership in the larger ethnic groups. For him ethnic identity is the result of human experience and therefore, more than the cultural traits, attention should be focussed on the process of 'the creation and the maintenance of the borders' (Barth, 1969, p. 16). Following instrumentalism, Cohen observed that ethnic group is constructed in order to 'help people pursue or defend their political or economic interests' (as cited in Sabharwal, 2006, p. 11). In this process, Cohen (1974) and Brass (1991) emphasised on the role of elites who in order to fulfil their political goals, manipulate ethnic symbols and identity to gain the support of the masses (Hutchinson & Smith, 1996, p. 8).

A well formulated analysis of instrumentalism and constructivism in the development of ethno-nationalism is forwarded by Ernest Gellner (1983), Benedict Anderson (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1983). Thinkers like Gellner (1983) and Baruah (1994) understand nationality as a synonym of ethnic group and nationalism as the politics of identity. Gellner (1983) used instrumentalist approach in conceptualisation of nationalism. He observed that nationalism is a product and necessary condition of industrial society. For him the notion of nation is a fabricated phenomenon, created and conceived by the elites. However, unlike

other instrumentalist theorists, he did not believe that creation of nation is to benefit the elite. He believed that the transition from agrarian to industrial society raised the need for homogenised culture (Finkel, 2013). Industrial society generates need of common language for standardised communication among people. Such common language creates the need for 'cultural identification'. In Gellner's words, 'modern people do not in general become nationalist from sentiments or sentimentality atavistic or not, well-based or myth-founded: they become nationalists, through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however, obscurely recognized' (as cited in Kumar, 2010, p. 397). Thus, ethnicity is viewed as the product of modern society.

Constructivism reached another level in Anderson's 'imagined communities', which argued that '...all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined' (Anderson, 1991, p. 6). For him, nation is imagined political community because the members of the nation 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (ibid.).

Hobsbawm's 'invented traditions' also helped the development of constructivism as a perspective. In his view, traditions are not necessarily permanent phenomena in modern period. He held that tradition many a time is of recent origins and sometimes it is 'invented' (Hobsbawm, 1983, p. 1). For him, invented traditions are the result of the novel environment but it is not completely detached from the old situation and often invented tradition uses ancient materials. He observed that often '...the customary traditional practices such as folksongs, physical contests, marksmanship were modified, ritualized and institutionalized for the new national purposes' (ibid., p. 6). These invented traditions are the result of social engineering, which enables the ruling elites to channel the energies of the newly enfranchised citizens for their own benefit (Kumar, 2010, p. 396). Therefore, in their common perception ethnic groups are visualised as artificially created and not an eternal phenomena. Hence, 'as they can be created, they can also be destroyed...' (Green, 2006).

The discourse of ethnicity is, further, developed with the contribution of other perspectives. Armstrong (1982) and Smith (1986), following ethno-symbolic approach, emphasised on the role of symbols and myths in unifying people and ensuring their persistence. Armstrong (1982) considers 'nostalgia for past lifestyles, religious civilisation and organisations, imperial mythomoteurs and

language fissure' helps in creating ethnic identities. For Smith (1991) ethnic is 'a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more common elements of culture, including an association with a homeland, and some degree of solidarity, at least among elites' (as cited in Sutherland, 2011, p. 26). Hechter (1975) and Nairn (1977) widened the discourse of ethnicity emphasising on the factor of relative deprivation. They held that capitalism with its unequal development provides advantage to some regions and puts some region in backward state. The groups living in these backward areas get mobilised ethnically because of the sense of relative deprivation (as cited in Kumar, 2010, p. 395). Therefore, since the advent of the concept of ethnicity in academics, ethnicity is understood in relation to different dimensions. In this discourse, ethnicity is also studied as 'a political phenomena'.

Ethnicity and Politics: A Theoretical Understanding

Scholars predicted years ago that ethnicity would disappear in modern society. In contrast, ethnic identity seems to be more clearly articulated than before (Anttonen, 2003, p. 53). One of the reasons for its persistence has been the practical applicability of it as an instrument in the competition for scarce resources (ibid., p. 54). Rothschild believes that ethnicity survives in the modern times because of the process of politicisation of ethnicity (Rothschild, 1981, p. 30). Therefore, ethnicity should not be ignored as epiphenomenal, rather should be viewed as 'a political phenomenon'. Such understanding of ethnicity since 1980s has led it to study not in terms of cultural traits, rather to analyse the circumstances under which culture, tradition and history are used as a political tool (Anttonen, 2003, p. 53). Such concern has given rise to the discourse of ethnopolitics as a new domain, which studies the process of the politicisation of ethnicity.

Politicisation of ethnicity refers to the process of ethnic groups being 'politically conscious and organized' (Garg, 2007). To politicise ethnicity, Rothschild viewed, is to render people aware of the relevance of politics on their ethnicity and vice versa; to develop their concern about the relationship between politics and ethnicity; their group consciousness and thereby, direct the behaviour in the political sphere (Rothschild, 1981, p. 6). Anttonen held that the ambiguity, which is inherent in the ethnic symbols leaves scope for manipulating it politically (Anttonen, 2003, p. 54). It is similar in the case of myths where different version of same myths can be created for different political purpose. Cohen (1996)

identified four features of the politicised ethnicity. Firstly, the present day ethnicity is the result of interaction between ethnic groups, which often takes the form of struggle for some 'strategic positions of power' in places of employment, development and education as such. The struggle becomes more intensified when accessibility to powers differs based on tribal identity, as tribal groups tend to organise politically to participate effectively. Secondly, the tribalism has both dynamic and continuity elements within it. Continuity of ethnic groups exists through customs and social formation, whereas change can be observed in its functions. Thirdly, various traditional customs of ethnic groups are used as an idiom and mechanism for political gain. Lastly, ethnic grouping remains informal as it is never incorporated into the formal framework of the economic and political power as a state or region. If any ethnic group is recognised as a region or state it will no longer remain within the framework of ethnicity, rather it will be a nation (Cohen, 1996, p. 84).

The work of prominent thinkers on ethnicity and politics such as Barth (1969), Cohen (1969), Rothschild (1981), D. Horowitz (1985), Brass (1985, 1991), Hechter (1975) and some others have showed the conditions, which instigated the politicisation of ethnicity. The reason for the increasing politicisation of ethnicity lies in the modern society. The process of modernisation and globalisation in a multi-ethnic society has generated inequality by conferring benefits to some groups and debarring some others. Under such situation politicised ethnicity becomes an effective instrument for those who wanted to maintain or change the existing unequal structure in the 'competition for power, status and wealth' (Rothschild, 1981, pp. 2-3; Brass, 1991, p. 25). The competition on ethnic lines creates greater consciousness among people about their identity (Chee-Beng, 2010, p. 443). Referring to the process of politicisation of ethnicity, Rothschild describes it as 'a dialectical process' (Rothschild, 1981, p. 3), which on one hand, emphasises in preserving the singularity of the ethnic groups and on the other hand, uses the modern skills and resources of the members of ethnic groups to transform them into political conflict groups. Broadcasting of sacred texts through modern innovation such as radio and television reinforces the sense of belonging to the unique collective identity (ibid., p. 30). The political scenario of modern society seem to emphasise more on diversity and differences giving rise to a new essentialism whereby all differences are considered as inherent and crucial (Anttonen, 2003, p. 55).

In this process of politicisation, the state's policies of positive discrimination on ethnic lines provide scope for the politicisation of ethnicity (Brass, 1985, p. 8). Such policies generate the need to manipulate identities to gain access to resources. Chee-Beng observed that such state policies always influence the formation of ethnic group, realignment and redefinition of identities (Chee-Beng, 2010, p. 443). Moreover, the existing cultural differences and objective inequality among groups do not necessarily develop them into mobilised groups (Rothschild, 1981, pp. 2, 27; Brass, 1991, p. 26). The elites, to win over the competition for resources, instigate the members that without solidarity their identity and culture is at stake (Rothschild, 1981, p. 27). Considering the significance of their role in ethnic identity formation, the elites are referred to as 'political entrepreneur', 'ethnic entrepreneurs' and local elites (Rothschild 1981, p. 2; Brass 1991, p. 26). Brass observed that when local elites rise in conflict against the external elites it leads to 'ethnic self-consciousness', 'ethnic demands' and ethnic conflict (Brass, 1991, p. 26). He argued that the elites play a major role in the transformation of the ethnic groups into ethnic nationalism. Chee-Beng (2010, p. 446) and Anttonen (2003, p. 60) observed the role of elite in ethnic mobilisation among Malay and Kven respectively. For Rothschild, the major condition for ethnic mobilisation along with primordial difference is the elite's capacity in the competition for scarce resources (Rothschild, 1981, p. 29). Therefore, he held that the formation, consolidation and politicisation of ethnic group is a mobilisation process led by elites and result of the challenges brought out by modernity in the form of competing group and alien values. Thus, ethnic groups cannot be termed as 'primordial tout court' (ibid., p. 30).

Politicisation of ethnicity, thus, is a process in which groups under certain conditions become conscious about the position of the group at societal level and thereby, use their identity to improve or maintain their position by gaining political power. Consciousness emerges as groups interact, which takes the form of struggle for resources such as political power, economic advancement or social status. Ethnicity is used because unlike other identity, it is relatively abstract and therefore, can be manipulated for political purposes. The cultural elements attached to an ethnic group such as myth, religion, language becomes a great source of unity in modern society. Moreover, when accessibility to power is based on identity, people organise more on ethnic line. Therefore, in the present day, nationalism and sub-nationalism emerge among people for fulfilment of practical and objective need. Ethnopolitics as a domain studies the conditions under which groups become conscious and use their culture, tradition and history as a political

tool. In the present paper, the identity assertions among the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis have been analysed within the framework of politicisation of ethnicity.

Identity Assertion among the Bodos

The Bodos are a plain tribal group settled in the northern part of Brahmaputra valley of Assam in the districts of Kokrajhar, Dhubri, Chirang, Baksa, Udalguri, Nalbari, Barpeta, Bongaigaon and Goalpara. The Bodos are a Tibeto-Burman speaking Mongoloid group. Sidney Endle, a British anthropologist held that the people 'known to (others) as Kacharis and to themselves as *Bada*', belongs to the Mongoloid group spread over a large territory covering the present day Assam, North-east Bengal Koch-Bihar and Hill Tippera (Tripura) (Endle, 1911, p. 4). Considering the huge number of population, Endle referred to them as a *Kachari* race which includes – *Bara (Kachari), Rabha, Mech, Dhimal, Koch, Solanimiyas, Mahaliyas, Phulgariyas, Saraniyas, Dimasas, Hojais, Lalungs, Garos, Haijongs, Hill Tippera, Morans* and *Chutiyas* (ibid., p. 5). In course of time, because of isolation these large groups emerged as separate communities. British scholars like S. Endle, E.A. Gates and Indian historians like K.L. Baruah agreed to the predominance of the Bodos in the large part of Assam until the advent of Ahoms (Saikia, 2009, pp. 106-107).

Although Bodos have distinct culture, in the initial phase they showed a tendency of assimilation with the Assamese society. In the religious sphere, under the influence of *Neo-Vaishnavism* large numbers of Bodos were converted (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 55). In the linguistic sphere, E.A. Gates who was in-charge of the 1891 census of Assam observed widespread assimilation of Bodos into Assamese linguistic fold (Baruah, 1999, p. 181).

However, religious assimilation received a set-back with the religious movement known as *Brahma* movement that began among the Bodos in the early part of the 20th century (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 56). The Brahma Movement under the leadership of Kalicharan Brahma emerged due to the ongoing exploitation of the neo-vaishnavite preachers. Initially, Kalicharan's movement, preaching *Brahma Dharma*, tried to bring cultural and religious reforms among the Bodos. Later on, the movement turned multi-dimensional with its focus on social and economic reforms such as uplifting the educational status of the Bodos, organisation of mass meetings and adoption of new methods for agriculture (ibid., p. 58). Such multi-

dimensional effort helped in the development of an educated section of youths among the Bodos and made them conscious to revive their indigenous religion.

The linguistic assimilation was challenged by the Bodo educated middle class with the formation of socio-religious and literary organisations like *Habraghat Bodo Sonmiloni* (1912) and *Dakhinkul Sahitya Sanmiloni* (1918). These organisations published the first literatures in Bodo language in 1915-1924 written in Assamese and *Deodhai* scripts (Saikia, 2009, p. 110). Such pursuits for indigenous socio-cultural practices and literary activities created new aspiration among the educated sections of the Bodos to aspire for equal political rights.

By the later part of 1920s, while the political aspiration among the Bodos was growing, they were kept away from any discussion on the nationalist movement. Further, the negligence of the nationalist leaders towards their issue of land alienation, due to large-scale immigration, caused resentment among the Bodo youths (S. Choudhury, 2007, pp. 67-68). Such resentment was articulated when All Assam Kachari Association submitted a memorandum to the Simon commission in January 1929, demanding separate representation, reservation in education and employment for the Bodos. However, during this time although the Bodo leaders made demand based on 'their distinct civilisation' and backwardness, they did not assert their separation from greater Assamese identity. Paragraph six of the memorandum opposed the transfer of the then Goalpara district of Assam to West Bengal in which considerable number of population were Bodos. The memorandum stated that 'the habits and customs of the people of this district are more akin to Assamese than to Bangalees. We the Bodos can by no means call ourselves other than Assamese'¹. In 1933, All Assam Tribal League formed to articulate the interest of the Bodos and the plain tribes (Mahanta, 2013, p. 50). The League participated in the electoral politics of Assam in both pre and post-independence period. However, the League, being dominated by the middle class, focused on reservation in education and job and neglected the land alienation issue (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 82).

On the other hand, due to the state policy of encouraging immigration during the colonial and post-independence period, land alienation issue became rampant among the common plain tribes (Pathak, 2012, p. 22). In spite of that, in the decades immediately after Independence, the Bodo leaders showed the tendency to assimilate into the mainstream Assamese society. The Bodo leaders showed political support to the Assamese leaders at the time of reorganisation of the state

in 1954-55. On the literary front, the educated section of the Bodo leaders accepted Assamese language and extended their support during the formation of *Assam Sahitya Sabha* (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 94). Therefore, during that time mobilisation among the Bodos was not strong. It was the Assamese chauvinism, which again led to the growth of consciousness among other groups about their own identity.

Immediately after the Assam official language act of 1960, which made Assamese as the only official language of Assam, other linguistic groups of the region started a series of movements for the protection of their language. In 1962, Bodos under the leadership of *Bodo Sahitya Sabha* (BSS) (1952) raised the demand for making Bodo language as a medium of instruction in the schools of Bodo dominated areas (ibid., pp. 103-104, 107). The state government partially fulfilled their linguistic aspiration and completely neglected the ongoing land alienation process among them, which caused linguistic and economic marginalisation among Bodos. Such condition has ultimately, as Mahanta observed, led to the alienation of Bodos from the Assamese society (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51). The sentiment that grew out of such negligence provided the emotional base for the aspiration for more political power (ibid., pp. 107, 108). Therefore, by the later part of 1960s such aspiration took the form of organisations like Plain Tribal Council of Assam (PTCA) and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) (Goswami, 2001, p. 134).

The immediate instigation for such organisational mobilisation came from the announcement made by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi about the re-organisation of Assam, which the Bodo leaders interpreted as a signal to launch autonomy movement (Misra, 1989, p. 1147). The three organisations BSS, ABSU and PTCA were able to create a 'politically conscious movement' of the Bodos in 1960s (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51). The successful participation of these organisations in the 1970s language movement helped them to emerge as a potent force. Simultaneously, script movement, which emerged in the late 1960s for separate script to Bodos, against its earlier preference for Assamese and Bengali script for Bodo language, gave impetus to the identity assertion among Bodos. The successful mobilisation during the script movement prepared the ground for homeland movement of the plain tribes.

The period 1970s signify an era of political movement of the Bodos for autonomy. At that time, PTCA led by Bodo leaders demanded for separate

homeland i.e., *Udayachal* for Bodos and other plain tribes of Assam, especially *Mishings* (ibid.). But soon after its launch two major events changed the course of the movement – firstly, the emergency period of 1975-77; and secondly, the emergence of Assam movement. After the emergency, when the senior leaders of the PTCA, in alliance with Janata Party, decided to abandon their movement for a separate state, a rift appeared in PTCA causing the formation of PTCA and PTCA (Progressive), renamed as United Liberation Nationalist Front (UTNLF). The movement for homeland was carried on by PTCA (P) (Misra, 1989, p. 1148). The rift continued during the Assam movement, while PTCA supported it, PTCA (P)/UTNLF considered Assam movement an attempt to ‘Assamise’ the tribal population (S. Choudhury, 2007, p. 139).

Despite, the partial support of the Bodo leaders during the Assam movement, right after the movement resentment started growing among other tribal groups in Assam, including the Bodos. The Assam accord of 1985 made no provision for the protection of tribal groups in Assam. Moreover, the anti-tribal policy and Assamese chauvinism shown by AGP Government made the Bodos apprehensive of their identity. Criticising the AGP government’s decision of compulsory knowledge of Assamese language for government job, ABSU said that it is a way of depriving Bodo medium students from getting jobs (ibid., p. 141). This caused the identity assertion after Assam movement among the Bodos to become more emboldened. ABSU submitted several memorandums from 1985-87 with the demand to form Bodoland state for Bodos; two district councils on the southern bank of Brahmaputra river; and to enlist Bodo-Kachari of Karbi-Anglong as schedule tribes of hills (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51).

Under the leadership of ABSU a new era of homeland movement started, which shifted its focus from the pan tribals to protection and upliftment of the Bodos (Pathak, 2012, p. 20). The new era witnessed several new features such as fratricidal clash among the Bodos, emergence of militant organisations such as Bodo Security Force (BSF) and violence. This phase of the Bodoland movement came to an end with the formation of Bodo Autonomous Council (BAC) after 1993 accord signed between ABSU and Bodo People’s Action Committee (BPAC) on one side and Government of India and state government on the other (Mahanta, 2013, p. 51). But the institutional arrangement under the 1993 accord failed due to the limitations in its provisions and reluctance of the state government to implement it. Its failure not only aggravated the already operating BSF but also disappointed the ABSU (Nunthura, 2005, pp. 596-597). Such

disappointment led to the second phase of the autonomy movement for the Bodos, far more violent than the earlier phase. The rise of two extremist organisations, Bodo Liberation Tigers Force (BLTF) and National Democratic Front Of Bodoland led to a process of ‘ethnic cleansing’ whereby the other ethnic groups sharing the same territory were attacked by the Bodo militants to create a territory of homogenous population (Goswami, 2001, p. 136). The severe violence ended when Government of India began peace talk with BLTF, and after a series of discussions the historic accord of 2003 was signed. Accordingly, as per the Accord, Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) was formed and for the first time 6th Schedule provisions of the Constitution was extended to cover the plain tribes of Assam.

Identity Assertion among the Koch-Rajbongshis

Koch-Rajbongshis are associated with the homeland movement known as Kamatapur movement since 1970s. British scholars like S. Endle (1911), G.A. Grierson (1903) mentioned that the Koches belong to the broader Bodo family (A.C. Choudhury, 2009, p. 46). In the 16th century, the community established its kingdom known as Koch or Kamatapur Kingdom having domination over large area of eastern India with its capital in Koch-Bihar (present Cooch Bihar district in West Bengal). Presently, the Schedule Caste list of West Bengal mentions *Koch* and *Rajbanshi* separately and in Assam they are categorised in the OBC list as ‘Koch-Rajbongshi’ⁱⁱ. The mention of the term Koch in the ancient Indian text and their stone inscriptions in historical places indicates that the Koch identity was prevalent before any other identity. Interestingly, nowhere in the literary work of recent past the Koches were mentioned as Rajbanshi (Bhakat, 2000, p. 5). Colonial officials and some native scholars like C.C. Sanyal (1965) and S. Bandopadhyay (1998) viewed that some sections of Koch who adopted Hinduism, in course of time, came to be known as Rajbanshi. The census data until 1891 made Koch a wider category having Rajbanshi and *Paliya* people within it. But in 1901 census, Rajbanshi was formed as a wider category having all the sub-sections of Koches within it (Sanyal, 1965, p. 14). During *kshatriya* movement, because of mobilisation among the Rajbanshis, administrators attempted to separate the Koches and the Rajbanshis. However, due to ongoing assimilation the officials found it difficult to separate the people (ibid.). Thus, there can be Rajbanshis who may not be Koch and there are Koches who may not be Rajbanshi.

In the early 20th century, with the emergence of kshatriya movement, kshatriya identity was attached to the community. The assertion for such identity lies in the socio-political changes taking place in the north Bengal. The annexation of Koch kingdom in 1773 by the British ruler opened the region for large-scale immigration of upper caste Bengali-Hindus. Although the patronisation of Brahminism during the Koch kingdom brought changes in the indigenous practices among their subjects (Koches and Meches), in many aspects they continued their distinct aboriginal practices (Basu, 2003, p. 45). The upper caste Hindus used to practice untouchability with the Rajbanshis because of their distinct language and culture. Thus, humiliated Rajbanshi leaders aspired for higher status. Under such situation, the census conducted during the colonial rule was viewed by the Rajbanshis as means of getting recognition of the kshatriya status (ibid., pp. 63, 65). With the large-scale mobilisation, Rajbanshi leaders inscribed them as kshatriya in the 1911 census (ibid., p. 70). This was followed by the *kshatriyaisation* process among the Rajbanshis under the leadership of *Kshatriya Samiti*, a socio-cultural organisation of the community.

The identity assertion took a major turn in 1930s, when the Rajbanshi leader started claiming for Scheduled Caste status based on socio-economic backwardness (ibid., pp. 89-90). In 1933, due to mass mobilisation, Rajbanshis and Koches were enlisted as SC, in sharp contrast to their earlier claim for upper caste status. The movement for Scheduled Tribe status among the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam that began in 1967 with the demand for only en-scheduling them added another dimension to their identity (A.C. Choudhry, 2009, p. 20). But with *All Assam Koch-Rajbongshi Sanmilani* in 1980s the movement emerged with the demand for Scheduled Tribe status (Telegraph, 2002) and in 1990 All Assam Koch-Rajbongshis Students' Union (AKRASU) gave momentum to the movement for the ST status.

On the political front, by the end of the British period, the socio-religious organisations of Rajbanshis-Kshatriya Samiti and *Hita Sadhini Sabha* started aspiring for political power and became a potent force in the electoral politics in north Bengal, so far dominated by the upper caste (Basu, 2003, pp. 94-95). The socio-economic and political changes in the post-independence period had significant impact on the group. The transfer of Cooch Behar to West Bengal transformed Cooch Behar and its natives (Rajbanshis) into a periphery of West Bengal (Sen & Dutta, 2005, p. 2). In the post-independence period, due to the partition the immigration into the region got a boost, causing land dispossession

and marginalisation in the employment sector among the natives (ibid.). Culturally Rajbanshis were marginalised as their mother tongue was not recognised as language (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 76). The Rajbanshi leaders viewed such marginalisation as a threat to their identity, which led to the political movement for separate homeland in 1970s.

However, the seed for homeland was laid by Hita Sadhini Sabha (1946), which demanded 'to retain the independent status of Cooch Behar'. But due to the opposition of the non-Rajbanshi organisations and the conspiracy of the Kolkata leaders, the movement for independent state did not gain momentum (P. Barman, 2007, pp. 74, 76, 77). It regained strength in the early part of 1970s, when *Uttar Khandal Dal* (UKD) started mobilisation for the formation of separate *Kamatapur* state in north Bengal, emphasising the *Kamatapuri* identity of the Koch Rajbanshis (R.K. Barman, 2012, p. 231). However, the movement declined due to pro-people policy of the then Left Government in West Bengal and internal division in the leadership (Ghosh, 2013). Thereafter, *Uttar Banga Jati O Adivasi Sangathan* (UTJAS) demanded the protection of their *Kamatapuri* language. Simultaneously, the ethnic mobilisation among the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam in 1960s and 1980s often raised the demand for separate state based on their *Kamatapuri* identity.

In 1990s the homeland movement in north Bengal entered a new phase with the emergence of *Kamatapur People's Party* (KPP) and *Kamatapur Liberation Organisation* (KLO). While KPP followed a moderate and democratic method of protest, KLO was an extremist organisation involved in several major militant activities in 1999-2002. But the movement suffered after the police force of Assam and West Bengal executed joint operation (Debnath, 2010, p. 247). At that time, the arrest of the moderate party leaders of KPP revealed the repressing strategy of the government towards ethnic movement (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 82). However, in subtle manner KPP continued its democratic way of protest and kept the movement alive.

Along with KPP and KLO, *Greater Cooch Behar People's Association* joined the political movement of the Koch-Rajbongshis (R.K. Barman, 2012, p. 235). In Assam, the political movement of the Koch-Rajbongshis was led by the young leaders of AKRASU. In September, 2003 in a memorandum submitted to the then Defence Minister, AKRASU raised the demand for separate *Kamatapur* state (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 23). With the arrival of the 21st century, the Koch-Rajbongshi

organisations in north Bengal and Assam jointly launched movement for separate state comprising the six districts of West Bengal – Cooch Behar, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, North Dinajpur, South Dinajpur, Malda; and the four districts of Assam – Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Goalpara (The Hindu, 2006). Thus, Koch-Rajbongshi movement, their issues and demands based on their identity helped in the development of a separate Koch-Rajbongshi identity and the Kamatapuri identity as an integral part of the group.

Identity Assertion within the Framework of Politicisation of Ethnicity

The movements of the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis are an ideal representation of the process of politicisation of ethnicity. Similar to Rothschild's (1981) analysis, in the case of these two ethnic groups too, their demand for homeland cannot be understood as separate from their identity. Such movement in Assam is described by Saikia (2009) as ethno-nationalism and Baruah (1999) as the rise of sub-nationalism. The groups being distinct from the other ethnic groups mobilised under certain circumstances. The historical overview suggests that both the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis assimilated into the dominant ethnic groups at different levels. However, such assimilation became one of the causes of their aspiration for separate identity.

Scholars like Prabhakara (1994) and Baruah (1999) regard the process of assimilation of the Bodos into the Assamese fold as unequal. Only those Bodos were accepted into the Assamese mainstream who gave up their native identity and accepted Hinduism and Assamese language. Thus, for Prabhakara, the Bodos were not accepted as a part of Assamese society 'while they remained Bodos' (Baruah, 1999, p. 180). Baruah opined that assertion for distinct identity is an attempt of the Bodos to come out of such unequal assimilation process (ibid., p. 183). Similarly, even after widespread adoption of Hinduism, the Koch-Rajbongshis were placed in the lower social strata by the neighbouring Hindu upper caste. The reluctance of the upper caste to accommodate the Koch-Rajbongshis into the Hindu caste system is observed in their opposition to the process kshatriyaisation in the 20th century among Rajbanshis of the Cooch Behar. Such attitude is reflected in a Rajbongshi publicist, A.K. Roy's statement that '...Hindus (who) were not prepared to accept these (Rajbanshi) men as Kshatriyas. Many Brahmins began to refuse to serve these people as their priests in religious and social ceremonies and some officials refused to record the caste of these people as Kshatriya' (Basu, 2003, p. 8). Such non-reciprocal attitude of

the dominant groups served as a factor for the groups to aspire for sub-nationalism.

Cultural chauvinism of dominant groups often leads to assertion for separate identity. The relationship between chauvinism and ethnic mobilisation can be understood in the light of Horowitz's analysis who observed that any disobedience to the language and culture of ethnic groups can emotionally mobilise them (Hashmi & Majeed, 2015, p. 325). Baruah observed that 'the practice of cultural chauvinism, insensitivity and exclusivism by the ethnic Assamese' in their everyday interaction with the Bodos created a sense of alienation among them (Baruah, 1999, p. 188). Imposition of the Assamese language through 1960s language policy and anti-tribal policy of the AGP government created resentment among the leaders of the Bodos. Therefore, identity assertion among the Bodos was an attempt to 'counter the effort of the Assamese to Assamize Assam' (George, 1994, p. 882). The cultural marginalisation became severe among Koch-Rajbongshis, because neither in Assam nor in West Bengal the mother tongue of Koch-Rajbongshis is recognised as a language. It remained as a dialect of Bengali and Assamese. Soumen Nag identified that cultural marginalisation among the Rajbanshis rose because of the politics of nomenclature, whereby all the indigenous Rajbongshi names of places in north Bengal, particularly in Siliguri town, were replaced with modern names (A.J. Das, 2009, p. 76).

At the macro level, Barth observed that the state politics creates scope for ethnic groups to organise to gain access to state distributed resources (Anttonen, 2003, p. 56). In the post-independence period, political autonomy granted to tribal groups created aspiration among those groups deprived from the positive discrimination policy. The formation of tribal state has made 'the idea of political separation from Assam both attractive and seemingly viable', especially among the Bodos (Baruah, 1999, p. 184). Such provisions, Dasgupta observed, gave an impetus to Bodo radicalism (Dasgupta, 1997, p. 358). Moreover, the state policy raised the sense of relative deprivation among others deprived of state's benefit.

Realisation of relative economic deprivation among the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis provided basis for their ethno-political demands, which is similar to the observation of Hechter (1975) and Nairn (1977). Economic deprivation occurred in land rights and employments due to the state policies in colonial and post-independence period. The land reform policy of colonial ruler emphasising

on recorded land rights caused land dispossession among the tribals including the Bodos who were practicing shifting cultivation (Baruah, 1999, pp. 189-191). In the post-independence period, while illegal transfer of land continued in tribal belts and blocks, simultaneously detribalisation of areas continued due to urbanisation and government projects. Bodo leaders claimed that almost 600 thousand acres of tribal land in Assam were engulfed in government projects. Thus, the Bodos asserted that they became 'homeless in their homeland' (J.K. Das, 1994, p. 419). Moreover, the language policy of AGP government, which proved beneficial for the Assamese-speaking people to get employment, posed disadvantage for Bodos and non-Assamese people to access education and employment (Saikia, 2009, p. 114; Dasgupta, 1997, p. 359). In case of the Koch-Rajbongshis of north Bengal, economic marginalisation occurred due to state reorganisation policy, which placed the Rajbanshi dominated areas into the periphery of West Bengal; and marginalisation in the employment and land dispossession occurred due to large-scale immigration of upper caste Bengalis in the post-independence period into Rajbanshi dominated areas of north Bengal (Sen & Dutta, 2005, p. 2). Therefore, inequality in terms of economic advancement and political benefits in the post-independence period has been one of the reasons for the Bodos and the Koch-Rajbongshis of Assam to emerge into mobilised groups.

In the transformation of the marginalised Bodos and Koch-Rajbongshis into a mobilised ethnic group, the role of elites is visible since the initial phase of their mobilisation. Socio-economic reforms during the colonial and post-colonial period created circumstances for the formation of educated section among the two groups, who later on provided leadership to the movements. The multi-dimensional Brahma movement helped in the development of an educated section of youths among Bodos. Later on, the prominent leaders of the movements of the Bodos were drawn from the followers of Brahma Dharma. Similarly, the role of Rajbongshi leaders in the kshatriya movement was commendable in generating mobilisation. This is similar to Brass' (1991) observation on elite's role in ethno-nationalism.

In each stage of mobilisation, the active involvement of ethnic organisations of these two groups played major role in the articulation of their demands. The organisations like ABSU were able to harness the trust of the individual community members by educating them about their goals and activities (Saikia, 2009, pp. 139-140). Ethnic organisations seem to be a potent force in the electoral

politics as they view electoral politics as a means to materialise their socio-political goals. We can take into consideration Cohen's observation, who held that ethnic groups organise themselves in political groups because they visualise it as an effective means to participate (Cohen, 1996, p. 84).

Apart from these, the strong sense of solidarity among the groups, especially among the Bodos, as identified by Saikia (2009), helped organisations like ABSU to facilitate strong mobilisation. The existence of high level integration at the local level emerged from the pre-existing community affiliation (which Saikia termed as horizontal networks), made it easier for the organisation to mobilise the group members (Saikia, 2009, p. 146). Moreover, the Bodo leaders placed demands based on their historical domination and affiliation of other groups in Assam into the Bodo-Kachari family. Dasgupta rightly pointed out the advantage of the Bodos in his statement that 'credibility to recall a community's early historical accomplishments can offer valuable political capital for its political leaders' (Dasgupta, 1997, p. 357). Similarly, the Koch-Rajbongshis' demand for Kamatapur state is a representation of their nostalgia of their glorious past of Koch kingdom. Smith (1986) and Armstrong (1982) identified that cultural symbols and historical memories serve as a potent force in unifying the group. In the Koch-Rajbogshi and the Bodo ethno-national movement, such symbols are used to legitimise their political demands. Further, the 'geographical contiguous and close proximity of the Bodos' helped in their development as mobilised group by providing them a sense of a 'strong ethno-territoriality' (as cited in Saikia, 2009, p. 146). However, the Koch-Rajbongshis being more scattered geographically, the level of mobilisation and violence is not as strong as that of the Bodo movement.

Both the communities, in spite of common lineage, often come in contestation with each other. The Koch-Rajbongshis being one of the largest ethnic groups, their demand for ST status was not welcomed by the Bodos. Moreover, in 2003, when Bodoland Territorial Council was formed in the area where the Koch-Rajbongshis are inhabitants, they along with other ethnic groups rose to counter mobilisation. Such contestation can be understood in Baruah and Chandhokes' statement that state policies of providing self-government actually contributed to competitive mobilisation that increased contestation among groups and intensified conflict (Hassan, 2007, p. 3).

Conclusion

The discourse of the politicisation of ethnicity visualises ethnicity in contemporary times as ‘political phenomena’ and considers that it should not be studied separate from politics. The discussion on the movement of identity assertion by the Bodos and the Koch Rajbongshis in this paper has tried to analyse such interplay of ethnicity and politics. The study shows that multiple factors such as state policies, chauvinistic attitude of dominant groups, elites and ethnic organisations at different points of time led to the process of politicisation of ethnicity among these two ethnic groups. Therefore, the discourse of the politicisation of ethnicity can be considered as a significant approach to understand the present day ethnic movements.

Notes:

ⁱ All Assam Kachari Association submitted memorandum to Simon Commission consisting of 10 points.

ⁱⁱ In this paper, the author has used the word ‘Koch-Rajbongshi’ for the community because some of the prominent organisations of the community named it as ‘Koch-Rajbongshi’. But for the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, the author has followed the same word and spelling.

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Adivasis and Schooling: A Critical Reflection on Perspectives

--- Charles Varghese

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to reflect on the ways in which the ideas like ‘adivasi’ and ‘education’ have been conceived in the Indian context and its implication on the policies and programmes related to the social transformation of the adivasi communities including schooling. A critical reflection on the existing literature on these two themes in relation to the life context of adivasi communities is attempted in this paper. Inputs from the interventions in schooling, especially from the state of Kerala, have been used to demonstrate the arguments. This article explores the contours of possible future course of action especially in the context of a democratic education in a multicultural society.

Key words: Adivasi, Colonial Positivism, Critical Modernity, Rational Liberal Model, Schooling

Introduction

The *adivasi* question is not new to us. Academicians, policy planners, civil society organisations and state agencies have been deliberating on this theme ever since the colonial period and there have been divergent views since then. The debates continued even after Independence. However, the state adopted a policy of ‘integration’ as a desirable form of social change for the adivasi communities. The idea of integration was derived from the ‘Panchasheel Principles’ proposed by the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru himself. This means that the state neither wanted to isolate adivasis from the rest of the communities nor wanted to assimilate them. Integration was adopted as a middle path. This rejected the bipolar extremes like isolation or assimilation in the context of adivasi social change. Moreover, this position assured that adivasis will be allowed to develop according to their own genius. Many of the administrative measures for tribal development especially from the Fifth five-year plan were influenced by the Panchasheel Principles. Even before the Panchasheel Principles were proposed,

Indian Constitution granted special provisions for more autonomy and rights to the Scheduled Areasⁱ where privileged access was granted to the tribal people through reservation in educational and employment institutions. This special thrust was the result of two reasons: first, the distinctive and somewhat autonomous social, cultural and economic structure maintained by these communities despite relationship with the outside society; second, the deprived social conditions of these communities owing to a variety of historical injustice suffered by them at various points of history.

However, seven decades of our experience as an independent nation shows that many of these measures that we had were largely inadequate (if not a failure), not only in doing away with the inequality but also in preventing these communities from further deterioration. One can identify many reasons as to why positive discrimination and other protective measures failed to deliver the expected results. An important point that emerged from an enquiry hits at its very design, the manner in which it was primarily conceptualised and executed *by the state for the communities*.

In such a top down model, the conceptualisation of programmes and its execution was influenced by the way the state and its machinery understood who the adivasis are and what is desired for them. The developmental question of the adivasis was often posed in comparison to the ambient society. A yardstick of this sort automatically resulted in a deficit model in understanding inequality and the focus was to fill this deficit by bringing them into the standards of the ambient population. With such an orientation, measures to undo the historical inequality suffered by these communities or to develop the independent agency of the adivasis to deal with the larger social changes happening around them were never given priority. The focus was inexplicably centered around ‘developing’ them at par with the regional reference group.

Education is the foremost example of this failure. In education, integration was just understood in terms of access without a concrete plan to enrich the social, cultural and life skills brought in by the students of adivasi communities (or communities from the under privileged section for that matter). The ideals of education were shaped earlier by the nationalist state and of late by the liberal capitalist imaginations of the society. An inherent contradiction of such conceptualisation is that students from adivasi communities were looked down upon in these institutions. Their different cultural background and skills were

considered as a symbol of primitivism, underdevelopment and an obstruction to the 'modern'. Later, even when such education projects met with crisis, ironically most of the assessment studies in tribal education and development blamed the victim. The central understanding of these studies was framed around the question of 'why adivasis failed in attaining' specific goals. It was a question asked from the point of state and put the onus of failure on the subject.

On the political front, autonomy to decide on their affairs was very limited and availed only by a few. Most of these communities became estranged islands among regional linguistic societies in Post-Independent India, except in Northeastern regions (which account for only 13 percent of adivasis in India). This posed a challenge in protecting their rights and resources. In Northeastern communities, where considerable political autonomy was granted through 6th Schedule, they attempted to negotiate with the larger social changes in multiple ways. For example some of them adopted English as their official language. Roman scripts were employed to represent their languages including publishing of newspapers and books in those languages. However, Northeast witnessed violent ethnic conflicts, not just between tribals and non-tribals but among various tribal groups themselves. This means a broad identification of a collective identity as 'adivasis', beyond the specific group identities as in peninsular India, is limited at least in the Northeastern context. In its economy, the educated Northeasterners are finding scarce opportunities to accommodate them. An alternate economy which is rooted in the traditional philosophy of Northeastern communities or their social ecology is yet to evolve and shows no sign of one such full-fledged alternative in near future.

The current discourse of development is inclined towards intensifying the capitalist projects to resolve the issue. The experience of Jharkhand also gives similar signs. Despite having many chief ministers and a considerable number of legislative members from adivasi communities, the policies and programmes are adopted along a capitalist line, resulting in the displacement of large masses of adivasis from their own land in the name of development. The multinational capitalists indiscriminately invaded into the resource rich regions inhabited by the adivasi communities, and in the last twenty years in some states adivasis constituted around 40 percent among those who were displaced for various development projects (Government of India, 2002). This indicates the vulnerability of these communities and the need to uphold their political, social, economic and cultural life.

Therefore, it is evident that mere political autonomy is not enough to offer an alternative. To take the example of Kerala, one of the leading states in the development indices in the country, adivasi communities constitutes only 1.5 percent of the total population of the state. When compared to their counterparts especially from central Indian states, adivasis in Kerala fared better in many of the human development index parameters including access to school and literacy (Government of India, 2019). But their marginalisation, deprived social and economic conditions and vulnerability to exploitation continue even today. The dispossession of land of adivasis in Kerala is not associated with the present phase of neoliberalism. It is the result of colonial forest policies in the first place and peasant migration from plains to their tracts that put them in a disadvantageous position. Though Kerala has addressed the question of land to some extent, issues of adivasi's right over land and forest remain unresolved. This has accentuated over a period of time and systematically eroded their livelihood base with a lasting impact on their health, social organisation and their very existence itself. On the educational front, with the large network of schools along with many other supporting mechanisms, majority of them have got a 'potential opportunity' to access school. However, these communities are yet to make a meaningful gain out of schooling due to variety of reasons. Officially school dropout rate of adivasis is measured as 3-4 percent in Kerala. However, many field studies have raised question about this claim and some pointed out 20-22 percent of drop out/non-attendance among adivasi communities at primary and secondary levels combined (Rights Report, 2011). Besides this, in districts like Wayanad where 18.5 percent of the total population is adivasi, their participation in higher education is less than 2 percent. This happens despite the fact that many of the seats reserved for adivasis are left vacant in higher educational institutions. The serious mismatch between those who are coming out of the schools and those who are going for higher education or employment along with a considerably higher rate of drop out/absenteeism is indicative of a much deeper problem which demands a critical inquiry.

With the experience so far, in any further inquiry the questions that are posed needs to be qualitatively different from what have been asked so far. So, the focus of this paper is on the system and why it has failed to address the needs of the adivasis. In such an attempt the first point that struck my mind is the complex and divergent ideas existing among the functionaries and people at large about who is an adivasi and what kind of social change for them is desirable. With such complexity, what has been done so far for the 'best interest of adivasis' is often

done from the outsider's perceptions about the adivasi communities without bothering what these communities think about it. Thus, it is important to reflect on the 'basic assumptions' at work. Keeping this in mind, this paper tries to engage with some of the following questions especially in the context of the education of adivasis, such as: who is an adivasi?; what kind of education should be envisaged in the context of the adivasis?; what will be the implication of such an education on the adivasi communities?

'Tribe' or 'Adivasi'?

Usually we use the words tribe and adivasi interchangeably to represent the communities that are identified based on a set of criteria and listed under the 'Scheduled Tribe' category by the Indian Constitution. There are many other usages like *vanjati*, *girijan*, *janajati* with ontological reference to the communities categorised under the term tribe. However, from the time of Independence, official usage is categorised as 'Scheduled Tribe' for those tribal communities listed under article 342 of the Constitution. On the other hand, the activist groups and communities especially in the 5th schedule areas identify themselves as adivasisⁱⁱ. In the following section, I have briefly discussed some of the political, administrative and developmental significance of these usages. I am aware that these usages are highly contested among social scientists for empirical validity and coherence. However, by posing these usages in this way, I think it will certainly help us to address certain practical issues.

The idea of tribe, at least in the Indian context, was constructed by the British for their own administrative and political interests. Colonial Anthropology which is basically premised on the racial theories of 19th century was effectively used for this purpose. The earlier initiatives in this direction were taken by the British administrators themselves. For example, in 1901 as per the decision of Government of India, the then civil service officers Herbert Risley (1892) and Edgar Thurston (1909) carried out surveys in Bengal and Madras presidencies. The images of adivasis in these surveys were portrayed as primitive and uncivilised. Besides these official attempts, there were other studies that produced images about these communities with different interests. Bhangya Bhukya (2008) classified these early anthropological attempts into three categories: first, 'missionary anthropology' that emphasised on the 'primitiveness' of adivasi life and considered missionary activities as an important means in their civilising mission; second, 'romantic anthropology' that emphasised on the 'simplicity',

‘relative autonomy’ and ‘closeness to the nature’ as the way of life of these communities and wanted them to be protected from any external intervention; and the third, ‘Hindu nationalist anthropology’ that considered adivasi communities as backward Hindus, and wanted them to get assimilated in the Hindu society through the process of sanskritisationⁱⁱⁱ.

Later, Lokur committee (Government of India, 1965) who worked out the criteria for identifying a community to be declared as Scheduled Tribe in Post-Independent India was largely influenced by the imageries created by these studies. The criteria proposed by the committee were, i) Tribal origin, ii) Primitive way of life, iii) Remote habitation or geographical isolation, iv) Shyness of contact with other groups or communities, v) general backwardness in all respects. To identify tribal origin, traits like physical features, simple technology and living, tribal language and practice of animism were used. However, these criteria were not uniformly applied across the country (there were practical limitations for applying it in the strict sense). These criteria which are still in official use were created primarily out of the colonial-racial ideals and have deep rooted impact on the design of programmes and policies for the adivasis. In this perception, the adivasis were often understood in relation to the other communities, but never considered on their own right.

On the other hand, the usage of the term adivasi is rooted on a different set of assumptions about the communities in reference. The word adivasi originated from the region that belongs to the present state of Jharkhand and today is widely used as a functional equivalent to the word ‘indigenous people’ which is used by international bodies. However, this is also contested for academic and administrative reasons. Indigeneity is used to refer to those communities and state of affairs prior to the European colonisation. This may be true for countries like Australia or North America. But in Asian countries like India such a reference point is not possible as this may include many other communities including ‘Brahmins’ or ‘Syrian Christians’.

However, certain broad indicators are available for consideration as Benedict Kingsbury (2012) suggests. There are at least three sets of indications with different degree of emphasis to them: the first, ‘essential requirements’ that is constituted by the factors like ‘self-identification as a distinct group’, ‘historical experience of, contingent vulnerability to, severe disruption, dislocation or exploitation’, ‘long connection with the region’ and the ‘wish to retain distinct

identity'; the second, 'strong indicia' that is constituted by 'non dominance in the national or regional society', 'close cultural affinity with a particular area of land or territories' and 'historical continuity with the prior occupants of land in the region'; the third, 'other relevant indicia' which is constituted by 'socio-economic and socio-cultural differences from the ambient population', 'distinctive objective characteristics such as language, race, material or spiritual culture' and are regarded as 'indigenous by the ambient population or treated as such in legal and administrative arrangements'.

I am not suggesting that these are ideal set or non-problematic to be implemented, but for us what is important is the shift in 'basic assumptions' that constituted these criteria. Some of the notable features in these considerations are: i) it considers adivasis as communities on their own right, ii) understands their features in terms of the specific social-ecology they are rooted in, iii) they were taken out of the stigma attributed on them by the colonial racial theories and offered them a dignified self in the society. These considerations are important in liberating these communities from the burden of stigmatised identity attributed on them by the mainstream discourses.

Education

The aftermath of the 'tribal' conception in education is that, these communities were looked down upon by others, considered as primitive and under developed. Money was pumped in to bring them to the 'mainstream'. An appraisal of the developmental and educational programmes after Independence clearly shows that what was practiced in reality was assimilation which is a direct result of the way 'tribal' communities are perceived by the government and its machineries. This was close to an urge shown in other parts of the world like North America and Australia. In North America, the purpose of Indian American's education was considered to be a tool to kill the Indian in Indian American and to make them fully American. In Australia, the young aboriginals were taken to hostels in the cities to 'develop' them. Such aboriginal generations in Australia later came to be known as the 'stolen generation'. In a similar vein, in India, the adivasi students who were encouraged to attend classrooms met with severe estrangement with a system that urged to uproot them from their history, collective memory and every day experience. In other words, adivasi students found it difficult to survive in a relatively alienated system which considers their worldview irrelevant. So, the creation of a sense of inferiority in students was inherent in the design of our

educational system. Many studies have later pointed out that drop outs and absenteeism are in response to this estrangement in schools (Veerabhadranaika et al., 2012).

There may be different views on the nature and content of education, but everyone agrees on the need of education as a major tool of empowerment for any community or society. As it is widely recognised, there is nothing called an unbiased education. Every society imparts education with certain futuristic ideal in mind, i.e. an ideal which the society wants to achieve. It is this very ideal that makes the education project a field of power. It is important not just as a form of training, but also as a means to produce new knowledge. Colonialism used it in both ways during its reign over other societies. It used Anthropology to produce knowledge about other societies so that it could frame policies and programmes that will better facilitate their dominance. As Edward Said observed, 'Knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge' (Said, 1979, p. 36). At the level of training it also used its schools as an instrument to produce employees who are Indian in their blood and British in their thinking. Thus, the knowledge produced or the training imparted is not innocent but carries the political interest of those who are in power. The above discussion on the idea of 'tribe' clearly testifies this argument. In the following discussion, the focus is on the implication of the nature of education we envisage especially in a multicultural society like India.

Amita Sharma (2003) has traced the contemporary education models into two types of epistemologies. The first type is what she calls 'colonial positivism' which does not grant any room for human creativity and possibility of different interpretations. Such a knowledge building process makes some people subservient to those in power with the set of standards it creates. Under this system, equality is understood just in terms of access. In education it possesses a view that knowledge can be known equally by everyone, what we need to do is to create equal opportunities for everyone to get an education. A capitalist economy prefers this model as it cannot afford to tolerate an education which allows its takers to develop their own genius and imaginations or getting influenced by unpredictable results of numerous engagements of people from variety of social experience. Homogenisation of interests and straitjacketing of subjects to its pre-fixed models, based on the demands of market, is inevitable to capitalism. The second type she identifies as 'rational-liberal' and this considers knowledge as

something more than physical and the result of active and creative principles of human beings. In this position, education should be able to ‘facilitate the continuous development and expression of creativity’. This model enables human beings to discover their full potential and evolve a relationship with the world based on critical enquiry and empathy. In this approach, equality is not forcing everyone to be alike and accept what is given, but acknowledge the value of differences. It is an educational philosophy where students can only have a mere appreciation of differences and will not be able to change the system in which s/he is also a part of.

In plural societies like India, it is important to teach every member to critically appreciate one’s own experiences along with an exploration of differences of experiences out there in the society. Given the fact that the differences in society does not exist in isolation, education should also help these differences to co-exist, co-evolve and to negotiate with each other whilst keeping the respect for differences. Keeping such factors in mind, a brief reflection on some of the educational experiments in the context of Kerala has been presented in the following section.

Reflections on the Rational-Liberal model of Education in the context of Kerala

Education in a society is the indicator of the political and economic aspirations of that society. Kerala, with its long history of left political presence and anti-capitalist struggles, has always been a brewing ground for experiments in Rational-Liberal Educational model. In Kerala, this has two strands. One is the initiatives by civil society and progressive individuals. Kanavu in Wayanad and Mithra Nikethan in Thiruvananthapuram are institutions in this line. Second came from the government itself, as an initiative of Left Democratic Front in Kerala. The critical pedagogical experiment was launched in the state in 1997 which was later widely known as DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) model and this has been further developed with the introduction of State Curriculum Framework in 2008. In the following section, I will briefly reflect upon the potential of these models in addressing the question of education to the adivasis.

In the first variety, Kanavu was established in 1993 in the Wayand district of Kerala by a writer-activist KJ Baby, and Mithra Nikethan was started by a community-educationist Viswanathan in 1956 in Thiruvananthapuram. These

institutions basically tried to address the incongruence of curriculum and pedagogy of mainstream schooling with the life and experience of communities, especially marginalised social groups like the adivasis. They carved out an alternate curriculum and pedagogic model that can ensure a meaningful life worldview and engagement for students. These institutions definitely offered an experience which was qualitatively different from those who attended mainstream schools.

However, two major apprehensions can be raised about these models. First is about the replicability of the models due to the following reasons: i) it envisions a completely different societal model to build, and ii) it demands ‘teacher-philosophers’ as a key component in its functioning. Second and the most crucial one is its exclusionary emphasis on particular social groups like the adivasis though they are residing in a close relation with non-advansi communities in everyday life. I do not consider the first set of factors as a disqualifying factor for being an ‘ideal model’. But certainly the exclusionary social character of the school population will not help to address the needs of a multi-cultural society as discussed earlier. If we are emphasising on the need for education of the adivasis as an isolated and separate project, we are merely talking about an education for ‘training of certain skills’ at the cost of education as a process of socialisation for ‘complete citizenship’. However, this is not a suggestion about having an education where the adivasi students and non-advansi students are put together just to teach adivasi students about the life and ways of ambient population. It is equally or more important to teach the ambient population about the adivasi communities and their life. It is for the same reason special schools like Asram schools run by the government with a state syllabus may not be able to go beyond the level of a ‘training institute’ in a co-existing multicultural society from a sociological point.

In the second model, the government aided schools, which draw students from all communities and background, managed to create an ideal situation where students can bring their personal experience and knowledge as a resource to the school. Though there is a pressure from the ‘English medium private school’ models, these government and government aided schools, with its own curriculum and pedagogy, encourage their students to have a critical appraisal of other communities’ experiences and differences. This has been further strengthened with the increased participation of the local community in the school management. There is no doubt that this has redrawn the contours of power in

schools. But how this ‘potential opportunity’ in Kerala has benefited the marginalised groups including adivasis is a matter of inquiry.

A year-long ethnographic fieldwork^{iv} in one such government school in Kerala shows that the actual implementation of the curriculum and pedagogy in school is not upholding the spirit of rational-liberal philosophy of critical pedagogy. The new textbooks and other learning strategies provided ample opportunities for the adivasis to bring in their experiences and skills to the centre of the learning process. However, the perception among a large majority of teachers and students about the adivasis is determined by the colonial and racial imageries. Besides, the rat race for securing grades is re-surfacing in different manners due to continuing influence of the neo-liberal perception of education among a section of parents and teachers in school. They consider critical pedagogy as an impediment to achieve the neo-liberal aspirations which they wish to fulfill through education. There is a strong feeling and ‘innovation’ in schools to bring back ‘the good old days’ of ‘colonial-positivist’ model. As a result, text books with more ‘content orientation’ were brought back to Kerala schools with the support of United Democratic Front from 2014-15 academic year. If this trend continues, the re-launch of colonial-positivist model is not so distant. Such attempts will deepen inequality and marginalisation of communities, especially of the adivasis. The Left Democratic Front Government, which came in to power in 2016 in Kerala, tried a public participation model in pooling the resources for government and aided schools. More significantly the government also initiated developing school text books in the adivasi languages and appointed teachers from the adivasi communities, especially for the primary classes. Therefore the ideological disposition of the ruling government becomes so crucial in ensuring the continuity of education policies in the state of Kerala.

Conclusion

Uni-directional and dogmatic considerations of progress and primitivism have been seriously revisited by many scholars in recent times for its regressive effect on the life of the people. Though some of them completely rejected the legitimacy of progress and modernity from cultural relativist positions, some of them took a prudent approach and suggested for a ‘critical modernity’ (Peet & Hartwick, 2010) as an improvised form of modernity that can accommodate democratic politics and plurality of discourses. The conception of the adivasi as proposed by Kingsbury (2012) is actually an attempt in this direction. It establishes their right

to get back the land and forest from which they were uprooted, to rebuild a life which is rooted in their social ecology^v, to develop their course of life in relation with the world out there keeping their dignity of life. It repeals the racial imagery of ‘primitive’, or ‘uncivilised’ and establishes the fact that the backwardness they suffer is the product of centuries-long oppression they suffered under colonialism and its later incarnations including neo-liberal capitalism. A couple of state programmes of recent times like Forest Right Act (FRA) and Panchayati Raj Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) have imbibed this renewed understanding of the adivasi communities.

To further this trend, it is important to develop an independent agency of the adivasis to make their voice heard and to push their cases in the larger discourse of social change. This is nothing new because the adivasis had fought great battles with colonisers, they are fighting with the neo-liberal capitalists against occupying their land and resources, and they are also fighting with various other socially degenerating practices like abuse of alcohol, abusing their women and anything that degrade their dignity. The governance and popular perceptions have to be sensitised on this change of context. The political implication of such a conception may be that all oppressed classes will join their hands in fighting against larger forces of oppression like capitalism, but at the same time will also be aware of the nuanced difference in the forms of oppression and aspirations of different sections within the front. At the societal level, the co-existence of the adivasi communities with the ambient population and co-evolution within the society keeping the dignity and rights of their communitarian self needs to be given due space.

To come back to the questions with which we began, any programmes or policies on the adivasi communities should clarify the basic assumptions about these communities. These assumptions with an effect on the imagination of programmes and policies will have ramifications on the political, social, economic and cultural change of these communities. With the backdrop of the critical reflections on the experience of these communities in both colonial and post-colonial Indian society, there is a dire need for a shift from the ‘tribal’ imagery of these communities which is founded on the colonial and racial understandings. It should move ahead to an ‘adivasi’ imagery founded on more liberal and democratic ideals. This is suggested not just to root out the stigma created by the colonial depiction, but to redress the regressive actions it mooted in the policies and programmes for the adivasis. On the educational front, a rational-liberal

model of education would be a better alternative given our plural social context. In the context of development a comprehensive project that touches the economic, social and cultural aspects and stems from the adivasi worldview could be the vantage point for the mainstream development discourse.

Notes:

ⁱ Under the 5th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, in the areas with preponderance of Adivasi/tribal population, the President of India in consultation with the Governor of the concerned state declares an area as a Scheduled Area. This provision applies to states outside Northeast India. In the latter, the 6th Schedule applies.

ⁱⁱ Certain groups do not use the term adivasi to refer themselves, for e.g., those who are in Northeast India, i.e. the 6th Schedule Areas. However, it is proposed as a competent equivalent for 'indigenous people' in international forums. For details, see Uday Chandra (2014), Virginius Xaxa (1999).

ⁱⁱⁱ For a detailed discussion, see Bhangya Bhukya (2008).

^{iv} An ethnographic fieldwork was carried out from June, 2013 to March, 2014 in a government higher secondary school located in the Thirunelli Panchayat of Wayanad district in the state of Kerala. Along with the teaching and learning activities of the school, the school-community relationship was also studied in detail.

^v For a detailed reading on this, see Ramachandra Guha (2003).

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Article: Understanding State Sovereignty and Contestations around Land Governance in Guwahati City

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Understanding State Sovereignty and Contestations around Land Governance in Guwahati Cityⁱ

--- Trishna Gogoi

Abstract

Urban land as a scarce resource is a well-recognised phenomenon across the world which makes it a highly contested entity. Developing nations in the Global South are witnessing the highest rates of urbanisation, which finds countries like India struggling in governing land to make optimised and equitable use. The Indian states have constitutionally mandated powers of eminent domain over land, which by definition, makes it the sole authority over land administration. However urban land administration is found to be highly fragmented and urban planning is deemed to be a failure in Indian cities, bringing to the fore numerous incidences of state violence and public protests. Grounding my study on the governance of land in Guwahati city, I take a disaggregated view of the institutional framework and power hierarchy to analyse how sovereignty is interpreted in practice and how it impacts the urban fabric of the city. Through this article, I argue that fragmented authority within the bureaucracy *creates* the ambiguities and contestations that governance grapples with which in turn fuels contestations over land.

Key words: Contestations, Fragmented Authority, Guwahati, Land Governance, Sovereignty

Introduction

Assam's urbanisation can be summed up by using the term 'Guwahatisation'. With nearly 25 per cent of Assam's urban population in Guwahati city and its periphery, its population is the largest in the state as well as in the entire Northeast region of India. It is the recipient of the largest share of government funding amongst the urban areas of the state, along with receiving investments from national and international funding agencies. However, Guwahati is also situated within a fragile ecosystem of hills, wetlands, reserved forests and natural

channels. Evidently, it finds itself in a hotbed of tenure contestations, government-led evictions and violent protests.

The United Nation's Programme for Human Settlements and Sustainable Urban Development, UN-Habitat released its new Urban Agenda III in 2016, which reiterates a number of challenges around the scarcity of urban land. These range from rising poverty, inequality and vulnerability to issues of land market, health, natural hazards and violence. To address these issues, the urban agenda has upheld land administration, planning and governance as key to achieving 'peaceful, inclusive, safe, sustainable and resilient' cities (Wehrman, 2016, p. 6). In essence, the UN-Habitat's urban agenda of 2016 professes that formal authority over urban land shall manage the ground realities of metropolises. Contradicting such top-down models of development, social scientists researching on the post-colonial economies of the Global South find land governance to be a splintered entity. Land politics experts, Lund (2011) and Boone (2013) argue that no single entity takes all decisions regarding land, rather fragmented de facto powers within the state determine rights and control over land. Lund finds that sovereignty is held disjointedly and dominantly by those institutions which have managed to 'define and enforce collectively binding decisions on members of society' (Lund, 2011, pp. 886-887).

Studying Indian bureaucratic systems, Akhil Gupta states that the study of the 'state' itself is difficult as well as interesting because of the same reason: pluricenteredness (Gupta, 2012, pp. 64-65). He finds it difficult to encapsulate the state as a single entity due to the presence of various nodes of power, function and implementation. How does implementation reflect in the different levels of the state – say, between different departments or even within a single department the flow of power and functions amongst the state head office, district level and its ensuing towns and village administration?

Guwahati is the largest urban agglomeration and the 'primate city'ⁱⁱ of Northeast India. Guwahati has recorded an urban population of 9,57,352 in the 2011 Census, making it the top contender for the first million-plus city in the region. Naturally since the shift of India's development policies towards urban renewal and redevelopment in 2004, Guwahati has been leading the central government's urban agenda in the Northeast region. The city has been selected as the Mission City under Jawaharlal Nehru Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM), Smart City Mission and Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation

(AMRUT)ⁱⁱⁱ. It is also the recipient of funding from numerous other government and international financial institutions. Under the global neoliberal paradigm of development, there is a mounting pressure on cities to be self-reliant as well as to adhere to global standards of services and amenities. The state's compulsions of neoliberal, high-modernism ideals are reflected in the city's capital infrastructure – sports stadiums, five-star hotels, and numerous gated apartment complexes, towering over poor settlements spread across all hills and low-lying areas in the city, characterised by poor or non-existent basic services. Piles of garbage are strewn across the largest wetland in the city, as well as in natural channels and drains, clogging and polluting water bodies. Against this background, one needs to critically view the compulsions of 'good governance' in cities promoted by the World Bank in the 1990s. Cities must attract private investments into infrastructure building and developing revenue earning sources, which cannot be met from local tax collections. Providing free land is a proven yardstick for attracting global investors (Sathe, 2011). Thus, urban reforms and development schemes are based on market liberalisation and land commodification, alienating agricultural lands and forests into prime real estate in urban areas, pushing people to live in slums and poorer neighbourhoods around hills, water bodies and forest lands (Fernandes & Bharali, 2011; Fernandes, 2007). In Guwahati, land governance is characterised by contestations with public protests and dispossession remaining as recurring themes (Desai, Mahadevia & Mishra, 2014).

With this background, my research is an ethnographic study of the state apparatus, where I have studied procedures and tools of land administration by selecting those state departments which are predominantly involved in the allocation, reservation, sale and providing development permissions over land within Guwahati. Through my study, I intend to comment on the interpretation of authority in practice and how it impacts the urban fabric of the city. I argue that the ambiguities present in the procedural and legislative discourse of governing land by fragmented authorities are shaping and creating the contestations within Guwahati.

The paper is presented in four broad parts: firstly I present the institutional framework of land administration in Guwahati and their hierarchical set up. Secondly, I take a historical look at how Guwahati has evolved as a contested city and discuss legislations that have contributed to the land debates. Thirdly, by critically analysing documents and procedures employed by the authorities to govern, I discuss the ambiguities which perpetuate negotiations and contestations

between competing and mutually reinforcing alliances. This is followed by the conclusion.

Institutional Framework of Guwahati's Land Governance

Dispelling unified visions of the state as a sovereign authority, anthropologist Tania Murray Li posits that an image of the state as 'a unified source of intention, capable of devising coherent policies and plans' (Li, 2005, pp. 384-385) is problematic. Instead, she uses political theorist Timothy Mitchel's claims (1991, as cited in Li, 2005, p. 78) that state is actually an array of practices which enables the creation of a distinction between state and society. Such practices include surveys, censuses, data collection, planning, maps, etc. to produce the authority of the state (ibid., 2005). In this context, I shall discuss the institutional framework of the authorities involved in the governance of land in Guwahati.

As a precursory exercise to the study, I sought to understand how much land of the city came under the jurisdiction of each of the above departments to assess their scale of influence as well as to comprehend the issue of scarcity of urban land. Visits to the office of the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) revealed that there are no ready maps available for forests as they were under preparation. On the other hand, the officials in the circle offices of Guwahati, Dispur and Azara have reported that government land is highly fragmented and they do not keep a track of land records of the whole district at any one place, neither do they have any record of the forest land under their circles^{iv}. So instead, by compiling different reports and primary data sources, I have tried to develop an approximate figure of the distribution of land under the various land authorities discussed above.

Table 1: Department-wise Approximation of Land Area in Kamrup Metro District

Government Department/ Competent Authority	Sub-classification	Land authority over
Revenue and Disaster Management Department	i) Dispur Revenue Circle (RC) ii) Guwahati RC iii) Sonapur RC iv) Azara RC v) Chandrapur RC vi) North Guwahati RC	246.6 sq.km*
Environment and Forest Department	16 reserved forests within Kamrup Metro, including Deeporbeel wild life	331.58 sq.km (approx.)**

	sanctuary and Amchang wildlife sanctuary	
Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority	i) area around DeeporBeel ii) Barsola, Sarusola, Silsakoo, Bondajaan <i>beels</i> (water bodies)	As per dag numbers given in the Guwahati Water Bodies (Preservation and Conservation) Act, 2008***

*Sources: *Calculated by author as discussed in body of text; **discussion at office of the PCCF, May 25, 2018 and Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2012;***area covered is not known as only the cadastral numbers are provided for the area covered by the water bodies.*

The total area of the Kamrup Metro district as per Census 2011 is 627.18 sq.kms. Within this, the Statistical Handbook of Assam, 2012 records reserved forests cover at approximately 331.58 sq.kms. It is pertinent to note that reserved forests cannot be easily taken up for urban expansion or development. Discussions in the office of the PCCF indicate that of the 16 reserved forests (RFs) in the district, 14 RFs^v are within the city or its immediate periphery. Within the greater Guwahati boundary, Brahmaputra river covers around 49 sq.kms. area which also remains completely out of developable limits. From these figures it can be deduced that about 246.6 sq.kms. of land within the Kamrup Metro district falls under the Revenue department for urban use. However, the Guwahati Municipal Corporation already covers 216 sq.kms. of the urban land, while the Guwahati Master Plan (GMDA, 1992) has delineated 328 sq.kms. of the district within its metropolitan area and extension. Moreover, this calculation does not include the area covered by the protected *beels* (wetlands) in the city under the Guwahati Water Bodies Act, 2008, for discounting from the land available for urban use^{vi}. Still, this exercise indicates the scale of land scarcity in Guwahati. The Revenue department has already saturated its share of land, while reserved forest and environmentally sensitive areas cover the major proportion of land falling within the metropolitan area. Guwahati High Court advocate S. Barthakur (2019) claims that at the heart of the land contestations in Guwahati lies the fact that much of the city is covered by forest land, while the government *khas*^{vii} land is already exhausted. From this approximated land distribution, I have followed the workings of these three departments to illustrate how negotiations, nexus and contestations are in-built in the governance measures.

The Indian Constitution attributes the function of urban planning and administration to urban local bodies (ULBs). Guwahati Municipal Corporation

(GMC) and the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) are the urban local bodies of Guwahati. The GMC as the third tier of government, collects taxes, fees and charges against service provision, building permissions and undertakes urban projects, amongst other urban functions and is governed by elected representatives, headed by an elected Chairman and government Commissioner. The GMDA, on the other hand is a para-statal agency, which leads urban planning for the city and prepares master plans defining the urban land uses and built-up, along with developing infrastructure projects. GMDA is headed by a Chairman who is selected by the state government and is supported by a Chief Executive Officer, who is a senior-level bureaucrat. These ULBs are harboured under the Guwahati Development Department (GDD), which is the only such department in the country established to administer just one city. This supports my earlier claim for rephrasing Assam's urbanisation as Guwahatisation. The ULBs are guided by the Guwahati master plan and the Guwahati building byelaws, along with their individual acts.

The Constitution has accorded the states with the eminent domain powers over land. The Revenue and Disaster Management Department (hereafter called the Revenue department) represents the state in matters of land and has authority over all land in the state, even private land. The land legislations of Assam are guided by the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, a pre-independence era law which is in practice even today, albeit with changes through orders and amendments over time. As per its rules, the Revenue department remain heavily dependent on the bureaucratic set-up at the district, headed by the Deputy Commissioner (DC) at the district-level. The DC at Kamrup Metro which covers Guwahati and its peripheries is supported by six Revenue Circle Offices (CO), namely Guwahati, Dispur, Azara, Chandrapur, Sonapur and North Guwahati. These COs are the field offices which hold the fragmented records of land – government land, village grazing reserves, private land, other government reservations, grant land, vacant land, etc. All changes to the land ownership and land use are recorded in land record registers called – the 'Chitha' and 'Jamabandi'^{viii}. The departure of Revenue department from urban governance is evident from its land classifications. The Revenue department does not engage with land as 'urban', and thus finds no common ground with urban land use proposals in master plans, which form the base document for the major activities of the GMDA and GMC.

Although Revenue department administers all land under the state, all forest lands remain under the jurisprudence of the Environment and Forest Department. The presence of 16 reserved forests within the vicinity of the city has huge political implications of the land rights movement of Guwahati, especially due to the fact that none of the forests have updated records of maps delineating the boundaries. Guwahati has seen regular instances of state violence on forest dwellers, peripheral settlements and encroachers on reserved forests, thereby putting forest land at the heart of state-people contestations (Fernandes & Bharali, 2011).

Thus the major land authorities are listed below in Table 2, with their powers/functions which impact the physical form and socio-political status of the city.

Table 2: The Fragmented Land Governance Structure

State-level	District-level	City-level	Broad functions/powers
Revenue and Disaster Management Department	DC Kamrup (M) with six Revenue Circle offices		Survey and mapping, Revenue assessment for taxation, Land allocation for public and semi-public uses, Settlement for private use, Administer protected belts and blocks
Environment and Forest Department	Division offices with multiple Range offices		Forest survey and mapping, Revenue assessment of forest resources and Allocation of sand quarries, timber lots Management of reserved forests, eco-sensitive zones, social forestry, forest villages
Guwahati Development Department	None	Guwahati Municipal Corporation with eight zonal offices	Municipal taxation, Development control over land parcel, Project development
		Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority	Development control over land parcel, Land use zoning, Project development Conservation of reserved water bodies

Source: Collated by author

Other infrastructure development departments like Public Works Department (PWD), Public Health and Engineering (PHE), Transport Department (TD), all have to approach the above departments to request for land within Guwahati – making these abovementioned departments (Table 2) the focus of my study.

Contingency and Chaos in Guwahati: Context of the City

Assam has been historically a site of mass migration and exodus. Steered by the British policies of settling uninhabited wastelands and opening up reserved lands and forests for tea estates and forest produce exploitation, waves of migrants have been encouraged to settle in Assam, mostly from East Bengal. Subsequently, settlement of vast tracts of land for tea estates ensued migrant labourers brought in by the colonial estate owners from surrounding states of Orissa, Bihar and Bengal. Consequently, migrants displacing the indigenous inhabitants from their own lands became such a major concern for the tribal and local communities that the practice of ‘Line system’ was initiated as a double edged sword in the early 1930s. The local communities were contained within the imaginary separation line or closed villages for protection and preservation, while the uninhabited wilderness and forests were opened up for occupation to the landless migrant farmers and cultivators. In 1946, this Line system was expanded to encompass villages or groups of villages inhabited largely (50 per cent or more) by tribal communities and other backward classes termed as ‘Protected belts and blocks’ to legislate these protected areas of Assam^{ix} under Chapter X ‘Protection of backward classes’. The current city of Guwahati was part of one such belt – the South Kamrup (Guwahati) Tribal Belt.

This tribal history of Guwahati indicates the presence of commonly held land, village grazing grounds and most importantly the non-existence of private property and documentation amongst the inhabitants of Guwahati tribal belt. Various studies (Guha, 2006 & 2015; Baruah, 2008; Daimary, 2012; Sarma, P., 2013; Mahadevia et al., 2016) indicate the existence of large concentration of tribal communities in and around Guwahati since historical times. The Bodos were concentrated in Pub Boragaon, Betkuchi, Saukuchi, Borsojai, etc., while the Karbi community was found in Kharguli, Narikal Basti, Hengrabari, etc. Other prominent groups recorded to be of significance in the city were the Rabha and the Garo. Nepali graziers were reported to have inhabited the upper reaches of the hills across the city. The purpose of these protected areas was to ensure that those communities living in the sub-montane regions of Assam, who were backward in

terms of education and opportunities and were largely dependent on primary modes of sustenance, would be protected within the areas they inhabit, without the fear of losing their land and sustenance to more resourceful local communities and landless migrants. However, when Dispur was established as the capital of Assam in 1972, more than 7 lakh bighas of land from the tribal belt was de-reserved from protected status in preparation for setting up the capital hub (Daimary, 2012). De-reservation made large swathes of land accessible in the market, undermining the claims of those inhabiting the area since generations. This led to major changes in the demographics of the city as the bureaucrats and office bearers of the capital administration shifted from Shillong to Guwahati, along with the businessmen, students, service providers, informal sector workers, fourth-grade employees, etc., looking to establish themselves in the capital. They challenged the claims of those without legal tenure and managed to formalise land holdings otherwise held commonly. In spite of its land policies of protecting the indigenous communities, the revenue administration has continued to ignore and criminalise those without tenure documents. Discussion with the staff of the Settlement Branch of the Kamrup Metro DC office revealed that even the protected persons staying within the protected belts and blocks cannot claim rights to their land if they do not have ‘*miyadi patta*’ or ownership tenure. The aged Superintendent, nearing retirement at the Settlement office commented, ‘Sob dekhisu. Jiye rule nathakok kiyo, miyadi nohole, eku nai’, translated as, notwithstanding the prevalent rules, in his experience there are no rights without formal tenure or the *miyadi patta*. This strengthens Gidwani and Baviskar’s observations of Delhi, where they find that state governance enforce such strict controls on commons as publicly used commodities, that it is impossible to have any common claims over common lands (Gidwani & Baviskar, 2011, p. 43). Without land documents for the tribal belt, inhabitants had to shell out premiums for land ownership and taxation, leading to the alienation of the backward communities, who were either expelled from their land or forced to sell and to move out to the peripheral hills, waste lands and forests. Today, migrants looking for livelihood opportunities in the city are forced to settle on the hills, peripheral forests and waste lands which offer cheap and affordable housing, rather than the prime localities which are beyond their reach. However, in the drive for urban expansion, even these peripheral lands continue to remain vulnerable to evictions, elite capture and the land mafia (Mahadevia et al., 2017).

Assam has had five land policies post-independence – in 1958, 1968, 1972, 1989 and 2019. Since the first land policy, the focus of the policies remained

dichotomous – supplying more land to meet the demands of the landless people, while trying to safeguard the forests, village and professional grazing reserves (VGR and PGR) and forests from encroachers. Subsequently, each policy has reported the de-reservation of thousands of acres of reserved lands for settling the landless migrants over the years. Post the establishment of Dispur as capital, the Land Policy of 1989 formulated special conditions to provide urban land to indigenous people of the state. Occupiers can apply for ownership against payment of premium, after fulfilling the requirements of 15 years of occupation on any urban land, the main criteria being the applicant is an ‘indigenous person’. However, the term ‘indigenous’ is not defined officially, leaving Deputy Commissioners to interpret the term on their own. While talking to *mandals* (land record keepers) in Guwahati and Dispur Revenue Circle offices, some interpretations of an indigenous person used across Assam were collected, which included:

- protected persons as per definition in Chapter X of the ALRR, 1886^x,
- any SC/ST applicant from anywhere in India,
- any SC/ST applicant from communities belonging to Assam,
- any Indian citizen, etc.

Trying to get a better understanding of how the term is interpreted, I talked with an official at the Guwahati Revenue Circle about the procedure of settling land occupiers in Guwahati. On enquiring whether he feels that the term indigenous has been interpreted too broadly by the land officials, he answered in the negative, stating that ‘it is very simple; every administrator knows and there is no confusion’. He most probably wanted to establish that the knowledge and perception of the authority is unquestionable. The 2019 Land Policy, which came up after much furore over the land rights of the indigenous persons, has also refrained from defining who is an indigenous person. In his seminal ethnographic work on the working of the Indian bureaucracy, anthropologist Akhil Gupta (2012) argued that the Indian bureaucratic decision making was far from rationalised. Instead, the entire process is based on ‘contingency and barely controlled chaos’ (ibid., p. 14). He argues that such contingency leads to misinterpretation of bureaucratic processes taken in good faith which have serious social outcomes. Gupta stresses that such decisions can make the difference between life and death for the affected people.

The open-ended definition of ‘indigenous’ settlers and de-reservation of the South Kamrup (Guwahati) tribal belt in the early 1970s has had serious impact on the city’s hill settlements. Without the protection under the provisions of Chapter X, the hill dwellers have had to struggle for sharing the hills lands with migrants coming to the city over the years and looking for economic opportunities and cheap jobs. Benjamin (2008) has most eloquently presented the everyday struggles of the poor to hold on to their settlement in urban areas by coining the term ‘occupancy urbanism’. These are the development outside the planned spaces which provide the alternate narrative to the city. The difficult terrain and poor or non-existent municipal services ensure that the hill settlements can cater to the migrants. Thus the hills of Guwahati are populated with a mix of communities, settled mostly in informal settlements^{xi}.

However, all these hills are also covered by different categories of forests like reserved dense forest, open mixed forest, scattered forest and degraded forest, etc., which fall under the Assam Forest Regulation Act, 1891 and are thus regulated by the Forest department. The forest covered hills have witnessed the largest and most violent eviction drives in the city, most prominently in 2011 and 2017. Commenting on the struggle of hill settlements in Guwahati, advocate Barthakur explained that majority of the hill dwellers are not included under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights Act) 2006. This act protects the rights of two kinds of forest dwellers – firstly, those belonging to Scheduled Tribes (ST) of India and secondly, those qualifying under ‘other traditional forest dwellers’. In Guwahati, along with ST inhabitants, many belonging to non-ST communities have also settled on these hills. To be considered eligible under ‘other traditional forest dweller’, the resident has to be settled in the forest area for more than three generations (minimum period of 75 years). Since most of the migrants on these hills are single generation settlers, the law considers large section of the hill dwellers to be encroachers. Consequently, evictions on the hills have been a regular feature. Added to this issue remains the matter of the open-ended interpretation of a ‘forest’. Rather than any physical map or boundary, the forest land is administered based on the forest legislations. The famous writ petition no.202 of 1995 by T.N. Godavarman Thirumulpad in the Supreme Court against the illegal timber operations in Nilgiri hills led to the restructuring of forestry management and conservation in India, largely affecting the Northeastern states. The Supreme Court for the first time defined forests as per the dictionary definition which ambiguously meant thickly wooded areas or large area covered with trees or

plants, etc., and as per such definition, forest conservation would be carried out regardless of ownership. Thus the Forest department has been in the process of demarcating and administering forests as per the dictionary definition.

Thus settlements which have managed to obtain security of tenure, have in some cases found to be established on forest land, bringing them under the demolition drives of the state, which is discussed through examples in a later section of this paper. Although there are many forests in Guwahati with numerous historically settled communities, government policies aimed at ensuring rights for the eligible communities are found to be either ambiguous or inadequate for addressing the ground realities. Thus settlers are found engaged in public-interest litigations (PILs) against the state, indirectly supported by political parties to ensure vote banks and making a living by negotiating through the rubric of land laws.

Sovereignty of the City – Evolving Ambiguity

The state's eminent domain over land and its sovereignty to take decisions is viewed as monopolistic. Sovereignty has been traditionally understood as unlimited power over a territory and its people by the state, propounded in the juridical apparatus and the government structures (Lund, 2011, p. 887). James C. Scott (1998) has criticised how the state is viewed to be an all-seeing powerful entity, assigned with the role of developing the nation. Likewise, Akhil Gupta (2012) argues that the failure of the government to actually undertake and positively implement its development visions is not due to corruption only, rather due to the impossible burdens of bureaucracy. Fragmented resources, information, policies and powers of the bureaucratic set-up have led to the violent contestations over urban land. In the following section, I want to illustrate how sovereignty of fragmented authorities is imposed and experienced through 'procedures, techniques, aesthetics, ideologies, cooperation, negotiation, and contestation' (Hull, 2012, p. 5).

Plans and Development Permits

Scott (1998) found states taking up top-down, exclusionary decisions on large-scale schemes and projects, which are envisioned by the state to bring about vast improvement in the city, which he termed as 'high modernism'. Master plan is a representation of such 'high modernism' of the states. Master plan is a British construct and has been in practice in Assam since 1960s. The master plan provides a 20-year vision of the development of the city by proposing land use

zones for the entire city and its urbanising periphery. It has been brought into practice in the state through the Assam Town & Country Planning Act 1959 and after the establishment of the GMDA Act 1975, streamlined for Guwahati. Although as per the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1994, the municipal body should be preparing the master plan, but when the GMC Act came into force in 1969, the power to prepare master plan was not included and was later incorporated in the GMDA Act of 1975^{xii}. The practice has remained unchanged since, and has remained a matter of constant debate between the two ULBs. GMC has been appealing to the state department to revise the law to allow GMC to prepare the master plan of Guwahati, but no action has fructified.

Guwahati has formalised three master plans till date – in 1965, 1986 and 1992, but their implementation has been largely confined to providing permissions for development and land sale. This is due to the fact that these permits are the largest sources of revenue for the GMDA. The development permits are of two types – planning permit and building permit. The Guwahati building byelaws, prepared in consonance with the master plan, govern the building permits; while the master plan informs the planning and land sale permits. GMDA has shared an ambiguous and contested history with GMC in providing building permissions in Guwahati. As per the GMDA Act of 1975 and the master plan, GMDA's jurisdiction included entire Guwahati city, North Guwahati Town Committee area, and some revenue villages. This gave GMDA the power to issue building permits for overlapping areas along with GMC. In the early 2000s, the state government through the GDD directed GMDA to prepare building byelaws for Guwahati to better formalise each agency's powers and functions. The Guwahati building rules published in 2006 continued the dichotomy power-struggle in issuing building permissions with GMC. Officials in GMC's planning section^{xiii} believe that applicants tried to manage officials in the agencies when denied permits. They informed that there are numerous court cases where applicants have alleged that their neighbour has obtained permission for the same kind of building and site conditions which GMC has denied to them. This indicated that as both GMC and GMDA were issuing building permits for overlapping areas at the same time, the denial from one authority gave applicants the scope to manipulate their applications in the other.

After much deliberation, the Guwahati Building Construction (Regulation) byelaws, 2014 was notified to address the duplicity of permissions and increase the transparency of the procedure. It introduced the concept of planning permit for

the first time. It segregated the already existing activity of verifying whether the proposed building was permissible in the proposed land zone. While GMDA would issue planning permit across the whole planning area, Guwahati Municipal Corporation, North Guwahati Municipal Board and the Panchayats of five mouzas/ villages within GMDA were given the power of issuing building permit within their own jurisdictions. However, the building byelaws were prepared by GMDA and the envisaged separation of functions are still found to be diluted as detailed out from the byelaws in Table 3 below.

Table 1: The Separation of Functions between GMDA and GMC regarding Development Permits in the Guwahati Building Construction (Regulation) Byelaws, 2014

GMDA's role for providing Planning permit	GMC/North Guwahati/Panchayat's role for providing Building permit
Verify and make necessary inspection of <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - land use zone, - road width, - floor area ratio, - building coverage, - height of building, - parking norms, - layout and - requirement of external open spaces and functions 	Provide building permit after verifying the building plans and inspecting the building site (items are not specifically mentioned for GMC and others)
If satisfied, GMDA provides the planning permit within the 30-days limit and then forwards it with three sets of the drawings and maps, to GMC/North Guwahati/Panchayat as the case maybe	Building permit must be issued within 45 days from the date of sanction of Planning permit
Processing fees for planning permit is submitted at GMDA, of which 90 per cent is refundable, if the application is rejected	Building permit fees are submitted to the concerned authority of the jurisdiction. If Building permit is not approved, fees is not refundable, but adjusted if the building plan is submitted again within the validity period

Source: GMDA (2014, pp. 11-12)

From the above table, it is evident that both the checklist for planning permit and building permit are the same. Yet the byelaws are such that no permission applications can come to GMC without passing through the scrutiny and permission from the GMDA. The building permission procedure prior to the 2014 byelaws allowed both GMC and GMDA to provide the building permit, which also included the procedures segregated under the newly segregated planning permit. Thus, although as per the Indian Constitution, the GMC is the ‘third tier of government’, in Guwahati the para-statal agency has the upper hand in policy-making and administration. Discussions with town planners in both GMC and GMDA ^{xiv} revealed that to provide some disaggregation of functions in implementation, it was decided through subsequent orders that the town planner at GMDA would provide the planning permit without actually visiting the site, but on the basis of the building drawing and site map and in consultation with the master plan. On the other hand, the site engineers under the town planner at GMC would undertake site visits to verify the building feasibility as per the proposal after GMDA provides the planning permission. Thus, even though the government has targeted the implementation of ‘ease of doing business’ in the state, the 2014 building byelaws is found to have increased the layers of red tape, instead of simplifying the procedures. Presently, to ensure a single-window clearance of permissions, the building permission procedure has been taken online. Here again, it was GMDA who was provided the necessary funds to create the web-based single window for building permissions.

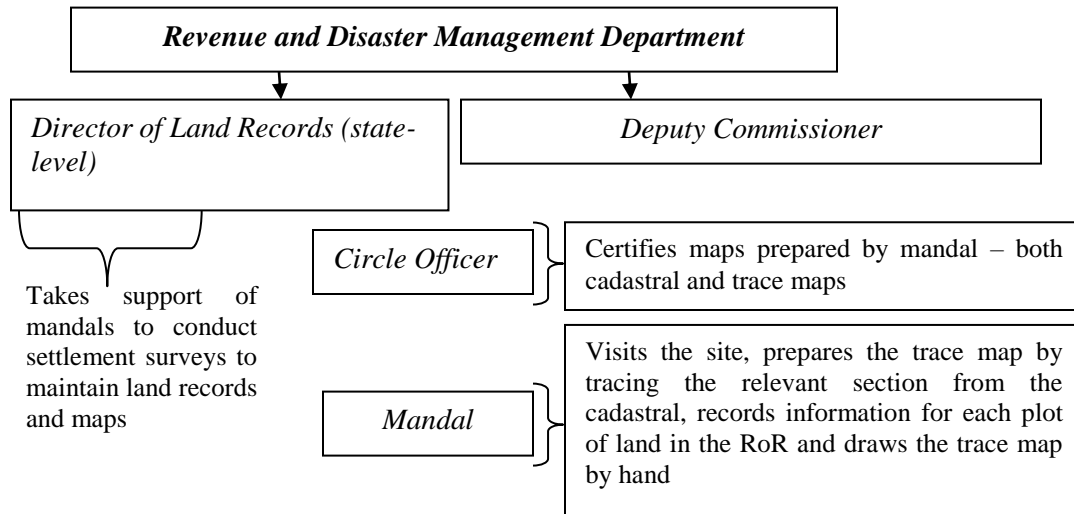
A serious failure of the permissions procedure is that numerous buildings have come up across the city without permission. Many settlers have avoided taking any permission from the government agencies, as they do not have legal tenure on their land. The ULBs cannot address development on non-tenured land, which on the contrary also means that these buildings and developments without permission are most vulnerable during evictions and land clearances. Large sections of the city fall under forest land or under other forms of government land like ceiling surplus land, eksoniya/annual tenure land, etc. on which occupiers can neither apply for miyadi patta, and consequently, nor for building permission. Instead settlers on such lands build incremental housing over the years by slowly developing the land and the house, aspiring to apply for formal tenure on the completion of 15 years as per the government’s land policy 1989 discussed earlier. Town planners in GMC and GMDA have guesstimated that about 30 per cent of all built-up in Guwahati do not have the requisite permissions.

Another issue worth noting in Guwahati's hierarchy of urban authorities is that the higher the authority with power, the newer has been its creation. The GMC was created first in 1969, GMDA in 1975 and GDD in 1994. Yet in practice, the power and money flows from GDD to GMDA to GMC. Also the practices discussed here indicates that the evolving trajectory of governance have led to greater complexities, increasing the levels of authorities, established for disciplining the people. Applicants now have to fulfil the eligibility criteria of both authorities instead of one, pay fees to both agencies as well as negotiate with officials to ensure that the field visits by the officials go smoothly. The reality of Guwahati's urban built-up is not represented in the maps; but as Hull puts, it is rather entangled in the 'prosaic practices through which the city is planned, constructed, regulated, and inhabited' (Hull, 2012, p. 212).

Mapping Land Ownership

Gupta terms every day practices and processes in the bureaucratic offices as 'cultural constitution' of the state that reveal the systematic negotiations within the framework of government rules which are informal and difficult to codify (Gupta, 2006, p. 11). One such negotiation in the Indian context is found in mapping land ownership. Land ownership in India is presumptive and based on notional documents because it is established primarily through registered sale deed^{xv}, and not through any government guaranteed title (Mishra & Suhag, 2017). One such notional document is the trace map. Trace maps are small hand drawn maps depicting a plot of land, their immediate boundaries, physical features and their legal enumerations. Although copied by hand from the original cadastral map prepared through settlement surveys by the Revenue department, the incremental changes on the ground are depicted on the trace maps by using a notional system of scale. Since it is extracted from a larger cadastral map, it is used as a true copy after verification by the Revenue Circle officer. The trace map is used for everyday office purposes like land sale, purchase, transfer, classification, mutation, etc., where using the full cadastral map may become too cumbersome. In spite of its widespread use, the trace map is not a formal instrument like the cadastral maps prepared by the office of Land Records or the topographical survey maps prepared by Survey of India^{xvi}; it is a product of quotidian practice. The institutional set up for the preparation, certification and maintenance of revenue records and maps is presented below:

Fig 1: Schematic Representation of the Institutional Set-Up for the Preparation of Trace Maps



Source: Collated by author

Mandal is the revenue circle official staff, the recorder who visits the site in the field and records the actual land ownership situation and the proposed changes of the site. The mandals note down everyday changes in the land ownership in their written records. These changes do not get reflected in the cadastral map as regularly as required, as a land settlement exercise for updating cadastral maps is supposed to be undertaken every 30 years. The mandal traces out the requisite section of land plots from the larger cadastral map and records all the field-level changes in the individual plots, occurring on a day to day basis. New subdivisions, mutation, sales along with reservations for road development, etc. are recorded by the mandal and reproduced as per need onto trace maps using a very notional scale. Mandals use a small ring worn on the finger called a *guniya*, to measure and hand-draw the changes on the trace maps. This in turn creates the situation whereby all the records in the trace maps have no real representation on the ground. Thus, the location of a plot of land depicted on the trace map is in reality found to be somewhere else on the ground – a scenario common across India.

Roy argues that such processes from which the ‘ownership, use or purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed set of regulations or the

law' reveal informality in quotidian practices (Roy, 2009, p. 80). Such practices weaken the sanctity of land ownership and use rights, creating complications. Yet, the trace maps continue to be used as certified copy of the land reality, and decision-making is dependent on the information on these maps. The practice of trace maps is found in other states of India too, where the trace maps are verified using satellite imageries and drone surveys, like in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. But in Assam, trace maps continue to be used to depict field level changes which are informal and without scale, making interpretation of land information dependent on the mandal.

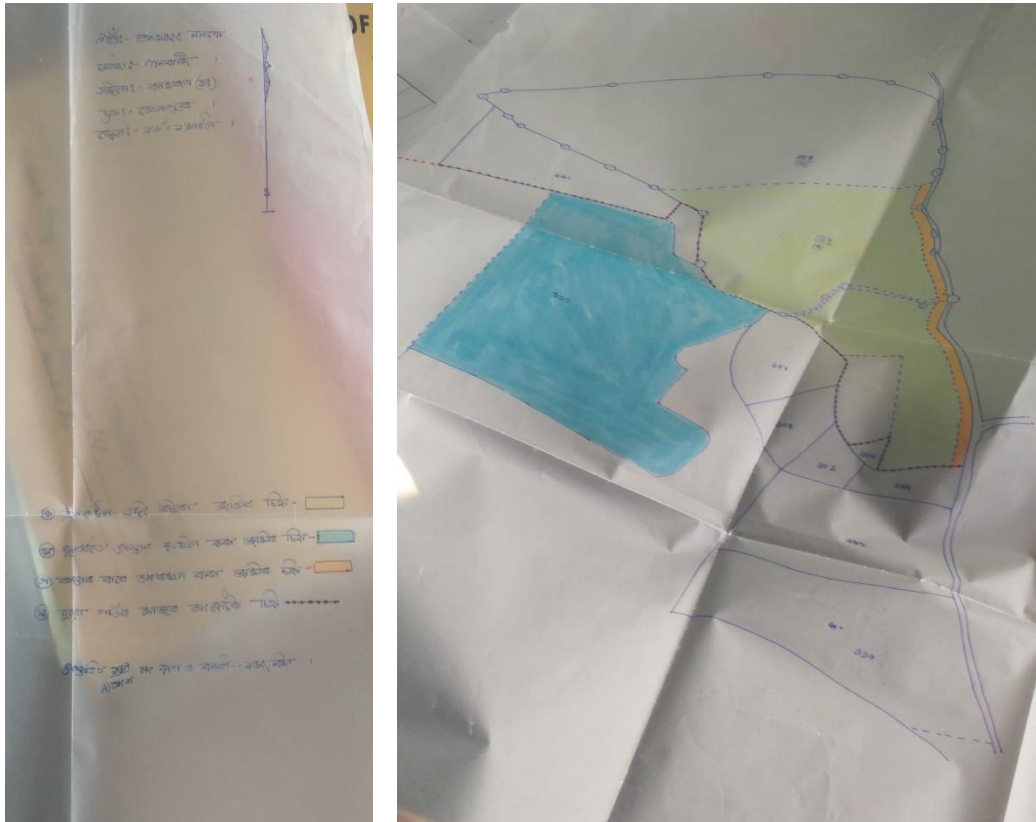


Figure 1: Trace map

Mandals are the storehouse of land related information. No land related decisions can be completed without field report from the mandal. The mandal is an important authority on land matters, and few can challenge the mandal's words. This gives mandals a very powerful position in land matters, where a line drawn by the mandal can determine whether a person shall be a citizen or not! Yet

within the bureaucratic system, mandals have very poor career progression. They start at one of the lowest rungs in the bureaucracy^{xvii} and in their entire career they can at best get one promotion. Bhogeswar Das, a Mandal in Dispur and later, Azara revenue circle^{xviii}, emphasised during our conversation that the pressure of work on mandals is extremely high, while their numbers and office resources are quite poor. Their work requires special training which is provided by the state government's Directorate of Land Records. Yet they have been fighting to get recognised in the grade pay category as technical employees. Mandals are often alleged to be at the centre of all major land corruptions. Das accepts that mandals are so infamous for corruption that there is a popular saying in Assamese, which goes as – *mandal manei kandal*, loosely translated as Mandal ensures contestations.

In a similar scenario, the Forest department in Assam has been governing their forest reserves without formal maps. Forest pillars are placed to demarcate forest boundaries and in most forests these pillars were placed mostly in reference to surveys done during the British administration. These pillars continue to guide most decision-making regarding the extent of forests and encroachments thereof. As discussed earlier, there are no maps available with the Forest department to confirm the boundary of the forest reserves, and this problem is enhanced after the Supreme Court judgement of 1998 in the famous Godavarman case to determine forests based on its dictionary definition (Rosencranz et al., 2007). In spite of this lacuna, by following a Supreme Court mandate^{xix} for removing encroachments on forest lands, the Forest department has been carrying out large scale evictions since 2002 across the hills of Guwahati.

As recently as 2017, Guwahati saw much furore due to the reservation of the area around the Amchang Wildlife Sanctuary as Eco-sensitive zone by the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF). It led to the demolition of homes and eviction of about 700 families considered as encroachers into forest land (Pisharoty, 2017; The Telegraph, 2017a and 2017b). The state government proposed an eco-sensitive zone covering an area of 109.99 sq.kms., with an extent of about 8 to 10 kms. around the present protected area of the sanctuary. Large-scale evictions and demolition were carried out in the extended areas of the proposed zone to clear, what the forest authorities called, encroachments. The eviction drive was stopped through a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) in the Guwahati High Court claiming that the eco-sensitive zone was overlapping 37 revenue villages which cannot be considered as encroachments. As per reports, the forest department stated in an

affidavit that the original pillars demarcating the boundary of the reserved forests constituting the Amchang Eco-sensitive zone were not found during the survey conducted in 2014, and as a consequence, the forest boundary was re-delineated by following the boundary pillars available in a topographical map as further back as 1978 (Pisharoty, 2017). In the government documents available in the interlocutory cases against the Amchang evictions, the minutes of meeting held on March 29, 2018 by Minister of Environment and Forest department regarding the rehabilitation of people evicted from Amchang revealed that this mistake was taken cognizance of and corrigendum was directed to be issued after conducting a joint survey of the area by forest and revenue officials, along with GMDA.

The Amchang demarcations illustrates, ‘a message of domination’ (Abrams, 1988, p. 81) by the state, because a closer reading of the rules of demarcating Eco-sensitive zone notified by the MoEF in 2017 states that the land use ban within eco-sensitive zones is on industrial, commercial and construction activities, etc., and not on existing settlements. Evicted families have shown records of land settlement in the evicted villages during various government benefit programs, and have been practicing their voting rights from these localities.

Conclusion: Disjointed Governance

The various practices discussed above and the ambiguities present in them regarding development permits, land records, forest delineation, etc. reveal a disjointedness in governance. My research brings to fore the inadequacies in the rules made and the complexities that result in following them. Land which is a basic need of every person for having a home continues to perplex the urban citizen. Even though these bureaucratic policies and practices have been undergoing evolution and changes over decades, one is faced with the disjuncture and crisis-ridden entity that it is and ‘how it engenders its own modes of resistance, and makes, meets, molds, or is contested by new subjects’ (Gupta, 2012, p. 239). The fact remains that authorities are struggling to establish control over the urbansphere – by optimising land use to earn revenue to ‘improve the conditions of the population’ – which is the hall mark of governmentality (Foucault, 2007 as cited in Gupta, 2012, p. 240), while also attempting to maintain equitable land rights through the policies and rules that the government mandates from time to time.

Yet the practices are ambiguous and the procedures and tools have rather been exercises in disciplining the public, resulting in structural violence against the people – evictions and loss of traditional spaces. Although this has created a false sense of authority over land for the authorities, they are often questioned and opposed by the public, revealing the many chinks in the notion of sovereignty of the state.

Notes:

ⁱ I acknowledge the insightful discussions with Dr. Sanjay Barbora, Dr. Yengkhom Jilangamba, Mrinal Gohain and Dr. Chandan Sharma in structuring the arguments of this paper.

ⁱⁱ Primate city concept given by geographer, Mark Jefferson in 1939, states that a primate city of a state/region, is exponentially larger in population than the next largest city. In case of Assam, Guwahati has almost 8 lakhs more population than the second largest town of Assam, Silchar. In fact, no other city in the Northeast region of India has more absolute number of urban population than Guwahati, as per the Census 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ These are centrally-funded urban renewal/redevelopment schemes, implemented in a mission-mode across selected cities of India. Guwahati has been selected in almost all of the central schemes as the model city for project implementation. Under JNNURM, Guwahati took up water supply project and urban poor housing; under Smart city mission, proposals are for reviving the water channels of Guwahati, including river front development; under AMRUT mission, projects for park development and non-motorised vehicular transport project are proposed.

^{iv} Interviews of mandals and senior kanungos in the Circle offices of Guwahati, Dispur and Azara through 2016, 2017 and 2018.

^v Reserved forests within Guwahati city and its immediate vicinity include Jalukbari, Hengrabari, Khanapara, Fatasil, Rani, Garbhanga, Amchang, Gotanagar, Sarania, South Kalapahar, Maliata, Athiaguri, South Amchang and parts of Garbhanga 1st addition.

^{vi} Guwahati Water Bodies Act, 2008 has declared five beels to be ecologically preserved sites, which include Deeporbeel, Sarusolabeel, Borsolabeel, Silsakoobeel and Bondajaanbeel. These beels have been entrusted to GMDA for development and conservation. As per the Guwahati Water Bodies Act, 2008, the water bodies have been assigned under the authority of GMDA for conservation and development, if any.

^{vii} *Khas* lands are vacant lands which have not been assigned for private ownership. Such lands are available with the government for allocating to any uses as deemed fit by the authorities.

^{viii} *Chitha* is the field index of land parcels and *Jamabandi* is the Record of rights with name of owners and their daag numbers.

^{ix} Under this provision, initially 17 belts and 30 blocks of tribal dominated areas were reserved as protected areas for the indigenous communities covered under these regulations. The major provision of this act of the Chapter X was that, ‘...no person shall acquire or possess by transfer, exchange, lease, agreement or settlement any land in any area or areas constituted into belts or blocks in contravention of the provisions’. The DC is the final adjudicator on who could buy and sell land in these protected areas.

^x The communities who were enumerated as protected persons in 1947 within the protected belts and blocks, included, (a).Scheduled tribes (Plains), (b).Scheduled tribes (Hills), (c).Tea garden and ex-Tea garden tribes, (d).Santhals, (e).Schedules Castes, (f).Nepali cultivator/graziers, (g). Koch-Rajbongshis of few districts (Revenue

Dept, 1990). The SC, ST communities not indigenous to the state of Assam were not considered as protected communities (refer to Chapter II of the *Land administration in protected belts and clocks of Assam*, Revenue Department, 1990).

^{xi} Informal settlements are characterised by lack of formal tenure, although they are not completely illegal. Such settlements are usually established on state lands, or private lands without claims, where the settlers have some form of formal recognition from the government through water or electricity connection, government roads, voter cards, etc.

^{xii} Prior to the notification of the GMDA Act in 1975, the Town and Country Planning Department through the Assam Town and Country Planning Act 1959 was entrusted to prepare the initial master plans of Guwahati. So, in practice GMDA has only prepared one Master plan for Guwahati till date.

^{xiii} Discussion with official staff at the Planning Division, GMC Uzan Bazaar in 2016, 2017 and 2019.

^{xiv} Interviews with GMC Town Planners, Dipak Das (2015-16) and D. Bezbaruah (2016-19), and GMDA Town Planners, D. Kalita (2016-17) and J.S. Kakoty (2017-19).

^{xv} The registered sale deed is a record of the property transaction between the buyer and seller. Other documents used for this purpose are record of rights (*jamabandi* in Assam), property tax receipts and survey documents (cadastral maps, trace map).

^{xvi} Cadastral maps depict the revenue details of each plot within a village or a town ward, demarcating location, boundary, physical features and ownership details. Topographic maps provide the graphical portrayal of a terrain and thus are very useful for engineering works and are prepared by the Survey of India.

^{xvii} Eligibility for applying to be a mandal is a higher secondary pass certificate. The All Assam Mandal Kanangu Sanmilan or the Association of Mandals and Kanungos of Assam are lobbying to raise the entry level eligibility to a graduate (Bhattacharya, 2018).

^{xviii} Discussions held with Bhogeswar Das, Mandal, Dispur and Azara Revenue Circle office between 2017-2019.

^{xix} In 1996, a landmark judgement known as the Godavarman case was given by the Supreme Court under which tree-felling in forests across India was banned. Through this judgement, it was also mandated to conserve forests by removing illegal encroachments. On January 15, 1998, the Supreme Court directed that for forest wealth to be safeguarded in the Northeastern States, forest officers in these States should be empowered to investigate, prosecute and confiscate – thereby prosecuting encroachers.

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Article: Two Leaves and a Bud: Revisiting the Colonial Spaces from Plantation to *Bagan* (garden)

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**Two Leaves and a Bud:
Revisiting the Colonial Spaces from Plantation to *Bagan* (garden)**

--- Juri Baruah

Abstract

Sah bagan (tea garden) is a unique space created through 19th century colonialism in Assam where plantations played a significant role in changing power relations. Tea plantation economy acts as a political power of the company where the superiority of saheb/babu segregates the labourers. This article seeks to emphasise the belongingness to the bagan and how it is regarded as a contested space for the labourers in general and women labourers in particular. The narratives of the labourers collected through fieldwork in a tea garden¹ in Sivasagar district of Assam helps to also look at the connection between the field and the factory.

Key words: Bagan, Colonialism, Plantation, Women labourer

From Plantation to *bagan*: a colonial metaphor

Tea plantation is historically a reflection of colonial intervention on the space through the division of field and factory. Space here is produced and reproduced in connection with the forces of production and with the relations of production. The word 'plantation' originates from Euro-American agri-business. As explained by the social science literature on agriculture and labour, the plantation is dominated by colonial control and resource extraction. This form of extractive economy is in some ways distinct from agriculture. Literature from Asia, Africa, and Latin America reveal the painful and uncomfortable memories of the plantation, which starts from commodity crop production to the consumption of products in imperial metropolis. Despite common features and modes of production and management strategies, the plantation as a unit of analysis varied across time and space. Tea plantation dominates the districts of Upper Assam including Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, and Golaghat. Historically these districts have always had been the centre of attraction because of bagans (tea gardens) and tea garden communities. Lefebvre (1992) defined that space always

contains traces of the processes that produced it, and subsequently is acted upon by a variety of material and political processes to provide the context through which we can identify it. However, the 'tea estate', though it is public space for the labourers, it is a private property for the management where unauthorised admission is not allowedⁱⁱ.

Chatterjee (2011) explains that *bagan* represents a living metaphor to depict the civilised 'settling' of India's jungles. Indeed, *bagan* was to be worked 'through' the *realpolitik* of material historiesⁱⁱⁱ. The act of 'planting' is a transformation of wilderness, and it became a metaphor as *bari*^{iv}. Plantation could be imagined as a necessary 'Garden of Eden' through the lenses of cultivated order with the moral vision of imperial light. Consequently, the shift from *bari* to *bagan* is created as a colonial and post-colonial metaphor which reflects the old themes of civilising and civilisation. The frame of the *bagan* forced the labourers to be disciplined into work. It also creates the space of cultural, political and bodily meanings based on which social power is conducted through specific orders and disorders. Consequently, the term *bagan* is more familiar to the socio-political belongingness of the labourers rather than the term plantation. The specific nature of *bagan* confined to an enclave structure is typically associated with a 'total institution'. All the works of production, as well as, reproduction are done within its geographical boundary. The site of the *bagan* itself is indeed a distinct space, seemingly stuck in time and thereby seen as a remnant of a colonial past.

During the 19th and early 20th centuries, plantation owners in other parts of India forcibly recruited labourers (Chatterjee, 2011; Griffiths, 1967; Sharma, 2011). The shared feudal peasant system thus inscribed with plantations are socially and historically different from the industrial farm. The Royal Commission on Labour in India of 1931 has four chapters on 'plantation' that defines the system as:

The plantation system connotes the acquisition of a limited but fairly extensive area for the cultivation of a particular crop, the actual cultivation being done under the direct supervision of a manager, who in some cases may himself be the actual proprietor. A considerable number of persons (the number may run as high as 4000) are employed under his control in the same way as the factory workers are under the control of the factory manager, but there is one important difference in that work is essentially agricultural and is not concentrated in large building. (p. 349)

Plantation ‘certainly contains elements of a seemingly bygone era of bonded sharecropping labour, but it also reminds us of the capitalist industrial agricultural system’ (Besky, 2014, p. 6). Indeed, it has the characteristics of large scale production of single crops in a geographically intensive and sociologically hierarchical manner. Edelman (1998) defines that plantation also has the elements of ‘peasant’ agriculture, which is characterised by small farmers working land owned by large holders linked with subsistence and large estates (Kearney, 1996; Silverman, 1979). The term plantation thus developed as a plot of ground set with plants. During the period of British colonisation of the West Indies and North America, it came to denote a group of settlers as well as the political unit constructed by such a group (Jain & Reddock, 1998, p. 2). Scott (1976) highlighted that ‘peasantry’ has two remarkable elements that differentiates it from the plantation system. A peasant is a ‘rural cultivator whose production is oriented largely toward family consumption... this defines his central economic goal’. In plantation, on the contrary, the labourers do not grow food for their own families, and this distinguishes them according to the analysis given by Scott about peasant (Besky, 2014, p. 7). Secondly, in the case of ‘peasantry’, a peasant ‘is a part of larger society including non-peasant elites and the state that makes claims upon him which also defines his potential human antagonists in attaining that goal’ (Scott, 1976, p. 157); on the contrary, the plantation labourers are permanent and lifelong members of the industry. Their representation in the system is not only as a labourer, but they live in that particular space and thereby also trace a sense of belonging. It, however, does not negate the space as also being a space of oppression. One can thus compare this to the notion of how we trace belongingness within the unit of a family.

Although plantations are usually located in tropical areas, ownership and investment traditionally come from the North. Plantations as a ‘total institution of residence and work where a large number of life-situated individuals, cut-off from the wider society for an appreciable period, together with lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life’ (Goffman, 1961, p. 13). Plantation such as sugar, cotton, tobacco, coffee, rubber, tea concentrates on strict profit and loss calculations. European colonisation started plantation as a new form of ‘colony’ for their economic and physical expansion into previously unexploited regions. Indeed, the plantation system is functionalised through a kind of capitalistic exploitation in tropical areas where it developed as a political-economic institution (Jain & Reddock, 1998, p. 2).

Thompson (1975) regards the historical geography of the plantation as an outcome of its requirements. He characterised the plantation as a landed estate specialising in the production of agricultural staples for export. The plantation, according to Thompson was sparked into life by the market relationship itself. As an economic institution, plantation responds to ‘an industrial dynamic exercised through agricultural rather than through manufacturing production’ (ibid., p. 34). As an agriculturalist, the planter has to master the technical knowledge and skill required for the cultivation of new types of crops and to organise the production. According to him, the most important role of a planter is to perform as a manager of the dependent labour force. In his words, ‘the planter can be no mere landlord or farmer; he is chief of state and head of government’ (ibid., p. 29). This reflects that a plantation is a unit of authority.

This conceptual thread turned my initial concern into what constituted the categories of ‘peasant’ and ‘proletarian/labour’ into the larger colonial discourse. The mix of colonial and capitalist taxonomies, representations, investments, and sentiments shaped the plantations. According to Stoler (1985), ‘colonial capitalism’ conveniently collapsed the colonial into a modifier of capitalism. Marxist interpretation is relevant here as Marx (1998) distinguishes between two stages in the capital’s domination of labour. In the first stage, there is merely ‘formal subsumption’ of labour under capital. In the second phase, the ‘real subsumption’ of labour under capital, the capitalist moves into the process of production itself. Marx (ibid.) while describing the relationship between ‘fixed’ and ‘circulating’ capital, primarily concentrates on specific locations and populations. In this way, the capitalist exploits the worker through his ownership of the means of production but does not extend his domination to the process of production. Marx connected colonialism to mercantilism through the development of industry:

Today industrial supremacy implies commercial supremacy. In the period of manufacture properly so called, it is, on the other hand, commercial supremacy that gives industrial predominance. Hence, the preponderant role that the colonial system plays at that time.
(ibid., p. 533)

Plantation production has indeed a contested relationship with capitalism. Graeber (2003) explained that it is neither a ‘traditional’ social relation nor a formally capitalist relation of production; it is rather a generalised form of commodity

production effected through specific relations of domination. Plantation as one of the early origin in the life cycle of capitalism, Croucher & Wesis stated that ‘as boundary drawing is attempted around what capitalism is, plantations occupy the borderlands’ (Croucher & Wesis, 2011, p. 7). Plantation spaces are typically zones designed to optimise production and profit while controlling and monitoring labourers (Delle, 1998; Hauser, 2011a; Lenik, 2012). However, the strategy of labour control in the plantation is gendered and to create a ‘stable’ labour force through ‘family formation’. So, immediately the private and domestic are at once public and political.

Before 1826, Assam was a semi-feudal society characterised by the predominant presence of a barter economy with a limited circulation of money (Guha, 1991, p. 142). The establishment of the Assam Tea Company^{vi} in 1839 and the rapid expansion of the acreage under tea brought about significant changes to the socio-economic life of the people, especially those of Upper Assam as a colonial space. The strategies of making Upper Assam as a ‘colonial space’ here means making relations of power, production, and reproduction theoretically charged and politically active. Moreover, no other crop could have created an equal demand for development of transport and communication in Assam like tea, and all developments in the state during 1840-59 centred around tea (ibid., p. 160).

Labour lines are not ‘villages’, quarters are not ‘homes’

Though there are cultural differences, different orders of hierarchy, separations, and borders, but the labourers regard the *bagan* as a ‘family’. ‘We want to engage with work in the garden rather than going outside it. Here, we are working as a family, and that is why we do not want to lose the bonding of work’, said Binita while plucking in the rainy season in the tea garden. Furthermore, *bagan* is not only a system of work but it is also a feeling of satisfaction for some of the pluckers. Rita Munda, who describes herself as a ‘permanent labour’^{vii} said, ‘if *bagan* gives us the facilities we cannot go outside to work’. For the approval and regulation of work, the labourers should be conscious of the work schedule. Logen Mirkha, who has sixteen years of experience as a labour of the garden, became the *sardar* (supervisor) two years back implied, ‘if we want to stay in the garden we have to follow the garden rules and regulations. We must work hard to sustain here’, he said. His comments implied that *bagan* is a site where ‘expectations of permanence’ emerged among workers, even as such expectations were systematically undermined by plantation workers (Ferguson, 1999, p. 46).

However, in many cases, the formal structure of the *bagan* is not easy to understand for the pluckers. Rewati, a permanent plucker, does not know where the tea will be supplied. 'Our wages come from the profit of the tea. That is why we love the *bagan*', she commented. Sumitra and her daughter are pluckers in the same group, although Sumitra is permanent and her daughter Uma is a *faltu* (temporary) labour. 'We love to work in the garden together rather than working outside it. Because we feel comfortable and secure inside the *bagan*', Sumitra said. Crossing out of the boundaries of a regular space is significant in terms of social security. Wallman (1978) noted that the social boundary 'marks the edge of a social system, the interface between that system and one of those contiguous upon it'. On the contrary, boundaries are also for the members of these systems and how it marks the members off from non-members as well as the role that they play based on their identity. So, plantation space can be characterised by an interface line between inside and outside with the identity line between 'us' and 'them'. It overlays the physical space by making symbolic use of its objects. Indeed, production of space and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects, not as two separable ideas. Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 141).

Uma, on the contrary, commented 'we feel confident in plucking as we have learned this skill generation after generation despite the less *hazira* (wage)'. Spatial practices, which hold production and reproduction at some particular locations, also carry spatial features of each social formation. Spatial practices ensure continuity and some degree of cohesion. In terms of plantation space, and of each member of a given society's relationship to that space, this cohesion implies a granted level of *competence* and a specific level of *performance* (Lefebvre, 1992, p. 33). The spatial practice of plantation thus have both the layers of competence and performance; competence in terms of regularisation of work from temporary to permanent where the skill of plucking is the primary performance for the pluckers. Rita Nagbangshi, a woman plucker from the tea garden, implied:

The women pluckers have to go for work after having domestic violence in the previous night. The psychological stress carried by the pluckers is very high inside the gardens. It is one of the primary reasons because of which the women pluckers start drinking. Most of them do not have time for recreational activities.

After the ban of sulai (the local liquor), the men labourers buy from the wine shops which is more costly than sulai. If a labourer receives the amount of hazira of 167 and buys a liquor of 120, how can he/she save money? Because of this, their children have to face the hardest burden of their families. They quit school and start to work either in the garden or manager's residence.

Nevertheless, the management tries to divide the working class by creating competition between men and women labourers. From the beginning men, as employers and co-workers, have accepted women only in jobs that correspond to familial roles. There is an argument that women's engagement in factory work lasts only for a short while. The faltu male members from a tea labour family try to search for jobs outside the bagan so that the extra cash helps in the construction and maintenance of the quarters. But it will again increase the burden of women labourers in the bagan as men hardly get employment opportunities of sustainable wage. The gendered economic precarity that had increased since India's Independence exemplifies how the progressive deterioration of colonial infrastructure parallels the deterioration of domestic stability (Jegathesan, 2015, p. 45; Willford, 2014, p. 36). However, the tea estates of public sector undertakings, proprietorship, partnership as well as Assam Tea Corporation Limited (ATCL) do not take the demand for hiking the wage to Rs 351.33 seriously. The current wage in these tea estates is Rs 167, except for the ATCL tea estates such as Cinnamara TE, Naginijan TE, Deepling TE, Messamara TE. The current hazira of ATCL tea estates is Rs 137 without the facility of quarters and the proper amount of rations. Behal (2006) stated that the tea industry never suffered from a complete stoppage of production during its long history and this feature differs in the Assam valley tea plantations from the other major industries such as jute, textiles, and mining in British India^{viii}. Because of that, it only employed arguably the most significant labour force at the lowest level of wages of any private capitalist enterprise in the history of colonial India. On the other hand, those industries except tea have transformed over time regarding labour structure and production.

Eli, another woman labourer from the tea garden implied, 'we meet different people here coming from different lines. We eat together, express our feelings with each other, even we sing together, and that is how we forget our pain'. The togetherness in the form of the informal grouping of friends reflects the kinship ties of the respective labour lines. The emotional connection with the garden is critical in the sense of being and belonging to a particular space and place.

Emotions not only define someone's relationships with others, but also with spaces and places. Bagan here is a space which is inscribed to the life of the labourers and their day to day experiences. Sara Ahmed (2001) argued that emotions move us but also connect us to what surrounds us. She described, '...what moves us, what makes us feel...is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place' (Ahmed, 2001, p. 11). There is a distinction between the discourse of family and household regarding its type and composition. Agarwal (1994) stated that family is the material structure which may contain several distinctly demarcated social groups, while household implies a certain sharing of budgeting and compensation. Indeed, there is a link between the ownership, production, consumption, and distribution as well as reproduction in a particular household system. The household 'dimension' of the family, as Shah (1973) defined is linked with the strictly crucial and co-resident group. The joint household is significant for tea industry because of the demand for labour. However, the bagan itself is a bigger family for the labourers which gives them residence and work. So, the value and norms of the bagan is a continuous process of recovering 'the family' with the guaranty of permanent employment. Bagan thus reflects a form of the structure of household to a process of labour.

Parsons wrote, 'as the occupational system develops and absorbs functions in society it must be at the expense of the relative prominence of kinship organisation as a structural component in one sense, and must also be at the expense of what previously have been functions of the kinship unit' (Parsons, 1955, p. 12). While discussing the Indian joint family system, Maine (1972) critically argued about the absolute power of the family controlled by a senior most male member. In an industrial and colonial set up, the family system is significant not only to control the labourers but to divide them physically and sexually. Chafetz states, 'undergirding all systems of gender stratification is a gender-based division of labour, by which women are chiefly responsible for different tasks than are men' (Chafetz, 1991, p. 77). The gendered division of labour and income of the family is indeed a factor of concern for the management of the tea industry (Beteille, 1991, p. 28). The entire process of *faltu* to permanent labour is functionalised in such a cycle so that the family cannot break down. There are two types of labour lines in the tea gardens, namely, the lines where the permanent labourers have the quarters and the *bastis* (villages) which are constructed by the labourers^{ix}. For the quarters provided by the management, one member of each family has to work in the garden as permanent labour. As the ITA records show, planters had committed themselves to allocating houses 'on

the basis of one family to one house' (ITA, 1955, p. 254). 'Family' in this case meant a nuclear unit, having neolocal residence. This means that a married couple who were both employed in a bagan could expect to share a single house. In this way, the household process is dependent on permanent labour and his/her continuation of work. Plantation houses are sites that labourers can access but can never own. Calvao (2016) explained that housing is also considered as a site where a sense of belonging and intergenerational connection emerges alongside exploitative and dehumanising labour regimes. The labourers have no property in plantation and they are merely temporary occupants (ITA, 1890, p. 28). Indeed, labour lines are not 'villages' and that quarters are not 'homes'^x.

The Company and *saheb/babu*

The Company manifested itself as a system in which the planter holds powers. Company is the word frequently used by the labour as a designation of the management. Most of the labourers did not know the name of the company though they used the word. The *saheb* is the symbol of legitimate rule, metamorphic, corporeal, and the cultural core around which the geographies of authority/power are mapped. The *saheb* is indeed superior representation in terms of social distance, inclusion and exclusion. The widespread use of the term *saheb* suggests that planters and labourers together define their social space as an extension of feudal rule.

Saheb/babu is reflective of the superiority for the planters while the labourers are ethnically and racially in an inferior position. Sydie (1987) saw women's dependent social position as fundamentally determined by 'the normal superiority of the physical and intellectual energies of the male'. 'Acceptance' of the patronage without any question is the Gramscian (1971) notion of hegemony. The hierarchical work regime is thus constituted through the legitimate authority to extract the labour power for the profit of tea. The company has twin arms of the dominant ideology of order and discipline to continue the efficiency, productivity as well as profit (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 170). The company thus controls plantation feudalism through the superior-inferior structure. This process consequently begins a colonisation of life by work.

Bhadra Mirkhaa, sardar as well as a former president of a trade union, shared that the company gives them fewer facilities. 'If the company provides the labourers with every facility, will they work for it?' The question is a reflection of the

relation between the management and the labourers. It also indicates about the lack of understanding about the idea of rights and connects to the point about the feudal order. He also said that the company only helps them to sustain in the garden. 'Even the company built such kind of houses where you can only live and not to dream more', Mirkha maintained. The house that does not let the labourers' dream embalms of a condition that makes one continue in a vicious cycle of being labour in the tea gardens. The company thus is not only a concrete structure; it is a virtual power of authority that is inscribed to every dimension of the life of the labourers.

Belongingness to the bagan

The imagination of bagan as an intimate space by the labourers reminds of the issue of belongingness. Tea garden, though is a private property for the company, its public nature defines how it is attached to the daily life of the labourers. The household is an automatic self-regulating administrative unit, whose individual members are identified in terms of their relations to the household 'head'. Similarly, the entire bagan is a household and the labourers follow the orders of the barasaheb, i.e. the General Manager of the company. In this regard, the economic and political role of the bagan as a household is an intermediary unit between the labourers and the management/company.

The belongingness to the space of bagan cannot be ignored while interpreting the division of field and factory. In many cases, the bagan is not a precarious site to the women labourers but a secure space of the more prominent family; negotiating belonging is a concern related to the feminised space of the field and masculine space of the factory. Bagan, in fact, is an intimate space for not only work, but it is also a familial space of security and ties of social relationships. The question of security here is linked with sexuality, the status of the women's marriage as well as belongingness to a known place rather than encountering an unknown one.

Tea plantation follows a cultivation scheme based on seasons. Therefore, there is a strong dependence on weather, which is also useful for the deployment of various labour tasks. The first flush occurs in March. The permanent field labourers are engaged in the morning shift of work during this season. From June, with the arrival of monsoons, the primary task of harvest which is plucking reaches the peak of its intensity. During this entire season the industry is dependent on women labourers. The second major season of cultivation begins at

the end of November, which is pruning. Both men and women labourers do this work. Though the field work is considered to comprise of massive manual works, plucking is generally described as a skill that women have achieved through their nimble fingers. Despite rationalisation, the tea industry is still heavily labour intensive. Plucking is provided by women that are crucial for producing high quality tea; yet labourers are not given any particular benefits as a reward for their exclusive contribution to the tea industry. Women workers imagine the plantation as a space of care. The recognition that plantation work is not only environmental work but also a form of social reproduction produces more complex moral expectations between labour, management, and the landscape (Besky, 2017, p. 86).

The siren: the connection between the field and the factory

The second phase of production is the factory, which is also the end point of plantation's productive logic. Chatterjee (2011) termed the factory as the 'plantation power'. The factory is a large white building lying adjacent to the managerial and staff office. The factory, though dependent on seasonal production of the leaf, is also a reflection of the industrial workplace. The space within the factory is arranged in such a manner that it defines the relation between machines and male bodies. Machines replace the tea bush as a site of human reference, and it is a shift that constructs different modalities of labour (ibid., p. 176).

The factory is primarily male dominated where the machines of manufacture create large internal spaces. Unlike the typical image of a crowded factory, tea factory is spacious and well organised. The factory space governs through planter's ideology of order. Within the management there are various work disciplines under the immediate surveillance of the senior manager. The management is also dependent on the cycles of the field season as well as the women workforce. The spaces within the factory and the management are a reflection of a masculine regime of plantation while the field is feminised. It is clear from this view that manufacturing is mostly regarded as masculine work.

There is virtually unlimited power of the planters over their workers along with the 'garden time'. The garden time is an indication of the industrial clock, which is put ahead by an hour from the standard time in the work schedule of the tea gardens. Harvey (1990) admitted that each social formation constructs objective conceptions of space and time sufficient unto its own needs and purposes of

material and social reproduction and organises its material practices following those conceptions. According to Harvey, there is parallel domination over nature and women as ‘natural beings’. For instance, Blake insisted that ‘time and space are real beings’, where ‘time is a man and space is a woman, and her masculine Portion is Death’ (as cited in Forman, 198, p. 4). In both of the field sites, the pluckers are conscious about the time of beginning their work and they maintain the schedule strictly with the presence of the sardars and field managers. Time here is an order constructed by the management while the field is regarded as natural. It indicates that the field is a female space but maintaining a work schedule clears that there is a domination of the male management. So, there is a contradiction and hierarchy between time-space which is historically produced and reproduced in tea estates.

Along with the machines, there is also a large clock which is synchronised with the factory siren. The clock thus marks the day of work with the siren’s sound which reaches into the field. So, the spaces of the field and the factory, though clearly segregated from each other, but are connected through the siren’s sound. The siren is a symbolic representation of colonial time schedules. There was a temporal schism between the garden times and the Indian Standard Time during the colonial period. The siren clock was advanced for half an hour. Thus when it was 5.30 in the morning by the Indian Standard Time, the siren would sound the beginning of the 6. However, with the postcolonial legal stipulations of six and eight hour’s day, garden time is strictly obsolete, and its earlier extractive objective cannot be met (Chatterjee, 2011, p. 176).

Labourers, nonetheless, continue to perceive this artefact of colonial schedule as somehow present within the contemporary regimes of work. The siren sounds five times during the day, beginning at four in the morning. It sounds again at 12 when the first phase of plucking is finished and the labourers receive lunch break. It sounds at 1 pm which is an indication to start the work again. The siren sounds at 5 pm which is directly related to *thika* (contractual) workers. The final siren is at 7 pm and it is for the factory as well as for the staff workers.

The image of the field and factories are not just the reflection of work structure. ‘To work’ means, as Donna Haraway (2010) explains, ‘to get on’- to get along in a relationship and to move forward, together, in time. To work also means to labour. In maintenance, ‘idioms that are not themselves determined by capital prove consequential for actors’ experiences of economic transformation and, in

turn, influence the continuity of capitalist cycles' (Hebert, 2015, p. 35). It is also a reflection of how a particular space is feminised for the benefits of the management. According to Custer (1997), despite modernisation and the spread of commodity production, the division of labour between men and women remains consistent. He divides the sexual division of labour as social in the domestic sphere, while sectoral refers to the hierarchal structure of tasks within a sector. So, the social division of labour has not only remained mostly intact but is combined with sectoral work.

Conclusion

In this way, the plantation landscape has dynamic, complex and dialectical relations to capitalist process and becomes a unique site of work produced and reproduced by the colonial power structure. The power structure is a combination of different elements, which virtually can control the labourers, especially women labourers. The bagans in upper Assam has depended on the continued, permanent settlements of labourers, yet it has yielded them the settlers' rights afforded by such sustained occupancy, according to Indian regulations such as post-independence land reforms. Having no property rights is an indication of domination and production to the qualitative experience of exploitative work (Calvao, 2016, p. 452). Although capitalism appears to be reaching its limits in tea gardens in Upper Assam, and domestic space appears to be decaying in terms of maintenance of quarters and security of land rights. To understand the tension of labourers in terms of land rights, it is essential to interpret the lived space between bondage and security of work.

It also follows a plantation ideology under which there is continuous oppression of labourers in general and women labourers in particular. Plantation ideology is based on capitalist production precisely linked to male power. Historically, colonialism develops a labour class which is the primary source of tea gardens, and it also maintains two layers of control. The first one is the management which can directly divide the workspaces for men and women labourers. However, Marx and Engels argued, 'by the action of modern industry, all family ties among proletarians are torn asunder' (Marx et al., 1998, p. 57). The gendered division of work indicates that the work burden of women is higher than the males in both the public and private spaces. The most powerful one is the companies which accumulate the capital and keep the colonial spaces in a hierarchical power structure. Bondage labour is an important quality to continue in the plantation

system, and the management imposes the division of gender in the work regime. For this, the entire industry is dependent on the continued bondage labourers to land complemented by the fact that the wages on plantations are too low to support independent livelihoods. The system demanded that the families have the facilities of food rations, housing and other non-monetary forms of compensation. From one point of view, the ration has a direct link to the success of the tea trade. On the other hand, the plantation workers are tied to such a vicious cycle that they can hardly protest against the exploitation.

However, while talking about the security of work in tea gardens one cannot ignore the tension in late capitalism between the private space (freedom) and work space (bondage). Revisiting the colonial spaces in the bagans thus certainly demands some structural changes in cash and non-cash benefits, but it also points towards the issue of belongingness to the garden space in terms of the growing resistance of the demands for Schedule Tribe status of the tea labourers community.

Notes:

ⁱ Due to ethical concern, the name of the tea garden is not mentioned here.

ⁱⁱ Soja (2001) makes the point that ‘space is never given’. It is never an ‘empty box’ to be filled, never ‘only a stage or a mere background’. Soja’s analysis helps to understand that space is politically constructed, and like any political entity, plantation space is either formed/changed, or accepted/rejected.

ⁱⁱⁱ Historian Jayeeta Sharma (2011) argues in her book *Empire’s Garden* that the British viewed the indigenous tea variety of Assam as ‘wild’ and ‘uncivilised’. Assam tea is always referred as ‘*jungli stock*’ where *jungli* means wild. It is also used by the British to refer to the native inhabitants of the region and later on to the plantation labourers. For the colonial botanists, the wild tea is problematic, and that is why they hypothesised that it would be wise to temper the Assam *jat* with the non-native, more civilised Chinese *jat*. Though the planters founded the industry in the image of Chinese tea production, gradually it lost the mode of production, not only because of its lack of mechanisation, but also in its organisation of labour. Chinese labourers refused to perform any labour not associated with the cultivation and manufacture of tea, including clearing forest, pottering tea and supplies. Then the British planters attempted to attract native people, particularly Nagas and Kacharis in Upper Assam who would perform such manual labour. By the 1850s, it became clear that the model of producing tea with an imported Chinese labour force was unsustainable.

^{iv} Mr. Charles Bruce, who was the Superintendent of tea culture and had to look after the government tea plantation in Assam, pioneered the term ‘garden’, which has the vernacular meaning *bari*. In pre-colonial Assam, *bari* and *basti* had particular denotation that referred to raised or highlands used for homestead and garden sites. Peasants used to have hereditary proprietary rights over these sites. The tea *baris* of the Assam Company and other planters thus owned it as their private property which was a significant claim, considering the vast area of land that the tea enterprise occupied from the state (Sarma, 2011, p. 40).

^v The first stage can be observed in the ‘putting-out’ system of early capitalism. In this phase, the capitalist provide a labour with raw materials and paid him a wage to transform them into a finished product. In this way, the labour is

reduced to an appendage. So, in the second phase, there is an additional form of domination in which the labour loses all autonomy.

^{vi} Tea Committees were formed in early 1834, the starting of the Government Experimental Tea Gardens in 1836 and the first successful manufacture of Assam Tea in December 1837. In 1840, two-thirds of the Government Experimental Gardens were transferred to the Assam Company (Guha, 1991, p. 13).

^{vii} Similar studies are reflected from Verena Stolcke's works on Sao Paola plantations, *Coffee Planters, Workers and Wives* (1988), in which she showed major shifts in labour recruitment strategies from 'permanent to casual' labour in the Sumatran estates in the 1970s by the exploitation of family labour and by manipulation of gender hierarchies within it.

^{viii} Because of that 'it employed arguably the largest labour force at the lowest level of wages of any private capitalist enterprise in the history of colonial India'. On the other hand, those industries except tea have transformed over time regarding labour structure or production.

^{ix} After Indian Independence in 1947, when ownership of the companies gradually began shifting to Indian companies, planters have consistently made licit and illicit efforts to reduce the plantation house to 'mere' infrastructure, a basic shelter for labour and nothing more.

^x The history of plantation housing, as mentioned in the Annual Bulletins of the Indian Tea Association (ITA) founded in 1881 and still going on. Across South and Southeast Asia, the maintenance of a feasible labour force has historically been entangled with households/quarters and identity formation (Breman, 1989; Daniel, 2008; Stoler, 1985).

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Article: Internet Use among Tweens and Teens: Threats, Risks and Concerns

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Internet Use among Tweens and Teens: Threats, Risks and Concerns

--- Kanika Panwar

Abstract

The 'second modernity' has created 'manufactured risks' that are unsolicited repercussions of technology backfiring on human society, forcing it to respond to them. No one is safe from globally emerging risks of technology that have turned boundaries irrelevant. The interactive capabilities of the Internet 2.0, through user-generated content and participatory culture, has brought the threats and risks like cyber bullying, cyber-stalking, online sexual solicitation, exposure to pornography, into the life of tweens (pre-teens) and teens. Based on the concepts of 'risk society' and 'information security', this paper presents the risks and threats faced by tweens and teens from internet use. Grounded on a systematic review of studies pertaining to different threats, this paper conducts a risk analysis of these threats. Endeavoring to contribute towards 'Cyber Sociology', it concludes with the concerns faced by the family, society and state.

Key words: Cyber-bullying, Cyber-stalking, Internet use, Risk Assessment Matrix, Risk Society

Introduction

India, having 560 million internet users and second largest online population in the world after China, is expected to reach 600 million by 2021, 32 per cent of which are estimated to be in the age group of 12 to 19 years in the year 2019 (Statista, 2020). India shares the global characteristics of increasing internet use by tweens and teens. An average internet using tween (pre-teen, 8-12 yrs) and teen (13-17 yrs) in India represents a child trying to strike a balance between high degree of parental aspirations, peer pressure and imaginations. The internet has opened up a world of opportunities for all ages, but at the same time, it is laced with enormous content deemed unfit for them.

Hannemyr argues, ‘the adoption rate of the internet has exceeded that of earlier mass communication technologies by several magnitudes’, making it an ‘irreversible’ innovation (Hannemyr, 2003, p. 111). Lenhart (2001) opined that an entire generation of youth growing up with the internet resulted in it gradually replacing television as the prime source of entertainment, communication and education. According to Tillman, development of more sophisticated searching tools on the internet resulted in increased likelihood of identifying information and answers to questions but, ‘within the morass of networked data are both valuable nuggets and an incredible amount of junk’ (Tillman, 2003, p. 1). This junk may be in the form of unsolicited information, advertisements, gaming sites or even pop-ups of pornographic nature.

The constant exposure of young minds to the unsuitable load of information and dangers has been studied by various researchers. Though there is a lack of multivariate studies on threats and risks of internet use by tweens and teens, various univariate studies have focused on the risks to tweens and teens in the form of internet addiction (Shapira et al., 2003; Young, 1998; Yen et al., 2007), exposure to pornography (Quadara et al., 2017; Flood, 2009, 2007), self-harm (Grandclerc et al., 2016; Lewis & Seko, 2016; O’Connor et al., 2014), effect on mental health and depression (Kraut et al., 1998; Bessièrè et al., 2010), cyber-bullying (Smith et al., 2008; Nixon, 2014; Litwiller & Brausch, 2013), cyber-stalking (Maple et al., 2011; Worsley et al., 2017), online sexual solicitation (Mitchell et al., 2007; Whitaker & Bushman, 2009) and trolling (Griffiths, 2014). These studies have elaborated various threats of internet use individually, but a holistic approach to the threat, impact and risk severity analysis is highly desirable.

The present study being exploratory in nature identifies and analyses threats and risks, explores vulnerabilities, likelihood and impacts associated with tween and teen internet use to compensate the research gap. The articles and research reports for the present study were extracted using keyword search technique through Google Scholar, Science Direct, PubMed, Web of Science and other publication houses. Articles reporting specific threats of internet use by tweens and teens were searched and studied thoroughly using a focused checklist.

The present study, aiming to contribute towards Cyber Sociology and Sociology of Risk, applied the qualitative technique of ‘Risk assessment matrix’ and ‘Risk analysis of threat’ using likelihood and impact to find out the severity of risks

associated with each threat. Risk and threat were the two major conceptual categories used in this paper which were drawn from the concept of ‘Risk society’ⁱ and ‘Information security studies’ⁱⁱ.

The modern-day ‘network society’ⁱⁱⁱ brings with it an unprecedented speed of processing information, great volume of information, the complexity of operations involved and speed of communication. This also brings with it the risks as mentioned by Beck (2002) in ‘risk society’. According to him, technology keeps on producing new risks and humans as members of the society are required to respond to them.

‘The difference being that risk is attributable to positive human intentionality, so that harms constitute “bads” that are tied up with the production of “goods”, while the threat is attributable to negative intentionality, the harm being deliberately produced by ill-intentioned actors’ (Beck, 2002, p. 44).

Beck defines risk as ‘a systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced by modernisation itself’ and ‘in contrast to all earlier epochs (including industrial society), the risk society is characterised essentially by a lack: the impossibility of an external attribution of hazards. In other words, risks depend on decisions, they are industrially produced and in this sense politically reflexive’ (Leiss et al., 1994, pp. 545-546).

As per above discussion, the objectives of the paper are:

- i. Identification and profiling of threat and risk to the assets (tweens and teens).
- ii. To appraise the implications of internet use by assets and conduct risk analysis of threat.
- iii. To assess severity of risk to the assets through risk assessment matrix.

Internet Use Patterns and Online Behavior

Internet use among the assets is expanding as evident by a survey (McAfee, 2014) administered across India on tweens and teens. On a normal week, almost three-fourths of online teens spend more than 5 hours on the internet. Among the social networking sites used, Facebook is preferred (93 per cent), followed by YouTube (87 per cent) and WhatsApp (79 per cent). The tweens reported using social

accounts such as Snapchat, Pinterest, Tinder, Tumblr, and Vine daily, little higher than their teen counterparts (McAfee, 2014).

More than half of the teens hide their online behaviour from their parents and clear their browser history, almost one-third delete messages, one-fourth use privacy settings, almost one-fourth use a mobile device instead of laptop/desktop or minimise the browser when adults walk in, almost one-third teens do not worry about their parents finding out anything, they just need privacy (MacAfee, 2013). In 2017, one-third of internet users worldwide were children, showing 'children are accessing the internet at increasingly younger ages. In some countries, children under 15 are as likely to use the internet as adults over 25' (UNICEF, 2017, p. 9). A large number of teens are participating in dangerous and even illegal activities, such as hacking. In addition to putting themselves in risky situations, much of their online behaviour is also creating personal problems as well.

Risk, Threat and Vulnerabilities

The growth of the online industry has led to a transition from physical to virtual. Everything from marketplace to eateries, entertainment to education is available online. This rampant growth of cyber-world carries various potentially detrimental threats.

Operationalising the concept of risk, it can be deduced as a function of threats exploiting vulnerabilities to damage or destroy assets. Thus, threats (actual, conceptual, or inherent) may exist, but if there are no vulnerabilities then there is little/no risk. Similarly, one can have vulnerability, but if there is no threat, then there is little/no risk.

Threat is a statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done. In consonance with sociological notions of risk and uncertainty, this definition puts stress on the pro-active exposition of future damages in terms of 'staging of risk' (Beck, 1999). 'It conveys the meaning that there is necessarily a hostile actor out there, an intentional adversary whose aim is to cause harm to a valued object.' (Battistelli & Galantino, 2018, p. 6).

The principal ideas used in this paper are:

Threat as, anything that can exploit a vulnerability, intentionally or accidentally, and obtain, damage, or destroy an asset (tween and teen).

Risk as, the potential for loss, damage or destruction of an asset as a result of a threat exploiting a vulnerability.

Vulnerability is a weakness of an asset or a group of assets that can be exploited by one or more threats.

Impact is defined in terms of any long-term effect to the health and well-being of asset, whether intended, unintended, positive, negative, direct or indirect.

Likelihood is a chance that the threat can successfully exploit the relevant vulnerability related to internet use.

Social Concern is any issue, problem, or conflict that is a high priority for a society to solve or prevent.

A: Risk Analysis of Threat

For analysing threat, comprehending the impact, likelihood and risk involved are pertinent. For this purpose, 'impact' has been classified into low, moderate and high concerning health and well-being of assets. The health and well-being are positive factors which people perceive about life satisfaction and good living conditions. Well-being includes positive evaluation of people's life such as happiness, life satisfaction, healthy life, healthy behavior, emotional fulfillment, social capital, etc. Health refers to a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (Gasper, 2007). A threat was categorised as high if it severely impacted health and well-being by being potentially detrimental or causing grievous hurt (Table 1). When it had ordinary impact on health and well-being, such as physical, social and/or mental pathologies, it was considered to be of a moderate impact. Low impact threats were considered similarly. Table 1 lists the impact faced by assets owing to different threats.

Table 1: Health and Well-Being Concerns and Impact of Threat

Threat	Major Health and Well-being concerns	Impact
T1 Internet addiction	Anxiety, stress, impact on physical health and social life, compulsive behavior	Low
T2 Poor physical health	Sedentary life-style, decline in physical fitness, irregular diet patterns, sleep deprivation	Low
T3 Negative social relations	Low social activities, weak social ties, negative impact on academics	Low
T4 Tendency of self-harm	Self-poisoning, self-injury, depressive thoughts, suicidal ideation	High
T5 Cyber-bullying	Depression, anxiety, delinquent behavior, suicidal ideation, self-harm	High
T6 Cyber-stalking	Intimidation, sleep deprivation, PTSD, risk of homicide, suicidal ideation	High
T7 Online sexual solicitation (OSS)	Anxiety, frustration on lack of control, risk of victimisation by pedophiles	High
T8 Exposure to online pornography	Sex addiction, acceptance to sexual violence and physical violence	Moderate
T9 Trolling	Annoyance, hurt, anger, threat of rape and violence in real life	Moderate

It is evident that the assets face various concerns due to different threats delineated. For example, internet addiction (T1) results in anxiety, stress, impact on physical health and social life, poor academic performance and compulsive behavior. These concerns may be harmful for the asset but may not lead to significant loss or disruption in life, thus termed as low impact. Same is observed

for all the threats examined. Correspondingly, the likelihood of a threat was determined as low, moderate and high depending on the probability of its occurrence in the life of an asset. To gauge the likelihood of its occurrence, several sources of information were used including the analysis of classical threat situations and research studies. This process is not expected to deliver the exact probability of a threat actually occurring, but rather to help prioritise those threats which can be deemed as imminent, requiring urgent attention.

The risk analysis of threat (Table 2) was drawn to assess the risk of threats based on impact (Table1) and likelihood of each threat. This analysis breaks down the likelihood of each threat to transpire and its impact on the asset facing the threat. Risk is the intersection of impact and likelihood.

Table 2: Risk Analysis of Threats

	Threat	Impact	Likelihood	Risk
T1	Internet addiction	Low	Moderate	Moderate
T2	Poor physical health	Low	Low	Low
T3	Negative social relations	Low	Moderate	Moderate
T4	Tendency of self-harm	High	Low	High
T5	Cyber-bullying	High	Moderate	High
T6	Cyber-stalking	High	Moderate	High
T7	Online sexual solicitation(OSS)	High	Moderate	High
T8	Exposure to online pornography	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
T9	Trolling	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate

Table 2 presents risk analysis of threat where poor physical health (T2) is the only low risk threat. Threats like internet addiction (T1), negative social relations (T3), exposure to online pornography (T8) and trolling (T9) are moderate risk threats. The tendency of self-harm (T4), cyber-bullying (T5), cyber-stalking (T6) and online sexual solicitation (OSS) (T7) are high risk threats.

The findings of Table 2 were further corroborated to compute risk severity assessment matrix in Table 3. Each threat was analysed (T1-T9) for the risk likelihood (R1-R3) and the impact of Risk (0-3) to determine the severity (S0-S2) of risk faced by the asset.

B: Risk Assessment Matrix

A risk assessment matrix is a qualitative visible representation of risk severity to ascertain the risk faced due to each threat based on examining the impact and likelihood of each correlate. In the present study, the risk assessment matrix has been calculated on the basis of two variables, i.e. likelihood probability and impact of a risk.

Table 3: Risk Assessment Matrix

RISK PROBABILITY		IMPACT		
		Acceptable	Tolerable	Unacceptable
Likelihood	R3:Improbable (Unlikely)	Low	Low	Moderate
	R2:Possible (Likely to occur)	Low	Moderate	High
	R1:Probable (Highly likely)	Moderate	High	High

The impact has been termed as low, moderate and high as per consequences of impact associated (Table 1).

Risk probability, or likelihood, is the possibility of a risk occurring, which has been further divided into three categories based on the probability of occurrence (Table 2):

- R1 (Probable): High chances of occurrence
- R2 (Possible): Moderate chances of occurrence
- R3 (Improbable): Low chances of occurrence

Further, the impact was divided into three categories:

- Acceptable (0): Little to no effect on the health and well-being of the asset
- Tolerable (1): Effects on health and well-being are felt but cause no major harm to the asset
- Unacceptable (2): Cause major disruption to the life of the asset or may cause grievous hurt and/or death.

These variables were deduced from Table 2, i.e. risk analysis of threat. Based on the likelihood and impact of each risk, it was placed into the risk assessment matrix and level of severity was designated to each as: Low (S0), Moderate (S1) and High (S2).

The criteria of recognition of risk severity are as per the risk assessment matrix from Table 3. For example, Risk with acceptable impact and low probability would have low severity (NRC, 2005).

As per the risk assessment matrix (Table 3), the threat of internet addiction (T1) and negative social relations (T3) were low severity (S0) because there is a possible risk probability (R2) of an asset experiencing them and has acceptable level (0) impact associated. There is a possibility of these threats to take place in the life of an asset but the severity on health and well-being will be low. Threat of poor physical health (T2) has low severity (S0), indicating improbability (R3) and acceptable level (0) impact. It has low severity, as the impact is acceptable and likelihood improbable, indicating rare chance of occurrence.

The tendency of self-harm and/or suicide (T4) is moderate severity (S1) in spite of unacceptable impact (2) because there is improbable (R3) chance of occurrence. Although this threat is of high impact and may cause grave injury to the asset's health and well-being, but there is a low chance of it taking place. The exposure to online pornography (T8) has moderate severity (S1) risk with probable (R1) chance and tolerable (1) level of risk. The threat of trolling (T9) has a moderate severity (S1) due to some probability of occurrence (R2) and tolerable impact (1) of the threat.

The threat of cyber-bullying (T5), cyber-stalking (T6) and OSS (T7) have a high severity (S2) level because there is a probable (R2) likelihood of occurrence and unacceptable (2) impact associated.

This classification of risk severity as low, moderate and high can be done according to the priority of stakeholders on the basis of perceived loss.

C: Threats Faced by Tweens and Teens

In the following subsections, the threats are individually discussed vis-à-vis the concept, vulnerabilities, likelihood, impact and risk severity based on risk assessment matrix.

T1: Internet Addiction

The term 'internet addiction' introduced by Ivan Goldberg (Dalal & Basu, 2016), is defined as internet related, compulsive behavior interfering with regular life, causing a high level of stress on family, peer groups and colleagues. The internet becomes the ruling activity of addicts' lives (Najar, 2015) as internet addiction is faced by 1.5-8.2 per cent of adolescents in US and Europe (Cash et al., 2012).

According to Liu and Luo (2015), this online behavior may result in the disruption of nerve wiring in the brains of adolescents. They found that a large proportion of individuals who overuse the internet shared the same characteristics with substance addicts such as, excessive use, tolerance, withdrawal, repeated unsuccessful attempts to cut back or quit, and interference in major areas of life functioning. This situation is exemplified by getting a 'kick' through the use of the internet and resultantly feeling normal by its usage and feeling of powerlessness and alienation due to inability to shun addiction (NetAddiction, <http://netaddiction.com/>). Pornography, sexting, cyber-sex addiction, addiction to video games, online role plays, online gambling, etc. are some of the most prevalent activities which grasp the attention of internet addicts online (Block, 2008; Cash et al., 2012).

As the excessive internet use is associated with some socio-psychologically dysfunctional variables such as deteriorating social circle, alienation (Yang, 2001), lower self-esteem and life satisfaction (Yen et al. 2007), seeking sensory pleasures (Lin & Tsai, 2002), degenerative mental health (Young & Roger, 1998), and low participation in family activities (Armstrong et al., 2000), it has been

indicated that the internet addiction may enhance internet anxiety. Ahmet and Murat (2011) indicate that the more internet addiction among teens, the more anxious the individual will be.

The threat of internet addiction (T1) multiplies when the vulnerabilities such as loneliness, lack of family attention, socially pathological family and/or living conditions, peer pressure and feeling of powerlessness are exploited to convert into risk. Its risk analysis indicated that it has low level impact and the moderate likelihood of occurrence among the assets. There are moderate chances of them becoming internet addict also with a low level of threat associated.

Evaluation through risk assessment matrix (Table 3) illustrates that there is a possible risk probability (R2) of an asset experiencing internet addiction (T1) and has acceptable level (0) impact associated, resulting in low severity (S0) risk to the asset. It can be deduced that if a tween or a teen is addicted to the internet there is some probability of her/him facing the risk of low level severity which might not lead to grave consequences. The likelihood depends on the co-prevalence of preconditions such as high level of time spent on the internet, perceived or real lack of affection in family, excessive freedom and/or excessive control by the parents, social maladjustment, lack of social capital, and inquisitive tendency.

T2: Poor Physical Health

Long hours spent over the internet result in a sedentary lifestyle of assets. Sitting at a place for long hours (using internet) results in obesity, decline in physical fitness, strain in eyes, migraine/headaches, backaches, pain in the neck, sleep deprivation, postural misalignment and peripheral muscle weakness (Zhen et al., 2016). Assets resort to unhealthy snacking and irregular diet patterns leading to nutritional deficiency resulting in stunted growth and development. In a study of health-related internet use, it was found to be associated with small but reliable increase in anxiety and depression (Bessi ere et al., 2010).

The threat of poor physical health (T2) multiplies with the vulnerabilities such as low physical fitness, weak eyesight and nutritional deficiency. Table 2 indicates T2 to have low impact and low likelihood depending on the already existing lifestyle and the amount of time spent on internet usage. Risk assessment matrix

(Table 3) shows that poor physical health (T2) being improbable (R3) and acceptable (0) impact.

T3: Negative Social Relations

Heavy internet usage is correlated with a decline in and replacement of social activities, as mostly assets like to spend more time in the cyberspace than in the real world, avoiding participation in social gatherings. In addition to this, another effect is observed which is the replacing of 'strong bonds' with weak superficial relations (Moody, 2001). Flaherty et al. (1998) indicated that when teenagers are involved in a large number of virtual relations, they might reduce the number of real-life interactions and relations, substituting their real friends with virtual ones. Kraut et al. (1998) argue that by using the internet, teens substitute poor quality social relationships for better relationships that are substituting weak ties for strong ones. The virtual relations are believed to be weak and single-dimensional lacking kindness, tenderness, sentiments and commitment to the relation. There is a negative relation between internet surfing and life satisfaction which can cause isolation from real-life social relations among teens.

Table 2 illustrates the negative social relations (T3) as a moderate likelihood and low impact correlate. Risk intensifies when the vulnerabilities such as superficial offline relations, loneliness, lack of social solidarity, resentment towards family and society start to take advantage of the threat.

Table 3 indicates that negative social relations (T3) have possible risk probability (R2) and acceptable level (0) impact of the threat, thus qualifying it as low severity (S0) risk. The likelihood of negative social relations (T3) rises with low-quality parent-child relations, low level of family integration, faulty socialisation and low level of social cohesiveness.

T4: Tendency of Self-Harm and/or Suicide

Self-harm is a term used to describe all intentional acts of self-poisoning or self-injury, irrespective of the presence of suicidal intention. This phenomenon is important to understand because the repetition of self-harm is frequent and an independent risk factor for suicide, although many acts of self-harm begin with non-suicidal intentions (Grandclerc et al., 2016).

The tendency of self-harm can be defined as a non-cataclysmic act in which a person commits a particular behaviour or consumes a substance intentionally, causing harm to themselves (Jacob et al., 2017). Internet use may promote self-harm practices as found by O'Connor et al. (2014), where more than one-tenth respondents reported being influenced by self-harm and dangerous content on social networking sites. Oxford review (2013) suggests that moderate or severe internet addiction may be linked to an increased risk of self-harm, as well as enhanced levels of depressive thoughts about suicide. Use of blogs and forums in moderate to high severity was seen to be associated with increased risk of self-harm, rise in depressive thoughts and suicidal tendency (Lewis & Seko, 2016).

When tendency of self-harm and/or suicide (T4) is analysed in Table 2, high impact with low likelihood was observed. The vulnerabilities associated are internet addiction, depressive thoughts, loneliness, poor self-image and/or low self-esteem, and suicidal ideation.

The risk assessment matrix (Table 3) depicts that tendency of self-harm (T4) is improbable (R3) with unacceptable (2) impact, causing a risk to health and well-being of the asset. This locates the severity of risk as moderate severity (S1) because of improbable likelihood. This severity may accentuate with vulnerabilities outlined above. It has low probability likelihood, as it is not very common among the assets.

T5: Cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying is the use of electronic communication to bully a person, typically by sending messages of intimidating and threatening nature including texts or emails, embarrassing pictures, videos, websites or fake profiles posted on social networking sites, publishing/writing fake rumours on forum boards, damaging behaviours in online games such as abusive language and killing players gaming avatar (Smith et al., 2008).

A significant number of causal studies have depicted a conclusive relationship between teenagers' involvement in cyber-bullying and negative health indicators. Assets who are targeted via cyber-bullying report rise in depressive tendency, anxiety, stress, feeling of loneliness, suicidal and self-harm thoughts (Klomek et al., 2008), skipping classes, discontinued social media usage. They are more prone to be unwilling to attend social gatherings, may have low self-esteem and

stress-related health issues. Teens threatened of cyber-bullying are more likely to resort to increased substance use, aggression and delinquent behaviours (Nixon, 2014) and violent tendency as a coping mechanism (Litwiller & Brausch, 2013).

Cyber-bullying (T5) according to Table 2 is high impact threat with moderate likelihood. The vulnerabilities which put assets more in danger are inherent behaviour traits, feeling of isolation and loneliness, and low self-image. Table 3 indicates that the risk severity level of cyber-bullying (T6) is R2 (2), with a possible probability (R2) and unacceptable (2) impact and resultant high severity (S2) level. This level of severity is critical and requires attention to the risk due to the threatening consequences associated. The experiences of assets related to cyber-bullying (T5) range from offensive name-calling, spreading of false rumours, receiving explicit images they didn't ask for, constant asking of what they are doing and whom they are with by someone other than a parent, having explicit images shared without their consent and physical threats.

T6: Cyber-stalking

When a person is followed, tracked online, his/her privacy invaded, constantly watched and threatened using internet technology, it is referred to as cyber-stalking. As the internet is a rapidly expanding medium of technological advancement in 'risk society', it is evolving and providing additional tools for stalkers repository to heighten risk. The impact of cyber-stalking may range from fear, stress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, low mood, feeling of helplessness, sleep deprivation, loss of appetite, alienation, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal ideation (Short, 2014) to fear of being killed/physically harmed (Maple et al., 2011).

Table 2 makes it evident that cyber-stalking (T6) is a high impact threat with moderate likelihood of occurrence. The vulnerabilities such as weak password management, sharing private information on the internet and negative social relations may enhance the risk. The Risk assessment matrix (Table 3) depicts T6 as an R2 (2) level of risk with high severity (S2) level, showing a possible likelihood (R2) of its occurrence with unacceptable (2) impact. The high severity (S2) level indicates an urgency to address this threat for its efficient management. Its likelihood augments with real-life situations of the assets such as weak family support, low social capital, low perceived social support, real-life stalking and poor peer connectedness.

T7: Online Sexual Solicitation (OSS)/Online Grooming^{iv}

The OSS may be defined as online communication where one person attempts to coax another person to discuss sex or get involved in sexual activity (Worsley et al., 2017). Online grooming of children for sexual purposes is when an adult communicates online with a child under the age of 18 to establish an emotional connection or relationship with the child and gain their trust for sexual abuse or exploitation (NSPCC, <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/grooming/>). This activity is likely to take place on various websites as well as through online video gaming, instant messaging or various social media platforms (Mitchell et al., 2007). OSS may include an asset being incited to engage in sexual activity; this can include sexual chat, generating sexual photos and/or generating sexual videos. They may also (but not necessarily) be encouraged to meet up offline. The behaviour and the purpose of OSS remain consistent across environments, despite potential variation in specific grooming techniques (Whittle et al., 2013).

Whitaker and Bushman (2009) found that assets who had experienced OSS felt extremely upset and felt extremely afraid afterwards. Other negative effects of OSS included uneasiness, embarrassment, distress, inability to stop pondering on it, anxiety, stress, being irritable and losing interest in things (Wolak et al., 2006). Additionally, significant links have been observed between OSS, experience of substance abuse and symptoms of depression (ibid.). Victims of OSS struggle with additional complexities (such as, the possibility of the images being distributed online and the permanence of this) when dealing with the impact of abuse, and there is a need to challenge the presumption that victims of non-contact internet abuse suffer less harm than those who experience contact abuse (Mitchell et al., 2007).

If OSS (T7) is examined for risk analysis of threat (Table 2), it can be observed that this threat is high impact with moderate likelihood. Table 3 indicates a possible likelihood (R2) and unacceptable (2) impact of threat, making it R2 (2) level risk with high severity (S2). The correlates such as easy, frequent, non-monitored access to the internet at an early age leave an asset vulnerable to the risk of OSS. The level of risk may rise to critical as they may accidentally be victimised by a pedophile and may put their lives in danger.

T8: Exposure to Online Pornography

For all the opportunities that the internet provides for education and communication, concerns about children's access to illegal or potentially harmful content such as pornography remain an area of high concern (Livingstone & Mason, 2015; Horvath et al., 2013). The studies about exposure and prevalence suggest a significant number of assets being exposed to pornography online, with the figures being slightly higher among boys (14-16 years) (Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014). A survey reports that 30 per cent of 14-17 year olds claim to watch online pornography regularly (Stanley et al., 2018). Not only do teenagers watch sexual content but also exchange and reciprocate with similar content, also creating it using their smart phones and other electronic gadgets. Prevalence figures for sexting are also well studied but they vary widely (Przybylski & Nash, 2018), raising additional policy concerns relating to coercion, consent and illegal image creation (Klettke et al., 2014).

Exposure of assets to pornography leads to tolerance towards casual sex, unprotected sexual behaviour, legitimising myths about non-conventional sexual practices (Flood, 2013), permissive attitude towards multiple partners, indulging in early sex life, pornography addiction, sex addiction, intimacy disorder and sexual violence (Ross, 2012). It may leave a deep impact on the psyche of assets with them getting wrong messages, not only about sex but also gender, power, pleasure, dominance, etc. Watching physical aggression, like slapping, kicking, hair pulling, choking, impossible sexual practices, verbal aggression predominantly against female partners as widely presented over porn sites leaves a deep impact on the subconscious mind of teenagers (Sun et al., 2016). Physical violence and aggression in porn are mostly coupled with non-consensual and non-mutual sexual interaction, where consent is assumed rather than asked (Quadara et al., 2017).

When exposure to online pornography (T8) is examined through risk analysis of threat (Table 2), it is observed that T8 has moderate impact and moderate likelihood. Vulnerabilities like a high level of internet exposure, no supervision over internet access, the influence of peer group, low parent-child communication, faulty socialisation and early exposure to sexual activities may aggravate risk. As per the risk assessment matrix (Table 3), the exposure to online pornography (T8) is evaluated as probable risk (R1) with tolerable level (1) impact and moderate severity (S1).

T9: Trolling

Trolls are individuals who engage in provocative and offensive online behaviour intended to gain attention and create a negative emotional reaction. Morrissey (2010) expanded this further by saying, 'trolling is an utterer producing an intentionally false or incorrect utterance with high order intention [the plan] to elicit from recipient a particular response, generally negative or violent' (Griffiths, 2014, p. 85). Trolls severely disrupt flows of online civil conversations between people. They can be annoying or dangerous to public figures and celebrities. Many people troll out of annoyance, hurt, anger or amusement, and the act of trolling people addresses a need in them to vent anger, hate and sarcasm, or to get attention.

As online interaction becomes a part of postmodern life, internet trolls have become a cause of concern for everybody, especially tween and teen minds. It has become antisocial behaviour in lines with harassment and bullying, resulting in significant emotional distress and threats of violence and even rape in the real world.

Trolling (T9) is emerging as a threat to the virtual world due to the convenience of anonymity. The real-life equations of the power imbalance between genders and offline inequalities are being reflected in online space. When examined through risk analysis of threat (Table 2), it was observed that the impact, as well as the likelihood of occurrence of T9, is moderate. The vulnerabilities which may aggravate the threat by exploiting it are active on social media, blogs or micro blogs, expressing any opinion against the normative structure of society, sexuality and/or religion.

As far as the risk assessment matrix (Table 3) is concerned, the level of risk is R2 (1), i.e. possible risk (R2) and tolerable (1) impact with moderate (S1) level of severity of the risk. S1 is a moderate-severe risk which requires attention towards risk management. The consequences of trolling (T9) may range from anxiety, distress and a threat to harassment.

Emerging Social Concerns

The threats and risks associated with internet use of assets are a cause of concern, not only for the family but also the society and the policy makers.

Family:

Most parents feel unsafe at the prospect of their child using internet, especially those who are aware of its threats, risks and privacy concerns (Sorbing, 2012). In order to safeguard the assets, parents should supervise their online activities including the time spent. The assets should be taught to use customised privacy settings, privacy protection techniques, restriction on location sharing and importance of keeping personal information private. Also use of anti-virus and anti-spyware on the computers and smart phones should be encouraged in the family.

‘Children should be taught to use the internet in the same way we help teach them how to cross the road. They cannot be prevented from crossing the road just because it presents dangers; our role is to teach them how to cross the road safely and responsibly in all situations, and to teach them securely to do so.’ (UNICEF, 2019, p. 1)

Parents must guide the assets about internet usage in the same way as we socialise them about other aspects of society such as following rules, playing with peer group, etc. The assets must be educated to develop resilience and strength in the digital world in the same way as the real world, as virtual is the new reality.

Society:

All the threats, right from OSS to cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and trolling are inflicted by few members of the society over others. As a member of the society it is important to minimise the exposure and risk of the digital world by teaching safe practices to them. The research studies have been concentrating on time spent by them on online platforms, while it should be addressing problematic online content. Technology companies should actively watch and regulate any harmful content and/or restrict its circulation. Technology companies should provide tools that can help parents and educators to support children in learning digital safety and safe internet usage. The educational institutions should train educators to support and guide students for both internet use and avoid abuse. They must keep a watch on access of internet from schools and must internalise the habit of cyber safety and cyber hygiene^v among the students. The threats like cyber-bullying and cyber-stalking should be taken seriously and effective measures such as student-

teacher counseling, peer counseling, activities and workshops may be conducted for assets to understand the threat and give courage to those who are facing the threats.

Policymakers:

Policymakers hold a very important holistic role in the management of the risk by implementing appropriate policies and associated mechanisms, promote awareness, monitor and evaluate policy and control effectiveness. There is a lack of specific laws to address the threats associated with internet use in India. The IT Act Amendment 2008 has provisions dealing with cyber-bullying, but not all threats with high severity are addressed efficiently.

Conclusion

Technology keeps on producing new risks which the human society has to respond to and cope with. These risks are not spatial or time constrained, they are global and spread as technology itself. With Internet 2.0, the world is facing the challenges posed by this new advance in technology. As Beck (1992, 2002) opines, risk society is an inescapable structural condition of advanced industrialisation in a way that it produces the risks and then keeps occupied with managing them. The hazards produced by risk society threat everybody, they are not distributed according to wealth, social structure or stratification, and they affect society as a whole. This fact has been made clear by the present study.

Assessment of the risk severity through risk assessment matrix illustrates that threats such as internet addiction, poor physical health and negative social relations had low risk severity. The second group of threats was tendency of self-harm, exposure to pornography and trolling which were of moderate severity, having some effect on health and well-being. The high severity risks were found to be cyber-bullying, cyber-stalking and online sexual solicitation, which leads us to concerns about the safe internet usage. Though the risks produced by the technology do not differentiate between individuals and societies, but the ability to avert the risk depends upon information, knowledge and education.

There is a need to further study the management of these risks in detail which was not the objective of the present study. To manage the risks and threats and to provide structural solutions for the same, an investigation into risk management of threats and risks among tween and teen internet use is highly required. Modern

society has developed into a risk society, increasingly engaged with assessing, averting and managing self-induced risks.

Notes:

ⁱ Ulrich Beck (1992) coined the term 'risk society', which is used to describe the type of risks that have primarily been created as a result of the industrialisation and modernisation processes.

ⁱⁱ Information security is a set of strategies for managing the processes, tools and policies necessary to prevent, detect, document and counter threats, risks and vulnerabilities to digital and non-digital information.

ⁱⁱⁱ The concept of the network society is closely associated with interpretation of the social implications of globalisation and the role of electronic communications technologies in society.

^{iv} The terms Online Sexual Solicitation and Online Grooming are used interchangeably.

^v Cyber hygiene refers to the practices and steps of maintaining system health and improves online security by users of computers and other devices.

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Research in Progress: Conflict and Compensation in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Kaziranga National Park, Assam

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Conflict and Compensation in Protected Areas: A Case Study of Kaziranga National Park, Assam

--- Shapna Medhi

Abstract

Protected Areas often share boundaries with local communities leading to frequent human-wildlife interactions, which result in conflicts. Though the Kaziranga National Park, located in the Indian state of Assam, is considered one of the most successful cases of conservation, it witnesses recurrent human-wildlife conflicts thereby leading to conflicts between park management and local communities. In such cases, compensation figures act as one of the most important conflict mitigation tools. Based on empirical research conducted in the vicinity of Kaziranga, this paper deals with the dynamics of human-wildlife and park management-local community conflict. It examines the process of compensation policy, along with the issues and challenges experienced by the local communities. It also raises the question as to whether the compensations offered to the victims have been able to fulfil its primary purpose of reducing conflict and building trust between the park management and the local communities.

Key words: Compensation, Human-wildlife conflict, Kaziranga National Park, Park management, Protected areas

Introduction

Conflict is pervasive and the theories essentially suggest that social interactions coupled with incompatible goals lead to conflict. In a dynamic world with rapid changes in bio-physical environment and socio-cultural systems, Protected Areas (PAs) are now at the core of many conflicts. These PAs are areas of conservation with varying degrees of laws and regulations, mostly managed by state agencies, more often than not surrounded by human population. The resultant human-wildlife interaction causes losses for both human and wildlife. Amidst this, the PA authority responsible for the management of PA is mandated to uphold

conservation objectives. In such areas of conservation, financial aid for losses incurred by local communities due to wildlife is often regarded as a means of conflict mitigation.

Against this backdrop, the focus of this study is on the compensation offered to people for the loss of livestock, crop depredation and damage of houses, etc. This paper focuses on the compensation policy, process and the experiences of the local communities regarding compensation in Kaziranga National Park (KNP) in Assam. The paper begins with a brief discussion of the major conflicts in PAs and progresses on to the debate of financial compensation as a conflict mitigation tool in the context of KNP.

Study Area and Methodology

This qualitative study has been conducted in two fringe villages bordering the southern boundary of the park, i.e., the Mori Difoloo river. These villages namely, Lukurakhaniya and Gosanibor are located 5 and 6 kms. respectively east from the central range, Kohora. The Lukurakhaniya village, dominated by Assamese community, also has a few tea tribal households. Gosanibor village is inhabited by the tea tribe, Assamese and Nepali communities. A majority of the respondents of these villages engage in agriculture.

In-depth interview with the help of a semi-structured questionnaire was conducted with the respondents belonging to different communities in the villages through repeated visits to the field between October, 2017 to May, 2018. Interviews were also conducted with forest officials. For conducting the study, snowball sampling was used as it was found that respondents were reluctant to participate in the study without proper reference.

Conflict in Protected Areas

PAs, or more precisely, national parks can be termed as institutional projects (Selby & Petajisto, 2008, p. 14). They are often located in the proximity of the rural population in developing countries that have become more marginalised with the establishment of PAs (Wells, 1994; Stone & Nyaupane, 2016). The traditional approach employed by conservationists was based on the idea that nature and man are separate. This idea was foregrounded on the premises that man's interaction with nature can only lead to its destruction, which overlooked human dependence on nature for sustenance and survival. Within this framework,

the conservationists fought for nature and wildlife protection, while it became a fight for survival for the forest-dependent local communities, thereby leading to conflict.

In India, the scientific management of forests began during the colonial rule, primarily for consolidating British control over the forests. Guha and Gadgil (1989) describe the plight of the hunter-gatherers, the shifting cultivators, and also the settled cultivators that were affected by the imperial forest policies throughout the Indian subcontinent. The people were oblivious of the notifications regarding reservation of forest areas, thus continuing their daily affairs in the forests that led to them being labelled as encroachers in their homestead (Nongbri, 1999). Protests and rebellions against colonial forest policies became the new norm. Even after Independence, the plight of the forest dependent communities received little attention, with acts and policies continuing to overlook the poor and tribal people's dependence on forests. In this context, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Forest Dwellers Act or Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006 is considered as a weapon against the historical injustices done to forest dependent communities.

With its initial inception as a game forest in 1905 to being declared a national park in 1974 and a tiger reserve in 2007, KNP has been a ground of conflict¹. One of the prominent forms of conflicts that can be witnessed in PAs is human-wildlife conflicts (Ogra & Badola, 2008; Johnson et al., 2018). When the conflict between the local communities and wildlife escalates and the PA management fails to address those issues, the conflict does not remain confined only between human and wildlife but transforms to conflict '*between humans about wildlife*' (Madden, 2004, p. 249).

Human-Wildlife Conflict in Protected Areas

Due to damage caused by wild animals to agricultural crops, human-wildlife conflict (HWC) is likely to have occurred ever since man resorted to agriculture. According to the World Parks Congress Recommendation, the human-wildlife conflicts occur when wildlife and humans adversely impact each other (Madden, 2004, p. 248). In areas adjacent to the PAs, conflicts also surface because local communities directly or indirectly often feel pressurised to assist with conservation, despite financial burden and personal risk (Nyhus et al., 2006). It has been noticed that whenever wildlife has caused damage or the possibility of causing damage to human life and livelihood has existed, they have been killed

leading to extermination of certain species in some cases (Woodroffe et al., 2005). HWC, which seems as an offset of direct loss caused to communities, is made more complex due to people's attitude towards nature that is determined by varied factors like religious affiliation, ethnicity and cultural belief (Dickman, 2010).

In KNP, the animals from the park often spill over the park boundaries destroying crops and property, threaten human life at times even causing human death. The resentment and animosity towards wildlife is apparently because the cost of conservation is largely borne by the communities residing on the fringes of the PAs (Brandon et al., 1998; Terborgh et al., 2002). However, with the highest degree of protection offered under the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 to KNP, the people have little control on such situations. The enactment of strict rules and regulations prohibit the people from safeguarding their crops and livestock by traditional methods and practices like culling (Watve et al., 2016). Apart from the direct costs, they are also subjected to 'hidden costs' like diminished states of psychological and social well-being (Ogra & Badola, 2008). While narrating experiences of residing near KNP, a respondent confided that they lived in 'constant fear' of being rendered homeless by herds of elephants, a situation they had to encounter more than five years back. It has been observed that though there is an acceptance amidst them that they are disadvantaged due to the location, the dismay due to lack of a proper redressal of their grievances emerged simultaneously.

A retired forest officer expressed shock at the violenceⁱⁱ displayed by the people while chasing away stray wildlife. He added that such scare tactics distressed the animals and they 'wreaked havoc' causing further damage. This expression of violence might be an indication of the underlying resentment in the minds of the people or an opportunity for retaliation against the wildlife. In spite of the recurrent losses to fringe communities from wildlife in KNP, the communities show better tolerance than in other national parks like Sariskaⁱⁱⁱ. However, a proper understanding of the context branches out to another dimension of the conflict often visible in areas surrounding PAs.

Park Management-Local Community Conflict

It has been contended that the HWC in PAs might be a manifestation of human-human conflicts instead of being the other way round (Dickman, 2010). The human-human conflict referred to here can either imply conflict between the park

management authority and the local communities or amongst different communities residing in the vicinity of the PA. It is seen that the resentment of local communities towards wildlife becomes pronounced as they view the PA as an imposition by an external agency, i.e., the state, and the wildlife as being the property of the state (Naughton-Treves & Treves, 2005). A forest guard recalled that the staff under KNP authority was often made fun of as *chaprasis* (clerks). A forest officer said that sometimes when the local people were requested to inform of animal sightings in human-inhabited areas, they retorted by saying ‘why should we do your duty?’, or, ‘if you don’t come early and handle the situation, we will harm your animals’^{iv}. It is supplementary to the fact that the designation of PAs infuses a feeling of alienation in the fringe communities from the wildlife with whom they had cohabited. It has been observed that the feeling of imposition is dominant in the narratives of the local communities. Watve et al. (2016) used the term ‘your animal syndrome’ to signify this attitude of the local communities.

In 2007, a tigress along with her cubs was poisoned in the fringe areas for the repeated killing of livestock belonging to the fringe communities in KNP (Bora et al., 2015). The incident coincided with the notification of KNP as a tiger reserve. The local communities in the fringes of the park were agitated because of the notification and rumours spread that KNP authority had released tigers to get it declared as a tiger reserve. Thus, the poisoning of the tiger seemed to be an act of protest and a nuanced manifestation of the resentment of the local communities towards the park management. Such actions undermine conservation efforts and place park management and local community at warring ends. A respondent opined that the declaration of KNP as a tiger reserve while ignoring the local sentiments ‘worsened’ park management-local community relationship. Contrary to the common perception that the HWC is an act of revenge for loss caused to them, it is rooted in ‘historical wounds, cultural misunderstandings, socioeconomic needs, as well as gaps in trust and communication over how to conserve wildlife and ensure the well-being of the people at the same time’ (Madden, 2004, p. 250).

Studies have shown that such HWC and their untimely resolution by the PA management becomes the primary reason for conflict between management and local people. Therefore, conflict resolution mechanisms in PAs primarily focus on seeking to reconcile two objectives – biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development of the people inhabiting the surroundings of the park (Blomley, 2003). Offering compensation to the local people for losses incurred

due to their proximity with PAs have been reasoned as one of the tools to ensure their continued support to conservation (Dixon & Sherman, 1991; Lewis, 1996). On the contrary, the effectiveness of compensation in achieving the desired outcome is also debatable.

There has been a consistent effort of the PA management worldwide in providing the local communities with alternate sources of livelihood to reduce human dependence on forests. It is presumed that this approach would also ensure local community co-operation in conservation efforts. For example, the KNP management has constituted eco-development committees (EDCs) in line with the approach. However, a discussion on this conservation aligned developmental activities requires a detailed discussion which is beyond the scope of this paper.

Does Compensation Mitigate Conflict in Protected Areas?

The President of International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Sir Sridath Ramphal, in his opening address of the fourth World Parks Congress in 2003 remarked that protected areas cannot co-exist with communities that are hostile to them (as cited in Mcneely, 1993). He further stressed that ‘protected area managers must develop a working relationship with the people who live in and around the areas which we value so highly’ (Ramphal, 1992, p. 57). Though assertions have been made that local support is not a necessity for the protection of protected areas (Brockington, 2004; Holmes, 2013), studies have found that direct compensation programmes have a significant relationship with local support and management effectiveness (Bruner et al., 2001; Nyhus et al., 2005).

The Government of India considers payment of ‘ex-gratia’^v or compensation to persons as a primary HWC mitigation tool. It is provided ‘with a view to reduce retaliatory killings’^{vi}. The States and Union Territories receive financial assistance from the Central Government under various schemes such as the ‘Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats’, ‘Project Tiger’ and ‘Project Elephant’ to make payment of ex-gratia relief in respect to damage of crops, and loss of human lives^{vii}. The State governments also pay ex-gratia relief to the victims of HWC as per their state policies along with the assistance received from the Central government. Though the Government of India has a strong mandate for offering compensation in cases of HWC, uniformity is lacking in its implementation across the states of the country (Karanth et al., 2018).

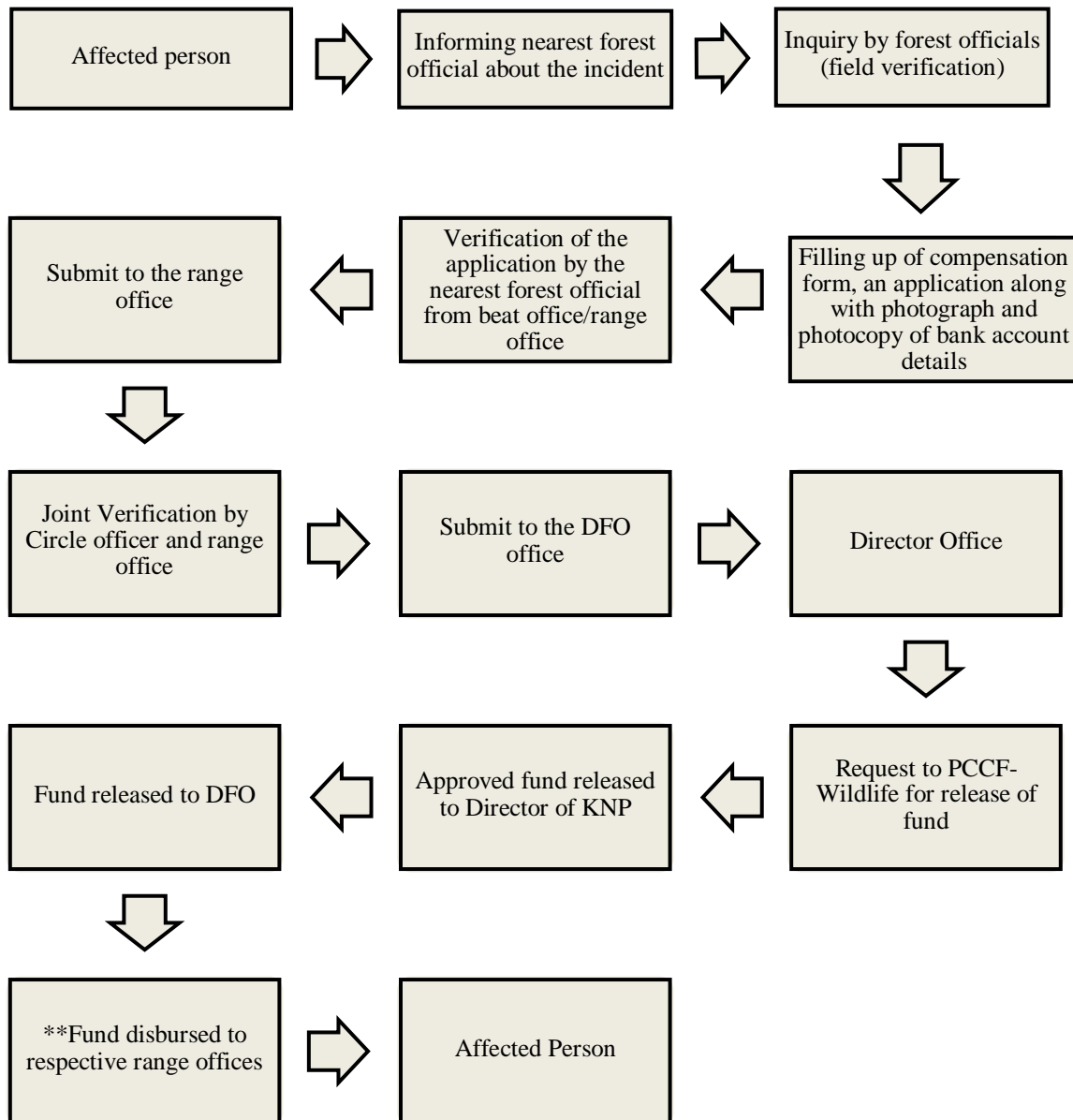
Compensation Process in Kaziranga National Park

The compensation process in KNP involves a lengthy procedure that proves to be a barrier for the local communities. A respondent was of the opinion that compensation process in KNP was a tedious one and it 'wasted' time as it might only materialise if claimants could go to the office at regular intervals to know about the status of the claim. This refers to the transaction costs that weigh significantly on the claimants and often acts as a deterrent, which has also been reflected in a study conducted by Ogra and Badola (2008) in the fringes of Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand. This also indicates that most of the losses faced by the fringe communities are not reported by the victims, which corroborates with the findings of Karanth et al. (2018) in Kanha National Park.

The process of compensation claim in KNP is initiated after an incident is reported to the nearest forest office, known as beat office or range office. The incident might be crop depredation, loss of livestock, injury caused to human by wild animals or death of a human. When such an occurrence is reported, it is verified by officials from the nearest forest office. In cases of depredation of livestock, crops and property damage, once the verification by a forest official is completed, the affected person is required to submit certain documents to the range office consisting of an application, a compensation form filled by the claimant, a photograph of the damage, a photocopy of the claimant's bank passbook^{viii}.

After the submission of the compensation claim to the nearest range office, the documents are sent to the Circle officer. A joint verification by the Circle officer along with a range official is required to ensure the validity of the claim – in case of crop depredation and damage of houses, the ownership of the land is required to be established. It is important to mention here that there is no fixed interval of time for forwarding claims to the Circle office from range office. They are sent only after a substantial number of claims have accumulated. With the final joint verification report, the claims are forwarded to the office of the DFO of KNP which are put up before the Director of KNP. The Director's office forwards the claims to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forest-Wildlife (PCCF-Wildlife) for the release of fund. The fund, after being approved and released, is sent to the Director and the DFO of Kaziranga from where the compensation amounts are disbursed by cheque to the claimants. The entire process of claiming compensation has been represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1



Diagrammatic representation of the compensation process in Kaziranga National Park

Source: Author

**In some instances, the compensation cheques are handed over to the claimants directly from the DFO office instead of sending the fund to the respective range offices.

The complete procedure involves lengthy verification processes in different government offices due to which it becomes time-consuming and cumbersome. The local communities are, however, only aware of one third of the process (until the process of submitting the compensation at the range office). There is no timeframe within which compensation is likely to be received by the claimants. Karanth et al. (2018) found that a similar situation also existed in some other states of India^{ix}. A forest official admitted that it usually took a minimum of six months to a year for the claimants to receive the compensation. The delay in sending the claims immediately from the range offices for processing often leads to the claimants who suffered losses months apart to receive the compensation at the same time. This added to the negative image of the park authority as the local communities perceived the park authority to be biased. It has been found that due to the excessive delay in receiving compensation, the claimants tend to equate it with no compensation. Observations from the field suggest that these lacunae in the compensation process have further strained the volatile relationship between the park management and the local communities, which is similar to the findings of Ogra and Badola (2008).

In case of livestock depredation, when large cattle are killed by tiger, the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) arranges for receipt of compensation by the afflicted people within a short span of time. The amount, same as stipulated by the Government of Assam, acts as an interim relief for the people till they receive the amount from the government. The study revealed that in case of human injury, the cost of treatment is borne by the KNP management according to the doctor's prescription. In case of human death, some part of the total compensation amount, decided by the management, is handed over to the family immediately and the rest of the amount is released later. However, it has been noted that the recurrent damage caused by the wildlife to the crop and the livestock draws more resentment from the local community.

Inadequate Compensation

Apart from the lengthy compensation process, narratives from the field strongly indicate people's dissatisfaction with the compensation amounts. Respondents expressed dismay at the lack of compensation for crop damage caused by wild boars or deers and damage of houses. As a majority of the claimants did not receive compensation, the people lacked the motivation to claim. Consistent with the findings of Ogra (2008; 2009), people attributed their conflict with wildlife

more to their destiny but expect the management to take cognizance of their situation. A farmer who lost his cows to tigers for two consecutive years did not claim compensation because he was 'certain of not receiving it'. He added,

We understand the forest department has not instigated the tigers to attack or kill our cows...it is our destiny because we stay here. If people get the compensation against the loss, we would have thought positive about the department. (Interview taken on 30.09.2017)

The Government of Assam fixed compensation for crop damage and livestock depredation (cows and bullocks only) at Rs. 7500 and Rs. 3750 respectively^x. Claimants confirmed of having received amounts in the range of Rs. 1000-1200 only for crop damage which depended on the assessment of a forest officer. Regarding the compensation amount for cow or bullock, a comparison with the market price of cattle showed an enormous gap. In an interview with a respondent it was said that the compensation policy 'is not designed to do justice' to the people and that it is 'removed from reality'^{xi}. They perceived that corruption in the department led to irregularity in compensation process and nominal amounts being disbursed as compensation. The local community exhibited lack of trust upon the park management.

The issue of insufficient and unavailability of timely compensation often directs the angst of the people from animals to the park management. It is well amplified in an incident narrated by a forest official in which a family whose bullock was killed by a tiger held two forest guards captive for a brief period of time. The guards had arrived at the spot to verify the killing of the cattle. An NGO personnel revealed that the local communities are highly dissatisfied with the inadequate compensation. As a case in point, he reveals about such an incident where a woman whose goat was killed had said, 'Why shouldn't I help the poachers then?' Though such extreme cases are rare, they give an understanding about the angst of the people against park management. The responses from the officials of the park management, to some extent, displayed an understanding of the hardship of the local community. Other responses included apathy and a feeling of helplessness about the situation of local communities regarding the compensation process. A forest official reflected on the issue of compensation saying,

The amount they receive as compensation against their loss is not sufficient and it also takes a lot of time for the compensation to reach them. If a tiger kills the cattle when it is time for the farmer to till the land, what will he do? The situation is unmanageable.
(Interview conducted on 01.05.2018)

Conclusion

An analysis of the compensation policy in the context of KNP sheds light on the discord in the park management-local community relationship. A compensation policy can be effective when it is characterised by fairness, quick disbursement of amount, involves scope for greater involvement by people to increase their agricultural productivity amongst others (Watve et al., 2016). Continuous engagement by the park management with the fringe communities under state direction to monitor the effectiveness of the schemes is required, along with reducing the HWC through simple damage prevention interventions (like improving crop safeguarding techniques, modified sheds for livestock, etc.) (Karanth et al., 2018).

It has been seen that the process of disbursing compensation to the claimants is delayed mostly because it depends on the approval and release of fund from the state level authority. As HWC adds to the park management conflict making the fringe areas around PAs sensitive, a designated fund amount can be released to the park authority from the state to compensate the victims at regular intervals. This can help in diminishing the feeling of loss of the fringe communities to some extent.

Another important fact associated with the compensation process that has emerged is the assessment made with respect to the crop depredation caused by the wildlife. As there is no scientific process of assessing the damage, the compensation hardly addresses the losses of the people. Therefore, a mechanism for assessment of damage can be put in place that might be able to counter the inadequacy of compensation amounts. The state, therefore, within its ambit, needs to do more in terms of designing a compensation policy and process that can be effective in addressing the various shortcomings and inadequacies of the present policy.

Notes:

ⁱ During the colonial times, when it came under legal protection, the peasants, grazer community and tea planters protested against its reservation. Later with stricter laws, with addition and proposed addition of more areas to the park in the 1980s and 90s, notification of No Development Zone, declaration of tiger reserve, notification of Eco-sensitive zone etc, the conflicts became regular feature.

ⁱⁱ People resort to use of fire torches and firecrackers, heavy beating of drums and creating loud noises causing distress to the animals.

ⁱⁱⁱ Shahabuddin (2019) writes about the poaching of the last remaining tigers in Sariska that happened with the connivance of the resident Gujjar villages. [Shahabuddin, G. (2019). The tiger's last stand: challenges for protected area management in Sariska. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 54(20), 15-18]

^{iv} Interview conducted on May 1, 2018 in fringe village of KNP.

^v The term ex-gratia is used in all government notifications and correspondences to denote the compensation.

^{vi} Lok Sabha, Starred Question No *62 answered on 07.02.2017 by Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Question asked by Shrimati P.K. Sreemathi Teacher.

^{vii} Starred Question No *328 answered on 16.12.2014 by Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Environment, Forest and Climate Change. Question asked by Tanwar Shri Kanwar Singh.

^{viii} The compensation money is transferred into the bank account of the claimant as cash transactions have been discontinued.

^{ix} The study found that there was no stipulated timeframe for the receipt of the compensation in case of crop and property loss in the states of Assam, Andhra Pradesh, Jharkhand, Kerela, Mizoram, Sikkim, Telengana, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. In addition to these states, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Punjab and Rajasthan did not have specified timeframe for release of compensation for livestock depredation. In case of human injury, Jammu & Kashmir is an addition.

^x The Government of Assam declared a revised ex-gratia package for victims of human-wildlife conflict vide Govt. Notification No FRE.-3/2017/31 dated 6th March/2017. It fixed the amount for crop damage at a maximum of Rs. 7500 and for livestock depredation that consisted of killing of large cattle like cow, bullock etc. at Rs. 3750.

^{xi} Interview conducted on May 1, 2018 in fringe village of KNP.

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Research in Progress: Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation: A Study of the Naths of West Bengal and Assam

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Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation: A Study of the Naths of West Bengal and Assamⁱ

--- Kunal Debnath

Abstract

The Nath *sampradaya* (community), one of the ancient communities in India, comprises of two groups – the ascetics Yogis and the householders. The householders later formed an endogamous caste known as Yogi or Jogi in West Bengal and Assam and they commonly use their surname ‘Nath’ or ‘Debnath’. The Naths of these two states believe that they are the descendants of a priestly community, but, later degraded by the then king of medieval Bengal. The Naths have been showing their resistance against the brahmanical society since the late 20th century CE and projecting themselves as the Rudraja Brahmana having every right to be a priest. Inclusion of this caste in the OBC list led to an intra-community identity conflict and contention over the reservation. The ‘radical’ Naths want to forsake the OBC status, whereas the ‘pragmatic’ Naths want to retain the OBC status.

Key words: Caste association, Nath sampradaya, OBC, Rudraja Brahmana, Yogi

Introduction

The Nath sampradaya has been an age-old community of the Indian subcontinent. The householder Naths of West Bengal and Assam formed an endogamous caste known as Yogi or Jogiⁱⁱ. The Bengali householder Naths commonly use their surname ‘Nath’ or ‘Debnath’ indicating the direct lineage of Lord Siva who is regarded as the *adinatha*. Exclusion of this caste from the mainstream Bengal society occurred long back in the then medieval Bengal. Followers of this caste have undergone great hardships over the centuries. Even now some of the Naths ‘are highly educated, but in general, level of literacy is low’ (Chowdhury, 2008, p. 554). Owing to their socio-economic and educational backwardness, they are declared as Other Backward Class (OBC)ⁱⁱⁱ by the central government and the respective state governments of West Bengal and Assam.

However, a section of the Naths have been showing strong resistance, since mid of the 19th century CE, against the manner they are being looked down upon by other castes, especially by the *brahmanas*. They often cite some legends as well as literary works where their glorious past has been recorded as proof of their claim. It is widely believed by the Bengali Naths of these states that once the Yogis of Bengal were engaged in priesthood (Mallik, 1946; N.C. Nath, 1995; R.G. Nath, 2001; H. Nath, 2014; Nath Majumder, 2018). The Jogis of Rangpur (now in Bangladesh) once claimed themselves as the descendants of the priest of King Gopi Chandra^{iv} (Wise, 1883; Mallik, 1946), but ‘the recent status of this community in contemporary social structure is really thought provoking and agonising too’ (Ghosh, 2011, p. 30). Theologically the Naths are followers of the Natha *panth* (cult) which is philosophically against the institution of caste (Ray, 2013). But ‘in Bengal, the Natha cult is practically dead’ (Sen, 1956, p. 280). Today, however, the householder Naths is quite distinct from that of the ascetic branch. The former branch maintains an endogamous caste framework called Yogi or Jogi, but the latter is beyond the *varna* system since the religious practices they observe do not conform to the Puranic version of Hinduism. Just a few decades ago, a large number of the householder Naths were engaged in weaving and cultivation. A small number of the Naths were engaged in small businesses, public or private sector offices, and in educational institutions. The OBC status indicates the community’s socio-economic and educational backwardness, but the attitude towards the OBC reservation is ‘surprisingly contested’ among the Naths in both West Bengal and Assam.

This paper will touch upon the history and identity of the Bangali Naths. The discussion on history and identity of the Bangali Naths is central because contentions over the reservation are consequences of the dichotomous nature of the Nath identity among the Naths themselves, which has largely been constituted by their past history. This paper will also try to trace the probable reasons that caused degradation of this community in the local caste hierarchy and the social resistance of the Naths against the age-old Hindu caste system. At the end of this paper, the ideological as well as action oriented contentions among the Naths over the OBC reservation will be dealt with.

Methodology

The present work is basically qualitative in nature. Historical analysis has been applied to analyse the historical specificity. In addition, ethnographic method has

been applied to understand the nuances and the discursive logic of the Nath. A questionnaire was prepared to collect data from the field. Information has also been collected from the interviews with some respondents and prominent activists of the Nath community. Snowball sampling has been employed as the data collection technique. The interpretations in this paper have been carried out through discourse analysis.

A Brief History of the Bengali Nath

There is no unanimous opinion on the origin of the Nath tradition in Bengal. Sen argues that the Yogic tradition is supposed to have existed in Bengal prior to the Aryan colonization (Sen, 1352 BS, p. 19). Ghosh has shown that Nathism was probably initiated and developed first in Bengal during 9th-13th centuries CE (Ghosh, 1950, p. 522). It is also held that Nathism was developed in Bengal approximately in the 3rd century CE (Nath, 2014) or in the 10th century CE (Dasgupta, 1969; Ghosh, 2011). Chakraborty (2014) argues that the Nath tradition, along with the Buddhist tradition, had a glorious history in Bengal during the Pala dynasty (mid-8th to mid-12th centuries CE). But Ghosh (1950) argues that the Nath tradition in Bengal can be traced back prior to the Pala dynasty and probably during the Gupta dynasty (mid-to-late 3rd to mid-5th centuries CE).

The Nath sampradaya comprises of two groups – ascetics and householders. Nath ascetic order has its first historical initiation made by Guru Matsyendranatha (probably lived in the 8th or 9th century CE) or Minanath^v, and Guru Goraksanatha (probably lived in the 11th or 12th century CE)^{vi}, a disciple of Matsyendranatha. Other Nathgurus were Cauranginatha, Jalandhari-pa or Hadi-pa, Bhartriharinatha or Bhartrharinatha. Yogi means the people who practiced yoga as a part of their daily ceremonies (Mallik, 1946; Dasgupta, 1969; Ghosh, 2011). The path of seeking *mokhsa* (salvation) in the Nath tradition is *kaya sadhana* (culture of the body) through the process of *hatha-yoga*. The ascetic Nath is the follower of Saivism and have several sects like Kanfat, Aoughar, Matysendri, Bhartrihari or Bhartrhari, Kanipa, etc. (Dutta, 1882, pp. 114-141). ‘Householder Nath’, Mallinson argues, ‘greatly outnumber ascetics and consist of a broad variety of mainly endogamous castes’, [but the householder Nath see] ‘themselves as descendants of Nath ascetics who broke their vows of celibacy and settled down as householders’ (Mallinson, 2011, pp. 409-410). They formed a caste known as Yogi or Jogi (Risley, 1892; Sen, 1956; Waligora, 2004), but ‘the origin of the

caste is extremely obscure' (Risley, 1892, p. 355), and the origin has still been a mystery and not unveiled properly (Dasgupta, 1969). The Yogis are often called as 'Jugi'. But Jugi is either a 'vernacular derivative' (Gold, 1993, p. 35) of Yogi or Jogi, or 'a term of contempt' (Waligora, 2004, p. 158). Besides after deviation from the original Natha cult, which was beyond the caste framework, some of the householder Nathas assert to be included in the brahmanical caste framework and claim themselves as Rudraja Brahmana^{vii} (Debnath Bhattacharyya, 1372 BS; Dasgupta, 1969; Nath, 1995). They belong to *Siva gotra* (Siva lineage) and they are the followers of Saivism (Mallik, 1946; Dasgupta, 1996; Nath Majumder, 2018). According to *Vallala-charita*^{viii} (Kaviratna, 1889), though it is mythological and hence there is no such concrete historical evidence, but it is widely believed by the Nathas that the Yogis originated from Rudra, another form of Lord Siva, so they are *rudraja*.

Some scholars argued that the Nath sampradaya had been in close proximity to Buddhism because of the many similarities between the two traditions (Sensarma, 2015). Ghosh identifies Nathism as a syncretism of the Saiva Tantrism, Buddhism, and the cult of Dharma Thakur (Ghosh, 1950, p. 522). Mallik, however, opined that despite many similarities between the Buddhist Siddhas and Nath Siddhas, the latter were not the Buddhists as such, rather they were the followers of Saivism (Mallik, as cited in Sensarma, 2015, p. 353).

Degradation of the Nathas in Bengal and their Resistance

Popular history says that during the reign of Vallalasena (a king of Bengal, who reigned from 1158 to 1179 CE), the Nath sampradaya was degraded and marginalised from the mainstream (Kaviratna, 1889; Nath, 2014; Nath Majumder, 2018). According to the popular oral history^{ix}, the Nathas were confronted by the *kanyakubja brahmana* (Brahmin of Kanouj) migrated from North India with the patronage of *Adisura*^x. Later they secured the favour of Vallalasena. Though the then *rajgurus* of Vallalasena were the Nathas (Nath, 2014; Nath Majumder, 2018), the position of the Nathas were downgraded due to the *kaulinya-pratha* (Kulinism) or the caste rules introduced by Vallalasena^{xi}. Description of castaway of the Nathas has been narrated in *Vallala-charita* (Kaviratna, 1889). *Vallala-charita* shows us how the state power was exercised for pushing a community down to the caste hierarchy. Though there has been a dubiety in the authenticity of *Vallala-charita*'s assertion that the degradation of the Yogi caste has been annexed to it later or not, but nearly similar incident might be traced out in the

statement of the archaeologist Hamilton-Buchanan. He wrote ‘...degradation [of the Yogis] may also have been due to the anathema of the ruling prince. Whose displeasure the leaders of the caste incurred; that is quite probable’ (as cited in Ghosh, 2011, p. 30). In the above-mentioned quote, the phrase ‘anathema of the ruling prince’ indicates that the exclusion of the Naths occurred due to the displeasure of the then ruling prince. It is also possible that Vallalasaena put effort to the resurgence of the *smarta* (according to *Smriti* literatures) tradition of Bengal that had been facing some difficulties since the Pala dynasty (Sensarma, 2015). Initiation of *kaulinya-pratha*, rejection of various *Puranas* that were supposed to have been affected by the Tantric rituals, and degradation of the Naths were part of that effort taken by Vallalasaena. Waligora indicates that the Naths are followers of non-brahmanical cult and they have no Brahmanas to minister their priestly works (Waligora, 2004, p. 158). For that reason, ‘this social group is generally looked down upon by brahmins’. Ray (2013) also acknowledges that the Natha cult and its community were marginalised by the brahmanical Tantric Saktism. There were several socio-political reasons which placed this community in a comparatively lower stratum of the brahmanical society.

After such marginalisation, the Naths had undergone several socio-economic crises as a corollary. Some of them had to engage themselves in weaving and cultivation. But during the colonial period, the Naths, who previously took the occupation of weaving particularly in Eastern Bengal, had undergone hardships caused by de-industrialisation of indigenous handloom sector. This sector faced further challenges from the competition of English piece-goods. Later the Naths engaged themselves in agriculture, goldsmith’s work, lime-burning, and some low grade of government services (Wise, 1883, p. 290; Risley, 1892, p. 355).

Available records indicate that since the mid-19th century CE, they started resistance against the caste hierarchy and it was contemporary to the Namasudra movement^{xii} in Bengal. Mukerji (1910) has shown that the Yogis did not acknowledge the superiority of the Brahmanas, and a section of the Namasudras followed the example of the Yogis. Krishna Chandra Nath Dalal of Howrah took the first initiative to earn a respectful position for the Naths in Bengal society in 1873 CE. At the same time Manimohan Nath of Calcutta (now Kolkata) also started elevating the community’s status (Nath, 2017). Later Bharat Chandra Nath of Noakhali (now in Bangladesh), Radhagobinda Nath of Comilla (now in Bangladesh), Suresh Chandra Nath Majumder, and Rajmohan Nath of Lala

(Assam) tried to consolidate the resistance against the existing hierarchy by unifying the hitherto scattered Nathas. The resistance had two strategies, first, at the intellectual level such as publication of books and journals^{xiii} for propagating and promoting ‘caste consciousness’; second, at practical level such as inculcating brahmana *samaskara* (rituals) among the Nathas, particularly by initiation of *upavita* (sacred threads), and making of *purahita* (priests) within the community through proper training. The first *upanayana* samaskara (sacred threads initiation ceremony) took place in 1284 BS or 1878 CE (Nath & Nath, 1985, pp. 24-27).

The Yogis have probably been the first caste to claim the brahmanic status in Bengal. After formation of several caste associations^{xiv} by the Nathas, the resistance had also been shifted from individual level to the collective level. The roles of caste associations and the leaders are crucially important to organise a movement – social or political – in three senses. First, in order to build up an ideological basis of the movement, their roles are of paramount importance. Second, they are pivotal in inculcating caste consciousness. Third, they are crucial in mobilising the common caste members. For the Nathas, however, the relations among these associations are hardly cooperative, rather sometimes are antagonistic. The claims for OBC status have been one of the many issues of disagreement.

Radical-Pragmatic Debate over Reservation

Assam-Banga Yogi-Sammilani (ABYS) was constituted to counter the existing brahmanical hegemony in Bengali society through inculcating ‘caste consciousness’ and ‘mobilising’ the Nathas (Nath & Nath, 1985), creating a counter hegemony by the elite and intellectual sections of the Nath sampradaya. But ideological conflicts on two grounds led to a split in ABYS in 1979 and a new association, the Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, renamed later on as Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani (NBRBS) was formed (Debnath, 2009). The first ideological issue was centered on the question of the identity of the Nathas – whether they are close to the Yogis or Brahmanas; and another was what should be the stand of the Nathas on the question of OBC reservation. Some members, who tended to assert the Brahmana status as against their inclusion in the OBC list, joined Rudraja Brahman Sammilani in 1979. While ABYS officially promotes their ‘Yogi’ identity beyond the caste framework, NBRBS asserts the ‘Brahmana’ status within the caste framework (Debnath, 2009), and the latter regularly holds training camps for the priests^{xv}. The NBRBS, thus, on principle

does not accept the OBC status^{xvi}. Although at the early phases ABYS claimed that the Yogis fall under brahmana varna (Nath & Nath, 1985, p. 31) and demanded their status at par, or sometimes more prestigious position than that, now it prefers to identify the Nathas more as Yogis, than as Brahmanas^{xvii}. This ideological shift of ABYS creates a difficulty in conforming to the authenticity of the brahmanic claim of the Nathas.

In Assam some of the Nath associations, other than ABYS and NBRBS, have become prominent. ABYS, and, until recently, NBRBS hardly had any such influence. The pragmatic Nathas of Assam, who have been or likely to be benefitted from reservation do not accept the views of NBRBS. Recently the NBRBS, however, has been able to retain some of the Nathas in their association by promoting their pro-brahmanic identity. On August 17 and 18, 2019 four persons from this community of Assam, one from Barpeta and three from Cachar, participated in a priest training camp organised by NBRBS at its head quarter in Kolkata. Three out of these four persons have their OBC certificates, but now they speak against the OBC reservation because for them this status is derogatory.

Though Cachar Yogi Sammelani (CYS) does not convey any official stand on the OBC question, some of their members think that there is no conflict between Yogi status and OBC status. Asom Pradeshik Yogi Sanmilani (APYS) asserts that the Nath identity is based simultaneously on brahmanic legacy and OBC status. Contrarily, Barak Upotyaka Nath-Yogi Rudraja Brahman Sammilani (BUNYRBS) has been working in Assam in quite similar manner to NBRBS and are putting emphasis on inculcating Brahmana and upanayana samaskara, producing Nath priests, etc. They want to rescue the Nathas from the OBC 'trap' (Barak Upotyaka Nath-Yogi Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, 2016). In Assam, some of the Nathas voice their objections against the OBC status and they assert their identity as Rudraja Brahmana^{xviii}. During the field work, one school teacher had taken a stand against the OBC status of the Nathas, although all members of his family have been facilitated by OBC certificates^{xix}.

The attitude centred on the OBC status is 'surprisingly contested' among the Nathas in both the states. Unlike a section of the Nathas in West Bengal and Assam who do not support the OBC status for the Nathas, most of the Nathas of both the states support OBC reservation for getting special privileges in education and government services. Simultaneously the supporters of reservation wear sacred threads as a symbol of upper caste identity. They believe that OBC is merely

related to one's economic status and has nothing to do with caste position. The OBC status is likely to be changed as one reaches what is known as 'the creamy layer'. ABYS holds the similar opinion on this issue^{xx}. While sacred threads are the signs of their high social caste status and past pride, the OBC status is indicative of their economic and educational backwardness^{xxi}. They appeared to be pragmatic in terms of their caste and class identity. They do not consider OBC as derogatory in existing caste framework, but it is, rather, a means of escalating in higher class stratum through upward mobility.

The Yogi-Rudraja dichotomy is very prominent here. Thus, contemporary situation opens a cleavage between the 'radical' Naths who want to forsake the OBC status, and the 'pragmatic' Naths who want to retain the OBC status. It can be looked at as a 'radical-pragmatic debate'. In this debate, the NBRBS and BUNYRBS play the role of the 'radicals', whereas the ABYS, APYS and CYS appear as 'pragmatic' who accept the OBC status as a means of well-being of the community. NBRBS and BUNYRBS believe that their OBC status is derogatory and it is a conspiracy of the upper caste elites and also the government to pull down the Naths from higher strata to lower, from Brahmana to OBC^{xxii}. NBRBS and BUNYRBS are radicals in two senses. First, they are against any kind of reservation for the Naths that challenges their Brahmanic claims. Second, they always intend to alter their social position from lower to the *highest* stratum through internal reformations like accepting the brahmana samaskara (brahmin rituals). Giving up the OBC status is their primary agenda, despite knowing that the OBC reservation can bring well-being for the community, and, at the same time, this stand may diminish their popularity relating to the inter-associational politics. On the other hand, the ABYS, APYS and CYS are pragmatics because they know that OBC reservation can help them to realise upward mobility. It is quite true that most of the aspirant Naths are not keen to give up their OBC reservation due to various government facilities. The pragmatics know that it would be productive for their associations if their ideology has been fitted to be acceptable to the common Naths, since there is an inter-associational politics concerning which one among these associations is the real representative of the Naths.

Conclusion

Thus, the Naths bear an ambiguous identity. They are supposed to be considered as 'high caste but are placed in the Sudra varna by others' (Chowdhury, 2008, p.

551). Nevertheless, the OBC status of this community provides an opportunity from economic and educational points of view. It is also an opportunity to be empowered politically using reservation in the local bodies. The ‘pragmatic’ Nath opine that OBC reservation can ensure the well-being of the Nath, but the social status of the Nath is to be restored in society. The ‘radicals’ always highlight how the Nath priests have been recognised by some other castes including the Brahmanas^{xxiii} and change in this regard is only possible by taking a pro-brahmanic stance.

Notes:

ⁱ Here I used Assam not in its entirety, but my study is geographically limited to its three southern districts of Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj, commonly known as the Barak Valley, that are culturally and linguistically dominated by the Bengalis.

ⁱⁱ In this paper, I have used the word Nath, Yogi, and Jogi interchangeably.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reservation of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) was introduced by the V. P. Singh government in 1990 as per recommendation of the Mandal Commission, named after its Chairman B. P. Mandal, which was constituted in 1978 and report submitted in 1979. Reservation of OBCs includes new beneficiaries from different religious communities other than Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Three criteria, such as social, economic, and educational backwardness, were taken into consideration for awarding OBC reservation. Many economically well-off castes were included, as the indicators of social backwardness had been given three times more weightage than those of economic and education backwardness. Many scholars argue that the reservation of OBCs was a politically driven state policy to ‘consolidate their votes’. See Jodhka (2011); Mahajan (2013).

^{iv} For the legend of King Gopicandra, see Grierson (1878). This legend is also popular in Rajasthan, see Gold (1993).

^v It is held that Matsyendranatha, Minanatha and Lui-pa were the same person, see Mallik (1946); Ray (2013, p. 492).

^{vi} For a detail research on Goraksanatha, see Briggs (1938).

^{vii} During the field study, I found that a large section of the Nath call themselves as rudraja brahmana both in West Bengal and Assam. A few Nath were also found who like to identify themselves as Yogi, not as brahmana, but who held that the Yogis are supposed to be placed above the brahmanas.

^{viii} Two versions of Vallala-charita are available, one has been edited by Kaviratna (1889) but was originally written jointly by Gopalbhatta in around 1300 CE and Anandabhatta in around 1500 CE. Another version has been edited by Sastri (1901) but was originally written by Anandabhatta in 1509-10 CE. It is still unsettled which one is the authentic version. The incident of Yogis has been depicted in Kaviratna (1889), but not in Sastri (1901). Sastri (1901, p. v) pronounced the Kaviratna’s edition to be ‘spurious and unreliable’, on the other hand, Sastri’s edition has been described by Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyay as a fake. See Ray (2013). Ray (2013, p. 163), however, argues ‘that there is not much cause to regard either work as a fake’.

^{ix} This is a popular oral history of the Nath in Assam, West Bengal, Tripura and Bangladesh.

^x Adisura was a king of Bengal, whose name is associated with the genealogical texts or *kulajis* of the brahmanas in Bengal. He brought five Vedic brahmanas from Kanauj to rule Bengal under brahmanical hegemony. However, the legends of Adisura are doubtful as there is no such concrete historical evidence. See Chakrabarti (2018).

^{xi} Some scholars opine that Vallalasa did not initiate kulinism, rather it existed since prior to the Senadynasty. See Sensarma (2015). It is also argued that kulinism has been inherently linked with Vallalasa since centuries. So it cannot be said that this popular history has been totally misleading. See Mitra (2000/1914).

^{xii} A prominent caste of Bengal and often synonymous with the Matuas, now under Scheduled Caste category, which has been showing a strong resistance against brahmanical caste system in Bengal since 1870s. For details, see Bandyopadhyay (1997).

^{xiii} Publication includes *Yogi Samaskar-Byabastha* (1876) by Krishna Ch. Nath Dalal; *Yogi Jatir Sankhipta Itihas* (1277-1293 BS) by Padma Chandra Nath; *The Yogis of Bengal* (1909) by Radhagobinda Nath; *Manimohan-Jibane* (Autobiography) (written in 1911, and published in 1922) by Manimohan Nath; *Rajguru Yogi Bangsha* (1923) by Suresh Ch. Nath Majumder; *Bangiyo Nath-Yogi Tattva* (1958) by Rajmohan Nath; and *Yogisakha* (since 1904 to present), later it became the official journal of Assam-BangaYogi-Sammilani in 1918.

^{xiv} Associations are Yogi Hitaishini Sabha (1901), later it became Assam-BangaYogi-Sammilani (1910); Adinath Siksha Bhandar (1908); Asom Pradesik Yogi Sanmilani (1919); Cachar Yogi Sammilani (1922); Paschim Banga Rudraja Brahman Sammilani (1949), renamed as Rudraja Brahman Sammilani in 1979, and again renamed as Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani in 2000.

^{xv} I witnessed one such priest training camp organised by NBRBS on 18 August, 2019 at the head quarter of Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, Kolkata.

^{xvi} Interview with Upendra Kumar Debnath was held on 18 August, 2019 at the head quarter of Nikhil Bharat Rudraja Brahman Sammilani, Kolkata.

^{xvii} Interview with Tapas Kumar Nath was held on 10 November, 2019 at Nimta, West Bengal. He says that the Yogis are not brahmana, but they are superior to the brahmana, so they must use sacred threads.

^{xviii} Such as Bijoy Kr. Nath of Hailakandi; Jyotirmoy Nath, Bablu Nath, Ankit Nath and Sudip Nath Sastri of Karimganj; Bijan Debnath, Dibakar Nath and Gitesh Nath of Silchar, Cachar.

^{xix} Dibyajyoti Nath is a school teacher. Interview was held on 24 June, 2019 at Rangpur Part-I, Katlicherra, Hailakandi, Assam.

^{xx} Interview with Tapas Kr. Nath was held on 10 November, 2019 at Nimta, West Bengal. ABYS has not been against the OBC status if it brings community's well-being. Tapas Kr. Nath says that OBC denotes backward classes not the castes.

^{xxi} During field work in West Bengal and Assam, I found that 80 out 120 of the Nath's support this statement.

^{xxii} Interview with Barun Nath, Joint Secretary of NBRBS, was held on 29 April, 2018 at Howrah, West Bengal, and with Jyotirmoy Nath, President of BUNYRBS, was held on 22 December, 2019 at Karimganj, Assam.

^{xxiii} I have met some Nath priests who are often called for priestly work in the brahmana families such as Dhiren Debnath, Kolkata; Mithun Debnath, Nadia, W.B.; Monomangal Nath Sastri and Dibakar Nath, Silchar, Assam; Bablu Nath and Sudip Nath Sastri, Karimganj, Assam.

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Research in Progress: Cross-Cultural Understanding of Witchcraft Accusations

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Cross-Cultural Understanding of Witchcraft Accusations

--- Draghima Basumatary

Abstract

The paper explores the genealogy of witchcraft accusations which emerged centuries ago in countries like Europe, and in contemporary times in developing countries such as India and Africa. By tracing the genealogy, the paper highlights that witchcraft accusations are part of modernity. Due to different contexts, occurrence and causes behind every witchcraft accusation in communities are different. The aim of this paper is to examine witchcraft accusations beyond the realm of superstitions and how it is used as tool to ostracise a person in the community. It also attempts to highlight that witchcraft accusations reveal rising socio-economic inequality in the so called tribal egalitarian societies. In this context, the paper begins discussion on the European witch craze and witchcraft accusations in Africa and India in contemporary times, and lastly focuses on the analysis of witchcraft accusations among the tribal communities considering the increasing number of witch-hunting cases being reported in Assam.

Key words: Witchcraft, Witchcraft accusations, Witch-hunting, Tribal

Introduction

Beliefs in spirits and witches have been present since time immemorial in many communities across the world. It is believed that misfortune such as sickness, death, failure of crops and so on could be brought to the community by the spirits and witches. To deal with the misfortune, the angry spirits are appeased by performing rituals, but in case of witchcraft performed by the witch, ritual appeasement is not viable. It is believed that the witch brings harm through rituals, spells and medicines and is supposed to be done by using the victim's hair, nails, clothes (Daimari, 2012). In a community, whenever a crisis occurs, witchcraft is suspected, and accusations are directed against a person as the witch. According to Chaudhuri (2013), accusations are based on shared assumptions such as quarrelsome, physical traits such as hunch back and so on, and most of the times women are more often accused than men as the witch. It is the fear of the

witch's power to harm others using witchcraft which lead people to identify a person as the witch, punish or even kill the witch. In this context, witchcraft accusations have led to manifestations of witch-hunting. The manifestations of witch-hunt from witchcraft accusations have been found to be present across cultures during different time span, such as during the European Witch Craze. In the present times, witchcraft accusations are prevalent in Africa and India. However, not all witchcraft accusations lead to extreme manifestation of witch-hunting. It is in this context that witchcraft accusation occurring in different societies during different time periods raises a lot of questions which needs to be engaged with and may throw light in understanding witchcraft accusations occurring in many parts of Assam in the Northeastern region of India.

Witchcraft Accusations across Cultures

The paper attempts to historicise the witchcraft accusations across cultures from the past to the modern times. It begins with the anthropological study on witchcraft, as Evans-Pritchard (1976) says that witchcraft is not irrational to Azande as they look for witchcraft as the rational explanation to justify the misfortunes in their lives. It plays an important role in everyday activities like fishing, agriculture, etc. He discusses the significance of witchcraft among the Azande to settle suspicions between members of the society, thereby releasing tensions to regulate the smooth functioning of society.

In another context, in the village of Bisipara, Orissa, India, due to lack of medical facilities, any sudden illness or death is suspected to be the work of an angry spirit or witchcraft. However, a closer look at the events of the witch-hunt case studied by F. G. Bailey (1997) reflects the exercise of power on the marginalised individual to maintain caste hegemony in the village. By accusing Tuta, a washer man, for keeping a harmful *Devata*¹ in his house, the study shows that by forcing him to pay fines for crime which he did not commit, witch-hunt served as a reminder that the social order has to be maintained by the members of the village (ibid.). However, Alan Macfarlane's [1999 (1970)] study of the legal records on witch trials of Essex, England between 1560 and 1680, reveals the breakdown of the communal bond between people which was present during the medieval period. Therefore, 'witchcraft prosecutions may be seen as a means of effecting a deep social change; a change from a 'neighbourly', highly integrated and mutually interdependent village society, to a more individualistic one' (ibid., p. 197).

Witch-hunt also took place in societies which went through large scale socio-economic, religious and political changes, such as the European Witch Craze from 14th to 17th century where many women were persecuted as witches. Using the idea of Thomas J. Schoneman (1975), who contends that witch-hunt reflects the social change and is also an agent of socio-cultural change, one can say that European witch-hunting signified a period of crisis (Muchembled, 2002). The witch craze period was not just confined to religious persecutions of women, rather it was a period of anomie in Europe (Ben-Yehuda, 1980) and witch craze was created due to a crisis in the society (Trevor-Roper, 1967). According to Ben-Yehuda (1980), witch-hunting in Europe occurred due to the convergence of many factors like anomie, powerlessness, climate, plague, cholera, demographic changes, etc. In Europe, the feudal, hierarchical order legitimised by the Church, which had defined the moral boundaries, began to crumble. This order was threatened by rapid changes in society including economic changes which witnessed shift from production to cash economy. These changes increased witchcraft accusations as people could not comprehend the rapid changes which the societies were facing. The European society experienced crisis which finally ended in the 17th century.

Unlike Europe which witnessed European witch craze for a time period, in many regions of the world, especially in developing countries such as Africa and India, witchcraft accusations continue to the modern times. Witchcraft accusations are contextual as witch-hunting has manifested differently across cultures. Edward Miguel (2005) studied the poor rural areas of western Tanzania who are dependent on rain-fed agriculture. Extreme weather conditions lead to droughts or floods affecting the agricultural output. The Sukuma, an ethnic group of Tanzania, believe that extreme rainfall and epidemics are controlled by witches and only their killings can eliminate the causes of suffering of all the households. Therefore, a lot of witch-killings occurred during 1960s and 70s in Tanzania as the economic conditions became the driving force behind beliefs in witch-hunts.

Witchcraft accusations arose due to different reasons in India too. Shashank Sinha (2006) suggests that low literacy, economic backwardness and belief in witches also lead to the internalisation of the idea of witchcraft. Sinha says that 'colonialism and capitalism became unconscious precipitants in witch-hunts in India' (ibid., p. 145). The uncertainties brought by capitalism in colonial Chotanagpur brought pressure on the tribal economy. The incoming of market relations, land and forests legislations and commercial exploitation of forests lead

to deforestation, famines, etc. Capitalism led to unequal relations in production and distribution thereby weakening the traditional institutions. In such a scenario when a community undergoes huge changes, the fear and belief in witches in turn becomes instrumental in witch-hunts.

Therefore, in modern times, as Federici (2008) argues, witch-hunting is not just a historical phenomenon; and 'is not bound to a specific historic time. It has taken a life of its own, so that the same mechanisms can be applied to different societies whenever there are people in them that have to be ostracised and dehumanised' (ibid., p. 33). For instance, witchcraft accusations can be understood in the context of workers alienation and exploitation. Soma Chaudhuri (2013) studied witch-hunts in the tea plantations of Jalpaiguri area of North Bengal and viewed witch-hunts among the adivasisⁱⁱ, a migrant tribal community, as 'the products of alienation experienced by the workers within a capitalist mode of production' (ibid., p. 115). She draws a Marxist interpretation connecting witch, worker's alienation and plantation politics, and argues that witch-hunts represent a class struggle as devil represents misery. She situates witch-hunts within the context of gender, class, politics, wage struggles and epidemics which are instrumental in occurrence of witch-hunts among migrant adivasi workers (ibid.).

Witch-hunts can be understood in the context of workers alienation in tea plantations as they have no chance of social mobility. They are forced to work in coercive environment for survival and yet cannot afford to lose the work as new recruitments are plenty. The strained relationship due to class hierarchies and conflict between the management and workers in the tea plantation is visible in their continuous exploitation. In such an oppressed environment, they believe in witchcraft accusations which lead to witch-hunts to deal with stress, insecurity of wages and unemployment. As they are trapped in a coerced atmosphere, adivasis turn to the enemy within – the *dain*ⁱⁱⁱ. In their world of beliefs, the idea of the witch always existed. So, it was natural to blame their misfortunes onto a person as the witch. By blaming a person as the witch, the migrants are taking control over their lives. They eliminate the person accused as the witch, as they believe the witch is the only obstacle in their path to their happiness. 'It is out of feeling helplessness, in a culture of oppression and tyranny that witch hunts emerge as a normalcy or balancing factor in stressful times' (ibid., p. 130).

Peter Geschiere (1997) emphasises that modern witch-hunts reveal that witchcraft has been subjected to constant reinterpretations and change in the meaning which

can be used either as levelling or as accumulative force. In this context, he gives examples of levelling and accumulative force. The Zambian Chewa uses witchcraft as a leveling force to undermine inequalities in wealth and power. The deprived individuals use it as weapon of weak to level inequality, to blame for low economic productivity, for problems related to fertility. The other example of accumulative force is in areas of West and Northwest Cameroon, where the chief decides who is a witch and who is not a witch. Because of ambiguity of witchcraft as a concept, the chief can interpret to give meaning regarding whom to charge with witchcraft and whom not to.

Witchcraft accusations can be reinterpreted to look for imaginary enemies when the real motive of witch-hunt is political. Albert James Bergesen (1978) discusses modern-day political witch-hunts which occurred during the Chinese Cultural Revolution from 1966-69. The government periodically rejuvenates collective sentiments by creating deviants and punishes them as witches. Counter revolutionary, spies or whosoever stands against nation's ideology is seen as a threat. Similarly, James T. Siegel (2006) suggests that in Java, witchcraft accusations arose in the absence of a state control. Post Suharto regime, accusations were an attempt to reassert social control where the witch is the name given to the national menace, instability, a force affecting everyone, bringing a generalised catastrophe. During this period of political instability, anyone could be targeted as a witch. Even in Africa, witchcraft is intertwined with politics, for example, in Soweto, 'witchcraft is affecting the creation of new state as well as the ways in which the new state is understood as shaping the contexts within which witches work' (Ashforth, 1998, p. 506).

Despite the uncertainty brought by the political instability, few members among many communities sometimes take advantage of their social situation using witchcraft. James H. Smith (2005) discusses how Kenyans hired a witch-finder to find witches in Tanzania. The modern kind of witch-finder uses symbols of modernity, for example, technology to suppress witchcraft which had turned into a threat. They use shaving the head as cleansing ritual to remove the effects of witchcraft. In fact, the increase in practice of witchcraft reflect uncertainty among the local people on how to manage and control the set of socio-economic and political forces which came in their societies due to global market and polices (ibid.).

Globalisation processes assume concrete, localised forms but it has not reduced hierarchy or spatial inequalities (Sassen, 2005). As the local economy gets transformed due to international policies and the effect of global market, it becomes difficult for people to comprehend as to what brings about such sudden and abrupt economic changes in their society. People are not able to grasp why some people prosper whereas others are lagging (Federici, 2008). They cannot grasp because the real factor for disorder in society is breaking down of their old socio-economic institutions. All these changes bring suspicion of witchcraft at work or even re-emergence of Devil in indigenous communities. For example, Michael Taussig (1980) explores cultural reactions in pre-capitalist society to industrial capitalism in the sugar plantation of Columbia as well as in the Bolivia tin mines. The peasants who work as landless labourers are seen as having made a deal with the devil. So, whatever they earned from the labour is not seen legitimate. They are tempted to earn but at the same time, they resist it as they believe that if they buy goods or property from the money earned from the plantation, it will bring disastrous consequences to their lives.

Therefore, across cultures, witchcraft accusations have manifested differently due to different reasons. However, one thing is certain that witchcraft accusations are very much part of modernity. Whenever there is a general atmosphere of mistrust and fear, witchcraft accusations are used as a tool to ostracise or scapegoat someone as the witch, and most often it is the vulnerable or marginalised sections who are accused. This framework is used to analyse the data on witch-hunting collated through fieldwork conducted in Kokrajhar and Chirang districts of western Assam.

Study Area and Methodology

According to the literature and reports on witch-hunting cases, in Assam most of the witch-hunting cases occur among the tribal communities such as the Bodos, the Santhals, the Rabhas and the Mishings in the districts of Kokrajhar, Chirang, Goalpara, Majuli and so on. The witch-hunting cases have been on the rise according to the media. The Assam state even received the President's approval for the Assam Witch Hunting (Prohibition, Prevention and Protection) Bill, 2015 which has been converted into an Act in the year 2018. The drafting of Assam Witch-hunting Act raises a lot of questions which needs to be investigated and answered.

Based on the reports by the media, for the study on witchcraft practices in Assam, I chose to study the tribal communities in the districts of Chirang and Kokrajhar in Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) to analyse the prevalence of witchcraft practices in modern times. The district of Chirang has mostly Bodo, Koch Rajbongshi and other communities living in the district. The Kokrajhar district has Bodo as the dominant community besides the Santhal community. Regarding the witch-hunting cases, attempts were made to study equal number of cases from each district. However, it was not possible because it is a sensitive issue and people do not want to talk about it due to fear of getting arrested by the police. Regarding the collection of data for the study on witchcraft practices in Assam, newspaper reports were collected. The cases on witch-hunting cases were gathered from Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development (OKDISCD), Guwahati. The most valuable data were the cases gathered and maintained by the Assam Police in every district. The maintenance of records on witch-hunting by the police highlights how the state is trying to understand the occurrences and patterns of the cases among the tribal communities in Assam.

The data was collected after official permission was granted by the authorities in the district. The maintenance of records of witch-hunting cases by the Assam Police also served a very important function. The data collection serves as the point of building information about the cases and gives a fair idea of accessing the area where the incidents occurred. Most of the time, the police officials have extended their help in visiting the area owing to its sensitive nature. However, sometimes, they themselves suggested not visiting certain areas where a fresh case of witch-hunting has occurred. According to the officials, the community is not ready to speak about the incident and it may not be safe to visit immediately. The sudden visit, even with police officials, could be threatening as it is a very sensitive matter for the community and violence might erupt which would be difficult to contain even by the police. Even approaching the victim induces panic in the victim fearing future attack by the villagers. The victim feels that the visit may reinforce among the villagers the suspicion of being the witch.

However, most of the cases are not reported to the police. So, the official records may not give a fair idea of the total number of cases which occurred in a district over a certain period of time. The cases are not reported as the community does not report to the authorities and resolves the matter within them. Most of the time, victims also do not report fearing future attack from the perpetrators. Lastly, most of the cases are not reported due to ignorance of the people about law.

Besides the help received from Police officials for the reported cases, I followed case studies through gossips and rumours. From there on, I used snowball sampling method to follow the rest of the unreported cases. Besides the in-depth interviews, focus group discussions were also conducted on witch-hunt cases. As a female researcher, I faced challenges in accessing the remote villages to follow the case studies. However, being a female researcher also helped in conducting in-depth interviews on the case studies as many people generally do not want to talk about a sensitive issue as witch-hunting. This paper discusses a reported case of Kokrajhar district and an unreported case of Chirang district to analyse the witchcraft accusations.

The Case Study of Rishab^{iv}

The reported case study is about Rishabh, a 65-year-old male *Ojha*^v, who belonged to the Bodo community and was accused of being a witch. The incident occurred in the rural area of Kokrajhar district in the year 2017. The area is near the reserve forest and the villagers mainly earn through selling agricultural products in the market. According to the accused, he was resting at his house after selling bags of mustard seeds at the weekly Sunday market. He was sleeping when suddenly few young men came and barged the door and beat him and his wife accusing him as a witch. They beat him up, ransacked his house and took the six hundred rupees which he had earned after selling the mustard seeds. The accused told them repeatedly that he is an *Ojha* and not witch. By profession, he is an *Ojha* who performs rituals at the village. He prepares medicines for ailments such as jaundice, smallpox. He also said that he has never done animal sacrifice in his rituals and he does not know the craft of harming people using rituals. After witchcraft accusations, he does not visit people's house for curing any ailments and does not prepare herbal medicines anymore.

The perpetrators beat him up accusing him as the witch because according to them they heard that a young bride fell ill suddenly, and in a delirious state saw Rishabh's face and took his name as the witch. After this incident, people started falling ill and this led to the spread of the rumour that Rishabh is a witch, so they beat him up. This matter was later reported to the police. The case was later resolved by the police, local organisations, village headman where they attended the meeting together in the village. In the meeting, the villagers were warned that in future no such accusations should occur in the village and Rishabh should be allowed to stay in the village.

When the case was probed further, the villagers said that Rishabh is an Ojha, but he brags a lot about his possession, that recently he bought a plot of land and his son is a member of village council. This boasting by the priest of his acquired property was not taken well by the villagers.

The Case Study of Matu^{vi}

Matu, a 70-year-old male Ojha, who belonged to a sub-tribe of the Koches^{vii} in Chirang district, was accused of being a witch ten years ago. Matu was a daily wage labourer who also practised traditional healing. He performed rituals and administered herbal medicines whenever there was sickness in the village. It is common in villages to visit a traditional healer for any kind of illness rather than visiting a medical doctor for diagnosis and medication. People from different communities visited him for healing. However, a member of the village who belonged to another community was not cured of sickness by his medicines. The person's condition aggravated and succumbed to the sickness. According to Stewart and Strathern (2004), gossips and rumours become instrumental in constructing a person as a witch. So, whenever there was sickness in the village or any kind of misfortune, he was suspected, which finally led to Matu being beaten up by the perpetrators. When the case was probed further, it seems that witchcraft accusations may have been used as a means to scapegoat Matu as he belonged to the marginalised section. Moreover, there were tensions within his own community too as he was earning well, both as a labourer as well as a healer. Economically, he fared better compared to his fellow members in his village, so, these could have been the reasons for witchcraft accusation.

In the two cases of witchcraft accusations, both Rishabh and Matu were Ojha who were made scapegoats as the witch. The cases are contextual as it occurred in different time periods, and due to different reasons. However, it points to the insecurity arising from socio-economic inequality within the so-called egalitarian tribal communities. This inequality, in an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear, leads to exercise discrimination on the individual, especially on the vulnerable and the marginalised in the communities. The tribal societies are no exception to such discrimination. As Prathama Bannerjee (2016) explains how 'tribes' itself is a modern construction, and they are a stratified and gendered society. She adds that tribes 'were neither stateless peoples, nor peoples outside history, nor simple, non-hierarchical, egalitarian communities. Indeed, they were fully involved in kingships, in land and forest politics, in tributary relationships with other groups,

in particular occupational specialisations and even in commerce and war' (ibid., p. 132). Therefore, it highlights that the tribal societies have never been egalitarian societies as assumed to be.

Conclusion

The significance of prevalence of witchcraft accusations implies serving different ends across cultures. Its applicability should not be limited only to the realm of rituals and superstitions. Generally, rituals are performed to 'recognise the potency of disorder' (Douglas, 1966, p. 1). Rituals are performed to deal with misfortunes by pacifying the angry spirits. However, the witch cannot be appeased, so punishing and removal of the witch is believed to be the only solution during crisis (Chaudhuri, 2013). This idea of elimination of a person as a scapegoat, in the name of being a witch, has been used as a tool to achieve various ends historically across cultures. In the garb of superstition and in an atmosphere of mistrust and fear it has served different purposes, such as releasing tensions among the members of the community among the Azande (Evans-Pritchard, 1976), to maintain the caste hegemony (Bailey, 1997), it even signified the breakdown of the communal bond [MacFarlane, 1990 (1970)].

Even in the modern times, witchcraft accusations are present and has been used as a tool to reconstruct new meanings (Geschiere, 1997) so that people are made scapegoats and punished. It has been used as a means of exploitation in Jalpaiguri tea plantations (Chaudhuri, 2013), for climate disorders in Tanzania (Miguel, 2005). It has ushered in a new era of uncertainties due to the onset of capitalism in Chotanagpur, as it has broken down the traditional institutions (Sinha, 2006). Capitalism in pre-capitalist society of South America although does not bring out witchcraft accusations, rather it has brought out the re-emergence of Devil among the labourers of plantations (Taussig, 1980). The witchcraft accusations can also be reinterpreted to look for imaginary enemies when the real motive of witch-hunt is political (Bergesen, 1978). However, there are situations where people take advantage of this fear and mistrust, for example, in Africa there is a rise of new modern witch-finders who claim to cleanse a person of ill-effects of witchcraft through modern methods (Smith, 2005).

Therefore, witchcraft accusations across cultures do not display linearity; rather these are dramatic outbursts of latent issues particular to each culture in modern times. Similarly, the fieldwork in Chirang and Kokrajhar districts across the two

communities reveal that the cases are not linear, and the causes and occurrence of witchcraft accusations are also contextual. However, witchcraft accusations highlight rising socio-economic inequality, signifying tribal communities as hierarchical and not egalitarian at all.

Notes:

ⁱ Devata means deity. As per the beliefs in Bisipara, there are deities which represent different things. Some were considered benevolent deities, whereas some were considered harmful deities.

ⁱⁱ In this context, the term adivasi used by Chaudhuri (2013) here refers only to the migrant population in tea plantations of Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. Adivasis of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas experienced political and economic crisis due to British Permanent Settlement Act. These adivasis were displaced from their lands. Today adivasis such as Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Gond provide the much needed labour force for Jalpaiguri tea plantations.

ⁱⁱⁱ Dain means witch. The other local terms used for witch are Daina, Daini.

^{iv} Pseudonym. The interview was conducted in the month of June, 2017.

^v Traditional healer who uses rituals and medicines to heal people. Ojha is also known as medicine man.

^{vi} Pseudonym. The interview on the unreported case was conducted in the month of December, 2017.

^{vii} Tibeto-Burman ethno-linguistic group of Assam, Meghalaya, West Bengal and Bangladesh. A small number of people belonging to this community live in Chirang district.

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