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Note from the Editor

Human Responses and Understanding the Emergence of Subjectivity: Agency and Voices Across Time

Dr Vibha Arora*

This issue of the Summerhill Review (2018) understands the interconnections between human responses (combination of actions and emotions) and reactions, the emergence of agency and an assertive subjectivity, a positive engagement of the self and the collective self with the social context, from not merely an inter-disciplinary but also a broad socio-historical perspective. This large canvas highlights the complexities and challenges in our everyday life and those that shape the nature of the political and its connections with negative experience of social marginalization and the positive end of achieving happiness and inner well-being. Hence, the contributions comprising this issue cover a wide-range encompassing the development of political abilities and movement towards inner well-being, the actor's (individual and collective) responses to everyday life and political processes, local and national level developments (such as colonialism, religious conversion, hydropower development, the appropriation of adivasi lands, enforcement and violation of human rights, citizen's litigation and organization of public protests) and towards national and global movements revolving around mindfulness and fostering inner peace. This issue collates article submissions made by fellows and associates of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study Shimla over the last few years, and other emerging scholars. At first glance, these articles stand in isolation with little common ground, but when we dive deeper into their narrative then we realize the

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common thread that ties them together and helps us understand the complexity of our everyday, predicament of the collective and our political life. As a collection, these six articles indicate the connections between several pertinent social themes, geographically diverse social contexts, an increasing use of distinctive methodologies that no longer are confined to disciplinary boundaries and local contexts. Broadly, the issue is looking at the nature of the socio-political in historical contexts, the recent encounter between amalgamating eastern-western contexts and ideas, and locating them in the extensive debates of our humanities and social sciences. The issue is about diversity and grappling with the human condition.

The issue begins by presenting the 'subaltern', who is an ignored agent of political processes, who are often not heard rather than being termed a missing voice. To recover their political agency and subjectivity may require recourse to other histories, and drawing on biographical narratives, as mainstream political narratives may tend to marginalize or submerge their concerns. Hence, recovery and understanding of tribal women's agency is pre-eminently a political concern for us. This may necessitate listening to stories, and re-reading histories and acknowledging biographical accounts. Methodologically, by opening up to voices from below our authors (Arora, Jacob, and Rohmingmawii's papers) seek to fill gaps in our understanding across time and understand conversion, alienation, and political subjective expressions among tribal communities in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Methodologically, biographies are emerging as a critical arena to understand how the personal and political are deeply intertwined and interlaced in events, and places. A strong autobiographical perspective is

afforded by Jacob's discussion on C.K. Janu's *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story* as it highlights a narrative of a feminist struggle for survival and dignity, and a petition for understanding the difficult milieu in which adivasi agency has emerged in Kerala. In Janu's own words, 'no one knows the forest as we do. The forest is mother to us. More than a mother because she never abandons us' (2004: 5 cf. Jacob). Painting a very romantic image of tribal as the guardian of the forest, the author narrates how the encroachment of tribal burial lands paved the way for political mobilization and adivasi struggle against a Communist regime. In doing this and advancing such imagery, Jacob's paper inter-connects with Vibha Arora's contribution in this issue. Jacob underscores how an incomplete biographical narrative published as *Mother Forest* highlights the predicament of the tribal communities in Kerala who have been transformed from forest dwellers to forest encroachers in their own land. It narrates a partial life story of an empowered politically conscious adivasi woman who played an important role in the socio-political scenario and raising a strong voice against exploitation as part of state-directed development programs. Jacob argues how emergence of women's agency is one important indicator and mediator of socio-economic changes, and Janu's autobiography although an unfinished one demonstrates the power of change, and emergence of self-confident strident agency among Kerala's tribals in the emergent context of development conflicts. Janu's life testifies how 'instead of being conditioned to be passive objects of dominant history, they have realised the need to be active subjects shaping their own history' (cf. Jacob). The emergence of subjectivity is dominating discussions of historical events, colonial encounters, and expression of political agency; this is especially on the margins of the Indian state that are often neglected by us. Jacob, Arora and Midya's papers focus on and describe development conflicts that are similar across divergent locales ranging from peninsular Kerala to Himalayan Sikkim and North Bengal.

Eco-political subjugation and cultural imperialism are often inter-twined, and culminating in the disappearance of indigenous cultural heritage. A large number of scholars, historians, ethnographers and not necessarily only those belonging to the different states of India's North-east region are increasingly documenting the colonization of different ethnic nationalities residing here, and their cultural-political resistance and armed opposition to expansion of British Imperialism and the Christian missionary activity that followed the imperial flag. The colonial state and the Christian missionaries legitimized their socio-political dominance and interference as an integral part of their white man's burden to civilize the

savage (the head-hunting Naga warrior epitomizing such a cultural stereotype), and transform these warring unruly tribal communities. Political subjugation was accompanied by overall socio-cultural subordination and strong psychological impulses to civilize these 'heathen' communities.

Christianity and its denunciation of 'heathen' practices among the tribal groups and other ethnic communities played a powerful role in bringing social change, influenced nature of political leadership, created new elites, and basis of legitimacy. It will be erroneous to homogenize this process and encounter, and to understate sectarian competition. It is interesting how different sects of Christianity carved their spheres of influence, undermined and interacted with the local tribal religious traditions and led to their disappearance. Contested histories are emerging from these ethnic constituencies and scholars are examining and reinterpreting the colonial encounter, and contextualizing its pervasive influence in the contemporary. Due to widespread religious conversion, many other scholars are providing a critical perspective on missionary activity in contemporary Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Sikkim and Mizoram.¹

Historicity, historic representations, and history have become major concerns as the contemporary tribal focuses on asserting their origins and tracing migration histories, documenting lost and disappearing indigenous traditions and symbols of particular difference, affirm their cultural politics and analyze the impact of religious conversion and spread of western education during the colonial period. Some of this emerging literature is being written in tribal languages and published by the vernacular press and getting circulated within the community and Dr Rohmingmawii's article in this issue also makes extensive use of this popular literature.

Contemporary Mizoram presents a very important ethnographic locale as Christianity permeates the socio-political fabric of society and influences the shape and direction of politics. Following protracted violence, Mizoram became an Indian state after the Mizo accord was signed with the Mizo National Front (MNF) in 1986. The Presbyterian Church and the Baptist church are the largest denominations in contemporary Indian state of Mizoram, and this undulating landscape is absolutely dominated by Christian population. Sometimes this political agency has taken on a distinctively vernacular expression in the post-colonial Indian and supposedly 'secular' context. The current President of (MNF) Pu Zoramthanga sought and was actively backed by the Church and became the tenth Chief Minister of Mizoram. When the new Chief Minister was sworn on December 15 2018, according to newspaper reports, after the national anthem was sung, the Leprosy Mission

Choir Mizoram performed George Frideric Handel's 1741 composition "Hallelujah Chorus" and passages from the Bible were read-out. Furthermore, 'a prayer was led by Reverend Lalmingthanga, the chairman of the Mizoram Kohhran Hruaitute Committee, the body of 16 major churches in the state.'² All this took place as part of an official oath-taking ceremony on 2018. This amalgamation is representative of both politics, agency and a permissive indigenization of routine democratic processes of electing leaders. Is this a novelty or part of an older political pattern and response?

Cultural extinction, expressions, revivalism, and resurrection of ethnic symbols were central to the political turn among the tribal in the past as a response to imperialism and not surprisingly identity politics and claims coalesce with each other even in the contemporary post-colonial context India. Dr Rohmingmawii's article in this issue contributes to this growing literature understanding of colonial expansion in the frontier areas of Northeast India and Southeast Asia asserting the indigenous was not a passive recipient of proselytization zeal and cultural influences, but actively resisted a top-down approach. The church in early stages had prohibited the use of drums in worship, and the traditional Mizo songs and dances had been banned given their intimate and obvious association with what clergy regarded as 'heathen' practices and prohibited the widespread consumption of rice-beer among³ the converts. But not for too long as waves of cultural revival gradually reinstated them into the cultural life of the Mizo. Rohmingmawii's discussion on cultural revival in Mizoram during 1906-1937 details the indigenization of Christianity in Mizoram and dwells on revival as the 'state of being awakened', and conspicuous ecstasy. Cultural revival and religious hybridity was marked not merely by preaching of ideas and performing prayers, as gradually it began to incorporate communal activities of singing, body movements, speaking in different tongues, shivering and quaking, and intense emotional expression sometimes even in the form of trance in the ambience of the Church (which were somewhat contradictory to Protestant Christian doctrine and practices). This revival was not led by any charismatic figure and Rohmingmawii emphasizes, 'it was the people who led and directed the movement. There were actions and instances that could be interpreted as being anti-establishment during this revival movement.' The missionaries found it difficult to accept the rising composition of indigenous hymns and tunes among the Mizos, accompanied by extensive use of drums and dancing, communitarian participation in prayers (mass prayers) and community celebrations that included offerings of domestic animals (pigs for instance) as a thanksgiving. Several educated Mizo

church leaders doubted and nearly all the Missionaries questioned these practices, nonetheless it is revivalist tendencies and the indigenization of Church practices are singularly responsible for widespread conversion in the region. Cultural revivalism did not result in conflict but transformed western Christianity and practices outlawed earlier got actively incorporated and reconstituted these sects and their following in the region. Armed resistance to colonial powers was difficult with demilitarization of the Mizo warriors, so resistance took an indirect form in the cultural-political realm and through the indigenization of Christianity. The author argues that Mizo agency was directly expressed in this cultural revivalism, and powerful symbolic incorporation of indigenous symbols and practices as part of Church practice. In my perspective, and understanding some contemporary developments, this was instrumental in framing a colonial subjectivity and expressing subaltern agency.

The Rohmingmawii paper on historical conversion and revivalism in Mizoram interconnects with another contribution in this volume which examines the emergence of (eco) political subjectivity in Sikkim. The democratized vocal tribal citizen is demanding a particular right to exercise greater political control over their social life, resources, territory, and demand internal autonomy (Arora and Kipgen 2012, Arora 2013). The eco-warriors of Sikkim proclaim that the Indian state is colonizing their indigenous common resources, and continuing imperial policies of exploiting the under-developed tribal groups of Northeast India.

Religious expression combines with modern environmental thought to galvanize public opposition into a social movement that incorporates narratives of cultural genocide and a variant of colonial oppression and resource appropriation in the post-colonial context of Himalayan Sikkim. Indigenous agency is taking strength from access to and opening of democratic spaces afforded by ICT and the Internet. Vibha Arora's paper elaborates and critically examines the organization of narratives authored and circulated by indigenous subjects themselves as part of their campaigns against the power of the state, and the ideology of hydropower development as being essential to progress in an ecologically sensitive context. Weepingsikkim.blogspot.com is a collective self-publication and biographical narrative by activists, albeit an interactive chronicle. Texts, newspaper reports, visuals, and films were uploaded on the blog namely weepingsikkim.blogspot.com, and it has been internetworked with other online media content and websites. Words, pictures, sounds, and hyperlinks interconnect in cyberspace to narrate a story on weepingsikkim about the Save the River Teesta movement, a narrative among diverse understandings

about the emergence, rise, and decline of this indigenous movement.

Combining ethnography with visual anthropology, Arora highlights how 'photographs of people and activists, various activities and events organized by the activists, the river course and Himalayan landscape and construction activities therein, maps (drawn and digital one's), images of formal communications sent by the government, and banners circulated on this website', construct a tribal as an eco-warrior for the global imagination. This paper examines the self-representation and proclamation of tribal groups as environmental custodians and the energetic framing of the Lepcha/tribal eco-warriors rising to protect their River Teesta from hydropower projects and other outsiders (Indian citizens) who are encroaching on their ancestral landscapes and appropriating them in the name of national development. Youth and women play a vanguard role in fighting exploitative capitalist state driven by need for energy, profit, and development (development that is not inclusive necessarily), but they do with restraint, non-violence, and Gandhian methods; presents quite a contrast to Midya's discussion on tribals siding with the Maoist ideology and justifying use of violence. As Arora argues in her paper, 'blogging enables local politics to network and situate themselves in global politics, overcome their peripheral geographical position, and counteract government apathy by actively carving an alternative public space.'

Increasingly, cyberspace now presents itself as a 'democratic' arena and domain where ethnographic subjects are writing about selves and blurring the distance between the knower and the known through digital activism. Methodologically, self-reflexive and critical in its perspective, Arora emphasizes on the readers: 'selective images can mislead, narrate a fictitious story, unless corroborated by other accounts and circulated as part of a larger body of evidence. Ethnographic fieldwork will continue to be significant as a way to know the world and generate knowledge about it.' She admits the gravity of locating subjectivity and understanding the nature of the political in cyberspace, and how she herself became part of the polyphony of voices documented and chronicled on this weblog. Precisely why the boundaries between ethnographic writing, biographical narratives, and social sciences are increasingly getting blurred in interactive portals on the Internet.

Arora's paper on tribals' resistance to state-sponsored development interconnects with Midya's paper on the development deficit and marginalization among tribals of West Bengal state; both contexts are natural-resource rich areas and focus of state development initiatives and welfare schemes. Dipak Midya's paper highlights political extremism, violence, and tribal inclinations towards

Maoist ideology due to continued socio-economic marginalization in the post-colonial development context. This anthropological study is based on data collected during 2014-2016 in four village communities (Amlatora, Sangram, Bhimarjun and BhumijDhansola) in Jhargram district of West Bengal, wherein the tribal population is high one and quite marginalized, although they are also living with the non-tribals. He demonstrates how using sentiments of social exclusion and marginalization, the Maoists and/or Naxalites have built up a strong movement 'under the leadership of the proletariat' with the purpose of seizing state power and an annihilation of class enemies and the state has promoted counter-attacks to neutralize these Maoists. He argues that socio-economic isolation and marginalization from the mainstream enabled the Maoists to recruit locals, and incite them into violence. The state launched counter-insurgency operations that culminated in the killing of many activists and their tribal supporters while some others were compelled or persuaded to surrender their guns. In some ways, this paper should have interconnected strongly with N. Sundar's analysis of Maoist infiltration and state-sponsored counterinsurgency operations and civil strife in her book, *The Burning Forest*.

If Jacob, Arora and Midya's paper was about human agency and recovering subjectivity using the political frame for collective well-being, then recent emergence of spiritual awakening and mindfulness techniques point towards how social harmony and inner happiness can be achieved through the religious realm. At the other end of the apolitical spectrum are discussions about the emergence of religious institutions (such as *Radha Soami Satsang Beas*, *Prajapati Bramhakumaris*, *Art of Living*, *Sadhguru and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*) promoting spiritual awakening. Using the lens of positive psychology the authors demonstrate the differences in their approaches, their leadership, and roots in the eastern values of Hinduism and their strong interconnections with psychological trends in Positive Psychology and promotion of happiness as a way of life. The authors argue on the challenges of scientific validation of these spiritual practices and relevant documentation to showcase their efficacy in promoting human development, mindful coexistence, and social harmony (locally and globally). This paper is a strong contrast with Rohmingmawii's paper on how Mizo people transformed the Christian Church and indigenized it, as it also mentions how these movements and sects have a global appeal and has incorporated others into their fold (sometimes also leading to conversion to Hinduism). Religious revivalism is very much happening and promoting social harmony (in other contexts fundamentalism has also escalated conflict and communalism) for some groups and contexts, and cut-

across class-ethnic divides to unify and consolidate sense of group belonging and collective worthiness.

While many lament the demise of the social, all the six papers attest to the burgeoning expansion of core social selves in post-colonial contexts. The return to focus on the individual and their biographical self and search for happiness and meaning inter-connects with the powerful autobiographical narrative of C.K. Janu's and her inner discovery and struggles. However, the individual and collective self are intimately connected and perpetually shaping each other, as the discussions on ethnic identity in various papers attests. Cultural and political opposition and resistance to the state can take different routes – religious expression (Rohmingmawii), violence (Midya's paper) and non-violence (Arora's paper), and counter-responses and opposition in place (Midya's paper) and cyberspace (Arora's paper). The papers by Jacob, Arora, and Rohmingmawii raise issues of methodology and use of what were earlier termed non-traditional personal-historical and inter-textual sources for circulating representations of both self and the others, and understanding ethnographic and historical developments in space. Social movements can equally deploy violence and non-violence in diverse contexts to organize political protest, and launch opposition or seek patronage and development interventions.

It's a supremely creative impulse that knits the issue together and prompts us, to push us to think through cross-connections, to commence inter-disciplinary conversations, to explore the horizon of the historic and the political, and to understand their constant intersections. Collated together the collection of five articles, and six book reviews this Summerhill issue sensitizes us to the heterogeneity in the human condition, the changing evolving nature of the political, development of ideas and institutions, the emergence of agency and subjectivity across time and in space (including cyberspace). The book review section of this issue again testifies to diversity and scholarship emerging on some important themes and processes.

Notes

1. It is not possible to review this extensive literature here but I will like to acknowledge its existence and point towards scholars such as Barkataki-Ruscheweyh & Lauser 2013; de Maaker 2007; Lawmsanga 2010; Pachuau and Sarkar 2016; Nongbri 2009; Oddie 2013; Pachuau 2003; Pachuau 2006; Stanley 2003; Thong 2010; Zhimo 2015.
2. Refer to <https://thewire.in/politics/zoramthanga-sworn-in-chief-minister-mizoram-mnf>; <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/zoramthanga-anointed-mizoram-chief-minister-amid-hymns-and-bible-reading-1963194>; <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/First-time-for-Christian-prayers-at-Mizoram-swearing-in-ceremony-45745.html>, accessed on 20 December 2018.

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Situating the Tribal: Mother Forest, the Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu

Dr. Asha Susan Jacob*

Abstract

The current explosion of lived narratives has necessitated a renewed perception of the canonical concept of expression of the self as a genre. The conventional, patriarchal, western, elitist subject position stands confronted by voicing of the postcolonial, the female, the abject, the surplus, the redundant. Through Janu's *Unfinished Story* the paper proposes to establish how the rendering of a tribal woman's life story becomes a significant slice of the history of Kerala, the state eulogised for its unique model of development. The mobilization of the tribal community by an unschooled tribal woman to establish and exercise their rights in a society that brands them as encroachers and primitives, and evidences women's agency for social change.

Introduction

The recent proliferation of autobiographical writings with its various monikers like life writing, testimonies, memoirs, personal narratives, auto-fiction, biopic etc. point to the postcolonial positioning of the genre of self-expression. The "heterogeneity of contexts and cultures from which postcolonial life writing has emerged" (Gilbert 2009:xiv) have necessitated a redefinition of the conventional concept of autobiography as western, elite, male-centric. Unlike a conventional autobiography centred on a bildungsroman self, the postcolonial text by a "denostalgizing of the past" and orientation "towards a liberated society in the future" renders itself the calibre of "resistance literature" (Gunn 1992: 77). Most postcolonial systems with a subjugated context of political disempowerment have gained audibility and visibility through personal narratives. They function as a remonstrance against denial of fundamental human

rights, a reclamation of the bulldozed self and articulation of the hitherto stifled voice.

Alternative and diverse practices of female narratives also function as counter narratives. Post-colonial female life writing too faced a double marginalisation until the publication of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson's seminal text *Del/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography* (1992). Women's life writing is characterised by the "politics of fragmentation" and a "dialogical conception of selfhood" as something which is essentially social and relational (Gilmore 1994:xiii).

Though Philippe Lejune defines autobiography as a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality," (Lejune 1982:192) Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak argues that western psychobiographics cannot be "applied unthinkably to subaltern women in the (former) colonies" (Spivak 1989:227). Unlike western female life narratives that usually engage with collective identities based on gender rather than class, in the Indian scenario the individual defines himself /herself with regard to one's caste, class, or culture: "If a (postcolonial Indian) cannot relate himself meaningfully to his culture, his society, the whole purpose of writing an autobiography is lost" (Devy 1984:65).

Mother Forest

In traditional aboriginal communities, autobiography is never an individual activity, but a collective identity that erodes the boundaries between "autobio" and "bio" (Gilbert 2009: 18). It exposes the ways in which colonial and post-colonial civil societies have encroached upon the autonomous lives of the indigenes with their modes of resilience, coping and resistance (Franz and Abigail 1994:20). Gail A Hornstein remarks: "In ethics there is process called anamorphosis in which an image is distorted so that it can be viewed without distortion only from a special angle or with a specific instrument"

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(Hornstein 1994: 51). *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C.K. Janu* is the tale of struggle for survival, a petition for understanding, an attempt at self-expression by an adivasi female from Kerala, India, which offers that particular angle to have a clear vision of the otherwise distorted image of the adivasi as unclean, unethical, uneducated, uncouth. Bound by the milieu of powerlessness, she voices her protest to be heard in the present and in the posterity. A life as lived in the degenerating and revolutionary phases is evidenced through the life of Janu.

Stephen Yeo observes that for the marginalised communities the attempt at expressing themselves, reciting their history is "somehow a political act in itself" (Denith 2005: 61). Neither an extolling nor an enervating, but a neutral recapture of the yester years of the people of the forest by an unschooled woman challenges the current notions/concepts of the aesthetics of autobiographical writing itself. The "impact of the experience itself is so powerful as to transmit power to the writing" (Denith 2005: 76). Denith continues: "The politics of working-class autobiography are not reducible to their contents, but neither can you equate their positions with the simple fact of publication" (Denith 2005:79).

The oral narration which is recorded and written down by Bhaskaran and translated into English by N. Ravi Shanker offers a reservoir of lived experiences concealed from history. "Oral testimony is seen as a cultural artefact, a text embedded in language and which attempts to make sense of a life history" (Murphy 2007: 120). We witness a society struggling through redefinitions and paradigm shifts in an era when the local merges with the global, and the boundaries between the self and the other merge and widen. The forest-based economic base of the tribal society has encountered significant changes through various forces like globalisation, liberalisation, privatisation, industrialisation, technology-centric development programmes, infiltration of non-tribal communities, and apathetic governmental policies. "Struggles for justice, equality and freedom need to be grounded in a process of collaborative inquiry and the co-construction of knowledge that leads to collective social action" (Buckles 2013:2). *Mother Forest* brings to focus the predicament of the tribal communities in Kerala who have been transformed from forest dwellers to forest encroachers in their own land. It also recounts the struggles to exercise their rights in a society that still brands them as primitive.

The booklet is a fifty-six-paged text that divides itself into two parts—Janu's childhood in the lap of mother forest and her politically awakened adulthood as a tribal activist. Elen Turner sees this as "the unconscious, pre-modern, private, tribal childhood half and the rational, political, modern, public half (Turner 2012:336). While

the burgeoning of adivasi consciousness and politics can be attributed to the impact of the civil society among the tribals through literacy programmes and political parties, Turner observes that "the idealisation of adivasi society is resisted" (Turner 2012: 336). The *Mother Forest* is here critiqued as the life history of a tribal woman who spearheaded many a tribal movement in Kerala and its pertinence as expression of women's agency in revolutionising the political and social scenario.

Born into an Adiyar tribal family in 1966-67 in Checkotte, Thrissileri in Wayanad, the northern district of Kerala, India, Janu's schooling started in the laps of the forest that surrounded her. Adiyar is an exonym for Ravula, found in the Wayand and Kannur districts of Kerala. With no initiation into formal instruction, like any other tribal child, she was taken care of by the Mother forest. In her narration, Janu uses the word from the Malayalam language 'nammal' that stands for the plural "We" rather than the singular Malayalam term 'njan', which stands for "I," for both herself and the adivasi community as a whole which highlight the differential consciousness of the adivasi, a name that is preferred in Kerala over the tribal. Even the terms tribal or adivasi are problematic on account of the contentions on the concept of indigeneity itself. While the Government of India uses Scheduled Tribes, both adivasi and tribal are used in common parlance.

The first part of the narration deals with the inner world while the "second was more polemical and belonged to the outer world," (Shanker 2004:xii) which reasons for the absence of any upper cases in the first part of the text against the conventional use of language, while the entry in to the public sphere is marked with the common rule regarding upper cases for sentences. Commencing her narration with the description of the kind of work that was there in her childhood, Janu subtly signals the altering nature of cultivation that their times witnessed consequent on the infiltration of farmers and labourers from other parts of the state: "where we all lived there was time when work just meant pulling out the paddy seedlings transplanting them in the fields as such. Mostly work related to paddy farming. Plantation work became common later" (Janu 2004:1). She was already earning a wage of two rupees at the age of ten or eleven and two and a half or three at the age of twelve or thirteen (Janu 2004:1) for work from before day-break to night when jackals howl close by. The descriptions often have a tinge of ecofeminism in the way she describes the process of clearing the woods for cultivation: "when the virgin earth catches fire it gives out a strange smell...in the night it looks as if a human being is burnt alive...when it rains the hill looks like a woman with her hair shorn, the wild water all blood-red gushing angrily" (Janu 2004:2). To the

adivasi, her life is in communion with nature, which like a mother provided them with all—tubers, fish, and crabs: “in the forests one never knew what hunger was” (Janu 2004:2). With no electricity nor lamps, they would sit around at night listening to the music of the forest: “it used to be extremely dark. There were simply no lamps to be lit. No lamps no kerosene no match-boxes. We used to keep one ember alive to kindle a fire in the hearth” (Janu 2004:3).

The woods around the huts and the fields yielded necessary vegetables, millets or colocasia. The little children too participated in the cultivation activities like scaring away the pigs and elephants by using the makeshift drums from the *erumadam*, a small hut made on tree top. The monsoon brought hunger, the danger of elephants huddling close to their huts, and more work for adults. The symbiotic attachment to nature transcends the apprehension of others. Insulated from school, with their minimal clothing, the forest like a mother offered shelter to the children from any stranger: “no one knows the forest as we do. The forest is mother to us. More than a mother because she never abandons us” (Janu 2004:5).

Whether married or single everyone had to toil in the *jenmi*'s field, but to have bellyful of food, they had to resort to the forest. Hence, the desertion of the father for a second marriage did not affect the family. Janu's exposure to the other world—the world of buses, radio, and umbrellas happened—when she was taken as a helper at the house of a school teacher. Back from there she worked in the field of the *jenmi* and when there was no work, they worked in their own land. Fear crept into their lives with their enforced dependence on the *jenmi*, who became their provider. Janu's reminisces exposes the inhuman treatment meted out to these people: “at noon after work we got some *kanji*...with some salt and chilli to go with it. *Kanji* was poured into a pit dug in the earth with an areca paala lining...when it rained we stood and got wet in the rains. Couldn't even spread one's *chela* to dry. Most of us didn't have a second one to change it” (Janu 2004:13). The fright that hovered over their lives muted their voice and bent their backs: “in those days we were afraid of almost everything. The backs of our people seem to be so bent because they have been terrified of so many things for generations. When our people speak they don't raise their eyes and must be because they are so scared” (Janu 2004:30).

Janu ruminates over their gradual transformation from independent forest dwellers to bound labourers of *jenmies*: “after our forefathers had soiled so much to clear the woods and soil the undergrowth and convert the hills into fields they had taken them over as their own. That's how all our lands became theirs” (Janu 2004:15). The shift from paddy cultivation to plantations

marked the trajectory of feudalism to capitalism. It altered the economy and the feudal landlord-labourer relationship. Mass immigration from the outside world, which proclaimed itself as being civilized, and the commercialisation of land during the colonial regime had deteriorated their status. The social degradation that they experienced through the years was reflected during the time of festivals in the temples, though it provided a distanced audio-visual entertainment for them. The shift from the centre to the periphery is marked by Janu: “long ago our people used to be in all the activities at Valliyur Kaavu. Later their role was confined to the outskirts of the temple. And then don't know when that too vanished” (Janu, 2004, 19).

Without any formal education, Janu was introduced to the world of letters by a Canfed Project of Literacy and later by the Literacy Mission programme of the State through which she became a literacy programme instructor in the 1980s. Her initiation into politics was through the *Kerala State Karzhaka Thozhilali Union* (KSKTU), a union of the Agricultural labourers affiliated to CPI (Marxist) and participation in the rallies conducted by them.

Active membership in the KSKTU Union, does not curtail her to give a sharp critique of the Party, which she observed was on the side of the exploiter: “Problems specifically related to our people were not discussed much in the Party or the Union. The Party saw us as a vote bank only. Therefore, issues related to our agricultural lands or better conditions of life for us hardly found their way into Party circles. The speeches made in the Party classes were not what we could easily understand. They were full of strange words and hidden traps. They tried their best not to let us speak” (Janu 2004:34). In the political nexus between the Party, the *jenmi* and the estate owners, the problems of the adivasis found no locus.

The accelerating number of unwed mothers is a direct product of the non-tribal penetration into the insulated world of the adivasis. Janu vehemently disparages the Party for vying with the civil society in producing unwed mothers: “The Party and its workers have a great responsibility in creating unwed mothers. I do not know whether it would help the Party to grow if the children of Party men grew up in our hovels. Actually, martyrs could be born of blood in this way too. There were many such women in Thrissieri who bore babies for a pinch of tobacco or a stone necklace or some food” (Janu 2004:35). A survey conducted by KILA (the Kerala Institute of Local Administration) in association with local bodies and the Scheduled Tribe Welfare Department attests Janu's rendering of the violation against the female. The survey, extending from 2008-2011, confirms the shocking number of 887 unwed mothers among Scheduled tribe women (The Staff Reporter 2011: 01).

Political involvement for a woman is and has never been easy in Kerala despite the state having the highest female literary rate in the country. In a community where women never moved out much, in spite of internal freedom in the community, Janu braved all hurdles, which enabled her exposure to other communities. She was inspired by the stories of Verghese, popularly known as Naxal Varghese who led agitations against bonded labour and exploitation of the adivasis from the feudal lords which ultimately led to his murder by the police in a fake encounter in the 1960s.

Disenchantment with the Party boiled within her and she expressed it: "A feeling had started growing within me, even while working for the Party, that nothing much could be done for the people of our community through Party work. ...I also had the feeling that the Party lusted after nothing but power, saw the people of our community as mere exhibition pieces" (Janu 2004:37). Party leaders became big idols adorning as calendar picture on their walls. Growing awareness of their alienation and predicament dawned a new awakening: "The fact that we could no more collect even fallen twigs from the forest, the fact that tree after tree was cut down and transported in lorries down the mountains, that our huts had walls that could crumble any moment, that we could not thatch our fallen roofs, that we had to squat in front of the Panchayat officers demanding drinking water, that our indigenous medicine and occult customs became calendar pictures printed on the newspapers" (Janu 2004:38). Many adivasis who used to associate with the Communist Party for its stand for the working class and the exploited, distanced themselves owing to the bourgeoisie orientation of the Party, despite Kerala inaugurating the first democratically elected government in the world.

The vulnerability of the tribal people extends to their livelihood, life style and spirituality. People Jeffrey Sissons remarks "are rooted in particular landscapes and histories" (Sissons 2005: 13). Eviction from one's own land severs them from traditional modes of forest-based living. Encroachment of even their traditional burial land, where they used to perform certain traditional rites and *gaddiga* rituals, had forced Janu to mobilise her people to protect it. The police' arrest of the adivasis instead of the encroacher prepared the ground for her first public political entry with all the women marching to the police station carrying spades and other implements. The Party's attempt to appease the encroacher through a compromise was turned down realising the political agenda of the Party that it "always stood for money and power" (Janu 2004:40). The projects of the Party and the state created folk art academies and research centres, but the community always remained poor, starved, and

incapable of resistance (Janu 2004:40). Disgusted with the utilitarian agenda of the Party she decided to stay away: "It was when I knew that I could not do anything from my community or even anything else in an honest manner remaining in the Party that I decided to stay away from Party work" (Janu 2004:40). The decision to disassociate with a leading political organization in her commitment to uplift her people from the abysmal depth in to which they have been forced into heralded her striding into a realm of agency.

In post-independent India as the land acquired more and more survey numbers, the tribal people who never knew the intricacies of these numbers, started becoming landless as they failed to prove their ownership; others were victims of indebtedness or other kinds of exploitation. In a desperate attempt to reclaim their mode of existence, she mobilised forty five landless families to encroach 18 acres of land at Tirunelli in Wyanad. The singular move without the support of any political party had withstood all pressures, braving denial of voter's right, ration card, electricity, water supply, work, or anything that sustains normal existence.

The tribal people have always lived in rapport with their surroundings, respecting the laws of nature and never by greed. Through centuries of direct communion with nature, they have created a life style which may not conform to the needs of the civil society, but is a system in itself. The development projects targeting tribal's benefit the civil society rather than these people and alienate them further by denying them the right of self-respect: "But civil society and parties looking for power had to cook up projects apparently for our people, but actually to fulfil the needs of civil society, siphoning off all that money and transforming our people into good-for-nothings" (Janu 2004:47). The consequence is forced transplantation of the forest people into wastelands without any facility like drinking water, toilets, or any other facility conforming them to the constructed image of unclean, uncivilized people.

In the name of development, the girls are put in tribal hostels where they are misused for power and money. Janu observes: "Their greedy, fear-inspiring, powerful hands forced our girls into doing wrong things. They imbibed only the wrong aspects of the civil society. The way they spoke and behaved became a matter of shame and degeneration" branding them as lewd and immoral, stamping them as people destined to fail (Janu 2004:48). Language is another area that has been vitally affected by their geographical proximity to Coorg, contact with migrants and civil society, and the new education system: "Since the people who knew reading and writing were few and since there was no need to write down the language, the script to write them down also did not

exist. Our language is full of Kannada words because Coorg is nearby. Later, the words used by the migrants and by civil society began finding a place in our language. Among our children who studied text books, a rotten new language has also emerged" (Janu 2004:34). But the crux of the problem "mostly relate to our work, our lands and our hunger" (Janu 2004: 34).

All the land that disintegrated into the hands of people, who had documents, became commodities to be sold and bought. The advent of market economy has impacted negatively on their natural habitat. Without any sense of the smell of the soil, Janu says, they fragment and commercialise the land, the state and the media support it through state-funded research, and then cry over environmental disasters, dragging the citizens of the forest further into physical and cultural alienation: "And in colonies our new generation grew up without knowing how to read, washing utensils in restaurants, doing menial jobs in households, becoming unwed mothers, listening to cassette songs and fooling themselves that they were the black power behind the red power of the ten-thousand-strong Party rallies" (Janu 2004:49). They are here deprived of basic amenities to such an extent that their survival is under threat. With no toilets or space to enjoy the breeze, the roads are turned to toilets and they become victims of bank recovery. "When transplanted, we lost not only our lands but also the environment in which we existed" (Janu 2004:52). The new colony life has made them strangers to each other and the joy of togetherness vanishing, a society that was proud of its cleanliness becomes unhygienic.

The comment of Verrier Elwin, the British born Indian anthropologist who lived and worked among the tribals in India, on the cultural and material loss of the tribals when they were compensated with decrepit housing and economic bondage is still valid: "a pitiful instance of what happens when highlanders are dislodged from their mountains" (Elwin 1964: 173). He adds: "to steal colour, beauty and freedom from poor people is just as bad as to exploit them in more obvious ways" (Elwin 1964:336). In the absence of any ownership record, they are often deprived of compensation, which adds to the trauma of the tribal evicted from their moorings. The once-independent, forest-fed people are reduced to a consumerist and dependent society. The edible tubers of the forest that fed this community are declared poisonous. "It is in this situation that we felt we must have some land of our own to keep hunger away," Janu clarifies (Janu 2004:52).

Janu vehemently protests against making their songs, customs, and medical practices mere cultural exhibits, converting in to "paraded pieces for leisure time" (Janu

2004:50) which have no existence in a different system. All these practices, born from an intimate association with Earth, are signs of their presence in this world: "They should exist on their own, striking a balance with the changes that time brings about" (Janu 2004:49). They refuse to be treated as living fossils, fragile relics in virtual museums and exhibition halls or emporiums.

Hailing from a community that practices gender parity, Janu places all her hope in the women who always shoulder more responsibility than the men who surrender their lands for a pinch of tobacco, toddy, arrack, or even a glass of tea supplied by the outsider: "Our community can surely grow only through the togetherness of our women" (Janu 2004:47). She sees women, who bond together for the community and culture, as harbingers of change with immense capacity for resilience: "In our case, unity in everything originates from our women. They have something in common that shelters us from meaninglessly adopting the ways of civil society. They have enough resilience in them to stand for what they feel is right even though they may have to suffer a lot for it. It is among our women that our traditions and the way we dress live even now. There is a resolve that is hardened by the wind and the rain of the forest and in the face of other difficulties" (Janu 2004:53). It is this agential capacity that became manifested when she led about three hundred people in Mananthawadi in 1994 to occupy an area and built huts there. Neither brutal corporeal punishment by the police and consequent hospitalisation for twenty-four days nor eviction from the place ever demoralised them. The strength derived from resistance reverberated to encroachments in neighbouring sites despite the brutal forces of both the leftist and rightist governments to break them up for they had no other place to run away to. To them they "were not just land encroachments. They were life and death for our basic right to live and die where we were born" (Janu 2004:54).

As an insider Janu considers herself qualified enough to represent her people and critique the policies and plans of the government machinery. Since the ways and means of the civil society are different from that of the tribal world, she feels: "It is necessary that people who know about our real situations and are willing to work to resolve them should come from within our community itself" (Janu 2004:54). In most aboriginal societies, land is never a private commodity for transaction, but a critical part of their very sense of self. The outlook of the civil society to land and their problems are different: "All our struggles have been struggles to establish the ownership rights of the real owners of this land for the right to live on it. It is true that civil society's traditions and process relating to land ownership are quite different from the

traditions related to our community. That is why, for the sake of our sheer existence on this land, we are forced to struggle against all centres of power" (Janu 2004:55).

The text of the autobiography ends in her mid-career, but the story as the title suggests, is an unfinished story and the misery of these tribal people also continues. The interventions between society and individual life become valid for the rationality of life and for the cultural expression of that life. If history focuses on collective experience, a polyphonic voice, Janu's rendering becomes a significant one in their own sense of history, and the history of tribal revolution and its making. There has been an explosion of discourses on agency in the social sciences today. Apart from the dictionary definition of the term as action or intervention producing a particular effect, the term has ramifications in human epistemology, particularly in women and Dalit studies. Amartya Sen's observation regarding women becomes pertinent in the case of Janu who has become an icon: "No longer the passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help, women are increasingly seen, by men as well as women, as active agents of change: the dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of both women and men" (Sen 1999: 189). Janu substantiates that women are ready to shoulder "additional modalities and responsibilities that are inescapably associated with the agency of a person" (Sen 1999:190). The different phases of her life—literacy campaign, political involvement, exposure to the other communities—though appear to be rather diverse and disparate, positively contribute "to women's voice and agency-through independence and empowerment" (Sen 1999:191). When women barge into the preserve of men, they prove their agential calibre which has hitherto been male dominion down the centuries. The opportunities at the highest political levels evade women, but the chances have been invariably seized with much vigour (Sen 1999:200-201). The changing role and agency of women is one of the major mediators of economic and social change as one realises while setting the unfinished story of Janu in motion to its current site.

The historical, cultural and gender significance of Janu's autobiography can be understood in the light of the socio-political scenario of Kerala, the southern state of India with 33.4 (33,406,061) million people as per the 2011 census belonging to diverse religious communities. Tribal communities comprise less than 1.5 percent (1.45) of the total with their highest concentration being in Wayanad (where 35.82 percent are tribals), Palakkad (1.02 percent), and Idukki (15.66 percent). There is decadal increase of 0.36 percent from 2001 to 2011 of tribal population, while the decadal growth of total population is 4.9 percent. Tribal scenario in Kerala remains a paradox within the paradox that is the Kerala Model of Development.

Kerala has been eulogised for the unique Kerala Model of Development with its exceptional strides in social indices of health, gender and literacy despite its low per capita income and high unemployment rate.

The main reasons for tribal backwardness in Kerala in postcolonial India have been attributed to:

1. The low percentage of tribal population in Kerala
2. Negligence in policy making.
3. Lack of data available on the tribal communities in the state.
4. Lack of political mobilization of the tribal communities to receive attention from the governments and political parties for the complete implementation of the Supreme Court Order for the reclamation of alienated tribal lands. (Chandran 2012:2-3)

Absence of effective leadership and bargaining power are other significant reasons for their marginalisation. Heller notices that even the progressive leftist parties of Kerala were apathetic to the political organization of the tribals (Heller, 2000). Although the state tops the developmental index of the country, corresponding pattern is not visible in the tribal scenario, which remains a mockery of the developmental model. The regressive pattern among the tribal setting is visible in all the metrics like education, health, mortality and infertility rate, employment rate etc. It is surprising to note that the differences are more obvious in Kerala than in other states which have low socio-development indices and high tribal population.

The survey conducted by Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) shows the abysmal level of tribal habitation in comparison to any other social or religious community in the State. It reports that about 49 percent tribal houses lack toilets, about 24,289 families lack ration cards, hundreds of educated tribals are jobless, while more than 50 percent are living in dilapidated houses (The Staff Reporter 2011:01). The colonial as well as the post-colonial land alienation has removed them from productive resources and accelerated the rate of deprivation and poverty which leads them to a state of non-affiliation to any mainstream community. Janu's account reveals the challenges faced by people like Janu who demands a thorough re-thinking of the tribal marginality.

The hiatus between the lived-in experience of the adivasis and the constitutional guarantee of equality conscientises one about the social injustice meted out to the marginalised sectors of the society. "Large disparities in living standards, displacement from traditional lands and territorial resources, exploitation in the workplace and humiliation in day-to-day transactions mark the Adivasis as a population apart" (Buckles and Khedkar

2013:2). Caste-based representation, access to education and reservation in government jobs have enhanced the quality of life, but have been availed by the upwardly mobile and dominant sections restricting the entry of others: “constitutional protections have become entrenched and mired in an administrative apparatus not yet endowed with eyes to see or ears to hear. Policy and advocacy failures continue unabated, not because the subaltern cannot speak...but rather because they cannot be heard” (Buckles and Khedkar 2013:2).

Though spiritually rooted in landscapes that have confronted radical revolutions, they have braved the opposing forces of governmental apathy, general indifference and marginalisation by conglomerates by refusing, just like the leaves of grass, to breakdown amidst the mounting pressures around them. Resisting the caucus of a homogeneous modernity, indigenous cultures are actively shaping alternative futures for them and appropriating global resources for their own culture specific needs. Culture for them is not merely heritage, but a continuous process of confrontation, preservation, and revival. The autobiographical rendering of Janu in her book ends in 1994, but the resistance movements triggered by this unlettered, tribal woman continues relentlessly in the political scenario controlled by the patriarchal governance. In 1995, fifty-two tribal families occupied surplus land at Panavally and the government was forced to distribute the land among them, Janu being one of the benefactors. The ownership of land altered the living conditions of the people and restored their confidence as it guaranteed a livelihood too.

In 2001 she launched *akudilketty samaram*--building huts--in front of the political capital of the state “that propelled a tribal movement for land to the centre-stage of political discourse in Kerala” (Nazeer 2011). The historic agitation started in August was prompted by the thirty reported starvation deaths among the adivasis. The protest zeroing on the reclamation of alienated land of the adivasis lasted for forty days till the government acceded to the demands of the agitators through a signed agreement on October 16, 2001 to provide up to five acres of land to the adivasis. Failure on the part of the government to implement the contract forced to Janu marshalled the adivasis to reclaim the reserve forest in Muthanga in Wayanad District in 2003 and establish a tribal settlement. The brutal eviction of these people from Muthanga on February 19 2003 marked a red day in the history of modern Kerala when the police mayhem resulted in the death of a policeman and a tribal.

The Muthanga uprising led by Janu and Geethannandan jolted the complacent other, including the academician and media, leading to a realization of the problems of the

tribal people of Kerala. The Muthanga Tribal Agitation of 2003 can be considered as the prominent tribal uprising in Kerala, after the historic Kurichya Rebellion of 1812 against the colonial rule that literally shocked the British. The agitation emanated from the continuous negative or apathetic attitude of the ruling governments of the state to the problems of the tribal people and their attempts to regain their rights over alienated land reached a violent phase with the death of two people in police firing. “The police unleashed a reign of terror in the region; physical molestation of women was also reported, the latter having been substantiated by the National Women's Commission” (Raman 2004: 126).

The government strategies to dilute the Kerala Scheduled Tribes (Restriction of Transfer and Restoration of Alienated Land) Act 1975, under which all tribal land transfers before January 1, 1960 were to be annulled, to ensure that only the land which was alienated after 1986 had to be restored to the adivasis. The verdict of the Supreme Court favouring reclamation of tribal land was diluted by the government by incorporating several clauses protecting the claims of the non-tribal settlers over the long-pending demands of the tribals for their land. While the settlers were allowed to remain in their lands, the tribals were evicted from their land by the law. The shattering of their cultural and economic autonomy as well as the poverty deaths aggravated their discontent.

Dissociating with the party in 1991, the determined woman formed *Adivaasi Vikasana Pravarthaka Samiti* (Organisation for Tribal Development Workers) and toured throughout the adivasi settlements across the state to comprehend the crucial issues encountered by them. The realisation that landlessness and alienation of land were the major causes for the tribal predicament triggered the adivasi struggle for the reclamation of land. With the same intention *Dakshina Mekhala Adivasi Sangamam* (Southern Region Tribal Meet) was organised in 1992 where prominent tribal leaders of South India participated. For stirring and marshalling agitations Janu had been physically battered by the Police and undergone imprisonment.

Indigenous politics has now emerged as a calculated social movement. They organize politically to make them heard and be visible. Instead of being conditioned to be passive objects of dominant history, they have realised the need to be active subjects shaping their own history. They have aligned themselves to the global indigenous movements where indigeneity has become a political discourse. Spathes of indigenous movements are clamouring for recognition in the public sphere through political manoeuvres including action-oriented practices.

These resistance programmes have affirmed their cultures and re-established themselves as viable political

entities posing unique challenges to states and their bureaucracies (Sisson 2005). They attempt to define their identities by experimenting political and social alliances. The tribal people have been awakened to the need of seeking unique ways of making them heard and seen in order to solve their issues. In January 1999, she toured Europe as part of a delegation to participate in the programme organised by People's Global Action Group to protest against globalisation. When the governments were not keeping their part of the negotiation covenant made between the two, they for the first time realised the need of a political mobilization which resulted in the formation of Adivasi Gotra Mahajana Sabha (AGMS) under the leadership of C.K. Janu and .M. Geethanandan. Following a non-violent, Gandhian path they occupied the Muthanga Wildlife sanctuary, in Wayanad which highlighted the issue. The political apathy and denial of justice and human rights towards these people snowballed into a bigger agitation. However, the violent suppression of the agitation opened the eyes of the media and the general public and the world at large to the atrocities against these citizens of India. In addition to the revelation of the brutal face of the state, the Muthanga incident became a major turning point in the political articulation of the ideas and interests of the tribal communities in Kerala (Janu, 2004). The ripple effect of the uprising generated the birth of many tribal organizations in the following years like *Rashtriya Mahasabha* led by Geethanandan. But the lack of any political ideology or experienced leadership hindered the visibility of them in the political corridors of the state.

For the true agent in her, her personal hardships are indicative of desire for social change: "My personal experiences have no relevance as they are part of a cause that highlighted the collective dispossession and deprivation of the hapless adivasis," she comments (Nazeer 2011). "It was the Muthanga agitation and its fallout that strengthened the political consciousness of the Adivasis. The mainstream political parties started wooing the Adivasis and highlighting the Adivasi causes," Janu observes (Nazeer 2011). It was fitting repartee to the condemnation and indignation that she experienced because of her detachment from the major political organization. She remarks: "When I left the KSKTU to focus my attention exclusively on problems faced by my fellow Adivasis, I was taunted by my former comrades in the organisation with their comments that an illiterate woman like me was not going to solve the problems of the Adivasis" (Nazeer 2011).

In 2014, a 162 day long Tribal *Nilpu Samaram* was organised by adivasi *Gothra Maha Sabha* in front of the Secretariat—50 tribals standing for eleven hours every day—which was called off following negotiations by

Medha Patkar. Earlier about 10,000 Adivasi families have received land following the 2001 agreement, says Janu. Over 4,000 hectares of land including the Aralam Farm land in Kannur district has been assigned to the landless Adivasis. In 2016, Janu floated a new political party, *Janadhipathya Rashtriya Sabha*, an ally of NDA and contested in the 2016 Assembly election from Sultan Battery, Wayanad, though she failed. She has become what Pramod Nayar calls, "the knowing subaltern is the newest entrant into the discourse of rights in the postcolonial nation" (Nayar 2014: 301).
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Conclusion

The depletion of natural resources and the systematic forced alienation from their land has led to the destruction of the autonomous nature of tribal culture. Side-lined by history, ignored by the civil society and the indifferent state governments, the tribal community of Kerala have been "without voice in social life or agency in the public sphere" (Chevalier, 2013, xiii). Janu's writings and her actions attempt to give a voice to the dishonour, humiliation experienced and the resistance of a people entangled in the structures of power, poverty and social injustice. "The individual becomes a synecdoche for a community where she is recognized only as a member of her group" (Nayar 2014:299). Though *Mother Forest* appears to be simple, straight forward narration, it offers valid insights into a way of life that established links with the biosphere and exposes some of the gristly problems and provides documentary evidence. It provides valuable insight to a hitherto unrecorded event in the history of the modern state, but kindles and adds to what we think we know.

Ramnika Gupta has opined: "The writing of the tribal people is a testament to their agony and their trials. It is also a medium through which they try to find solutions to their problems. Their writing is an expression of their revolutionary spirit against the 'established' who have conspired to kill their culture and control their resources....Thus literature has proved cataclysmic in positively shaping the non-advasis's perception and attitude towards the adivasis.... It is about man's existence with nature; it is about freedom, equality and brotherhood, about social integration and honesty... (Gupta 2009: 191). Gupta continues: "It expresses the compulsion to speak of one's pain in one's own idiom, breaking the age-old silence and crossing the lines set by the "established to check one's space"(Gupta 2009:192).

The normative history about social change either "are totally gender absent" or male-centric. "They don't take cognizance of the role played by women in bringing

about these changes" (Deka 2013:xxiii). But the current history of adivasis in Kerala is one that is founded on the vision of a woman and her agency. The oral narration of the tribal woman "can help us to both understand the subjective experience of social change, and to bring it to discussions of what is historically significant" (Sarkar 2016:119). The emerging indigenous consciousness is gaining momentum across the world. The regional heterogeneities have been homogenised under the global manner of indigeneity.

Mother Forest provides an alternative representation of the adivasi, and hence a counter narrative on its own. The struggle for land is not only for social justice, but also for "the maintenance of past and the development of possible future conceptions of land, its meanings, its uses and concepts of ownership" (Featherstone 2005: 208). By exploring the truth of contemporary life, deliberating about problems and suggesting solutions, adivasi literature "in every sense of the term, is literature of life and not entertainment or fantasy" (Gupta 2009;192-93).

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Cultural Revitalization and the Experience of Revival Movement in Mizoram (1906-1937)

Dr. Rohmingmawii

Abstract

The establishment of colonial rule in Mizoram since 1890 and the advent of Christianity in 1894 marked the beginning of a new era for the Mizos. In a short span of time, the people experienced overwhelming changes which affect all aspects of the Mizo life and turned their 'world upside down'. Yet, the Mizos refused to be passive observer but assert their resistance through the revival movement that led to the so called 'indigenization of Christianity' in Mizoram. Though it was a religious movement, the people's response swerved it from its primary objective and turned it to a movement which soothe the deep mental longing of the people. It was through the revival movement in Christianity that the Mizos laid their claim for their space in the new politico-social and cultural set up.

Introduction

The hills of Mizoram (earlier known as the Lushai Hills) in Northeast India was the last to be occupied by the colonial government at the end of the nineteenth century. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the relationship between the people living in the Mizo hills and the colonial government was nothing but one of hostility. The expansion of the tea garden in the Cachar plains was considered an intrusion to the territorial claim and hunting ground of the Mizos. As a result, the Mizos conducted repeated raids of the British protectorates in that area and it was usually returned with 'punitive' expeditions from the British government (Lalremsiamia 1997). However, the Mizos could not put up for long against the superior weapons and better organised army of the British. Hence, from 1890 onwards, the colonial

government permanently occupied the land and the Mizo Hills was being placed under colonial rule 'against their will' and these areas 'practically governed by the sword' (Thanzauva 1997: 5).

Following colonial rule, Christian missionaries landed in Mizoram on 11 January 1894. The two pioneering missionaries, Rev. J.H. Lorrain and Rev. F.W. Savidge of the Arthington Aborigine Mission, with their sustained work, gave a script to the non-literate Mizo society and also started a school. Their missionary zeal and efforts marked the beginning of modern education in Mizoram (Llyod 1991). These pioneers left Mizoram, but again returned in 1903 under the patronage of the Baptist Missionary Society of London. The missionaries from Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, Rev. D.E. Jones and Rev. Edwin Rowlands began their work since 1897 and continued to operate in the northern part of Mizoram while the Baptist missionaries confined themselves in the southern part (Hminga 1987). Thus, the Presbyterian Church and the Baptist church became the largest denominations in Mizoram. During the colonial period, the revival movement was experienced most widely in these denominations, and it was partly responsible for the emergence of other denominations in Mizoram in the subsequent period.¹

Understanding the revival movement among the Mizo

The term 'revival' has been loosely applied to a wide range of phenomena, especially in the religious and cultural movements. This paper is concerned with the cultural revival movement among the Mizos in Northeast India. The dictionary definition of the term denotes 'restoration to life' of the vigour and strength which are lost and/or renewal of interest in something (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary 2005). An investigation into the understanding of revival mostly leads us to the functional aspect of the experience in the given situation.

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However, in Christianity, the term revival implies a renewal or increased spiritual interest as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit that resulted in rejuvenating the church's life and growth of church members (McLoughlin 1978: 3; Hastings 1980: 753). The works on revival within Christianity emphasises on the work of God to revive his people in the 'periods of great drought, great deadness, apathy and lifelessness in the history of the church' (Llyod 1991: 27), and the theological interpretation tends to treat it largely as an isolated phenomenon. The revival movement experienced in the history of America and England was also referred as the 'Great Awakening' or 'the Awakening' (Hastings 1980: 754-55).

Although culture is dynamic, nevertheless, societies seek to perpetuate their culture, and in normal circumstances, the cultural changes are taking place 'as a part of the normal processes of individual training and socialization' and it was usually done unconsciously (Linton 1943: 230). But Linton (1943: 239) argues, when 'a society becomes conscious that there are cultures other than their own and that the existence of its own is threatened', a movement to revive the 'selected' and 'remembered' culture takes place. Anthropologists have used various terms to characterise such revival movements, namely 'nativistic movement', 'reform movement', 'cargo cult', 'religious revival', 'messianic movement', 'social movement', 'revolution', 'charismatic movement', and so on (Wallace 1956: 264). Anthony F.C. Wallace uses the term 'revitalization movement' as a comprehensive term for the cultural movement in a society which are variedly expressed above (Wallace 1956: 264).

In a cultural revitalization movement, the end target is not to bring back the culture for its own sake. It is rather an attempt to find accommodation in the new system/state by wrestling some control in the process of the cultural change that has been taking place. The 'revitalization' model of Anthony F.C. Wallace (1956: 279) proposes that when there is a 'deliberate, conscious, organized efforts by members of a society to create a more satisfying culture' the individual members of the society undergo 'high stress' or feel 'disillusionment with a distorted cultural *gestalt*'. The experience of the ghost dance by the various groups of the American Indians is also studied as a sort of revitalization movement.² Anthropologist Ralph Linton (1943: 230) is of the view that, 'any conscious, organized attempt on the part of a society's members to revive or perpetuate selected aspects of its culture' is called 'nativistic movement'. He sees this phenomenon, which is essentially a revival movement, in a 'situation of inequality' that arises in a society which is in contact with other cultures (Linton 1943: 234). He maintains that revival movement can happen in a society which

is in contact with other cultures for a long time 'when a society becomes conscious that there are cultures other than its own and that the existence of its own culture is threatened.' It is frequently seen in societies that came in contact with European culture where 'each group is conscious of its own culture and consciously seeks to perpetuate its distinctive elements' (Linton 1943: 235, 240). In reading the revival movement, studies from the religious perspective (see Orr 1970; Warren 1954; Phillips 1989) tend to emphasise on divine intervention as a precondition for the outbreak of the revival. The secular scholars, on the other hand, tend to place the occurrence in a larger socio-cultural context instead of treating it as an isolated phenomenon, and it is studied to understand as people's response to the process of change in a society (Robertson 1970).

The Mizo term for revival is '*harhna*' which corresponds to 'awakening'; terms like '*harhtharna*' (reawakening), or '*hlimna*' (joyfulness) are also used. All these words connote a state of liveliness or sprightliness. It also refers to a 'phenomenon marked by a state of excitement accompanied by enthusiastic activities of singing, body movements, preaching and even of social action' (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 207). Therefore, to the Mizos, it was not simply a state of being. It represents action and expression which formed the vital part of their revival movement. In fact, when they ask if they are taking part in the revival movement, (in Mizo language expression used - *I hlim ve em?*), it basically means whether they take part in the revival singing and dancing.

The use of the term 'revival' in Christianity may be perplexing to the movement in Mizoram which happened when Christianity was preached only for twelve years. But the evangelical usage was applied to the state of experience in the Mizo church as well. The Mizos soon developed their own understanding of the phenomenon, and to them, it was more of '*hlimna*' (joy). The term '*harhna*' was also commonly used, and it was understood to mean awakening, as if someone suddenly awakened from a long and deep slumber. This notion was quite suitable to the people as they identified themselves as 'coming to the light' when Christianity came after being in the dark for all those times.

Though the term 'revival' was applied to the movement in the premise of the church, the Mizo revival was peculiar in many senses from those experienced in other parts of the world because the Mizos understood and experienced it in their own way and establish for themselves a 'Mizo revival'. However, in order to understand the Mizo experience of revival, it has to be placed in its own context. A brief historical sketch may help in contextualizing the movement under study.

Colonial modernity, Christianity and crisis in the Mizo culture

At the time of the advent of the British rule, the Mizo hills was occupied by many independent villages who were ruled by chiefs. Due to the practice of shifting cultivation, these villages moved from one site to another every ten years or so after they used up all the land in the area (Shakespeare 1977:22). This sometimes resulted into conflict with other chiefs. The villages were more or less self-sufficient and trade was limited to barter system. Though they lived in separate villages, the cultural practices were largely similar to one another as they belonged to the same ethnic group.

After the establishment of the colonial rule, minimal changes were made in the village administration and the traditional institution of chiefship was retained though much of the power of the chiefs were curtailed.³ Many new systems were introduced in the political administration which disrupted the traditional socio-political set up. For instance, the centralised administration, unlike the autonomous village administration in earlier times, ushered in the modern bureaucratic system. The new western education introduced by the missionaries catered to these changes and administrative requirements. There emerged a new educated middle class among the Mizo, many of them were from the traditionally unprivileged group, and the new western education facilitated their mobility. It disturbed the traditional social hierarchy where the highest privileges were enjoyed by the chief and his functionaries. The imposition of forced-labour (or *kuli*) under the British rule was hated by the Mizos because they felt it was the ultimate symbol of their subjugation. The demand of house-tax in a relatively cashless society caused much financial burden to the Mizos, and many migrated to the neighbouring areas of contemporary Manipur to evade these payments (Diary of Lt. Col. H.St.P. Maxwell 1900).

As Frederick S. Downs (1992: 215) rightly observed, in highly integrated tribal societies, challenges in one aspect affect the other and caused 'socio-cultural trauma.' For instance, the British government's policy of disarmament, apart from pacifying the people, also challenged the traditional value of gallantry which was required for the entry of *pialral* or heaven when the use of firearm and gaming was restricted.⁴ Gallantry was intimately connected with their traditional religious ethos, but rapidly became irrelevant under Christian influences and changes in the political system. In fact, the traditional socio-political system demanded the quality of gallantry to survive in a situation of perpetual warfare among villages and tribes. Thus, with the advent of the British, the Mizos were abruptly exposed into a situation

which was completely alien to them. Frederick S. Downs explains the experience of the tribes as follows:

For the first time they were brought under the authority of an alien political power and the old-village state polity was undermined. The procedures, and the values those procedures presupposed, of the imposed administrative and judicial system were entirely alien. A money-economy was introduced with new material options such as mill cloth and kerosene lanterns and tea which replaced the largely self-sufficient traditional economies. Modern communications and transport systems were introduced, breaking down the barriers of isolation necessary to the maintenance of the traditional way of life. Perhaps most significant of all was the presence in the hills of a number of outsiders – administrators, clerks, soldiers, merchants, technicians, missionaries – who provided new life-style models in the newly created towns. The process of modernization of cultural change had begun, and the old isolated cultures began a slow process of disintegration (Downs 1992: 215).

The pressure felt under the dual contact with the European is clearly described by N.E. Parry (1976: 18-19), one of the superintendents of Lushai Hills when he described the experience of Lakhers (one of the Mizo tribes) and this represents the experience of other tribes as well:

These tribes having been brought under administration in interests other than their own, their activities have been circumscribed, head hunting has been stopped, slaves have been freed, guns have been controlled. And the Hillman has been made to conform to a settled though loose form of administration. It will naturally take a savage time to adapt himself to order and discipline, and meanwhile, he may lose much of his interest in life. This is shown very clearly by the songs of the Zeuhngang: 'Government has taken over all our country, we shall always have to work for government; it were better had we never been born,' etc.

The Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, A.G. McCall (1977: 196-77), who believed in the government's policy of upholding the social customs of the people, also agreed that the British administration had far reaching implications in the life of the people. He observed that the establishment of the British government in the hills alone was enough to make the world of 'Lushai' 'staggered', 'bewildered' and colonial control over their land paralyzed the community. Added to this, the introduction of Christianity posed challenges to many of the cultural traditions. As in other mission operational areas, conversion meant refraining from all the traditional cultural practices which were considered 'heathen' and adopting a new system which often resulted in rupturing relations among families who may not be Christian (Webster 2007: 62-63). The early church prohibited the use of drums in worship, and the traditional Mizo songs and

dances, including its style were all banned for its palpable connection with 'heathen' practices. The first Christians in the South at Pukpui village were accused by their chief of disobeying orders when they observed Sunday as a holiday, and would not do any work (Saiathanga 1993: 15). The burning of charms and amulets by some of the pupils in the mission school caused hostile reactions from parents and the public as a whole (Hminga 1987: 59). The new converts were expected to strictly observe Sundays, and could not participate in any village ceremony, which involved religious functions related to their old religion, like, *katongpui siam*, *fano dawī*⁵ and so on. Thus, the newly-converted Christians were seen as anti-social, and were ostracised in many villages.

It was a very common practice for the Mizos to chew and smoke tobacco, and drink rice beer. In nearly every Mizo festivity, rice-beer drinking is an important feature. However, total prohibition was adopted against taking liquor (*zu* or rice beer), and among the few criteria the new Christians were required to meet; abstinence from drinking was one of the foremost requirements. Though the missionaries did not allow smoking a pipe inside the place of worship, they did not prohibit touse among the Mizo Christians. They could be ex-communicated from the Church, if after conversion they were found to be drinking rice beer. In fact, this become one of the biggest obstacles for the Mizos after religious conversion (Zairema 1978: 11). However, as much or even more than the missionaries were confused with Christianity and Western culture, the local people were gravely perplexed, for their culture and religion could not be clearly separated. The missionaries, when we study their work today, may have been relatively considerate to certain components of culture, but the 'distinction may be too subtle for the average convert' (Downs 1994: 191) to understand it.

The teaching of a new religion brought radical change in the lifestyle of the Mizos, wherein the Mizo Christians were expected to adapt themselves to new Christian standards of behaviour. The result was confusion and invalidation of many of the earlier Mizo cultural practices and therefore, a wholesale denunciation of all that was followed prior to conversion into Christianity. The concept of 'new creation' for the converts was emphasised by the people so much so that they condemned the traditional tunes and songs, dances, *khuang* (drum), use of *zu* (rice beer) etc. by the early Mizo Christians themselves (Pachau 1998: 134-36).

Many of the chiefs like Vanphunga of Khandaih, Lalzika of Sihfa were hostile to Christianity because they saw Christianity as a disruptive element in the normal village life (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006). The non-Christians would compose a satire against these people

whom they thought were merely imitating the foreigners. The complexity of the problem lies in the fact that, while the chiefs protested conversion to Christianity, unless they were ready to fight the British government, they could not do anything against the Christians who refused to follow the customary rules.

At the same time, the traditional institutions like *bawi* (bondage, some translated as slavery) system (Hminga 1987: 68; see also McCall 1977: 121-131) and *zawlbuk* (young men's dormitory) which were the backbone of the chiefs also came under attack as they became irrelevant under colonial rule. Thus, in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the Mizos found themselves powerless and confused. They were in a situation of what Christopher Hill calls 'the world turned upside down' (Hill 1978). In the words of A.G. McCall, who served as one of the superintendents of the Lushai hills:

Against these varying contacts, the Lushais [Mizos] had no equipment on which to fall back for strength, except the traditions and the stories of their grandfathers. But the pillars of their strength had tumbled down with shame and humiliation before these new and irresistible British invaders (cf. McCall 1977: 197).

Christianity and the Mizo revival movement

The revival in Mizoram was first experienced in 1906, twelve years after the first missionaries landed in Mizoram, six years after the first Mizo converted to Christianity, with only 122 male and 45 female, a total of 167 Christians in north Mizoram (Nunthara 1996: 59) while there were more than 245 Christians in the south⁶ (Anonymous 1993: 26). The Mizos experienced repeated revival since then unlike the Khasis from whom the revival 'fire' was received.

Most of the studies on revival movement in Mizoram identified the waves peaking in 1906, 1913, 1919 and around 1930. The mission field of the Welsh Calvinistic Mission (later known as the Welsh Presbyterian Church) in Northeast India experienced the offshoot of the Welsh revival of 1904-05, first in Khasi-Jaintia Hills and later in the Mizo Hills (Kipgen 1997: 215). When the news of the revival in the Khasi hills reached Mizoram, the missionaries sent delegates from Mizoram to attend a revival meeting in Khasi hills. These delegates experienced the revival fervour in the Khasi Hills (Lalsawma 1994: 33; Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 169). On reaching Aizawl on April 4, they stopped at Chaltlang, two miles from Aizawl and offered prayer where each of them felt some touch, an inspiration within their hearts (Lalhmuaka 1988: 135-36). The real outbreak was felt in the farewell meeting of the southern delegates on April 8, 1906 (Lalsawma 1994: 36). And this was the first revival wave, and it spread to

distant villages in the northern and the southern parts of Mizoram where there were Christians.

There is a tendency to connect the second wave in 1913 with the earlier revival and Lalsawma said it was 'a kind of a flashback current' of the first wave (Lalsawma 1994). It was experienced in the village Hmunhmeltha which was made up of Christians who were affected in the earlier wave (Lalsawma 1994: 59). However, there is no doubt that apart from the first wave, the subsequent waves of cultural revival originated from Mizoram. This revival also spread to various parts of Mizoram, and it covered a wider area than the first wave (Carter and Luaia 1945 : 75; Vanlalchhuanawma 2006 : 198; Lalsawma 1994: 76-7).

The third wave of revival which came in 1919 was considered to be the 'greatest and most powerful' revival in Mizoram (Saiathanga 1993: 83). Though it is said to have begun in 1919, there were reports of such stirring since 1916. Nevertheless, the stirring in 1919 was the most dynamic and it spread all over Mizoram within a matter of two or three months. Its spread was compared with 'a wild fire in a dry land' (Lalsawma 1994: 91). It is reported to have also spread to other places outside Mizoram inhabited by Mizo Christians in Tripura and Manipur, and even affected the Nagas (Kipgen 1997: 238). It is difficult to point the beginning of the fourth stirring as there were sporadic outbreaks here and there since the third wave. In the 1930s, however, a great wave was experienced again for the fourth time (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 329).

In the revival meetings, there was a lot of chanting and singing, which continued for days and nights together, followers experienced great excitement, indulged in dancing, and listened to the prayers of the preachers (Lalsawma 1994:153). Such an ecstatic state was a conspicuous feature of the revival movement. From the beginning, emotional manifestations like crying and dancing were the most common manifestations of the revival, and therefore, the general masses considered it to be the way to experience the spirit (Liangkhaia 2006:26; Llyod 1991: 96). Later, the people went to the extreme physical manifestations like symbolic actions, transference of the spirit by touch, state of trance or swooning, comatose rigidity, symbolic actions, speaking in unknown tongues, prophetic utterances, *khurbing* (spiritual attachment between opposite sex that often developed into intimate relationship, and if it continued, it may result into illicit sexual relationships) (Kipgen 1997: 296-298; Pachuau 1998: 129), etc. 'Speaking in tongues' or glossolalia (*tawnghriatloh*), when used in praying and singing constituted an enthusiasm that ran high, and 'very often, excited singing in a group led some to sing in the unknown tempo of the hymn, and occasionally the known would be swallowed up in the unknown altogether' (Lalsawma 1994: 158-59). 'Quaking' (*khurh*

harhna) which began in around 1920 and was later called *harhna sang* or *hlimsang* (high revival) also to be found. It was rejected by the leaders of the southern church in the 1920s, but it broke out again in the early 1930s and it was mainly confined to the north (Kipgen 1997: 245; Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 340-41). The revivalists (*hlimsang* or *mihlim* as they were called) acted like they were completely drunk with *zu*, and were rightly called 'drunk with Spirit'. It is said that they claimed to be able to directly communicate with God verbally at any given time, and often proclaimed what 'Father God says', for which they were often known as *Pa Pawl*, 'the Father's Clique' (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 341). Some of these features were condemned as 'excesses' even by the church and it produced division within the church (Pachuau 1998: 128).

The peculiarity of the Mizo revival movement lies in that fact that there was no individual leader or charismatic figure around whom the movement revolved. It was the people who led and directed the movement. There were actions and instances that could be interpreted as being anti-establishment during this revival movement. When it became extreme, the government had to intervene. In 1937, at the stirring of Kelkang village, the revivalists went to the extent of preventing even the pastor and the church leaders from preaching in the church. The revivalists also prophesied that the British rule would soon come to an end, and there would be supply of rice from the sky. This was taken seriously by the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, Major A.G. McCall. He took it as sedition and he marched to the village with his troop and arrested the revivalists. He even claimed that there was a coup to kill him but it failed because he took them by surprise (McCall 1997: 51).

In many places, the revivalists exhibited uncompromising behaviour against the established church, that is the mission church. They began to use drum (*khuang*) which was earlier prohibited by the church in the worship services. Songs in traditional tunes were composed, sang and danced. In the revival meetings, all the Protestant worship service orders were broken as the revivalists took charge of the meeting. The presence of the missionaries did not make a difference. The missionary Rev. E.L. Mendus writes:

One of our chief difficulties is that many of these people will not listen to teaching or respond to guidance from Church leaders for they say they have the Spirit of God himself within them. Who is man therefore that he should be listened to? (Thanzauva 1997 : 62).

The church leaders, both the European missionaries and the local leaders, scorned at the emotionalism and 'excesses' of the movement. In southern part where the Baptist Mission worked, the feature of quaking (*khurh*

harhna) and freezing which became popular from the 1920s was openly branded as outside the work of God, and it was related to 'illiteracy and simple mindedness' (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 202). In spite of this, the revival movement continued to happen, and it added many new members to the Christian fold. While the number of Christians grew, there were among them that were branded as 'revival Christians'. They were those who came to the Christian fold during the revival movement but they went back to their 'old' ways after the revival was over (Lalsawma 1994:155). Nevertheless, revival movement has been attributed to be one of the most important factors for the growth of the number of Christians (Downs 1994: 122).

Mizo experience- revival of traditional culture

It would be safe to say that the whole community, though in varying degrees among individuals, was involved in the revival movement which carried cultural revivalism. Though it happened within the ambience of the church, the educated Mizo church leaders did not totally accept the movement while the European missionaries were very suspicious about the trend. Nonetheless despite such disapproval and repeated attempts to control the movement, cultural revivalism increased in influence and extended to further areas (Hminga 1987: 347, 349).

When the first revival stirring was experienced by the Christians, the non-Christians also experienced the revival of 'heathen song' called *Puma Zai*, later known as *Tlanglam Zai* (meaning community dance song because the whole village community often was caught up in singing and dancing) in 1908. Both believers and non-believers alike participated enthusiastically in the performance of the song and the dance. It was a song in the 'old Lushai tune' set with new words, generally in praise of a great chief, and some were to deride the Christian preachers too (Hminga 1987: 87). One *Puma Zai* goes like this:

Lehkhabu keng vai lem chang,
Chanchin hril reng reng Puma
(Carrying books, imitating foreigners
Always proclaiming something Puma)(Carter and Luaia 1945: 57).

This happened after the futile attempt of the chiefs to persecute the Christians for their uncompromising character and their experience of revival. It was considered as a 'counter-attack' to the Evil One to halt the spread of Christianity in the Hills and the 'resurgence of heathenism' (Llyod 1991:55). In the words of J.M. Llyod, a missionary:

It spread like wild fire to all parts of the hills. Amazing manifestations of feeling accompanied the singing- almost as though the revival was parodied. Great feasts were held

during which the young men and girls danced in ecstasy. These demonstrations were made in every village. The cause of Christ seemed doomed in Lushai. The travelling preachers complained that preaching was a burden. The Gospel was losing ground and no one wanted to listen to it (Llyod 1991: 54-55).

The celebrations around *Puma Zai* soon died down due to the bamboo famine in 1911-12, but the resurgence of the 'old tune' for a time challenged the limit dictated to the Mizo cultural practices. Though it failed to get a solid grounding in a fragile socio-economic set up and thus, lost its force soon, this element was later accommodated in the Christian revival movement with more vigour and dynamism.

In the course of revival movement, the Mizo composition of indigenous hymns and tune, which were earlier rejected by the Christian community, made their way into the Christian ambit (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 242). The traditional form of singing, called *Zo zai* had already been prohibited for the Christians by the 1910 Presbytery (Remthanga 1996: 203). In 1915, Lorrain reported that out of the 450 hymns in the latest edition of hymn book published jointly by the Welsh Mission and the Baptist Missionary Society, 193 hymns were 'composed or translated by the Lushai's themselves' (Anonymous 1993: 129). New songs were ever increasing, and the Mizo Christians loved these new hymns and sang them with ecstatic fervour (Anonymous 1993: 266). Singing was one major element of the revival movement (Downs 1992: 8). During the revival movement, the people were so fond of singing that they sang all night (Kipgen 1997: 274-75). This was in a way the re-emergence of traditional practice, when young men and young girls sang and danced the whole night, particularly on the occasion of *Chapchar Kut*, the most celebrated festival of the Mizos (Shakespeare 2008: 87). The revival, too, was characterised by round the clock singing and dancing.

The use of drum in church service was another breakthrough. Drum (*khuang*) was closely associated with *zo zai*, and its use in the worship service was inconceivable. However, the revivalists began to use drums in the revival meetings, and then in the church without the sanction from the church or the missionaries, and it became a permanent accompaniment of singing all over Mizoram especially from the third wave except in the two Mission-station churches in Serkawn and Mission Veng where *khuang* was continued to be banned for a long time.⁷ The foreign missionaries strongly disliked using the drum. Nevertheless, drum was used extensively in almost all the Christian gatherings. It resulted into the formation of another church functionary, though unofficial for a long time, the drummer, who was as a rule self-appointed. J.M. Llyod specifically remarks the influence of use of

drums, which he considers as a 'very potent instrument' to charge the gathering:

The presence of the drum affected meetings profoundly and had a mesmeric influence on many. It induced and controlled the church service in 1919 more than in any previous revival. The repetitive singing of the same hymn was largely though not altogether due to the use of drum... The drum appeared to dictate to the congregation and even to the Holy Spirit (Lloyd 1991: 192).

The pre-Christian practice of giving feasts was also re-introduced during the revival movement, but in a modified form. Earlier, it was for the performance of *thangchhuah* that animals were killed and community feast was provided for the entire village, or as a sacrificial offering but here, it was for 'the glory of God.' This practice in its new form was noted first at the village of Hnawka (the chief) in connection with the 'fairly grand awakening' that happened in that village in August, 1910. Following the conversion of many people to Christianity, a Christian leader, Chawngbuta organized a large gathering on March 20, 1911 and prepared a feast by offering his mithun(gayal), which was one of the most valued animals of the Mizo, for the Christian delegates (Pachau and Schendel 2015:78). In the latter half of the 1920s, certain Christians in the south began to give their domestic animals like pigs, mithun, etc. and provided feast to the entire village 'to glorify God' or as a form of thanksgiving(Anonymous 1993: 248) and it was continued in many other places as well.

The element of individuality favoured by the new system, for instance, employment by individual's merit, conversion by the individual's decision, appointment of a preacher in the worship service, and so on were new components impacting the highly 'communitarian' Mizo society. On the other hand, the revivalists undermined this system when they emphasized on the communitarian participation in preaching, praying, etc. Apart from the community singing and dancing, there were *Fangrual* or *Zinrual* (the Itinerant Group Campaigners) especially from the third wave, who visited villages and preached the Gospel. One Pastor of that time remarked that there were always too many preachers in villages (Lalsawma 1994: 92). '*Tawngtairual*' or 'mass prayer' or 'community prayer' was a common practice during the revival movement. The practice seems to have no direct cultural root, but the whole congregation praying together simultaneously is much akin to the traditional Mizo custom of communal involvement in various endeavours (Vanlalchhuanawma 2006: 308). Through the revival movement, many of the cultural practices which were condemned and censured by the early Mizo church resurfaced in the Christian community. In fact, the Mizo revival movement resulted

into the 'indigenization of Christianity' (Downs 1994; Kipgen 1997; Vanlalchhuanawma 2006), transforming the western Christianity into their own.

Conclusion

In the situation of 'cultural conflict', anthropological studies show that the subject can either bear the stress and give themselves into regressive action, or attempt to assert their identity through some means (Linton 1943; Wallace 1956). Revival or revitalization of culture is one of such means to derive and redefine the self, claiming its space against the dominating force in the dynamics of cultural change.

Within a brief period, the Mizos were abruptly exposed to the new system and new culture under the dual contact of colonial rule and Christianity. The independent political control and intact cultural tradition was suddenly disrupted by the encounter with the stronger political and cultural force. The presence of a foreign power and the complete demilitarization subjected the erstwhile warriors with little or no chance to rise against the invasion to their realm of control. Under such circumstances, it was a big challenge for the Mizos to find their place in the cosmos. Since armed uprising was out of question for the disarmed tribe, the form of resistance that took place during the colonial rule in Mizoram was rather subtle. It was in the cultural sphere that the Mizos carved out for themselves a space which was effectively manipulated to accommodate their survival claim. Through the Christian revival movement which was witnessed repeatedly during the colonial rule, the Mizos were able to wrest their claim of distinct entity, forcing their foreign masters to accept their resilience against the challenges that confronted them. The objective of the Mizo revival movement was purely religious but the people's response swerved it from its primary objective and turned it to a movement which soothed the deep mental longing of the people. It was in and through the revival movement in Christianity that the Mizos laid their claim for their space in the new politico-social and cultural set up. The cultural pre-eminence induced by the new colonial power was checked to the level acceptable to the Mizos as they indigenized the movement as well as Christianity.

Notes

1. Due to the difference of opinion regarding the revival, there were dissenters who started their own sect, like Tlira Pawl, or who joined some established denominations like the Salvation Army whose founder was a former revivalist, etc. For more, see Vanlalchhuanawma 2006.

2. For more, see Wallace 1972; DeMallie, 1995.
3. Before the advent of the British, the Mizo chiefs were independent sovereign rulers in their jurisdiction but most of their judicial powers and their rights over the land were curtailed by the colonial government. For more, see McCall (1977), Malsawmdawngliana and Rohmingmawii (2013).
4. In the Mizo belief of life after death, there are two places of abode for the spirits-*Mithi khua* and *Pialral*. In *Mithi khua*, life would be considered more or less the same as their earthly life with all the struggles while in *Pialral*, the souls would enjoy eternal bliss and luxury. It was reserved for the extraordinary achievers during their lifetime. Since they lived in a situation of perpetual threat from enemies and wild animals, the brave men were the heroes, and *pialral* was reserved for them.
5. These were the annual community sacrificial ceremony and all the villagers were expected to take part in it. It was performed to seek blessings for the village for that year.
6. In 1901 Census, there were 82,434 people in Mizoram. <http://mizoram.nic.in/about/popu-trend.htm> accessed on 24.8.18.
7. At Mission Veng, the mission centre of the Presbyterian Church, drum began to be used permanently in worship services only from 1980 and at Serkawn, which is the centre of the Baptist Mission, it was used from 1982.

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The Narrative Gravity of Weepingsikkim.blogspot.com

Dr Vibha Arora*

Abstract

Initiated in June 2007, weepingsikkim is a mediated 'framed' cyberspace censored/operated by a blogger/webmaster(s) in order to narrate a particular perspective and disseminate information about the multi-sited activities and protests enacted by some indigenous people against the proposed and ongoing construction of hydropower projects over River Teesta in Sikkim and North Bengal in India. The activists reiterate emphatically in words and through visual content that they want to cherish and preserve their fragile Himalayan landscape from greedy capitalists. The visual narrative frames and represents the Lepchas as environmentalists and the true custodians of Sikkim's environment. The blog has functioned as an electronic bulletin board, an online chronicle of the activities, and is subsisting in cyberspace as a multimedia archive about the Teesta movement (2007-09).

My analysis of weepingsikkim emphasizes how the availability of multimedia narratives originating from various sources can blur the distance and difference between the ethnographer and the subjects/field and democratize the production of knowledge and representations. Images, texts, films, and comments posted on weepingsikkim could be used stand-alone for any research. However, I have used them in conjunction with textual and visual data gathered through fieldwork, discussion and conversations with subjects and informants/collaborators using Internet and Communication Technologies (ICT). Given the digital divide and persistent inequities in access to telephony and internet among people residing in Sikkim, I emphasize the danger of (mis)representing and proposing generalizations based only on the blog and ICT.

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Introduction

This paper analyses the organization of a particular narrative authored and circulated by subjects themselves namely indigenous activists residing in remote Himalayan Sikkim in Northeast India on weepingsikkim.blogspot.com (henceforth weepingsikkim). It is remarkable that a small-scale resource-poor social movement¹ emerging from a remote Himalayan borderland of India where a big digital divide persists has used internet activism and authored representations on weepingsikkim.blogspot.com. In doing so, they have acquired a global presence and a stronger voice. It is equally striking how cultural representations framed and circulated in cyberspace are engaging with ethnographic writings and informing our fieldwork practices. This case demonstrates how the Internet has become an active space for circulating self-presentations and a site for validating or challenging ethnographic representations. How I picture and what I write about them is available online without constraints of geography and time so long as 'democratic' access is given to them and to others.² Undeniably, the digital domain is democratizing the production of knowledge by permitting greater collaboration and demanding reflexivity in writing and methodological practice(s) (Banks 2001; Pink, Kurti and Afonso 2004) nonetheless it is concurrently undermining our authority to represent others.

Initiated in June 2007, weepingsikkim is a mediated 'framed' cyberspace censored/operated by a blogger/webmaster(s) in order to narrate a particular perspective and disseminate information about the multi-sited activities and protests enacted by some indigenous people against the proposed and ongoing construction of hydropower projects over River Teesta in Sikkim and North Bengal in India. I will term these organized protests as 'Save the River Teesta' movement after reworking their popular slogan 'Save Teesta'. Texts, newspaper reports, visuals, and films have been uploaded on this blog and it has been inter-networked with other online media

content and websites. It is not the organization of Save the River Teesta movement, but the blog and its discourse that is the central object/subject of my social research here. The blog exemplifies 'web activism' where notions of the self, the community, and representations of state-directed development, and participatory development get transformed and challenged by non-state actors who transgress state-produced and state-controlled texts and images (see Dartnell 2006: 4). I juxtapose the particular representational frame evoked on the blog between June 2007 and November 2010 with my analysis that draws on extended fieldwork, digital ethnography and visual research. My analysis of weepingsikkim emphasizes that online circulation of different ethnographic writing(s) (by subjects themselves and by anthropologists) and availability of multimedia narratives originating from various sources can blur the distance and difference between the ethnographer and the subjects/field and generate fuller cultural representations.

For my unfamiliar readers, I will briefly explain the main reasons for the organization and emergence of Save the River Teesta movement. On the one hand, the government of Sikkim asserts that the hydraulic development of River Teesta is the prime solution to the national energy crises and Sikkim's underdevelopment. Hence, in partnership with private companies it has proposed to generate around 3500 megawatts from the cascade development of River Teesta. It contends that hydropower projects would generate revenue, augment employment opportunities and develop the infrastructure and develop Sikkim. On the other hand, civil society organizations and indigenous activists have organized opposition to counter what they term to be the government's arbitrary decision to authorize the construction of 26 mega hydropower projects on the Teesta River. The majority of those who are opposing these projects belong to the indigenous Lepcha and Bhutia community mostly who will be directly and indirectly affected by these projects. Displacement, environmental degradation, loss of land and their livelihood, and loss of culture and heritage with the 'desecration' of their sacred sites are some common concerns. The government and project developers claim that they have consulted the people in order to generate consent and their participation have been counteracted with the emergence of formal opposition since June 2007. The leadership and membership core of the Save the River Teesta movement is drawn from the Lepcha community and their protests have inordinately focused on Dzongu (the Lepcha reserve) and North Sikkim, and less on other stages of the Teesta cascade. The activists' banner proclaiming, 'In the name of development, do not make us refugees in our own homeland [Sikkim]' succinctly challenges the rhetoric

of public interest. Nonetheless, some members of the Lepcha community residing in Dzongu were persuaded or pressurized to sell their ancestral land with promises of employment and other developmental benefits. Hence, the unanimity within the Lepcha community of Dzongu and their voice is diluted. The state government is the single largest employer in Himalayan Sikkim and many people repeatedly mentioned to me that they could not think of antagonizing their political and administrative bosses. The movement has not gained momentum and strength definitely due to internal differences within the Lepcha community and existing ethnic divisions, but also significantly due to the fear of government repression. This partially explains why the indefinite hunger strike was withdrawn and the protests subsided in September 2009 with both government and leaders deciding in September 2009 to negotiate and find solutions to the raised concerns.

I begin this paper by outlining how new technologies and texts demand adoption of new methodologies and the closer integration of the visual in our ethnographic practice. These developments generate new sites for research, enable fieldwork at a distance, but can also inhibit us by exercising control over our ethnographic representations. The second section discusses the structure, the thematic content, and organization of multimedia content on weepingsikkim, and the outreach and limitations of such internet activism. The third section discusses the framing of Lepchas as eco-warriors and the critical role played by pictures uploaded on the blog. I group the different visual representations circulated here into photographs of people, pictures of the landscape, satellite and digital Google images, photographs of banners, pictures of the day count, images of different kinds of maps, pictures of formal government communications and orders, and so on. Embedded in texts and comments, they document and provide visual evidence in support of the textual argument, and powerfully engage the viewer-reader.

My writing in this paper has been influenced by discussions and debates in three areas. Firstly, Erving Goffman's *Presentation of the Self*, the *Writing Cultures* debate on the inherently partial nature of ethnographic representations, the importance of multi-sited fieldwork, and the need to understand the connection between local and global contexts (Goffman 1959, Clifford and Marcus 1986, Gupta and Ferguson 1997, Sassen 2004). Secondly, the emergent literature on internet ethnography and internet activism (Dartnell 2006, Jordan 2001, Jones 1999, Kahn and Kellner 2004, Rheingold 2002) has influenced my understanding of technopolitics. What is vital here is not merely the form and content of the blog, but what it frames-in or frames-out. Thirdly, discussions in visual anthropology explaining the indexical and

representational quality of photographs, the intentionality in visual representations and their circulation in different media, and the idea of visual as evidence have influenced my interpretations (Banks and Morphy 1997, Banks 2001, Edwards 2001, Edwards and Hart 2001, Hall 1997, Jay 2002, Pink 2001, Pink, Kurti and Afonso 2004, Pink 2006).

Ethnographic Representations, Fieldwork, and Hybrid Methodology

Undeniably, ethnographic writings are inherently partial and therefore a particular representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986). This paper is an analysis about group behaviour and their self-representation in a local-global context, but concurrently also a text of my experiments in methodological practices. I have been writing about conflicting claims over natural resources in this region since 2001 and my engagement has been ethnographic, historical, and now increasingly mediated by information and communication technologies (henceforth ICT). I recall Sarah Pink's declaration in the opening sentence of the introduction to *Working Images* 'Now, more than ever before, ethnographers are using visual and digital images and technologies to research and represent the cultures, lives, and experiences of other people' (Pink, Kurti and Afonso 2004: 1). Images, texts, films, and comments posted on weepingsikkim could be used stand-alone for my research nonetheless I have used them in conjunction with textual and visual data gathered through fieldwork, discussion and conversations with subjects and informants/collaborators. I describe here the process and need to use hybrid methodologies in my writing about the Save the River Teesta movement.

A *bricolage* approach became necessary given the long gestation period and trajectory of the movement. During my extended fieldwork in 2001-02 and short-term fieldwork in 2003 and 2005, oppositional discourses against the proposed hydropower projects on River Teesta in North Sikkim and in neighbouring Darjeeling Hills of North Bengal were whispered notes and undercurrents voiced by few indigenous activists and concerned citizens. The activists had hoped the government would learn from the mistakes and controversies connected with the Rathongchu hydropower project that was shelved in 1997 (see Arora 2004, 2006a), and would be committed to protect the heritage and rights of the indigenous Lepchas. In 2005, a group of activists filed legal petitions in the National Appellate Authority at Delhi to question the grant of necessary environmental clearances.³ Activists have repeatedly sent representatives to convince the state and the national government to commission a review of the ecological impact of these projects. I would often meet

these activists when they came to Delhi during 2005-06. I was sometimes invited to attend their meetings with lawyers and environmental activists based in Delhi. One of the activists even shared the visual record that he was making about the impact of construction of hydropower projects on the fragile landscape and the so-called public hearings and some meetings. To an extent, I was able to get some sense of events occurring in Sikkim by looking at these video recordings.

Towards the end of 2006 and in early 2007 after government started to identify and acquire land, these oppositional narratives acquired a bigger audience, an audibility and formality in Sikkim. More and more villagers residing in Dzongu and Lepcha youth became alarmed and started organizing meetings and discussing how the projects would impact their present and future.⁴ The protest activities of indigenous Lepchas were organized under the banner of the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) and many ecologically concerned Sikkimese people and other organizations joined their movement in June 2007. They decided to combine indigenous religious imagery with Gandhian method of *satyagraha* in order to exert moral and political pressure on the government to concede to their demands (Arora 2007b, 2008), and this was explicit in the visuals circulated later on their blog. This movement gradually engulfed the Lepchas living in Darjeeling, Kurseong, and Kalimpong in West Bengal and elicited a sympathetic response from the ethnic movements there. Between June 2007 and June 2010, multi-sited non-violent protests, marches, mass meetings and *dharnas* (sit-ins) were organized by the activists in several villages of Dzongu, Lachen, Chungthang, Gangtok, Rangpo in Sikkim state and Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Calcutta in the state of West Bengal, and in New Delhi.

I was engaged in short-term fieldwork on medical pluralism and meeting some of the activists in June 2007, when they decided to launch formal protests and start an indefinite *satyagraha* against the hydropower development of River Teesta at Gangtok (Arora 2007b). It became essential to innovate and adopt new methodologies to write about these emergent protests, as my full-time teaching responsibilities precluded participant observation of the movement. Thus, I have been able to only conduct short-term multi-sited fieldwork in Sikkim and New Delhi during 2007-09. Here, I must stress that there are substantial methodological differences in my recent fieldwork since digital penetration was quite low in 2001-02 when I was undertaking extended fieldwork in the region. Since 2004, telephonic penetration has increased. The more recent spread of low cost mobile network penetration and increase in computer literacy and access to computers and the Internet has made it

possible for me to regularly communicate with some of my key informants. I have extensively used telephone conversations, chatted online with some leaders of these protests, and analysed content available in secondary sources and on the Internet to understand the complexity and follow the trajectory of this movement.

I know them and the field knows me. Some articles written by me about their protests (Arora 2007b, 2008, 2009b) and information about others were posted on weepingsikkim and other environmental portals. This circulation has validated my ethnographic writings and also contributed to the online representation of this movement. My writings in newspapers, journals, and books constitute an external representation nonetheless their circulation and reproduction on the weblog have made them part of the internal narrative.

Framing a Narrative in Cyberspace

Cyberspace was initially naively imagined to be an electronic commons, but we find that activism here is narrowly restricted to 'few participants who have the means, knowledge, social alertness, and the political will to participate' (Hurwitz 1999: 655-56).⁵ Amongst various forms of computer mediated communication, technological innovations such as web-blog or blog, vlog,⁶ and wiki⁷ are easy to create and maintain. A blog is a decentralized per-user publication with the author controlling and owning it (Karger and Quan 2005: 149). They are used by people for 'journaling, self-publishing and media news-critique (Kahn and Kellner 2004: 94). The essence of blogging is to transform consumers of information into content-producers (Karger and Quan 2005: 148). Weepingsikkim.blogspot erupted into cyberspace in simultaneity to an indefinite hunger strike initiated by Tenzing Gyatso Lepcha (General Secretary, Concerned Lepchas of Sikkim), Dawa Lepcha (General Secretary, Affected Citizens of Teesta)⁸ and Ongdi Lepcha at Bhutia-Lepcha house on Tibet Road in Gangtok in Sikkim in Northeast India on 20th June 2007. The blogger/webmaster(s) declares that they seek to environmentally educate the public about Sikkim's fragile environment and create awareness about the adverse impact of large Hydropower projects. The contextual justification for starting the blog is given in the right column:

It began the day our friends Dawa, Tenzing and others decided to go on an indefinite strike last June [2007] and appeal to the Government of Sikkim on the dangers of mega Hydel dams and the ecological degradation and social impact that it would bring to Sikkim and Dzongu in particular. It is dedicated to them and the courage and conviction they have had in standing up for a noble cause and going hungry all these days. Dawa and Tenzing went hungry for 63 days earlier and even longer

one of 96 days, a few months later during the second indefinite hunger strike...

The blog claims to be 'a forum to express environmental and other concerns regarding our natural surroundings'⁹ Organizationally weepingsikkim follows a linear format, with recent postings on the top and older postings running below. Structurally, it has a title with a header, a broad column in the left side for postings and a narrow column on the right declaring the intention of creating this blog, and its interconnections with select relevant websites and audiovisual content.

The header of this blog is written in Nepali language.¹⁰ It states, '*ani Sikkim runcha.*' This begets two critical interrelated questions - who belongs to Sikkim? Who is weeping for Sikkim? The graphic in the header depicts a man dressed in Tibetan clothes paying homage to a couple dressed in traditional Lepcha attire with a snowy mountain in its backdrop. An adjacent caption identifies this image as a depiction of the iconic Statue of Unity which symbolizes the unity of the Lepchas, Bhutias and the Nepalis, along with the sacred mountain Kanchenjunga acting as the witness of this historic ethnic pact that took place in the fourteenth century at Kabi in North Sikkim.¹¹ Those who are not familiar with the history and ethnographic context can easily be misled by this graphic in the header. Since, the graphic primarily represents the ethnic unity of the Lepchas and Bhutias in popular memory and in historical literature where occasionally it has included the Limbus, but nowhere does any oral or written discourse acknowledge the Nepali to be part of this ethnic alliance. The blog attempts to recast collective representations. People residing in Sikkim do not interpret and represent this graphic in this manner. The absence of online criticism is perhaps a function of moderated content.

Dartnell highlights how 'web activism's symbolic, image-driven, and identarian features upstage its information aspects' (2006: 101). Bloggers are self-selected in their desire to publish their thoughts online, and we can't regard them to be representative of the general population (Thelwall 2007: 5-6). Sectional ethnic interests (the activists are overwhelmingly Lepchas) are asserting on this blog that they represent the voice of general interests and sustainable development of Sikkim. The blog tries to transform a *particular* narrative into a universal one despite the fragmented narrative circulating within Sikkim. Any overarching suppositions are problematic in multi-ethnic Sikkim. My fieldwork in 2007-08 indicates that loss of livelihood is a foremost concern for all project affected communities, nonetheless an ecological narrative of protecting the environment that nourishes them like a mother is not a uniform one. Members of some Nepali

ethnic organizations acknowledged the adverse impact of these projects on the environment.¹² They stated that they feared government repression so were not openly supportive and were maintaining distance from the ongoing protests. However, some members of the Rai, Gurung, Kshetri groups residing in Gangtok expanded that as their communities were neither directly affected by displacement nor going to lose religious sites,¹³ therefore the responsibility of organizing resistance inordinately befell on the Lepchas and Bhutias who exclusively inhabit North Sikkim and periodically affirm their ritual connections with sacred landscapes located in it. Are those who are not resisting these projects being anti-Sikkimese and anti-national?

The footer of weepingsikkim contains a beautiful picture of a river flowing down misty forested mountains that is captioned as 'the most beautiful disappearing river.' The activists are visually alerting us how this beautiful river would be adversely impacted. Narratives on the blog explain time and again how the Teesta river will disappear after its water are channelled through underground race tunnels for producing power and the densely forested mountains of the river basin would be denuded with the water table receding.

The blog's right column contains an important disclaimer declaring, 'We would also like to clarify that <http://weepingsikkim.blogspot.com/> is not the official website of ACT (Affected Citizens of Teesta) and we do not have any political affiliations or belong to any political party or any other group as such.' Statements in the right column attest to responsible citizenship and impress on the readers that caring for Sikkim's environment is paramount an expression of belonging. This is evident in their assertion:

...It concerns us as normal citizens of Sikkim to be a little selfless at such an hour to not to turn or look away but rather show concern to a humanitarian, social and ecological cause in our own surroundings. As normal citizens of Sikkim, we have the right to see our rivers and forests and natural resources protected and preserved for the present and the future...

...26 or more mega Hydel projects being sanctioned across all of Sikkim is not the most appropriate of ways to so called industrially develop, as we feel. It is nothing but heading Sikkim towards major environmental disasters and negative social impacts in the very near future...this blog is therefore, our honest effort of intending debate, reasoning and understanding in this critical issue pertaining to our times and of Sikkim's and many thanks to this modern means of this amazing medium of communication...

The blog articulates an ecological nationalism albeit a restrictive one. Homage to Ms Chokie Topden was added here in April 2009 after her tragic death in an accident. Ms Topden was a social activist and leader of the Rathongchu

movement; at the time of her untimely death she was affiliated with the ongoing protests.¹⁴ Sometime in 2009, a Cree prophecy was added in the right column to stress the environmental wisdom of indigenous groups and interconnect Save the River Teesta internationally with other indigenous people's movements.

The right column provides us the list of developers and power projects uploaded on the government website. Uploads of videos and films on the issues and public hearings conducted are posted in the left column making it possible for us to adjudge certain events without travelling to the sites of resistance. The blogger declares in the right column that (s)he sincerely hopes that this blog will generate awareness, engender and aid research. Weepingsikkim connects with like-minded networks such as International Rivers Network (www.irn.org), Kalpavriksh, Narmada Bachao Andolan (www.narmada.org), South Asian Dams Rivers and People (<http://www.sandrp.in/>), Nespon (www.nespon.org) and so on. It interlinks with the Sikkim government official website containing the soft copy of the Carrying Capacity Study of Teesta River Basin (www.sikervis.nic.in/ccstb.html) and media coverage in news channels. In analyzing these interconnections, the blog's outreach and impact, I am reminded of 'the Reed law' of exponential growth that connecting two networks creates far more value than would be the case if we add their sum as individuals and if they exist independently (cf. Rheingold 2002: 59-62). The fruits of internet networking and political activism on the net are manifest in the international attention and support that the movement has received despite its small-scale and remote location. Global digital linkages do enable place-specific politics to acquire a global span (Sassen 2004: 654).

The left column contains a chronologically organized narrative. This section does not have a single identifiable author despite the extensive use of 'I' in the right column. The blog has an anonymous moderator who can be reached at weepingsikkim@gmail.com. The moderator/blogger declares it to be an open democratic forum, 'I am open to all views here and will publish them, whether the comments intend to support the cause of ACT or not. The important thing is to write and please do...this blog exists out of my love and responsibility to Sikkim, the land of my birth and my home.' Nowhere does the webmaster claim to be a Lepcha person.

Postings in the left column are sourced from multiple contributors, and it's an interactive portal where readers can express themselves. Three kinds of postings are discernible in the left section of the blog – reports of events and activities of activists by themselves, reports written by others and published in mass media, and comments by viewers and readers of the blog. The dominating

presence is of postings made by the activists that chronicle the trajectory of their struggle and the shifting ground of their oppositional discourse and activities. Many a times the entries were written by Dawa Lepcha who is trained as a film-maker himself while he was sitting on hunger strike and at other times a web-savvy activist has posted pictures of people joining the relay hunger strike and sharing print and media coverage of the movement. Content has been additionally sourced from newspaper coverage and commented upon by the moderator/blogger. Reader commentaries reflect the global outreach of the blog with supportive comments coming in from all over the world from the Diaspora, and sometimes from tourists who had travelled to Sikkim at that time.¹⁵ However, the number of readers' comments are few and of restricted nature. I have not come across adverse comments made against activists or pro-hydropower project postings being uploaded.

Content-wise, the left column thematically focuses on the activists' demands and concerns pertaining to the proposed, planned and under-construction power projects. Postings here discuss the indigenous rights of the Lepchas, their love of the land and the idea of a sacred landscape, the centrality of Dzongu for Lepcha culture and history, government apathy and indifference to their concerns, the heroic struggle of some youth who have demonstrated willingness to die for the cause, their endangered future with the implementation of Panang project in Dzongu and the migration and settlement of others here, the centrality of environmental wisdom in Lepcha culture, the clash of corporate greed and indigenous custodianship of natural resources for future generations, local and global water politics, energy crises and climate change, the idea of a common future and caring for the earth, meaning of development and the need to find alternative routes to large-scale hydropower projects.¹⁶

The Chief Minister acknowledged the power of this blog and its effectiveness in tarnishing his eco-friendly image publicly on 15th August 2007. However, as a democratic expression of some people, the government could never block it. The archive of the blog and number of postings made each month here are located in the lower section of the right column. I note that 232 postings were made in 2007 and the frequency has been declining with only 48 postings made in 2008, 43 in 2009 and merely 12 postings in between January-November 2010. Undoubtedly, blogging is proving to be an important expression of political engagement, source of corporate global media critique, inserting journalistic socio-political intervention, and technoactivism (Kahn and Kellner n.d.: 6-14).¹⁷ Blogging enables local politics to network and situate themselves in global politics, overcome their peripheral

geographical position, and counteract government apathy by actively carving an alternative public space. The regression in postings and irregularity in posting information on weepingsikkim are partially explained by the decline in number of organized events but also by a realization of the limited outreach of the Internet within Sikkim.¹⁸

Web activism is carving new political spaces for non-state actors, however 'techno-power is elitist' (Jordan 2001: 109-140). In the context of a persistent digital divide, digital narratives and representations may prevail uncontested. Hence, inequalities in access to internet and cyberspace will continue to be critical determinants structuring power between online and offline communities. The telecommunications network was poor until 2004 and thereafter computers were introduced with the establishment of 40 community information centres in rural Sikkim (Planning Commission 2008:108-09). My repeated query posed to the coordinator of the protests and one of the bloggers has yielded the interesting information that within India merely a few thousand people—largely Sikkimese students and other Sikkimese (not merely Lepchas) living within India and the world—were accessing this blog to keep abreast of events and the protest activities. Readers' posts were frequent in the first six months and declined as organized events declined and mass media coverage also became infrequent. This explains why pro-project supporters or the state government did not feel the need to counter online activism by circulating a differential perspective in another blog.

Depicting Teesta activists and Lepchas as eco-warriors

Visuals are acquiring prominence with the distribution and availability of low-cost digital cameras and literally entering into everyday circulation. Taking pictures is no longer a conscious planned activity but becoming a spontaneous and uneventful habit. Advances in digital technology and miniaturization are enabling people to take pictures frequently and instantaneously with the handy mobile camera. Easy to use and easy to circulate, visual communication and visual culture have become integral to our everyday life. Nonetheless, the selection of a photographic frame and the moment to be pictured is always a decision and a matter of choice. Choices are affective decisions and they matter since they construct and respond to a particular context (Edwards and Hart 2004: 6). Like words, pictures and images (in paper or in digital format) contextualize and frame a narrative and simultaneously slice and silence other possible narratives. They are fragments of history and always a partial narrative.

The indexical appeal of the photograph is a primary reason why an image is taken, selected, collected, and circulated (Edwards and Hart 2004: 2). As things or objects, photographs have life-histories. Hence, they acquire and lose value and meaning in contexts (see Appadurai 1986: 12, 17). The meaning of a photograph therefore lies not merely in its materiality, form and content, but in the context of its use, appropriation, and circulation (Sassoon 2004: 191). This involves a shift in understanding the photographic image as an illustration to their being understood as documents, texts, which are engaging inter-textually with other texts and visuals. I have been strongly influenced by Banks (2001: 11-12) insistence that we must attend to the internal (content) and external (social context of its production and dissemination) narrative of any picture. Photographs are transnational objects par excellence that may begin life in one place but travel through time and space to new destinations (Harris 2004: 134). When digitized these photographs acquire a life of their own and become amenable to manipulation, mass circulation or reproduction, and get disassociated from their authors and de-historicized more than their paper counterparts.

Pictures put together make a 'statement about the world (Worth cf. Pink 2004: 3). Words and image fuse together on weepingsikkim to give the reader a sense of the moment, the events impacting the landscape, and the arguments taking place about the projects. The blogger is conscious of the power of vision and a visual narrative has been central to the organization and narrative of the blog. Many blog entries resemble photographic essays. The blogger has clearly been coached to think visually and reveals an ethnographic eye while selecting images. This is not accidental since Dawa Lepcha who is one of the key leaders of these protests is trained as a film-maker and has several films on Lepcha culture and religion to his credit. He has also authored some of the content that has been uploaded here. In fact, I am surprised to find the low filmic content circulated here.

What weepingsikkim.blogspot.com has profoundly achieved is to represent the activists and the Lepchas as true sons of soil and the rightful custodians of Sikkim's natural resources. Graphical content has played a critical role in attesting to their depiction as environmentalists. Photographs of people and activists, various activities and events organized by the activists, the river course and Himalayan landscape and construction activities therein, maps (drawn and digital one's), images of formal communications sent by the government, and banners circulated on this website have contributed intensely to this eco-warrior imagery and imagination.

Circulated in mass media and on the blog, many of the pictures depict young men and women, lamas and

shamans, Lepchas, Bhutias, and sometimes even Nepalis (names and clothes indicate their ethnicity) participating in the relay hunger strike. These are not unhappy angry faces but carry expressions of serious concern and sometimes smiling as enthusiastic activists devoted to their cause. A silk scarf adorned picture of Gandhi presides like a patron-saint over these non-violent protests and is constantly included in the picture frame of those joining the relay hunger strike. These pictures attest the new leadership and concern for environment among Sikkim's youth and their resolve to struggle to save Sikkim's environment and their homeland. The faces of some Lepcha leaders and some activists (Dawa Lepcha, Tenzing Lepcha, Tseten Lepcha, and some lamas) become synonymous with the image of hydropower protests, as they recur on the blog. The picture of Dawa Lepcha sitting below a khada covered portrait of Gandhi, the many pictures of Dawa and Tenzing in the first *satyagraha* and later the second *satyagraha* have transformed them into unforgettable heroic faces of Sikkim. The pictures of their hospitalization, and messages they sent to public from the hospital bed were widely circulated. They tugged at our emotions and convinced us of their sincerity and conviction in their espoused cause of saving their homeland. The front porch of the ground floor of Bhutia-Lepcha house located on Tibet road at Gangtok got rapidly transformed into a site of non-violent resistance and the indefinite *satyagraha*. This front porch with the numerous banners and groups of supporters sitting is frequently depicted on the blog. It becomes a permanent backdrop and over time this site is recognized to be the 'unofficial' headquarters for holding meetings and organizing protests against the Teesta projects.

'The act of presenting a place through a picture is one of linking images to some idea that they both refer to and help articulate' (Coover 2004: 188). The selection of what is to be pictured and presented does highlight the framing of an imaginary. In some of the landscape pictures, we see the beautiful union of sky and the earth, the connection between lofty mountains and the rivers that originate and flow through the valleys, the intimacy between human settlements, fields and the forests.¹⁹ The pictures taken along the course of the river through misty forested mountains, human settlements and rice-valleys that lie on the banks of River Teesta remind us that this river is the lifeline of Sikkim. Those who have never visited Sikkim acquire a fair idea of the landscape and human settlements in this Himalayan setting by looking at them on this blog (or elsewhere on other websites). Many of the landscape pictures depict a lived landscape that is inhabited, a locus of heritage and rituals, and invested with meaning.

In isolation and by themselves these pictures could belong to any Himalayan context, however placed in the narrative context on the album akin blog, they become visual evidence and a quite convincing narrative of events, motivations and emotions guiding the activists and 'sympathetic' response of some others to this movement. Readers see the beautiful postcard image of a beautiful Himalayan village, which they are told is threatened by power projects. The greenery, the beauty, and the serenity of these landscapes, are often contrasted with other images that depict the ravages the projects are inflicting on the land. The activists claim that they don't want to lose their home and livelihood in the name of development acquires an urgency and poignancy. They reiterate that they want to cherish and preserve this Himalayan landscape. Their verbal assertion acquires a materiality with these depictions and they are transformed into guardians of the forests, river-waters, and the mountains. These pictures convey a message, which even a thousand words would not effectively be able to communicate.

The 'power of these image resides in their creation of fragments which come to stand as wholes, reifying culture in the endless repetition of images' (Edwards 1997: 61). These pictures are framing a narrative yet what is being framed-out is equally significant. The activists are depicted as eco-warriors engaged in the battle to control the course of development and thwart the greedy plans of the government and private companies to exploit the land and its people. The oppositional movement against the Teesta hydropower projects were supported by an ecologically conscious minority among Lepchas and residents of Sikkim and North Bengal. However, this is not what the blog highlights to the viewer/reader. It takes a moral position and beckons all Sikkimese citizens to protect its fragile Himalayan environment. Only some sections seem to be participating and in small numbers, and what about the majority that live in this area? Their response to the situation is captured not by their presence, but by their invisibility and absence. The majority of population in Sikkim is not as ecologically conscious and perhaps indifferent to the fate of their landscape. They seem to be going about their everyday life and opted to vote for and elect a government which is committed to construct these hydropower projects (Arora 2017). This is certainly not documented by the blog, but is an insight that I have gained during fieldwork and acknowledged by the leaders themselves to me in personal communications.

A certain degree of romanticism is evident in the choice and selection of images that can deceive a reader into imagining Sikkim as an idyllic rural setting where in the name of hydropower development corrupt project developers would enter and ravage the landscape. The Lepcha community itself is divided into those who

support and are pro-project and those who are opposing them. Clashes within the Lepcha community have been reported on this blog and admitted to me during fieldwork and in telephonic conversations.

Blogging does not preclude manipulation of these images – how do we confirm that these are true pictures and of specific landscapes that they claim to be? Only someone who has visited the area, seen and experienced the visual element can confirm that the circulated images are true. The truth of the visual depends on proof of its non-fabrication. Selective images can mislead, narrate a fictitious story, unless corroborated by other accounts and circulated as part of a larger body of evidence. Ethnographic fieldwork will continue to be significant as a way to know the world and generate knowledge about it.

Conclusion

The digital world has emerged as a space for interaction and networking and an important arena for circulating representations. The Internet has placed the apparatus of cultural production in the hands of all those who know how to participate and use it (Poster 1997: 222). The consumers and former subjects have themselves become producers of cultural representations. Cyberspace now presents itself as a 'democratic' arena and domain where ethnographic subjects are writing about themselves and blurring the distance between the knower and the known. However, like ethnographic writings by anthropologists, cultural representations circulated by subjects about themselves will remain partial narratives and contestable truths.

Words, pictures, sounds, and hyperlinks interconnect in cyberspace to narrate a story on weepingsikkim. It was started to circulate information to a wider audience who could not physically participate in these protests, circulate activists' perspectives that were inadequately being covered in state-directed mass media, and garner public support locally, nationally and internationally. It has functioned as an electronic bulletin board for posting updates, an online chronicle of the activities and different perspectives emerging from the field, and finally subsisting in cyberspace as a multimedia archive about the Save the River Teesta movement. It has also reconfigured Lepcha belonging in the world and framed them as environmental custodians. From its inception this blog became a vital connection and source of information for me about the organization and trajectory of the movement while the uploaded news coverage indicated the manner in which mass media was reporting the event. However, this information aspect was quickly overpowered by its representational aspects and activities.

I have argued in this paper how digital technology is informing and digital ethnography is reworking the nature and the duration of our embodied fieldwork. Fieldwork would have given me a deeper comprehensive picture albeit been more time-consuming and expensive. However, when participant observation over a period of time became difficult and impossible, then computer mediated communication and telephony enabled me to continue with my research and effectively elicit information from a select group. Given the digital divide and persistent inequities in access to telephony and internet among people residing in Sikkim, I am acutely aware of the dangers of (mis)representation and proposing generalizations based on data collected merely through ICT. Various kinds of narratives about the Teesta hydropower projects are being circulated in online media including daily newspapers published in the region and available for intertextual analysis. However, focusing singularly on digital content is problematic and not desirable. My analysis of weepingsikkim.blogspot.com has been influenced and informed by my decade long ethnographic and historical engagement with different communities residing in Sikkim and North Bengal.²⁰ Several of my papers were posted and circulated via this blog (and by email to these activists), hence I was part of the polyphony of voices documented and chronicled here. I contend that the proliferation of digital networks is going to ensure reflexivity in our writing, since it will become eminently accessible and beget a swift response from different people including those whom we claim to understand and represent.²¹ To an extent my ethnographic writing was accepted and validated by the activists online and other ethnographic writings disseminated on the blog. They constitute what Pink (2006: 138) terms to be an 'anthropologically informed social intervention' and aided in public advocacy on the Save the River Teesta movement. I conclude this article by asserting the need to combine fieldwork with visual and digital ethnography in our methodological practices to ensure fuller representativeness.

Acknowledgements

This paper is dedicated to the people of Sikkim, their quest for participatory democracy, and the spirit of environmental activism within India.

Notes

1. The scale of the movement and the competing discourses of Save the River Teesta movement have been detailed elsewhere (Arora 2009b).
2. I have mailed copies and emailed many of my articles regularly to a select group of informants and the

- leadership of the movement. Due to copyright restrictions and conditional access to journal websites, some of my published papers cannot be circulated on the blog. Hence, only their abstracts were posted on this blog.
3. Interviews with Tseten Lepcha, Dawa Lepcha and Ritwick Datta and Rahul Choudhary who are representing them as lawyers in courts at Delhi.
 4. Based on telephonic conversations with some people residing in Dzongu in North Sikkim.
 5. The demographic profile of users even in the US is skewed heavily towards the educated, the affluent, the urban and the whites (Hurwitz 1999: 656).
 6. Video blogs or vlogs are similar to blogs but have audiovisual content instead of textual. Youtube and MySpace are popular examples of vlogs.
 7. Developed in 1994, a wiki is a collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content, using a simplified markup language. The collaborative wikipedia is the most widely known wiki (See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki> accessed on 16/8/2008).
 8. Their website defines them to be 'an organization of the indigenous Sikkimese citizens to protect the land and the people against the threat of devastation of the biodiversity hotspot (Khangchendzonga biosphere reserve), endangering the demographic profile of the indigenous primitive Lepcha tribes and the right to live in one's own homeland in dignity and security in the name of development harbingered by numerous mega hydropower projects at one go.' See www.actsikkim.com.
 9. Refer to the right column of the blog.
 10. Interestingly it is not in the Lepcha language and script. Nepali is the lingua franca in this region. Hence, the activists have used Nepali words in order to reach out to a larger constituency of residents including those Lepchas who do not know their own language.
 11. Refer to Arora (2004: 146-149, 2007a: 211) for details about this statue of unity and the ethnic treaty.
 12. They requested anonymity.
 13. Most of them were Hindus and not Buddhists and North Sikkim largely contains Buddhist sites.
 14. Another obituary published in *Down to Earth* was posted on this blog (see Arora 2009c).
 15. Refer to Arora (2004: 197-247, 2006a) for details about agitations pertaining to the Rathongchu movement.
 16. The contested nature of hydro-development of River Teesta and the activist discourse challenging the rhetoric of participatory development has been extensively discussed in Arora (2009b).
 17. One of the most successful politically active journalist blogs is Indymedia (www.indymedia.com) that played an important role in reporting stories from the Iraq war that mainstream media could not. It is based on the idea of unmediated open online publishing.
 18. The father of this blog was unable to continue as webmaster in 2009 due to some professional engagements and a substitute could not be found. This is what was communicated to me by Tseten Lepcha, who is currently the working President of ACT.

19. This is also the Sikkim pictured and presented in promotional material and tourist guidebooks (Arora 2009b)
20. I enjoy a rapport with nearly most categories of people – those who are opposing the project, others who are neutral or are indifferent, and those who support the Teesta hydropower projects. The only stakeholder I have not been able to engage with are the people employed by the project and the private companies that are constructing these projects jointly with the state government of Sikkim.
21. My research has gained much wider attention by being available in online format.

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Social Exclusion of Ethnic Groups and Extremist Violence: A Study in Junglemahal, West Bengal

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Abstract

Ethnic groups living across the so-called red corridor in India mostly belong to the tribal category. These tribal groups can be distinguished from others by bio-social attributes like extreme poverty and malnutrition, lack of healthcare facilities, marriage at early age and its resultant effects, and a high rate of illiteracy. Since the pre-colonial era, these ethnic groups have been experiencing politico-economic exclusion from mainstream Indian social system. The development inputs of various schemes initiated by the Indian nation-state hardly reach the tribal people in the region. The parliamentary representatives from such region are usually chosen from among the 'outsiders' or from the insiders who can easily be controlled by the 'outsiders'. As a result, the needs and aspirations of the ethnic groups living in the red corridor are practically ignored. This results in their alienation and exclusion from the Indian politico-economic system. Under such a situation, these people become vulnerable to violent extremist activities that are directed against sovereignty of the state. The present paper demonstrates how Maoist activists and other subversive forces are exploiting the situation of social exclusion to their advantage and have fairly been successful in undermining internal security of the country. I argue that the greater the extent of social exclusion of the ethnic groups living in a region, the higher is the degree of their chance of engaging with extremist activities. It also appears that the stronger the ethnic elements of the engaging ethnic groups more will be the possibility of their detachment from the subversive activities as found in the Junglemahal area of West Bengal.

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Introduction

Addressing social exclusion is one of the major goals of a welfare state, as Bask (2005) argues. Yet, social exclusion of the minority and disadvantaged communities in many modern nation-states is very common. It increases inequality between the 'poor' and the 'advantaged'. The success of development initiatives, as Anne Power (2000) observes, depends upon cooperation and integration of the minority and disadvantaged communities with society. This is because social exclusion increases inequality, poverty, unemployment, health problems, experiences of violence, and results in lack of cooperation, mutual respect and trust among the engaging ethnic groups. Success of individuals rather than that of the surroundings are more important in United States. On the other hand, this is usually measured by individual success along with development of the surrounding area in Europe (Power 2000). In India, economic success is celebrated without considering success of tribal and minority ethnic groups who have been experiencing politico-economic exclusion from the mainstream since the pre-colonial era. Given such a context, the issue of 'underdevelopment' becomes a dominant socio-political agendum in Indian politics, more particularly across the region along the red corridor.¹ An ultra-left political context of conflict as well as movement under the leadership of the Maoists (thereby commonly referred to as Left-Wing Extremism) has emerged along much of the entire red corridor region of India.

The concept of social exclusion refers to the societal mechanism of keeping out. According to Anne Power, it is "about the inability of our society to keep all groups and individuals within reach of what we expect as a society. It is about the tendency to push vulnerable and difficult individuals into the least popular places, furthest away from our common aspirations" (Power 2000: 46). The concept is significant particularly in the developing countries for it addresses poverty and deprivation. It

opens up new possibilities for policy interventions for development (Rodgers 1995: 5; Gore 1995:8; de Haan 1998:11; Sen 2000: 45-7; Nevile 2007: 250-3). Sometimes exclusion is used alternatively with poverty, as they are inter-connected. But Halleröd and Heikkilä (1999) argue differently that while poverty refers to problem involving economic resources, social exclusion involves question relating to individuals' integration in society. Social exclusion may, therefore, be defined as the particular state of being resulted out of accumulation of various social disadvantages (Silver 1995; Westin 1999). For Amartya Sen (2000), there are two dimensions of exclusion: first, exclusion which is in itself deprivation, and second, exclusion which is in itself not deprivation, but leads to other deprivation (e.g., landlessness and lack of access to the credit market). He further attempts to make a distinction between active and passive exclusions. The former type, for him, is the result of a deliberate policy to exclude certain people from particular opportunities while the latter type is the unintended result of certain policy decision or social process (Sen 2000:15). However, the concept has various shortcomings as many critics have observed (e.g., Levitas 1998; Atkinson 2000; Geddes 2000; Du Toit 2004; Green and Hulme 2005).

The 'red corridor' of India is also known as the 'prime natural resource corridor' of the country since the area contains a high deposit of natural resources such as diamond, iron ore, coal, bauxite, limestone, chromite, copper, etc. Interestingly, the region has been at the same time the abode of several tribal and other ethnic groups who have been suffering from extreme poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and various other socio-economic constraints. Many groups are living even on the brink of starvation. The development inputs of various schemes initiated by our nation-state hardly reach these areas. Along the entire corridor the Maoists and/or Naxalites have built up a strong movement 'under the leadership of the proletariat'² with the purpose of seizing State power and of creating liberated zones through 'annihilation of class enemies'. The movement has a strong belief in Mao T'se-tung's political philosophy that voices 'political power grows out of the barrel of gun'. In more than one-third districts out of 634 districts in India, the Maoists had a strong influence (Chundari and Singh 2012). Nearly twenty-three Indian states have witnessed the violent movement. However, the movement is very strong particularly along the loosely contagious mineral-rich territory of red corridor (Chopra 2012). The movement was so strong that it was described as, in the words of former Prime Minister of India Dr. Manmohon Singh, 'the single biggest security threat' to the country. Presently ninety districts in eleven Indian states are affected as reported

by the *Times of India* on April 16, 2018. The extremist movement has got a strong support base particularly among the tribal and other marginalized people across the red corridor. However, one must not necessarily conclude that these tribal and other disadvantaged people are supporters of extremist activities. They are, in the words of Shah and Pettigrew (2009:228), not the 'natural vessels of a revolutionary consciousness.' On the contrary, they are living in the territory that is difficult to access by the state, on the one hand, and is well suited for guerrilla warfare, on the other. This may be one reason. But, there are other reasons too. The Maoists have taken up the causes of the disadvantaged people as their political agenda. The origin of the conflict may be traced back to the Telengana insurgency of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh during 1940s (Kennedy and Purushotham 2012; Pavier 1981; Sundarayya 1972). Dispossession of land has been the most prominent socio-political issue across the red corridor in general and in Telengana region in the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh and Naxalbari in West Bengal in particular (Kennedy and Purushotham 2012; Kujur 2008). Though the Maoist conflict has a long history of over seven decades, it intensified post 2004 after the formation of *CPI (Maoist)* through unification of the *People's War Group (PWG)* and the *Maoist Communists Centre (MCC)*.

The forested terrain of Paschim Medinipur, Jhargram, Bankura and Purulia districts of West Bengal in India, commonly called together as the 'Junglemahalarea', represents such an exemplar and falls under the red corridor. Police atrocities on the tribals and the issue of underdevelopment have been the principal causes of supporting the extremism in Junglemahal in West Bengal (Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2014a). This paper concerns the ethnic groups of Junglemahal area of the newly created Jhargram (part of the erstwhile PaschimMedinipur) district in West Bengal.

The tribal and other disadvantaged ethnic groups in Junglemahal have been historically left out of development initiatives. They have been witnessing extreme poverty, landlessness, malnutrition, health issues, early marriage and the resultant consequences (Midya 2014a). Keeping this historical background in mind, I have tried to examine whether social exclusion is abetting the tribal groups into getting involved with subversive activities. The study dealt with four village communities of Amlatora, Sangram, Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola in Jhargram district of West Bengal during 2014-2016. It involved several ethnic groups³ belonging to Scheduled Tribal (*viz.*, the Santal, Bhumij and Sabar) and non-tribal groups.

Locale and research methodology

The present study was conducted on two categories of village communities in Junglemahal: (i) tribal and other communities inhabiting the same village; and (ii) village inhabited exclusively by the Scheduled Tribal group(s). The study was based upon primary data obtained through fieldwork during 2014-2016 and the secondary sources already available (Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2014a, 2014b). The first category comprised two villages, *viz.*, Amlatora and Sangram. Both the villages are located under Jamboni Police Station in Jhargram Development Block in the erstwhile PaschimMedinipur (presently Jhargram) district. The Santal and the Mahata communities constitute Amlatora population. The former is a Scheduled Tribe and the latter is an Other Backward Class (OBC) group (Table 1). Population of Sangram comprises the Sabar (another Scheduled Tribe group who is recognized as an 'ex-criminal tribe'), two families of Santal and only a few families of caste people, *viz.*, Napit, Kulu, Kamar, Tanti, Baisnab and Dhopa. Except the Baishnab, all the other caste groups are categorized as Scheduled Castes.

The second category also included two villages—Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola. These villages were purposively selected since these were located in isolation. Bhimarjun is located under Binpur-II Development Block of the same district. It is located about 45 km away from the district headquarters at Jhargram. This village is exclusively inhabited by the Bhumij, which are regarded a scheduled tribal group. Bhumij Dhansola is located in an isolated and forested area under the Binpur-I Development Block of Jhargarm district. It is included in Lalgargh Gram Panchayat No. 7. On the other hand,

Amlatora and Sangram are located beside the Lodhasuli-Belpahari (*via* Parihati) State Highway, just opposite to each other. So, these two villages are well-connected to Jhargram town which is the district headquarter of the newly created Jhargram district. But Bhimarjun is located furthest away from the district headquarter at Jhargram town. The village is within the fringe of forest at Banspahari. Population structure of the villages (Table 1) showed that everywhere, except among the Bhumij of Bhumij Dhansola, males out-numbered females, which was quite unexpected in a tribal society where birth of female child was normally welcomed. Population distribution by age and sex in the villages indicated two important characteristics in particular: (i) all the populations exhibited a growing trend; and (ii) they had relatively long life-span.

In any population child-women ratio, dependency ratio, literacy rate, and rate of early marriage are essential demographic indicators. The socio-economic status of the tribal groups living in different villages are given in Table 2. For the present study, child-women ratio was used as a rough measure of fertility since there was hardly any birth registration system available in these villages. Child-women ratio was moderately low for all the three ethnic groups (Table 2). This indirectly indicated high mortality rate for the infant and children. This might be the compound outcome of poor awareness of healthcare as well as of poor healthcare facility available for the communities. The Santal, Sabar and the Bhumij groups further exhibited high dependency ratio among them. This suggested their economic marginality. For all ethnic groups, excepting the Santals in Amlatora, literacy rate was unusually low. This was much lower (ranging from 3.92 per cent to 38.88 per cent) than that in erstwhile

Table 1: Distribution of population

Village	Ethnic group	Families No. (per cent)	Population			Sex ratio
			Male No. (per cent)	Female No. (per cent)	Total No. (per cent)	
AMLATORA	<i>Santal</i>	54 (80.60)	167 (42.07)	151(38.03)	318 (80.10)	904
	<i>Mahata</i>	13 (19.40)	38 (09.57)	41(10.33)	79(19.90)	1079
	Total	67 (100.0)	205 (51.64)	192(48.36)	397 (100.0)	937
SANGRAM	<i>Sabar</i>	59 (66.29)	127 (33.25)	114 (29.84)	241 (63.09)	898
	<i>Others</i>	30 (33.71)	77 (20.15)	64 (17.22)	141 (36.91)	831
	Total	89 (100.0)	204 (53.40)	178 (47.06)	382 (100.0)	873
BHIMARJUN	<i>Bhumij</i>	114 (100.0)	300 (54.25)	253 (45.75)	553 (100.0)	843
BHUMIJ	<i>Sabar</i>	106 (65.03)	221 (30.36)	213 (29.26)	434 (59.62)	964
DHANSOLA	<i>Bhumij</i>	57 (34.97)	145 (19.91)	149 (20.47)	249 (40.38)	1028
	Total	163 (100.0)	366 (50.27)	362 (49.73)	728 (100.0)	989

Source: Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2014a.

Table 2: A few demographic features among the ethnic groups under study

<i>Some socio-economic indicators</i>	<i>Ethnic Groups</i>				
	<i>Santal (Amlatora)</i>	<i>Sabar (Sangram)</i>	<i>Bhumij (Bhimarjun)</i>	<i>Sabar (Bhumij Dhansola)</i>	<i>Bhumij(Bhumij Dhansola)</i>
Literacy rate	57.22	34.14	38.88	03.92	24.49
Percentage of persons having no educational qualification (15-44 yrs.)	22.36	76.70	63.05	86.66	60.41
Child-Women ratio	40.82	41.10	41.40	35.02	37.06
Dependency ratio	43.75	51.72	57.00	47.03	46.08
Early marriage (out of total married persons)	58.27	73.86	74.35	74.21 ¹	63.08 ²
Percentage of widow (among the total number of married women)	11.36	11.61	21.07	14.06 ³	25.00 ⁴
Annual family income (≤ Rs. 50,000)	58.67	66.00	86.33	81.13	87.72
Percentage of persons engaged in exclusive forest collection	43.21	44.23	68.23	64.90	52.04
Percentage of family using water from dug-wells	62.96	85.89	98.61	99.06	85.96
Percentage of family using water from tube-wells	37.04	14.11	01.39	00.94	14.04

¹N= 252, ²N= 149, ³N= 128, ⁴N= 84

Source: Midya 2016: 230.

Paschim Medinipur district (79.04 per cent) and in West Bengal(77.08) as per 2011 Census reports. However, the literacy rate among the Santals at Amlatora was above 50 per cent (57.29 per cent). Illiteracy rate among the females was alarmingly high. This was 78.66 per cent among the Bhumij of Bhimarjun, for instance. Majority of literates fell under the lower age groups (upto 14 years). High rate of illiteracy resulted unquestionably in high rate of unemployment. Interestingly, there were high schools in the vicinity of Amlatora, Sangram, and Bhimarjun. Poverty, lack of educational motivation and unemployment were presumably contributing to educational backwardness of the groups. It was found that the groups did not have facility of safe drinking water or any toilet in their houses. There was no primary health center or healthcare facility at Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola or in the surrounding area. Amlatora and Sangramdo had a primary health center nearby, but did not have any regular doctor. In case of any illness the traditional healer in the village or of nearby villages was consulted. Prenatal and postnatal care was regulated as per the traditional customs and habits. Cases of marriage at an early age were surprisingly high among all the ethnic groups (ranging from about 58 per cent to 74 per cent). Thus, in every aspect all these ethnic groups were

neglected. They were deprived of basic requirements of life and human rights. They were in fact excluded from the mainstream socio-economic development facilities and programs. Considering the basic socio-economic parameters, it was found that social exclusion prevailed more for the people of Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola. Such exclusion led no doubt to active deprivation.

Economic and political access

According to Anne Power, exclusion and deprivation result in concentrated poverty, rejection and isolation, deteriorating conditions, negative behaviour, and withdrawal (Power, 2000: 47). Most of these social phenomena, if not all, were found among the Sabar, Bhumij and Santal groups under study. In my earlier studies it was observed that more than 80 percent families of the ethnic groups, except the Santals in Amlatora (where it is 58.67 per cent), did not have an annual family income of more than Rs. 50,000/- (cf. Midya 2012, 2014a). But, the then government did not admit abundance of poverty among these ethnic groups. These groups were provided with rice in a subsidized rate through the Public Distribution System of the State Government. Most of the people of the area did not have any idea about the

developmental schemes, which were being implemented for their welfare. So the people of the area were in fact excluded from the national agenda of development, except few schemes. The degree of exclusion was more for the ethnic groups living at Bhumarjun and Bhumij Dhansola, as these villages were located in isolated jungle fringe. Developmental inputs hardly reached in these areas. On the contrary, the ethnic groups at Amlatora and Sangram were relatively better economically since these villages were well connected with the State Highway and with the Block Development Office. The ethnic groups were getting some benefits of few schemes such as the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) and the Indira Awas Yojana (IAY). Their dependency upon forest collection was notably low compared to that of the other groups under the present study. Taking into account the various socio-economic indicators as mentioned in Table 2, it was found that the groups settled at Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola were facing marginalization to a greater extent compared to those at Amlatora or at Sangram. The ethnic groups in the former villages were facing social exclusion to a greater extent. Although everywhere the feeling of alienation, rejection, isolation and deprivation, and the state of poverty was quite high. The ethnic groups were also found not to have good access to the political process in the area. They were represented in the Legislative and Parliamentary seats by the outsiders. So, this did not make any difference to the ethnic groups in question. Herein, came the issues of equitable distribution of resources, the role of governance by the nation-state, and the provision of basic needs as rights. Good governance must have a system of protection of democratic and human rights for the marginalized groups. The principle of democratic freedom could enable development of the institution of grievance redressal mechanisms, which were completely lacking in the region. These issues were taken up by the extremist groups under the leadership of the Maoist activists who were operating in these regions since 1990s. The Maoists were successful in building up a strong movement, often very violent in nature though, in Junglemahal area involving tribal and other disadvantaged people. To counter this movement, the then State administration adopted 'counter-insurgency' measures with active support from the Union Government. This resulted in increasing arms conflict between the two embattling forces, which took away lives of hundreds of tribal and other disadvantaged people across the Junglemahal area.

The extremist groups' mode of operation in building up a support base has several phases⁴ as observed in Junglemahal area: (i) formative (1996 – 2000), (ii) organizational (demonstrative phase, 2001 - 2007), (iii)

arms struggle (2008 - 2009), and (iv) terror operation (2009 – 2010). During the formative phase, the Maoists prepared the ground work for the movement by establishing social network and rationale for the movement. Their activism centered round various pro-people agenda such as raising questions on people's poverty and misery under the neo-liberal policy of the state, achieving higher price for *babui* rope and *kendu* leaves from the middlemen/agents, fighting for the causes of the tribal and other disadvantaged people, resisting political interference in the social life of the tribals and other disadvantaged people, encouraging women to resist violence from their drunken husbands, and eliminating gambling in rural fair or other social events. These activities were appreciated by the tribal and other rural people of Junglemahal. The second phase, i.e., the organizational phase was demonstrative in nature. During this phase, the Maoists were trying to take control of the area having political leaders and administrative staff under pressure. Their dominant agenda included elimination of strongholds of big landholders and contractors who were mostly shadow-actors of political leaders in power, protection of locals from harassment of police and forest officials, and attempt to eliminate political patronage. During this phase, the Maoists got popular support from the disadvantaged people. The third phase was marked by arms struggle. This phase witnessed the Maoists in authority with appreciable absence of the state administration. The leaders of the ruling and other major political parties abandoned the area. The activism emphasized upon mass mobilization programmes including rallies at night, attempt to confiscate and redistribute land of big landholders particularly political leaders, targeting ration-shops and owners appointed for public distribution system of food grains, who were accused of siphoning off food grains for sale in black market, and demolishing CPI (M) party offices and their leaders' houses, who were in power at that time. During this phase too, the Maoists received popular support. The fourth and final phase involved direct arms conflict with state forces, i.e., the counter-insurgency forces deployed to regain control over the area. This phase exhibited activities like setting up of *ganaadaalat* (people's court) to deliver instant justice, organizing night rallies, compelling each and every family to take part in rallies, extortion of money by the/in the name of Maoists, kidnapping, increasing cases of forced disappearance, killing spree usually of poor men (including the tribals), and discrediting independent tribal movement which originated at Chhotapelia in Jhargram (the erstwhile PaschimMedinipur) district in protest against police atrocities on tribal women in particular. The Maoist activists were found taking decisions on behalf of the

tribals. The people who were helping them hitherto became traumatized on finding out their own men being killed in the conflict and tried to keep themselves out of the activism. The joint forces deployed in the area came with all-out attack on the Maoists in this phase and, at the same time, offered protection to the local tribal and other disadvantaged groups. The operation was termed the *Operation Green Haunt*. The (new) State Government simultaneously came forward by 2011 with rehabilitation package to the Maoist activists on condition of surrender with arms. It was reported that a number of activists were killed by the counter-insurgency forces and many of them surrendered themselves before the security forces. As a result, the Maoist movement became gradually weaker in Junglemahal area of West Bengal.

The Maoist extremism achieved rapid success in some areas along the red corridor or tasted bitterness of failure in other areas. There were varied reasons behind their success or failure in different areas along the red corridor as substantiated in a number of studies by others and by me earlier (Ghosh 1974; Banerjee 1980; Sinha 1989, S.B. Singh 2005; Gomes 2012; Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya 2012, 2014a, 2015a). The objective of the counter-insurgency measures was 'to clear, hold and build'. In addition to deploying the central forces, the concerned states were also found engage hired goons to finish the Maoists without giving due attention to the issue of social exclusion of the disadvantaged ethnic groups and underdevelopment of the concerned area. For instance, Chhattisgarh government promoted *Salwa Judum* (meaning purification haunt) and recruited Special Police Officers (SPO) from amongst the local people. In Junglemahal of West Bengal youth assailants were hired to kill the Maoists. Such retaliatory activities only increased the rivalry and the resultant death of disadvantaged people in majority. Sometimes these retaliatory measures were misused. For example, in Chhattisgarh, the Salwa Judum helped the mining companies and politicians to take away the mineral resources of the state (Miklian 2009). The hired assailants in West Bengal were utilized to kill the political rivals and also engage in extortion of money from common people in the name of Maoists or in pretention of giving protection from the Maoists.

There are various factors behind growth of extremism. The most prominent factor that has been highlighted by many scholars is the socio-economic disparity or inequality (Paige 1975; Nagel 1976; Midlarsky 1981, 1982; Midlarsky and Roberts 1985; Muller 1985, 1986; Muller and Seligson 1987). In Kondeamodal in East Godavari, indebtedness of the tribals and their exploitation by the money lenders was the vibrant issue (Sinha 1989). Poverty and land alienation among the tribals had been the major issue of the Naxalite movement in Srikakulum district of

Andhra Pradesh (Banerji 2010). For Ramchandra Guha (2007), the Scheduled Tribes in India are in fact one of the worst economically performing groups and hence exclusion of the Scheduled Tribes from the growth of mainstream India is one of the key driving forces behind the Maoist movement. In Bihar the, Maoists achieved support of the *Dalits* by backing the latter's struggle against higher castes for better wages and dignity (S.B. Singh 2005; Kunnath 2006). The tribals in Khandadhar district of Odisha came forward to support Maoists in order to save their territory from being grabbed by the POSCO, a South Korean company. In Chhattisgarh, the Maoists achieved strong support from the tribal and other marginalised people who were struggling to protect their land and mineral resources of the region from the mining agencies. That is why Gautam Navlakha argues that the Maoist movement is a people's rebellion for protecting their traditional natural resources from the onslaught of the neo-liberal policy (Navlakha 2010). Maoist extremism is also seen by many as 'intellectually driven' since the middle class elites are motivated to fulfill their 'revolutionary fantasies' (Shah 2006; Shah and Pettigrew 2009; Nigam 2010; Simeon 2010). In an empirical study, Gomes (2012) demonstrates that the Maoist conflict in India is the outcome of grievances arising out of the feeling of exclusion of various forms.

For Chomsky, the issue of arms struggle is entirely contextual and must "meet the minimum moral standards" (Chomsky 2010). The growth of extremist movement appears to be the result of compound effect of various factors such as favourable geophysical setting along the red corridor, poverty, inequality in distribution of resources, illiteracy, lack of communication, poor or absence of governance, and the resultant overall condition of social exclusion. The social exclusion generated the feeling of deprivation and alienation from the broader framework of welfare agenda. Such sentiments have been successfully utilized by the subversive activists operating along the Red Corridor in India. Though the Naxalites and/or Maoists have been active across the Red Corridor since 1940s, but in the West Bengal segment of the corridor their presence was noticed during the 1990s. They were undertaking various pro-people programmes in order to achieve support of the tribal and disadvantaged people of the region and trying to unite the disadvantaged groups on the issue of deprivation and economic marginalization by the Indian State. Their nature of activities and the growth of the movement had already been reported in our earlier studies (Midya *et al.* 2012; Midya, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a). Out of the four villages studied, Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola were more affected in comparison to Amlatora and Sangram. The ethnic groups of Bhimarjun and Bhumij Dhansola were inspired more by the Maoist

activists. There was more involvement with extremist activities, with the nature of violence being more severe. The number of local activists who took part in the violent activities was higher. Incidences of *ganaadalat* held were very frequent in these two villages. It became easier for the extremist groups to interact and involve the people of these villages since these villages were in isolation and excluded from the larger socio-economic network. So it appeared that the more social exclusion the ethnic groups witnessed, they were likely to be vulnerable to extremist activities.

The tribal groups in Junglemahal showed a unique social phenomenon with regard to maintenance of their ethnic boundary. The tribal groups witnessed extreme violence perpetrated upon them both by the Maoists and the counter-insurgency forces. They became traumatized witnessing the killings of their own men in the violent conflict. A survival strategy was found to generate amongst them within their social process. It involved efforts to consolidate their ethnic identity in the region and resist extremist influences. The collective identities always involved certain categorization made by social actors that were, according to Fredrik Barth, either acknowledged or rejected by others (Barth 2000: 34). This categorization determined the scheme of inclusiveness of social phenomena, which were reinforced by and were expressed through their social or religious practices. For instance, there was a renewed emphasis upon ritual actions associated with different phases of life or those attached to the sacred groves in the area (e.g., the Santals' *Jaher* or the Bhumij' *Sarna*). The social practices had positive reinforcement in favour of regenerating identity consolidation of the respective ethnic groups, which was appreciable at that time. This social phenomenon acted toward dissemination of the larger boundary that was encompassing a number of ethnic groups (e.g., the Santals, Bhumij or others including non-tribal groups) during the peak moments of the violent movement at Junglemahal. It was in turn qualifying for weakening the movement led by the extremist activists in the region.

Conclusion

Various ethnic groups in India have always been treated differentially by the nation-state. This approach has its own drawback and consequences. Though it aims at fulfilling differential needs and aspirations of diverse ethnic groups in the country, it had at the same time inherent potential to generate ethnic conflict amongst the engaging groups. The latter might be exploited by the extremist forces in India as found in the North-East region, the Red Corridor, Jammu & Kashmir.

In the Junglemahal region, as also across the Red Corridor, the political extremism has been posing great threat to the internal security of the Indian nation-state. The extremists under the leadership of the Maoists have been fighting in order to seize the State power and to create liberated zones through 'the barrel of a gun'. In more than one-third districts out of 634 districts in India the Maoists had strong influence. But they were very active particularly along the territory of the Red Corridor. In Junglemahal of West Bengal extremist violence was the culmination of arms conflict between the Maoists and the 'counter-insurgency' forces of the state. The ethnic groups who were facing extreme social exclusion were more susceptible to extremist activity as found in the present study. At the same time, they were also showing a trend to develop societal mechanism of their own in order to strengthen ethnic consolidation of individual ethnic group within the context of violent conflict between the extremist groups who were striving to grab the state power through the power of gun, on the one hand, and the counter-insurgency forces who were deployed by the nation-state to keep the area under control, on the other. It was further found that as the ethnic elements of the engaging ethnic groups increased, the possibility of their detachment from the extremist activities also increased. The growth and decline of violent extremism in Junglemahal area is indeed very much contextual.

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Notes

1. The wide area spanning across Indian territory from south to north through the states of Andhra Pradesh, Telengana, Chattisgarh, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Bihar and beyond up to Nepal).
2. In the *Aims and Objectives* of the Constitution of the CPI (Maoist) it is stated that, "the ultimate aim of the party is to bring about communism by continuing the revolution under the leadership of the proletariat and thus abolishing the system of exploitation of man by man from the face of the earth..." Retrieved from www.satp.org on July 9, 2012.
3. An ethnic group here simply means, as Fredrik Barth observes, a population which is biologically self-perpetuating, shares fundamental cultural values, makes up a field of communication and interaction, and has a membership which identifies itself and is identified by

others as a distinct group (Barth 1969:10). Sociologist A.D. Smith defines an ethnic group in terms of six features: a common proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, or shared memories of a common past or pasts, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland, and a sense of solidarity (Smith 1986: Ch. 2). There are other definitions with significant connotations also (e.g., Handelman 1977; Schermerhorn 1978: 12; Van den Berghe 1981; Brass 1985; R. Cohen 1994).

4. This has been reported in one of my previous studies (Midya 2014b)

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Towards Bridging and Fostering Connections between Ideologies of Prominent Spiritual Awakening Institutions and Positive Psychological Practices

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Abstract

Of the many spiritual cults and sects that embrace a well-being enhancement philosophy, we choose the most prominent and active spiritual awakening institutions to elaborate the implicit connections between their operational philosophies and positive psychological practices. The underlying theoretical cum conjunctive analysis unveils the voids in the scientific documents and is a deliberate attempt to forge the connections between standard practices and preachings by taking instances from the philosophy and works of five movements oriented towards (namely the *Radha Soami Satsang Beas*, *Prajapati Bramha Kumaris*, *Art of Living*, *Sadhguru and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram*) spiritual awakening. The choice of these institutions is justified owing to an increasing congregational membership of their followers. Besides, we attempt to look at their philosophies from a critical realist lens to check as to how their ubiquity and pro-humanistic appeal is similar or different from the existing positive psychological practices. Overall, we intend to provide food for thought to researchers by drawing a comparative picture between ideologies of the spiritual awakening institutions and scientific terminologies documented in positive psychology literature.

The philosophy and ideological values embedded and entwined in the psyche of individuals vary across

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cultures and nations, yet the goals with which they are promulgated remain similar in most cases. The cultural dichotomy (Hofstede, 1980) adds flavor to the entire scenario wherein positive psychology movement is proceeding scientifically whereas the most prominent spiritual awakening movements are silently engrossed in professing their philosophical ideologies. There are vast numbers of such institutions which are showing widespread presence (both physically and virtually) and are involved in deploying mechanisms that are fruitful and beneficial to humankind.

The movement called 'positive psychology' (Seligman Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) which came into being as a science of human flourishing is one such revolution in the recent past with the primary goal of promoting factors that contributes to the development of valued subjective experiences at individual, group and institutional levels. Within the ambit of positive psychological resources a variety of topics such as hope and optimism (Snyder, 2000); faith and health (Sherman and Simonton, 2001); charity (Wind, 1938); self determination (Ryan and Deci, 2000), forgiveness (McCullough, Pargment and Thoreson, 2000a) gratitude (McCullough, Emmons and Tsang, 2001); subjective well-being (Diener, 1984); happiness (Seligman, 2002) among many others have been empirically validated in a variety of socio-cultural contexts. These and similar other concepts have been documented explicitly in the scientific literature, however, when it comes to referencing, the research done in this regard lack a definite Eastern connection.

The objective of this paper is to highlight the unexplored connecting links between the movements advancing spiritual awakenings and positive psychological practices. We intend to unleash the real potential of the existing well-being practices with legitimacy and plausibility in the eastern context by forging the connections between these

ideologies. To simplify our agenda, we divide this article into five major themes, each with the chosen schools of thought, having their own unique pro-humanistic appeal. We present arguments supported by facts in favor of the philosophical ideologies and practices of spiritual awakening institutions and their presumed consanguinity with existing positive psychological practices to inform this discourse. We deliberately choose five spiritual awakening institutions actively working in the field of enhancement of well-being and making human potential flourish. The five chosen spiritual awakening institutions deliberated in the paper are *Radha Soami Satsang Beas*, *Brahma Kumaris*, *Art of Living*, *Sadhguru* and *Sri Aurobindo Ashram*. Although we do not intend to restrict ourselves to these selected institutions, we present their ideologies because we find an intuitive appeal in their practices that correspond well with scientifically documented positive psychological concepts. The deliberations are detailed in the same sequence below.

Faith, Charity, Purpose and Meaning: The Case of Radha Soami Satsang Beas

Radha Soami Satsang Beas (RSSB) as one of the most prominent spiritual awakening institutions with a global presence in almost all the major countries of the world (with the exceptions of Russia and China) started as an offshoot to *Sikhism* in the year 1861 AD. The believers of this cult are known as 'Radha Soamis' and membership prerequisites include taking a vegetarian diet, abstinence from tobacco and alcohol, leading a clean and moral life, and meditating for at least two and half hours daily. The core philosophy of RSSB lies in the concept of centralization of God and a spiritual belief that there is special purpose and meaning to human existence (Sachdev, 2001). Being registered as "*Science of the Soul Center*" in western cultures it has more than 2 million members of which 15000 were from the United States of America (Wolfe, 2002).

This cult or sect, whatever term one may use, is represented by highly respected *gurus* who are carrying forward the iconic legacy of this institution by displaying the strength and values that earmark the very foundations of positive psychology. Their teachings are known as "*sant mat*", an Indian phrase meaning the teachings of the saints. These masters teach a practical way of developing our spiritual nature so that the individual can achieve lasting peace and happiness. Their works have reflected hope, faith and charity since inception and the "*Radha Soamis*" are still continuing the selfless philanthropies so that the individual can value their existence and purpose of life (cf. Sand, 1993; Enright, 2004). This seems evident

by the presence and growth of numerous charitable hospitals, societal welfare centers including satsang and meditation centers across the world (Larsen, 2007).

All these selfless acts indicate that the "*Radha Soamis*" believe that they are serving others in ways which help them to find and add a purpose and meaning to life. This is how it can be seen as a case of positive social institution which is ontologically understudied but reflects sturdy juxtaposition to applied positive psychology.

On the contrary, the conception of purpose and meaning in life that had been studied extensively in the West leaves behind a long trail from an existentialistic viewpoint in the scientific literature, especially in the positive psychological discourse (cf. Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler, 2006; McKnight and Kashdan, 2009). Furthermore, the hermeneutic metatheorists identify such kind of social acts as morally imbued at the level of agency, which in turn, at least by implication, cover for positive emotions, positive traits and constitute positive social institutions (Christopher and Campbell, 2008). What can be considered unfortunate is the language of spirituality whereby words such as suffering, faith, charity, forbearance, finitude, sacrifice, grace and transformation are largely unfamiliar to psychologists (cf. Pargament and Mahoney, 2002). This ought to be the reason why the voids which it has been created during its evolution and ongoing perpetuation needs to be filled because there remains so much that can be gained by bridging the worldviews, methods, values and practices of spirituality to psychology, especially positive psychology. This kind of reconciliation would be highly meaningful. Therefore, we recommend that their practical ideologies must be compared for a better interpretation of science flourishing in the Eastern context.

Positive Thinking, Living Values and Overall Self-management: The "Brahma Kumaris"

The second case taken into consideration has turned itself into a full-fledged spiritual university with its own specialized courses and programs on positive thinking, stress management and management of oneself. The "*Brahma Kumaris*" as an organization was instituted in 1936 by its founder, and as far as its current status goes, it has centers almost in every major town in India and abroad. In fact, they are showing their strong prominence by attracting over 2.5 million individuals of different ethnicities to various study centers (<http://www.brahmakumaris.org.in/history.php>) of their institution. This sect practices meditation for purification of the mind and their ultimate aim is to cultivate a collective consciousness of peace and enabling dignity to each soul.

To achieve this, the sect recommends a specific lifestyle that comprises of having control over physical senses. Membership into adapting the *Bramha Kumaris* way of life comes by practicing complete celibacy, clothing in white (symbolizing purity), adapting 'Saathvic' vegetarianism (lacto vegetarian diet which excludes eggs, onions, garlic and spicy food) which has to be cooked by one of the members of the sect, abstaining from tobacco, alcohol and non-prescriptive drugs, meditating every day in the morning from 4:00 – 4:45am and attending regular class at 6:30 am (Bartholomeusz, 1994). The *Bramha Kumaris* practice 'Raja Yoga', a form of meditation that can be done by people who come from all backgrounds. It is done with open eyes which make the process simple, versatile and easy to practice. Meditation brings along spiritual empowerment which comprises of spiritual awareness. It brings about harmony in thoughts, replaces negative feelings with positive ones, and responds to situations instead of reacting to them, creating healthy and happy relationships. The beliefs of the sect revolve around the self, the supreme power, karma and cycle of time. The self is constituted by the external physical body and the soul.

The soul is located in the forehead of the body occupying a small point coming from the "Supreme Soul", i.e., God (infinite light, peace and silence). The *Bramha Kumaris* believe that the soul enters the body to experience life and give expression to the personality. God is seen as unconditional, eternal and perfect, an embodiment of all virtues, power and values. God's purpose is to spiritually re-awaken humanity, eliminate sorrow, evil and negativity (Ramsay, 2009). Karma is the belief that every action done by the soul will return accordingly and that the destiny of the soul's next body depends on how it acts and behaves in this life. It is believed that through meditation, the "karmic account" can be purified to lead a better life.

Contrasting the various religious practices, abstaining from celibacy in the sect of *Bramha Kumaris* has often been questioned. The ultimate aim of 'Raja Yoga' is to create healthy and happy individuals. It was found that the practice of 'Raja Yoga' does contribute to higher happiness and self-satisfaction (Ramesh, Sathian, Sinu and Kiranmai, 2013). The concept of meditation is justified as 'mindfulness' in positive psychology. Meditation is a traditional self-regulatory approach that reduces arousal states and anxiety conditions (Krisanaprakornkit, Sriraj, Piyavhatkul and Laopaiboon, 2006). It is a type of mind-body complementary medicine. It provides a sense of peace, calmness and balance that aids emotional well-being and good health (Telles and Desiraju, 1993). Similar practices with different labels and minute differences call for an integrative approach to bring these theoretical perspectives under one umbrella to gain a holistic

understanding of spiritual practices and the positive psychology movement.

The Art of Living

The Art of Living is a community that came into being in 1981 founded by *Sri Sri Ravi Shankar*, a philanthropist and spiritual leader. The art of living way of life offers educational and self-development modules which helps diminish stress and foster profound inner peace, happiness and well-being. It has been taught to over 6 million people across 152 countries (Zope and Zope, 2013). The Art of Living foundation is a non-governmental, non-profit organization with the largest volunteer base spread across 156 countries (India Today, 2015).

In collaboration with The International Association for Human Values (IAHV), the Art of Living Foundation has implemented several humanitarian projects and services like disaster relief, conflict resolution, empowerment of women, sustainable rural development, environmental sustainability and education for all. The international office is located in Bengaluru.

Through his life, *Sri Sri Ravi Shankar* has reached out to millions of people with a vision of stress and violence free world. At the age of 4, he recited the Hindu mythology book, Bhagavad Gita and at the age of 22, he entered a period of ten-day silence in Shimoga, Karnataka, India. This gave birth to the powerful practice termed as 'Sudarshan Kriya'. The literal meaning of the word 'Sudarshan' is proper vision and 'Kriya' means an act to purify the body. 'Sudarshan Kriya' is an exclusive breathing technique that resides in cyclical breathing patterns ranging from slow and calm to rapid and stimulating. In this form, the individual takes control of one's breath thereby positively affecting the immune system, nerves and decreasing psychological problems. It involves four stages and it is recommended to be done under the supervision of an expert to have effective results. The four steps are *Ujjayi* (Victorious Breath), *Bhastrika* (Bellows Breath), *Om chanting* and *Kriya* (Purifying Breath). *Ujjayi* is breathing consciously, feeling the breath by touching the throat. Inhaling and exhaling in a relaxed manner (2-4 breaths per minute) to calm oneself down and keep one alert. *Bhastrika* involves rapid breathing, as much as 30 breaths per minute. Breathing is short and quick. It stimulates the body and calmness follow. The sound of *Om* (ॐ) is chanted thrice. It connects the individual to the origin of the universe and purpose of life. The chanting creates a state of bliss but the process needs to be done with silence around. The last is *Kriya*, an advanced form of breathing, which is carried out in slow, medium and fast cycles. These breaths are cyclical and rhythmic. Practicing this enhances overall health and

well-being, organs functions, brain function, creativity, increases energy levels, confidence and patience and also strengthens immune system, reduces cholesterol levels, helps deal with challenging situations in a better manner, decreases anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, eases out tensions facilitating joy, harmony and love. It also makes an individual aware of one's surroundings.

Through a critical rationalist lens and from a positive psychology perspective, the effectiveness of this technique over a prolonged period needs to be tested. Attaining the proposed state of vision through the activities of *The Art of Living* are also achievable through theories of humanistic school of psychology founded by Carl Rogers. This is done by giving unconditional positive regard and focusing on building human strengths (Rogers, 1966). Meditation to achieve the goals of art of living has also been documented by positive psychology. This comprises of contemplation and asking, leading to mindfulness and opening-up, which eventually increases focus, concentration and brings awareness (cf. Shapiro, Schwartz and Santerre, 2002).

The Contemporary Teachings of Sadhguru

Jaggi Vasudev, also known as *Sadhguru*, is a popular face in contemporary spiritual awakening movement. He hails from the southern state of Karnataka in India. He is currently known by his organization "*Isha Foundation*" with branches all over the country along with overseas centers. His foundation mainly imparts specialized yoga training to the disciples. There are frequent congregations where *Sadhguru* often delivers spiritual teachings to the audience. *Isha foundation* has also got the prestigious consultative status from United Nations Economic and Social Council (UNESCO). Their training center provides method for attaining physical, mental and spiritual well-being by cultivating the deeper experience of life and reaching to the ultimate potential (<http://www.ishayoga.org/en/about-isha>). The main teachings of this group are delivered through practices of Yoga.

A widely popular spiritual leader who has popularized the concept of *Adiyogi* (the Shiva) is the prominent figure for discussion among intellectuals and masses. *Sadhguru* is known for his contemporary thoughts which are blended with the spiritual essence and have many things to offer to the society. His teachings especially focus on the functionality which is well grounded in our ancient culture. Although it might be difficult to understand the two concepts (viz. *functionality* and *ancient culture*), we tend to ignore and leave them as old concepts and no more functional in the present era. Nevertheless, *Sadhguru's* concepts which he presents in his book *Inner Engineering*

have proved that many solutions of the problems are well rooted in the very heart of spirituality and tranquility. His overall school of thought revolves around many concepts which are essential for human functioning. For example, the concept of forgiveness (cf. McCullough, Pargment and Thoreson, 2000) has been detailed by *Sadhguru* in an influential manner. *Sadhguru* points out that in order to give away the bitterness one must give away the negative feeling and hence it is necessary to forgive. A similar exercise can be seen in positive psychology literature where the aim is to enhance functionality by boosting up positivity of self. The positive psychology preaches practicing forgiveness through writing letters known as "forgiveness letters" and journaling. The emphasis here is facilitating the positive emotions and it has already been proved by broaden and build theory (Frederickson, 2001) that positive emotions broaden our focus resulting in overcoming poor problem solving ability. Forgiveness as virtue can help the person to deal with the negative emotions yet retaining the positivity. Hence, it is considered to be one of the most important practices in Indian spiritual ideology.

There are various yoga practices which often resemble the essence of positive psychology that is to facilitate healthy, joyous and true living. However, the paths *Sadhguru* envisages to achieve a good living and the way through which positive psychologists have defined meaningful life and authentic happiness seem to be somewhat different. This gap between the modern day psychological techniques and the spiritual teachings might leave the readers in a bewildered condition as to what to follow and how deep the following should be. This gap must be addressed by positive psychologists and practitioners through a scientific and justifiable dialogue. We presume that such justification and rapprochement would be essential to bridge the gaps so as to move forward in a scientifically robust manner.

Blending Spirituality, Poetry and Philosophy: Sri Aurobindo

A mystic spiritual leader, great thinker and philosopher who defined the spirituality well ahead of his time was *Aurobindo* also known as *Sri Aurobindo* or *Rishi Aurobindo*. He was one of the most influential leaders during pre-independence Indian society. Currently his disciples are spread all over the world. *Sri Aurobindo* partnered with Mirra Alfissa known as the Mother, in his spiritual journey and they together founded the

"*Aurobindo Ashram*" in 1926 at Pondicherry, India. Since then the ashram has been a source for spiritual practices. Most of *Aurobindo's* major works were published between 1914 and 1920 in a journal named *Arya*. His major works

include interpretation of ancient Indian scriptures, practices and metaphysical description of yoga. As per Banerji (2013) Sri Aurobindo can be seen as one of the founders of contemporary Indian philosophy and psychology.

With so many prominent concepts and experiences that were propounded by Sri Aurobindo, including *Passive Brahman*, *Active Brahman*, the concept of *integral yoga*; any individual can visualize the spectrum of trans-personal psychology from philosophy to spirituality in his works. As per Aurobindo, "Man, at present, lives mostly in his surface mind, life, and body". There is an inner being within all of us which pushes him to a constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge. For him the best way to awake the inner being is by making oneself aware about the truth and nature. Thus, the concern of Aurobindo was to make the individual aware of the consciousness that lies within the person. This teaching carries relevance in today's era particularly in positive psychological domain where the emphasis is often on the subjective and objective alignment of self-goal. Needless to say, this can only be done when people are aware of their own selves. Aurobindo defined that there exist two beings in us, the ordinary exterior mind and the inner mind. The inner self when opens up becomes our true eternal self (cf. Moivic, 2004). It seems, as per this spiritual awakening that the aim of the yoga is to know and bridge the gap between objective and subjective reality to achieve the greater realm of consciousness. By consciousness, Aurobindo meant an entity beyond reality and a stage called *Sadchitananda*, where there exists the *Brahman*, the Transcendent divine. Though the descriptions of consciousness might seem to be heavy for contemporary readers and it might even be more skeptical to scientifically oriented readers, the present day positive psychological paradigm has something to offer similar to this concept.

Positive psychology essentially talks about happy and meaningful life where there is continuity of growth with respect to one's potential strength and self-actualizing tendencies. The ways to achieve this self actualizing state is not indeed different nor has it been intended to draw sameness in the concepts of positive psychology with Aurobindo's. However, it is indeed interesting to see that superficial appeal seem to be similar with the overall essence of positive psychology. In fact, the pathways of positive psychological experiences can even lead to the stage where there might be some conscious orientation to one's life. Aurobindo has defined that the inner being is in constant quench for greater beauty, harmony and knowledge. This expression should be understood as actualizing tendencies by prominent scholars as it

constitutes a root conceptualization for humanistic and positive thinkers.

Fostering the Connections: Concluding Remarks

Bearing in mind the traditional spiritual practices rooting in India and contemporary positive psychological practices coming from the West, it is imperative to bridge the connection between the two. The main objectives of these schools are to bring good health, happiness, peace, harmony and well-being to human beings. Looking closely, practices on both continuums involve yoga, meditation, self-awareness and self-love. However, the main challenge while linking the traditional roots of spiritual awakenings to contemporary positive psychological practices is the lack of scientific validation to the age old spiritual practices and relevant documentation. Another problem seems to be the vastness of the teachings in Indian spirituality which are at times difficult to comprehend and collate, thereby making it difficult to capture the vast vista of such value laden philosophical thoughts and ideologies.

The difference actually lies in the fundamental questions of Indian spirituality and other contemporary paradigms. Indicating towards this contextual variation, Salagame points out that each of the concepts has developed in two different contexts which are not comparable (cf. Salagame, 2014). However, it seems that if the contextual clarity can be brought at the first place, there will be chances to comprehend the concepts in a holistic way. The cultural variation plays an important role to understand these paradigms.

Another problem while equating the spiritual and contemporary psychological concepts is that Indian spiritual themes have not been tested against strict scientific paradigms and hence they lack scientific objectivity. As mentioned by Rao (2014): "There is abundant theory behind the practices, but little empirical data to scientifically connect the theory with practices". The similarity between the spiritual movements and the central theme of positive psychological practices is quite striking; however more research is needed to explore this relationship within varied cultural contexts. Researchers are now trying to connect the transpersonal experiences and other spiritual phenomena with widely popular psychological aspects, yet there is a long way to go.

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Of Traditions and Modernity: Contemporary Performance Practices of Bhāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* Plays

Mahesh Champaklal, *Bhāsa's Rāmāyaṇa Plays: From Page to Stage*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 2018, pp. xiv + 632, Rs. 950/-, ISBN: 9789382396604 (Hardcover).

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Performance Studies in India, and within that Theatre Studies in particular, is barely a few decades old.¹ It is a relatively juvenile extension of the scholarly engagements with dramas, Indian as well as Western,² both contemporary and of classical antiquity. Moreover, most of the existing studies on classical Indian theatre, end up studying the classical Sanskrit play-texts rather than their performances on the Indian stage. Dr. Mahesh Champaklal's monograph entitled *Bhāsa's Rāmāyaṇa Plays: From Page to Stage* breathes fresh air into the body of contemporary theatre criticism, firstly, because he places textual and performance analysis together, but more interestingly because on his grand canvas we find juxtaposed, the traditional performance style of Kūṭiyāṭṭam along with that of K. N. Panikkar's modernised production of Bhāsa's play.

In his prefatorial note, the author clarifies that what concerns him here is not the ongoing debates of authorship of the plays ascribed to Bhāsa. Rather, taking the authorship for granted, he is curious about three of their performances, one by Panikkar and two in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam form, the latter being a living performance tradition practised by specific communities in the present state of Kerala in the south of India. This form, as regards the available scholarship on the same, is at least a millennium old. Added to that, the discovery of Bhāsa's play-texts at the beginning of the 20th Century, and the post-independence fanning of the "Theatre of Roots" movement in India, have also re-energised performance artists, both traditional and modern, to engage with the classical texts in various ways.

Divided into three parts, the first one "Language in Theatre (Dramatic Text)" is a detailed act-by-act summary of two plays of Bhāsa – namely, *Abhisheka Nāṭakam* and

Pratimā Nāṭakam, based on stories concerning Rama and his life in exile – that forms the basis of Dr. Champaklal's present work. This section which deals with the existing dramatic texts, marks the influences and departures of Bhāsa from the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, ascribed to Vālmīki. The author is also careful regarding the varying colours that the characters in Bhāsa's texts take, when comparing them with their portrayal in Vālmīki's text. Such as, Bhāsa's Kaikeyi is completely absolved of all her "sins" and is no longer the evil incarnate as in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. Even so, Dr. Champaklal does not lead us further into the underlying politics of characterisation, probably because that would take his work beyond his present concern. Also, he refers to the fair possibility of Bhāsa's framing his plays not only from Vālmīki's text but from various other poets only once (p. 10) (and I would like to extend it to the popular oral narratives which were certainly available to both of them, from which they might have freely drawn) and does not develop his statement further. Such an argumentation would have destabilised the hierarchy, and therefore the privilege, of the source-text over the play-texts that often marks the author's analysis. Hence, his categorical conclusion: "while *dramatizing the epic*, Bhāsa always gives importance to only those scenes which have dramatic value. . . . To turn the narration into action is a real task for any dramatist which is evident from Bhāsa's work" (p. 38, emphasis added). Similarly, it might not be a baseless conjecture that the trope of "Mount Mandara" (p. 49) that the author has identified as frequently used by Bhāsa in many of his plays to elaborate Herculean tasks, might also have been popular in his time as a stereotypical image. However, that is not to say that the author necessarily undermines all contributions of Bhāsa to those of Vālmīki. He elaborates how Bhāsa uses

his imagination to add symbolic value to certain elements in the Rāmākathās³, often inventing to his will and dramatic necessity. We may refer to the *valkala*⁴ and the *pratimā*⁵ to consider how they provide causal links in the plot of the play. Nevertheless, the constant comparisons of Bhāsa's text to Vālmīki's, as presented, overshadow the more probable dialectical network of artistic influences. Had it been avoided, it would have opened up avenues of enquiry on Bhāsa's critical engagement with Vālmīki's text – as "the voice of dissent in Indian theatre" (p. 625) – asking disturbing questions to Vālmīki and his portrayal of idealistic characters.

The careful demarcation of the textual framework in this section allows Dr. Champaklal to draw analytical references with the descriptions of production manuals and performances which follow. Also, his compilation and annotations of the existing critical literature on the play-texts in this part, presents to his readers a rich variorum. In this section the author also teases out the clues grafted by Bhāsa into the texts, for the performers to read into the authorial intention.⁶ He puts forward in display how certain elements of the play-texts make the performers aware of the characters' frames of mind, thereby allowing crucial insights towards enacting those roles. In the same thread, he also talks about how certain turns of the phrase can also be interpreted as stage directions along with the direct ones – "falls unconscious" (p. 114). Bestowing critical attention towards the development of plot, coherence of play-texts, development of characters, characterisation of Fate, the role of humour, and various other dramatic techniques, the author hereby prepares the ground for consolidating his later arguments drawn on the analysis of performance texts.

The second part "Language of Theatre (Performance Text)," takes us through the contemporary performance practices of "*Vālivadhā*" and "*Toranayuddham*" – the first and third acts of Bhāsa's *Abhisheka Nātakam* respectively – on the Kūṭiyāṭṭam stage (with representative photographs taken during the Kūṭiyāṭṭam-Mahotsavam 2012 for "*Vālivadhā*" and of several performances around 2014 for "*Toranayuddham*"), and K. N. Panikkar's 2002 Bharat Rang Mahotsav production entitled *Pratimā* (with representative photographs of the same production).

The first subsection "Bhāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* Plays on the Kūṭiyāṭṭam Stage: The *Rāmāyaṇa* Trilogy," in its attempt to give us a holistic picture of the performance tradition, additionally refers to Shaktibhadra's *Āscharyachudāmani* along with the two other plays of Bhāsa, as these three together complete the performance cycle of twenty one acts, as is the practise. However, this inclusion seems to be quite redundant in the larger framework and purpose of this book.

The following subsections bring together the production manuals (*Kramadīpikā*), the acting manuals (*Attaparakāram*), and the production photographs of the two acts of *Abhisheka Nātakam* mentioned above. The sections, on the one hand, make us understand the liberties that Kūṭiyāṭṭam takes of Bhāsa's plays, while on the other, underscores the link between ritual and performance. It reads:

The Chakyar purifies himself by ablutions in the pond attached to the temple. He pays obeisance to the gods and preceptors in the green-room. He should wear only a fresh cloth that the washerman provides. As a beginning, when he ties a red cloth on his head, he is believed to have divine sanction, and nothing can defile him any more. No spectator, even a king, can criticize him; in fact the red cloth should not be removed until the performance is over. (p. 445)

Further, this section also shows how, for Kūṭiyāṭṭam performances, the prologue to the play is central to the performance to the extent that it supersedes the play proper. Taking up five to thirty-five nights,⁷ consisting of the commencement (*purāppātu*), flashback (*anukramam*), the summary (*samksepam*) and the elaboration (*nirvāhanam*), this development reveals to be of greater concern for the performers as well as the audience. Moreover, as identified by the author, because the Kūṭiyāṭṭam takes up only one particular act and not the whole play to be performed at a time, such alterations of the text reinforce the "spine of the body of the performance" (p. 447). Though it seems apparent that through such alterations of the play-texts and the amplification of the spectacular, the "body"⁸ of Bhāsa's plays too is cleansed off its politics, Dr. Champaklal, in his clinical engagement, keeps himself away from indulging into the effects of this transition in the performative practice. In doing so, he also refrains from commenting on Kūṭiyāṭṭam's heavy reliance on Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa* in these preludes and the characteristic differences that it, therefore, develops in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam-proper which relies on Bhāsa's texts.

The glossary of technical terms that accompanies this section also throws light on the aforementioned relationship between ritual and performance. The instances, where the contemporary Kūṭiyāṭṭam performers deviate from the prescribed *Kramadīpikā*, is noted (p. 290). The section also marks the economy of presenting characters on stage as practised in Kūṭiyāṭṭam and the use of costumes to demarcate the changes during multiple impersonations. Such performative techniques reduce the number of actors required, as it is performed by only two communities – the Chakyars and the Nambiars, primarily as a mode of worship, and only in the temple precincts, until recently. Added to that, we are informed that the recitation of speeches of absent characters and the appearance of unimportant

characters with their heads covered are conventionally accepted. The *Attaprakārams* also hint at numerous comic interventions that the performance ought to follow. Thus, as in Bhāsa, the element of humour continues to flow in the Kūṭiyāṭṭam. Also noticeable is the way the half-curtain and the wooden stool are used as the only major props on stage. Not only do they enhance the dramatic value of the performance by relying on the imagination of the audience, leading us to various time-zones and places, but also make us inquisitive about the shared hermeneutic codes in play. The present work extends an understanding of the network of meaning – the skilful combination of *nātyadharmī*⁹ and *lokadharmī*¹⁰ elements” (p. 444) – by supplementing the production and acting manuals with innumerable reference frames from various performances.

Dr. Champaklal also emphasises the fourfold *abhinaya*¹¹ in compliance to the *Nātyasāstra* – the stylised speech (*vāchika*); the movement of the limbs (*āṅgika*); the subtle facial expressions and gestures (*sāttvika*) and the combination of the make-up, costumes, music, props, *et al.* (*āhārya*) – and describes how they evoke the suitable states of the characters. The centrality of to the Indian traditional theatre is also highlighted especially through the elaborate use of the traditional drums (*mizhāvu*) and the sacredness ascribed to the space it occupies on the stage. The synchronic representation of the music played and the gestures performed demands years of training. It is through “discipline,” the author remarks referring to Panikkar, that the performers achieve “creative freedom” (p. 464). Drawing details and references the author concludes that “[i]n Kūṭiyāṭṭam, it seems the performance is the real text. An overwritten or verbose text is often hindrance to performance. The elaboration is the contribution of the performer” (p. 470).

In the following subsection “K.N. Panikkar’s Production of ‘Pratimā’: Synopsis, Director’s Note and Performance Data,” the author engages with Panikkar’s 2002 production based on Bhāsa’s play *Pratimā Nātakam*. In the words of the director, in his play *Pratimā*, he probes “the underlying relationship of the concept of Pratimā with the content of the play” (p. 478). Hence, as in the Kūṭiyāṭṭams, Panikkar’s is also a re-creation of the classical text. Furthermore, considering it as a Bharat Rang Mahotsav production, his is an attempt to present it on the proscenium for a metropolitan audience. As Dr. Champaklal shows, Panikkar too, like the Kūṭiyāṭṭam plays, freely borrowed from Vālmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa*, in as much as a verse from Vālmiki’s text is brought in as the pivotal refrain in the final scene of his play. The use of modern stage lighting systems that have enabled Panikkar to represent multiple time frames – with characters being faded out or appearing as if in a dream – have

also been indicated by the author. That this “modern” production also has vital ritual elements, has also been laid out. The author remarks that while the music brings into the production “the spirit of devotion” (p. 599), the use of the traditional umbrella in the production, would potentially drive the informed audience to relate it to a regional festival of Kerala – namely, the Pooram Festival – and connect it to the play’s tradition, its roots. Accordingly, to the author, this production stands as a reinvention of “a part of the mythology in a new era for a new audience. It involves the audience to question the mythical relationship of the concept of the play” (p. 604-5). Although Dr. Champaklal talks about the modernity of the play in using the lights, minimal and suggestive set elements, to me, the true modernity lies in the director’s reworking of the “*pratimā*” from a sculpture – a symbol of death in Bhāsa’s text, to represent it as an enlivened character in his production. With this transformation, the abstract idea of “recognition” became the thread of Panikkar’s play, lending it the thematic integrity.

Coming to the third and final part of the book, “Language in Theatre, Language of Theatre (Dramatic Text versus Performance Text): In the Context of Indian Classical Theatre,” the author opines that “[t]here is no question of superiority or primacy of one over the other. It is not merely a question of dramatic text having its fulfilment or realization only in the performance. It is, in fact, more a question of reciprocity, of mutual dependence” (p. 610). Further, as he compares the dramatic manuals – *Nātyasāstra*, *Vyangyavyakhyā*, and *Nātānkusha* – on the one hand with the productions under consideration on the other, we are informed about the crucial debates that have existed for centuries now (*Nātānkusha*, the latest of the trio, considered to be a text of the 15th Century). In this section of the book the author, albeit cursorily, looks at the audience and the theories of reception which deserved more attention. Referring to *Vyangyavyakhyā* he says, that the Kūṭiyāṭṭam took liberties with Bhāsa’s texts as “the audience is more interested in ‘How’ rather than ‘What’” (p. 620). For, the Rāmakathās being popular stories, the audience would already know it, therefore underlining the need for “retrospection and suggestive acting” (p. 620), which demands the expertise of the performers. In other words, the expectation of the audience would rarely be to see a new play (though they might be fascinated or disgusted to see one such play), but definitely a new performance. It is this that keeps the audience glued onto the performance. The author also says that the audience of these plays consists of the “ordinary folk” along with the “elite” (p. 622). This categorisation, however, in the Indian context, is not just of class or of erudition but of caste, always-already embedded in the other markers. Though, this could have been a take-off point

for a discourse on the dimensions of caste, from textual, performative, as well as the spectatorial framework, the author seems quite nonchalant to the role it plays in both the play-texts and in performative practices. For, with the “elites” sitting in the front and the “ordinary folk” at the back, along with the prominence bestowed on the subtle gestures and facial movements, a necessary hierarchy of meaning – of reception and erudition – is augmented through the tradition. Even though it is voiced that the body of current practices, “no longer the traditional Sanskrit Theatre of Bhārata, instead is an autonomous art” (p. 624) in various ways; with the identification of the categories of audience in mind, it might be interesting to take a second look at the productions at large, and their “popular” nature.

Before we conclude, it must be noted that Dr. Champaklal’s book demands at least a basic understanding of Sanskrit and a thorough knowledge of the Devanagari script. Otherwise, expressions such as “शरद् brought joy to the हंसी”¹² (p. 73) would leave the reader clueless. Secondly, though the author presents a dense account of the play texts and the performance manuals, one would wish a further interrogation of the source texts along with their enacted transpositions taken up in this book, so as to provide insights into the “politics” of these practices. Finally, the inaccuracies of copyediting I cannot help but mention. The book is replete with typological, grammatical and punctuation errors. Also, though it is understood that multiple spellings do exist in the popular usage for certain of the terms used in the text, one would like to avoid being lost in that quagmire engendered out of the lack of the standardisation of spellings, both of technical terms as well as proper nouns.¹³

Even so, Dr. Mahesh Champaklal’s book, providing

the readers an opportunity to take a comprehensive look at the *miseen scène* of the practices of classical Indian theatre today, demands further critical attention. It is an invaluable compendium, bringing together play-texts, performance manuals, photographs as well as crucial analytical debates onto our platter, representing Performance Studies in India.

Notes

1. That is, when we consider Performance Studies and Theatre Studies as institutionalised academic disciplines.
2. Aware of the existing debates on the categories “Indian” and “Western,” I use the terms here at their face value.
3. As the term suggests, *kathās* were oral narratives which evolved and were named after their central character. Hence, Rāmakathās denote the popular narratives of Rama.
4. Garment worn by the ascetics made out of the bark (*valkala*) of certain trees.
5. Statue.
6. The author, however, does not refer to the existing debates on the same.
7. Overlapping, but inconsistent data can be found in p. 465 and p. 614. Even so, that does not affect my argument drawn here on the primacy of the prelude over the play-proper.
8. Used in the metaphorical sense of the term.
9. Dramatic.
10. Realistic.
11. Acting.
12. The words in Devanagari mean “autumn” and “swan” respectively.
13. For example, the work uses both “*milavu*” and “*mizhavu*” to denote the traditional drum (*mizhāvu*), and both “Valin” and “Bali” for the Monkey-king (Vāli).

Tradition-Modernity Encounter in Postcolonial Indian Literature

Satish C Aikant, *Postcolonial Indian Literature: Towards a Critical Framework*, Shimla, IAS, 2018, pp. viii+113, Rs. 425.

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Anthologies, books, and readers on both postcolonial literature and theory are innumerable and the plethora of writings on this area are in many ways compelling both the readers and researchers to consider this field and use its resources carefully. Contrary to this assumption, there are still books and studies being churned out from publishing houses proving the field to be an inexhaustible terrain of scholarship. Not just Asian and African academia, rather even European and American scholars with added enthusiasm engaging with postcolonial writings produced by native, Diasporic and expatriate authors having the tenor of colonial, anti-colonial and decolonial underpinnings. The leading scholars in this area like Gayathri C. Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad and so on have taken new turns in their theoretical ruminations in order to keep the field alive with new rules of the game in place. Hence, the discipline of Postcolonial Studies remains relevant and vibrant as both the creative and the critical output are prolific.

Aikant's book on postcolonial Indian literature (the title of the book is the same) bears witness to the in-depth research happening in Indian academia in this field and how it is promoted by the Centers of Academic Excellence such as the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS). The nine pages 'Select Bibliography' at the end of the book does attest to the serious and rigorous research that this author undertook during his two years of fellowship at IIAS Shimla. The book follows a simple effective writing style that allows even a novice in postcolonial studies to grasp the background and easily follow the debates and arguments. The first two chapters introduce the reader to the world of postcolonial literature and theory and provide ample background and familiarize them with the seminal writers and thinkers of the field. In the introductory chapter, the author

declares openly that the scope of the book is confined to the landscape and mindscape of the colonial enterprise of the 'the British Empire' and so the nations, people and literature under perusal are inheritors of a common cultural and linguistic coloniality. The relationship of colonialism with capitalism and imperialism and the thin line between the three are presented in a lucid manner in the beginning. The scholarly engagement with the very understanding of colonialism and its various epochs and epiphanies pave the base to comprehend the complexity of postcolonialism. The invocations to Indian and Western scholars to 'position' the postcolonial turn out to be successful as the writer affirms "... in its therapeutic retrieval of the colonial past, postcolonialism needs to define itself as an area of study which is willing not only to make, but also to gain, theoretical sense out of the past" (p. 10). The historical contours of postcolonial studies invariably involve serious discussions on the categories like 'centre', 'margin', hybridity, 'identity', 'other' and many more and this book deals with all of them in a situated manner. The interdisciplinary nature of this field is brought out by exposing the tools used by it in estimating 'the proper order of things' and the author assigns postcolonialism as a novel way of 'seeing the world' and 'representing reality' against the grain of colonial hegemony.

Postcolonial theory is introduced through the controversy of Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad on third world literatures as "national allegory" and this approach produces curiosity in the reader to know and go deeper into this discipline, which is by nature controversial and revolutionary. The discursive function of the postcolonial is foregrounded by showing the crisis in 'three worlds theory' propounded by the western scholars. The scope of postcolonial theory is unlimited as it focuses on

'writing' and 'resistance', in other words the act of 'the empire writes back' in theory and praxis. Postcolonial studies privileging certain authors and their theoretical positions in a way make the field narrow, and the need of the hour is to bring to lime light the articulations and pronouncements of multiple authors who engage with gender, class and caste in their writings. The long and erudite deliberation on two influential books on postcolonial theory, namely, *Orientalism* (1978) of Edward Said and *The Empire Writes Back* of Bill Ashcroft *et al* provide a broad perspective of this discipline to the reader. The parallel drawn between postcolonial theory and the Dependency theory of Economics is succinct and the impossibility to accommodate 'much of the literature from India...within the framing grid provided by ... postcolonial theory (p. 30) is also acknowledged. To make postcolonial theory 'all inclusive' the author proposes 'to rework the concepts of 'mimicry' and 'hybridity' (p. 32) and believes that it would initiate an alternative approach that would promise freedom and equality to the writer who is in 'a condition of in-betweenness'. The scathing attack on 'print capitalism' does not end in repudiating it, rather turns to be a plea to become more inclusive by bringing into its ambit the non-conventional by an act of 'widening of the literary canvas' (p. 34). There is a sustained appeal in the book demanding postcolonial theory not to slip into a 'master narrative' of hegemony, instead take a position to become a resistant force that will dismantle monolithic and totalizing concepts. The contemporaneity of postcolonial theory, according to the author, posits its ability to 'interrogate contemporary myths of unitary nationhood' and 'supply us with an ethical paradigm for a systematic critique of institutional suffering' (p. 39).

The ensuing four chapters apply postcolonial theory in the four works of four famous Indian authors and bring to light the encounter between tradition and modernity and the tension, ambiguity and ambivalence involved in this encounter. The analysis of Tagore's *The Home and the World* opens up debates on nation and nationalism, which are essentially Eurocentric and modern in nature. The emergence of nationalism in India and other colonized nations is not the result of the blind reception of western liberal tradition, instead the ferment of it came from an anti-imperial movement demanding freedom. Tagore, who was initially with Gandhi in national movement, gradually disentangled himself from it by denouncing the claims of nationalism "which teaches [them] that a country is greater than, the ideals of humanity" (p. 46). The gory picture of World War I reaffirmed Tagore's position on nationalism and he believed it to be a utilitarian idea to the core as it disinvests humanity of its spiritual nature. Tagore was dismissive of both virulent

nationalism of the West and the non-violent nationalism of Gandhi. The novel exposes the futility of nationalism that ignores righteousness and conscience. The protagonist of the novel verbalises Tagorian vision of nationalism that privileges humanity over nation. *Bande Mataram* in the novel metamorphoses into a totalitarian/fascist paean and by doing this Tagore "registers his absolute disapproval of the iconographic phrases that drive nationalism" (p. 54). Tagore envisioned an internationalism that promoted a symbiosis of the East and West within a pattern of 'creative engagement'. Thus, the postcolonial ideal of nationalism finds an alternative vision in Tagore in which 'Home' and the 'World' transcend the narrow walls of division and embrace the ideal "*Vasudhaiva Kudumbakam*".

The chapter on R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* is a telling comment on the attitude of the Indian elite towards Indian National Movement under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. The evolution of 'the notion of India as a nation' (p. 59) and Gandhi's role in it is captured well in the beginning of the essay. Then, it goes on to analyse the novel and shows the 'amorphous nature' of the colonial bourgeoisie during the national movement. Gandhi is not Mahatma in this novel, whereas in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* presents Gandhi as an incarnation. In this novel, Gandhi and his ideals are not just compromised, rather used by the 'individuals to enhance their own status' and this is a fatal blow to the person and movement that he embodies. The very expression 'Quit India' suffers infamy as it is painted and propagated by Sriram who knows not the essence of it. Thus, the novel portrays the 'general atmosphere of ambivalence' of the times and distances itself from any 'ideological commitment', which was emblematic of the majority of Indian elite and a small fraction of the common man. The novel, however, succeeds in problematising the ideals of nation and nationalism.

The thorough analysis of U.R. Ananthamurthy's novel *Samskara* provides a postcolonial reading of caste with special focus on the Brahmanical traditions and its clash with modernity. The author appreciates the novelist for writing his novel in Kannada and making his plot rural to convey a typical Indian theme. The summary of the novel given in the essay gives the reader a feel of reading the whole novel and Aikant's reliance on S. Nagarajan's study of the novel adds to its credibility. The study becomes a vehement social and political critique as he observes, "the brahmin hero represents the modern intellectual and Chandri, the lower strata of society from whom the intellectual expects new impulses and powers for a political and social renewal to emerge" (83). Projecting the protagonist Praneshacharya as an epic hero and allowing his hubris not for a tragic end, but for a renewed self-consciousness and self-discovery is a new approach to the very reading of the novel. The Acharya, confined by

the norms and rituals of Brahminism, breaks the chains and enters into a 'world beyond caste and Brahminism' and turns to be an itinerant pilgrim and leaves the novel without a resolution which according to A.K. Ramanujan, is 'a movement, not a closure'. The novel, thus, is triumphant in foregrounding the Indian specific caste issue within a postcolonial narrative structure.

The author selects Nayantara Sahgal's *Rich Like Us* to analyse 'gender' in postcolonial scenario. The prominence given to women in National Movement by Gandhi went into oblivion in the post-independent era and women again "became the victims of double-oppression" (p. 95). The lives of the female characters in the novel revolve around tradition and modernity. They submit to 'a discriminate continuum with tradition' and thereby accommodate both tradition and modernity in their selfhood. The male character in the novel is a polygamous chauvinist who freely follows his libidinal drive and binds the women in his life within the normativity of the sacrament of marriage. The three women in the novel do not resist or relent against tradition, but they find consolation and audacity to live in the union of sorority and thereby repudiate the 'monumental lies' about nation, people and womanhood. Thus, women as the preserver of tradition in Indian mythology, in the novel, prepare the ground for, not a catastrophic, but a possible

change in a post-independent, postcolonial society, which is predominantly patriarchal and hypocritical.

The book, as a whole, contributes to the Indian scholarship in postcolonial studies and opens up new avenues of research with new priorities and emphasis to the young Indian scholars. The specific Indian postcolonial realities can be brought to wider attention only through such studies in place. The shortcomings of this research 'monograph' are limited, but worth mentioning. The study is totally silent about the other postcolonialism(s) outside the colonial experience of the British Empire and it is a pitfall as it may create a wrong notion of postcolonialism as a sole 'anglophone' reality. Raja Rao's 'Foreword' to his 1938 novel *Kanthapura* is certainly a manifesto to Indian postcolonial studies, but the appearance of the same citation in two places in the book could be averted. There are also certain unscholarly sweeping statements like "...colonization is a process requiring analysis and interpretation" (p. 5) and such comments in a 2018 book on postcolonial studies seem to be redundant. The summaries of the novels in chapters five and six is bit too long and it, in a way, compromises the serious research aspect of the book. Of course, these are just minor mistakes, but they in no way hamper the content and the objective of the book.

Fluvial Histories

Vipul Singh, *Speaking Rivers: Environmental History of a Mid-Ganga Flood Country (1540-1885)*, Primus Books, Delhi, pp xi + 245, Price/-, Rs. 1195, ISBN: 978-9386552822 (hardcover)

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Speaking Rivers is a welcome addition to environmental history on South Asia and confirms the view that our scholars are engaging with fluvial landscapes and riverine communities in earnest. Narrating an anecdote on how young researchers defending their research proposals two decades back used to be advised that their proposals would get more justice if one researched it from a disciplinary lens such as Geography, Vipul Singh tells his audience that environmental history has come a long way in South Asia. While there is no dearth of literary writings on the rivers of India, it is only recently that the scholarship has moved to explore how fluvial landscapes have been integral amongst environmental aspects, which have shaped cultural identity and regions.

Singh urges us, drawing on Mark Cioc's words written in the context of the Rhine, that "if we try to understand the transformation of Ganga, 'from a free flowing to a harnessed river' over a long period of time, we may get a fresh light on the river system perspective" (p. 11). In the current context, where two seers – Swami Nigamanand and Swami Sanand – have died during their protest in trying to get the Government's attention to "*aviral and nirmal Ganga*" (ensuring Ganga's free flowing and unpolluted status), Singh's book urges us to understand "what rivers have allowed people to do' in the *long duree*. The region Singh refers as 'Mid-Ganga Flood Country' has been studied earlier by scholars whose writing focused on what embankments did to the people of Purnea district from the late eighteenth to twentieth centuries (See, Christopher Hill's 1997 book, *River of Sorrow*). However, Singh's book doesn't discuss writings from Indian scholars who have challenged Hill's thesis of depicting Kosi as 'River of Sorrow'. While it is true, speaking in a strictly historical sense of periodization, that Vipul Singh has selected 1540-1885 as period of

study, it is curious that throughout the book there are no references to how communities organised themselves in North Bihar to seek literally and figuratively 'liberation from floods' (people's movement had chosen the name '*Barh Mukti Abhiyan*' then).

In the last two decades the narrative of historicizing our rivers and listening to them 'speak' have seen writings coming not only from Christopher Hill, Praveen Singh and Rohan D'Souza, but a range of other scholars, some of whom have moved from their academic training in civil engineering and their professional lives as 'community mobiliser' to undertake narrating history in a serious sense of academic scholarship.

This book persuasively urges us to go beyond 'shorter spells of colonial transition' and commit ourselves to the task of bringing together insights from agrarian and environmental histories of a region and traces how the 'Early Modern Bihar's evolving as a region was to a large extent influenced by the ecology of Ganga' (p. 188). Chapter two and three talk about the fertile floodplains of Mid-Ganga and shows how these regions of confluence of many rivers joining Ganga from the north and the south made the fluvial landscape as ideal settlement site. These chapters also bring earlier historical scholarship that looked at the land revenue changes and warfare between different rulers trying to extend their control on the floodplains talk to environmental historian's concerns where he tries to glean an understanding of these changes by paying close attention to river morphology, fluidity of the landscape and legal changes. Singh also brings in a refreshing perspective by devoting many pages to trace how 'the riverine character of the mid-Ganga plain, where many rivers met, went on to create its own cultural homogeneity' despite being populated by three speech communities. Singh goes beyond the predictable

material that historians weave their narratives with and bring folklore, literary writings and art.

Chapter four then moves to engage with economic history of 'how the region became linked with the maritime economy and trade'. While discussing 'the process of change from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century', it argues how 'the centre of commercial activities shifted from the Ganga-Yamuna Doab to the middle Ganga plain'. Moving to the changes that took place during the colonial period, Singh talks about how Patna was important for the East India Company and how 'beginning with the eighteenth century, the centre of economic and political activity shifted to the east, toward the Patna-Calcutta axis from the Agra-Delhi one.

Chapter five engages with the famines that occurred in 1770 and 1873-'74, by questioning 'Graham Chapman's contention that the British administrators' flood control schemes were based on 'rationalism and modernity'. Singh contends whether these famines were 'in any way linked to the concept of revenue maximisation'? Singh argues that "rather than the colonial administration's endeavor to pursue 'rational knowledge', it was their objective of maximization of revenue which led them to understand the river basin ecology of Ganga differently to early modern regimes" (p. 189).

Chapter six explains how after the year 1765, when the British East India Company obtained land revenue rights, several changes took place that ultimately led to the region being reconfigured in terms of economic interest rather than keeping it aligned to the complex natural of fluvial processes. Colonial administration actively "encouraged construction of embankments, canals and communication networks, especially railways that ran parallel to the river", leading to what Singh, borrowing from Nayak and Berkes (2011: 132-45) concept applied in the context of Chilika lagoon, calls 'the gradual decommonization of the river'.

Chapter seven follows the recent historical scholarship that has studied property rights in fluvial landscape such as *Char* in Bangladesh and Assam (See, Iftekhar Iqbal's *The Bengal Delta*, Kuntala Lahiri Dutt and Gopa Samanta's *Dancing with the Rivers: People and the Life on Chars of South Asia*). It discusses the life of people *diara* and how the colonial state tried to bring them under the administrative logic of legibility and control and how despite these efforts *diara* commons have remained a centre of conflict and dispute. This book will inspire young scholars to undertake more work on the fluvial landscapes and on the task of exploring conversations between agrarian and environmental history.

Nationalisms

Vikas Pathak, *Contesting Nationalisms: Hinduism, Secularism and Untouchability in Colonial Punjab 1880-1930*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2018, pp. xvi + 266, Rs. 1495/-, ISBN: 978-93-86552-79-2 (Hardcover).

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Theories on nationalism are many. Equally diverse are the takes on the rise and spread of nationalism in the Indian subcontinent. Vikas Pathak's book on Indian nationalism, *Contesting Nationalisms: Hinduism, Secularism and Untouchability in Colonial Punjab 1880-1930*, is a new entry into the league. 'If nationalisms in the rest of the world', asked Chatterjee (1997a: 5) back in 1993¹, 'have to choose their imagined community from certain "modular" forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine?' Chatterjee's response here targets Anderson's (2006) thesis on 'imagined community' allegedly founded upon certain forms of Western modularity. While it is of late a cliché to say that nationalism in India is a Western import, very few since Chatterjee have actually studied the peculiarity of Indian nationalism. Curiously, twenty-five years after Chatterjee's critique, Pathak has set out to examine 'whether an emerging Indian nation...meant a negation of ties of religion...in the interest of the construction of the modern citizen [purportedly to have happened in the West], or implied a need to negotiate these in more complex ways' (p.1). For this, one must admit that Pathak's work is congratulatory.

Using colonial Punjab as a case study, this book traces the different—often conflicting—strands of Indian nationalism, what Pathak calls 'contesting nationalisms', and their ideological moorings. It touches upon the discourse of Hindu nationalism, and that of communalism emerging therefrom. Historians, quite intuitively, juxtapose Hindu nationalism with Islamic nationalism in India. Besides, the conflictual Hindu-Muslim relationship, this book, while shedding light on the unsung contributions of the Dalits towards the collective imagination of nation in India, argues that there was (also) a certain form of Dalit nationalist consciousness—the

Dalit national identity was being engendered parallelly with the caste Hindu or the Muslim identities—was in place, and effectively countering the fervour of Hindu nationalism. In brief, *Contesting Nationalisms* identifies 'four visions of nationalism' (p.2) that was in place in colonial Punjab: (1) composite nationalism; (2) secular, citizenship-based nationalism; (3) religious nationalism; and (4) the depressed classes' vision of the nation, which is to say, Dalit nationalism.

Accordingly, the book follows neat chapterization. The introduction (first chapter) maps the contentions among these four strands of nationalism. The second chapter, 'Cultural Contests and Syncretism in Colonial Punjab', gives us a broad overview of the tipping point in history: the shift away from cultures of syncretism in Punjab to cultural-ethnic contestations during the colonial times. The third chapter, 'Composite Moorings of the Nation', focuses on 'composite nationalism': an ideological doctrine that believed in the mosaic of the different communities and harmonizing their interests for the larger sake of the nation. The fourth and the fifth chapters deal with the rise and spread of Hindu nationalism and its tendency to territorialize the nation. The sixth chapter discusses 'secular nationalism' which often had a socialist undercurrent and was based on 'a complete negation of the community-centered discourse' (p. 3). The seventh chapter, before the conclusion, is on Dalit nationalism. This, in my opinion, is the highlight of the book. Notwithstanding the dearth of literatures on Dalit nationalism, this book digs in the archive and some of the expository Dalit documents to demonstrate how the Dalits—alongside the Hindus who, according to them, came from the *outside* (p. 230)—relied on the logic of cultural insiderism in order to lay claim to the territoriality of the nation at a moment when histories

of nationalist struggle were being woven from the perspective of ethnic partisanship, and struggles over the meaning of nationhood.

The book is a welcome break from the chronological style of writing history. Pathak approaches the discourse of 'contesting nationalisms' thematically from the perspective of the 'four visions of nationalism'. However, he fails to provide an explanation to why there are *only* four visions—not more, not less—that he has considered. In principle, I am not opposed to selective representations, but any informed reader here would seek to know why the four visions, in particular, (not some other) warrant representation. Classifications and taxonomies, as Foucault (1972) and Hacking (1999) insist, are problematic, for they involve exclusionary politics, and therefore, perpetrate epistemic violence. From the book, one cannot glean the premise of Pathak's categorization. If we are to believe that the book has adhered to a classificatory practice along ethnic lines, then the omission of Islamic nationalism in colonial Punjab—particularly when Pathak admittedly acknowledges that 'Punjab had a multi-religious society with Muslims comprising about 51 per cent of the population from 1881 till [sic.] 1921' (p. 26)—is rather glaring. Likewise, the exclusion of the Sikh, or for that matter, the Sindhi perspective on nationalism raises questions over the methodological efficacy of the book.

In fact, the book does not provide us any insight on the methodology deployed. This is one major drawback. For example, Pathak, in insisting that the communal strife began with the advent of colonialism and 'there was far greater pluralism and syncretism in precolonial times' (p. 48), retrieves certain early twentieth century *secondary* sources in the section titled 'Discourse of Pluralism in Medieval Times' (p. 48) within the third chapter, while he uses *primary* sources when discussing Dalit nationalism in seventh chapter. Apparently, Pathak's claim is correct. However, this partiality in his treatment of different subjects is questionable, not least because secondary sources, at the best, may reflect on the *discourse*—as the title of the section rightly points to—but not on the *veracity* of the subject in question. Indeed, Pathak is aware that historiographies are often maneuvered to meet political goals, and therefore in the next chapter, he would contend that '[t]he Hindu nationalist scheme [read: historiography] was often teleological: since the "Muslim rule" was the darkest hour, [the] colonial presence was an improvement' (p. 120). In that case, why would Pathak rely on secondary sources alone for making claims on syncretism in precolonial India? Speaking of (post)colonialism, Pathak's passing reference to colonial modernity to have aroused 'two kinds of [Indian] responses: one, an imitation of the cultural innovations

effected by modernity, and, two, attempts at resisting cultural changes taking place by appeals to orthodox beliefs' (p. 27) is grossly simplistic; and is at odds with the notions of 'ambivalence', 'hybridity' (Bhabha, 1990' 1994) and 'derivative discourse' (Chatterjee, 1997a; 1997b)—analytical apparatus that the postcolonial theorists have furnished as alternatives to the much-cliched tradition(al)/modern(ity) dyad.

At least two contemporary scholars have taken up the topic of what may loosely be called 'other nationalisms' as different from imagining nationalism from the contours of territoriality: Ghosh (2016) in the context of colonial Bengal and Devji (2013) in the context of Pakistan. In all likelihood, these two interlocutors—surprisingly, who have not been engaged with—would have provided Pathak with a more robust conceptual framework upon which his thesis on the 'four visions' could be mounted. Last but not the least, the book, as it stands now, needs some editorial intervention. For example, an archival source titled *Bhai Parmananda* housed at the Nehru Memorial Museum Library has been accorded to John Zavos in the 'Bibliography' section. Additionally, there is no subject/theme index, which makes it difficult for a reader to return to the book. Despite these concerns—though serious, this book does a reasonably good job in tracing the multiple visions of Indian nationalism and their contentions for hegemony, and should be of interest to scholars of South Asian history and nationalism, particularly when the concept and definition of 'nationalism' is increasingly becoming a contested topic in contemporary India and beyond.

Note

1. Chatterjee's *The Nation and Its Fragments* was originally published in 1993.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Dissent

Kesavan Veluthat, *Notes of Dissent: Essays on Indian History*, Delhi: Primus Books, 2018, pp. xix + 193, Rs. 1095/-, ISBN: 978-93-86552-70-9 (Hardcover).

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The book under review is a motley collection of essays by one of the finest historians of early and medieval South Indian history. As stated in Veluthat's self-confessional introduction, despite the variety of themes that the essays deal with, ranging from 'religious ideology, cultural transactions, social crisis, political criticism, regional historiography, cultural milieu of castes, Christian worship and propaganda and so on' (p. xiii), there is a common thread that runs through them, that of the idea of 'dissent'. Further the readers are informed that dissent expressed in these essays are not ideologically polemical; rather the dissent is informed by questioning the pre-existing historiographical trends in these themes, which are otherwise not connected to each other.

The first essay "From Dissent to Norm to Tradition" may be read in tandem with the essay in the Appendix, "Bhakti Movement in South India." Both the essays while questioning the fixity of religious ideas highlight the continuous evolving nature of Indian religious traditions. Whether it were the Upanishads that questioned the Vedas and Vedic rituals, or the notion of *bhakti* as an antidote countering the much feared catastrophic *Kaliyuga* in Puranic Hinduism or the bhakti movement challenging the social hierarchies, these essays point out that all of them were subsequently transformed from modes of dissent and protest to modes of dominance, and became sanctified traditions with a normative structure. The essays situate these religious developments from the first millennium B.C. to second millennium A.D. in the change from pastoral to agrarian economy, social changes, for instance the rise of a mercantile class, transition from tribalism to a monarchical state and development of institutions like temples. These transitions we are told were moments of 'watersheds' or turning points' in history. This contextualization in the material milieu

is a valuable exercise as it tells the reader that the kings and merchants became the patrons of the bhakti of the Alvars (Vaishnava saints) and Nayanars (Shaiva saints), transforming it from a movement of protest against formalised rituals and caste to an ideology of dominance that legitimized political power and social authority.

Thus, the author rightly points out that religion was not a pre-given static structure but a dynamic process constantly evolving with new sets of beliefs and norms. Drawing attention to protest and dissent in traditions apart from the much discussed Buddhism and Jainism, both the essays emphasise that dissent in a particular religious tradition, in this case Hinduism was not a deviance from it. Rather, it continued as an integral part of the tradition, imparted a plural character, as opposed to the widely held belief of being a homogeneous monolith. Further, an instance of a broad and eclectic religious outlook can be seen in the essay - 'Use of 'Hindu' Idioms in Christian Worship and Propaganda in Kerala'. Questioning the simplistic binaries between religious communities as mutually antagonistic, the essay demonstrates the ways in which the Catholic Church despite its fundamentalist attitude borrowed symbols and idioms from other traditions, which were otherwise an anathema to it.

The essays revisit the historical evidence, viz., textual and epigraphic and provide a fresh insight to them, thus, questioning some of the long held, well known ideas of historical research. In 'The Mauryan Presence in South India', Veluthat questions the colonial and nationalist historiography on the ubiquitous presence and domination of the Mauryan Empire in the sub-continent and concludes that this idea based on a somewhat flawed analysis of epigraphy and early Tamil literature, Veluthat argues that the Mauryans hardly registered any presence in South India. Revisiting archaeological evidences, the

author points out that the Mauryan influences through trade, Jainism and Buddhism and political and social ideas and institutions in South India were post-Mauryan in date, thus establishing the uneven, not so centralized hegemony of the Mauryan state as has usually been understood. Similarly, Veluthat revisits textual evidence in the next essay, 'Making the Best of a Bad Bargain' and questions the idea of *kaliyuga* as a period of social crisis only. Based on the examination of the Puranic texts of the third and fourth century CE, Veluthat feels that though the texts delineated the Kali Age as a period of horror and gloom, however there are evidences in them which also show this 'Dark Age', to be one of the bright and benign moments in time. We are told that the idea of bhakti had become simplified and easily remunerative and emerged as a counterpoint to the rigours of religiosity as it espoused 'inexpensive and effortless means' (p. 40) accessibility to god. In this essay, Veluthat raises important questions on the basis of the re-reading of the sources, especially the Puranas. One crucial question was that what seemed to be evidently described, as a social crisis was perhaps a period of social change. Second question was that what seemed, as a protest to Vedic ideas, bhakti was perhaps an attempt to reduce the latter's hegemony and finally accommodate it. However, we are cautioned not to eulogise the ideas of bhakti as protest and social change in the Puranic texts as these ideas also provided the much-needed legitimacy to a new ruling class to assert its power. In his characteristic witty and sarcastic style, Veluthat remarks, 'When the pied piper's pipe accompanied the slave driver's whip, the former seems to have worked better than the latter' (p. 42). This statement sums up the efficacy of the bhakti ideology as an apparatus for power and religion.

The essays on *Mahisasatakam*, a praise poem for a buffalo in Sanskrit and Manipravalam literature are focused at reading the sources through an alternate lens. *Mahisasatakam* has been described as a humorous poem critiquing the world of kings, courts, bureaucracy and

power structure, thus, highlighting the medieval attitudes of humour as articulating protest against the existing system. Similarly instead of looking at Manipravalam literature as a product of Nambudari identity, Veluthat examines its historical context of production. Composed in a milieu of flourishing trade and urbanism, we are informed that these Manipravalam texts inspired by the Sanskrit *kavya* literature delineated imaginaries of the city and urban forms.

Historicizing a region and the idea of a regional history is a significant theme that often questions a top-heavy, empire centric view. Analysis of regional dynamics can be seen in the three essays on regional history, origin and development of land relations in medieval Kerala and 'temple-dwelling castes' (p.xviii) in Kerala. It is rightly argued that regions are not pre-given historical entities. They evolve over a period of time, changing their characters and forms and are perceived in different ways. Thus, there is no one idea of a region. The essay titled 'Regional History in the Making of Regions' examines ideas of 'Kerala' and its differing meanings and identities to different people at different points of time. Similarly, the essays on land relations and temple dwelling castes locate the historical processes leading to the rise of brahmana landlordism, social hierarchy, endogamous kin groups and professional communities within the regional milieu of Kerala.

The essays in this collection though pithy often leave us with need to have more details. It would have been helpful to understand the arguments further if the readers were provided with a translation of Sanskrit passages quoted extensively in 'Making the Best of a Bad Bargain' (pp. 34-47) and 'Laughter in the Time of Misery' (pp. 48-63). Nevertheless, the essays provide an alternate pattern of analysis deviating from the well-established and hegemonic notions of history. Seemingly, a random collection, the idea of academic dissent runs through and provides valuable insights into various aspects of history.

BOOK REVIEWS

Spiritual Despotism and Modernity

J. Barton Scott, *Modern Hinduism and the Genealogies of Self-Rule*, Delhi, Primus Books, 2018, pp. xi + 265, Rs 950/-, ISBN 978-93-86552-69-3 (Hardcover).

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Combining Weberian elective affinities and Foucauldian genealogy this volume studies the mobility of cultural forms and critique of priestcraft as it circulated between England (Europe) and India. The volume drawing on several sources (historical literature and cultural studies) makes an important contribution to understanding the modernization of Hinduism (social reform) diachronically, and traces the synchronic transformations between the West (broadly Europe) and the colonies in the nineteenth century. It also understands the impact of missionary activities that provided a spiritual legitimacy to politico-economic and the cultural subjugation of non-western contexts and an Orientalist representation of Hinduism.

The self-governing subject is a liberal modern ideal influenced by Protestant ascetic tendencies that emphasized religious values belong to the inner realm, the private domain, and connected with spiritual self-rule, while correspondingly the political domain was separated from priestly authority, and led to secularism. Throughout the narrative, the author often slips into using *Spiritual Despots* that perhaps could have been the original title of either the doctoral dissertation or a manuscript. In the author's own words, "by analyzing anti-clerical texts, the book shows how the critique of spiritual despotism in colonial India gave rise to the ideal of the self-ruling subject" (p. 2). The creative intertwining of concurrent intellectual developments in Hinduism in India and in Christianity (England and Europe) and political ideas of liberalism set the stage for understanding the decline in pervasive power of despotic priests, and other figures of tutelary religious authority. The push towards Protestant ascetic practices and self-rule was a precursor to development of nationalist thought (eminently evident in ideas and writings of M.K. Gandhi) in India. Gandhian self-rule and self-discipline was hence a revised definition and expression of secularism.

The book is organized into six chapters, an Introduction and a Conclusion. It is primarily an analysis of development of historical ideas, and analyzes the transcultural impact of flow of ideas during the colonial period, and how some thinkers and their writings and praxis influenced the direction of South Asian modernity. The first three chapters cover the historical period between 1810-1870s and focus on power of priest-craft while the remaining three chapters focus on development of ideal of self-rule during the 1860s to the 1880s by analysis of writings of Karsandas Mulji, Dayananda Saraswati, and Helena Blavatsky. The second part of the book focuses on these particular reformers who were active in colonial India during the 1860s to the 1880s and helped in the development of distinctively South Asian discourse on self-rule. The volume argues that priestcraft is one of the central and fundamental concepts, which has helped in the development of Indian modernity, and a peculiar variant of secularism. These arguments shape the emergence of the Gandhian strand and contextualize his experiments in ascetic self-rule, and situate his bio-politics. The reduction of self is the essence of non-violence, and appeals to the 'truth and non-violence' as principles of any religion and self-rule. In the late nineteenth century, self-rule emerged as one of the key concepts to understand religion, politics, and development of modernity. This volume enables us to understand this trajectory, and the cross-cultural fertilization of ideas between Europe and India, which is not an insignificant linear process but a circulatory one. Though it is written in lucid style, it is somewhat repetitive in its content, and technically requires better editing by the publishers. The volume is suited for courses pitched at the postgraduate level on South Asian Studies and Religious Studies.