

NORTHEAST REGION

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS
OF
DEVELOPMENT

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Northeast

Region : Problems and Prospects of Development

Edited by
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PREFACE

The Assam problem remains still unresolved. There are several reasons and more than one point of view as to why this has remained unresolved. There is no disputing the fact, however that, in the history of Independent India this has been the only movement which is comparable in magnitude and scale to the national freedom movement. A highly distinctive characteristic of the Assam movement has been the emergence of the student leadership which spearheaded the entire struggle. The leadership somehow managed to keep the movement on a non-violent course despite the eruption of violence on certain occasions and free from the party political alignment.

The present transactions of a five day long seminar should help illuminate this complex problem. The issues relevant to the movement have been identified and discussed in-depth in the context of the broader problem of the development of the North-East Region. This exercise became possible primarily due to the free and frank discussion between and amongst the members of the All Assam Students Union and the All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad on the one hand and academicians, planners, administrators, social scientists and researchers from all over the country on the other.

The papers and the reports of the proceedings of the Seminar speak for themselves. My own limitations to say anything at this stage or perhaps in the near future is born out of my having been involved in the negotiations for more than a year and a half between the Government of India and the leadership of the movement at a delicate stage.

I wish to express our sincere gratitude to the distinguished participants to the Seminar for their valuable contribution, in particular to the leadership of the AASU and AAGSP without whose participation the issues would not have crystalized.

Our thanks are due to the University Grants Commission and Indian Council of Social Science Research for their financial support.

Finally I must thank my friend Professor B. L. Abbi without whose efforts this publication may have not come out.

April 9, 1984

Rashpal Malhotra

FOREWORD

THE British imperialist ideology used to mock at us, denying to us any possibility of constituting ourselves as a modern State. We were, it was argued, such a congeries of peoples and babble of tongues that we could not possibly unite ourselves politically into a modern State. Our answer was that we could. The growth and promotion of secular nationalism was our response. We also argued about our uniqueness in welding together our diversities within a unified system. To be able to maintain and contain these diversities and yet be unified and united was our response to the imperial historiography.

Undoubtedly, we did achieve a remarkable sense of unity and solidarity even in the midst of our palpable diversities during the entire period of our struggle for freedom. This achievement also created an illusion—an illusion that we could rest on our oars. The events in Assam and now in Punjab and Haryana mock at our illusion. We have spoken so often on the theme of "Unity in diversity" and repeated it with such deadening reiteration that the meaning and its implications are lost.

Our Federal System is based on the recognition of the need for taking into account our diversity and the equally pressing need for unity. To maintain a fine balance between the two imperatives will be a continuing responsibility of those who seek political power through the democratic process. One would need a most sensitive understanding of our diversities if we are to weld them together and constitute them into an organic unity. The cultural, linguistic and historical identities which exist in India are the most durable elements and would continue for a very long historical period. This will call for a most delicate handling of the relations between the Union of India and the States. Even if the legal frame of the relationship is just and rational, the political handling has to be even more just, sensitive and fair.

Viewed in the light of the considerations I have set out in the preceding paragraphs, it would seem to me that when the young men and women of Assam first raised their voice against the 'foreigners', both justice and law was on their side. Surely, no State anywhere in this wide world can harbour aliens free from any regulation and become subsumed under the category of citizens, whether natural by birth

or by acquisition under law. In this view of the matter, the controversies about cut-off dates was irrelevant ; one should have and ought to have conceded the rightness and legitimacy of the question raised by the students in Assam. The legal machinery could have been set into motion to find out the status of the immigrants in terms of the laws relating to the citizenship. The question of deportation of large number of human beings, howsoever they may have come into our territory, was a separate matter. But since we failed to accept the legitimacy of the demands for dealing with the issue of foreigners, the question of deportation began to loom larger and larger; to reduce the number of deportees, we began looking for suitable cut-off dates.

Since Bengalis, Andhras, Tamils, Kashmiris, Malayalees and others are legitimately proud of and, consequently, sensitive about their language and culture, the Bengali-speaking immigrants in Assam should have been stimulated and encouraged to show a sensitiveness to Assamese language, culture and tradition. Instead, short-term political calculations led not to acts of reconciliation, but to the hardening of the lines dividing the Assamese and the Bengalis and the tribal people. Thus, the need for unity within Assam by acts of fraternisation and conciliation was ignored. The lines dividing hardened. And massacres took place. The leaders of the Assam movement too, in their turn, fell victims to the process of alienation when they allowed their ranks to be divided between the Hindus and the Muslims. In fact, the leadership of AASU and even more the leadership of AAGSP have to do a bit of introspection themselves and work out the imperatives of maintaining the unity of Assam in the midst of its own diversities.

It was in the midst of extremely tragic developments of the situation in Assam that the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development called together academics, intellectuals and others in a Seminar in Chandigarh. It was an exercise in aid of mutual understanding and comprehension. The object was to establish some sort of communication between minds which had barricaded themselves behind a wall of fear and suspicion.

Sanguinary events overtook us. And yet, the problems remain. Assam today is divided and distracted. The calm prevailing there is uneasy. Reconciliation on the basis of reason, justice and law is still necessary. I hope that this book which contains a variety of perceptions of the problems of Assam will be of some assistance.

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P N Haksar

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INTRODUCTION

B. L. Abbi

Development—A Rude Awakening

HOW naively optimistic were those days of 1950s and early 1960s ! The newly independent countries of Asia and Africa and other economically backward nations, spurred by the remarkable economic and social reconstruction of Europe, Japan and USSR, were seriously entertaining hopes of catching up with the affluent industrial nations. They were confident that what Europe and Japan had done they could do too. They could benefit from the developmental experience of those nations and, what is more, with the advantage of hindsight, need not repeat their mistakes. Given foreign aid, to ease initial financial constraints, they could select the latest improved machinery and technological know-how and start ahead of atleast some of the advanced industrial nations facing serious problems of replacing technically backward if not already obsolete technologies. Whatever doubts they might have had about the suitability of borrowed techno-economic models of planning and development, those were not strong enough to prevent adoption, though with some modification here and there, to suit local conditions. Not infrequently, it was even confidently asserted that the pursuit of economic development need not lead to an abandonment of traditional cultural heritage, but rather to a new synthesis representing the best of tradition and modernity.

All the hopes of yesteryears seem like so many shattered dreams. Not only the gap between the rich and the poor, the developed and the underdeveloped or, if you prefer the euphism, developing, refused to be narrowed, but on the contrary continued to widen with increasing speed, despite some tangible gains by a number of developing countries in actual techno-economic development. There was also a similarly widening disparity within the individual nation states between the developed and the less developed regions, the centre and the periphery, the haves and the havenots of various categories. This disparity

itself, as now being increasingly recognized, constitutes a major constraint on further development.

The developing countries have lost their innocence, if not altogether their faith in and vision (perhaps a variety of visions) of a developed future. They are becoming increasingly aware of the dismal prospect of a long and very troublesome journey ahead. They are no longer certain that they are moving in the same direction as the already developed countries, or that their paths would ever converge towards a common destination¹. To them, unlike Marx, the country that is more developed industrially no longer shows the image of their own future.

The question of uncertainty, regarding the nature and goals of development, is not confined to developing countries alone. The developed western countries (generally themselves developing at a faster rate), despite their growing affluence, are facing increasing problems of social and personal disorganization, violence, rape, juvenile delinquency, mental illness, disenchantment with work ethic, persistence of pockets of appalling poverty within the general affluence, pollution of environment and fast depletion of non-renewable sources of energy and other natural resources. The rising popularity of mythical cults, astrology, faith healing, magical practices of all sorts attest a growing disenchantment with scientism, secularism, and other prevailing materialist orthodoxies. Hippies, Yippies and counter culture movements of various kinds not only show the disenchantment of youth with parental values, but a general dissatisfaction with a wide spectrum of social and cultural values which, as advocates of modernization keep assuring us, the rest of the world must emulate to ensure a speedy development or modernization of their societies.² Hitherto accepted indices of development fail to satisfy advocates of "quality of life", who express dissatisfaction with consumerism and rising standards of living, and voice such heretical beliefs as restrictions on wants, emphasis on quality of life rather than material possessions, cultivation of stable affectional bonds rather than rational calculation of advantage, and so on. Thus the question,

1 The points raised in this section are by now old and familiar enough, but for a more recent discussion, see *Man & Development*, Vol III No 2, June 1981, articles by Sukhamoy Chakravarty, "New International Economic Order and the Brandt Report" pp 9-22; James Szentes, "The Strategic Issues of NIEO and Global Negotiations" pp 43-61; Fredrick F. Clarimonte, "Realities of the New International Economic Order" pp 62-76; S. P. Ganguli, "The International Economic Crisis and Further Distortion in the Third World Development Path", pp 81-98.

2 See Satish K. Arora, "Pre-Empted Future? Notes on Theories of Political Development" in Rajni Kothari (Ed) *State and Nation Building* 1976 pp 23-66.

what is development? has acquired so compelling an urgency as perhaps never before.

It is increasingly being asked, often with growing scepticism, must the direction of development and the sequence of change everywhere resemble that followed by western societies? In particular, how true can this be of developing societies, which not only have their own highly varied social structures and cultures, but also a very different historical context, within which they have to accomplish their development? Unlike the European nations they have no colonies to exploit to facilitate their own development. They operate in a world, economically and politically dominated by a few developed countries, who, through multi-national corporations, common market arrangements, etc., have a tremendous competitive advantage in protecting their own interests and exercising varying degrees of control over the economic policies of the developing societies.³ Hence the need to assess critically the relevant theoretical approaches to development.

Approaches to Development

For classical evolutionists, such as Tylor, Spencer, Morgan, in the broad sweep of human history, an imminent process of evolutionary change—slow, cumulative, but moving stage by stage, till it reached its highest point represented by the European techno-economic order and social institutions—was clearly discernible. They were concerned about understanding how such a development occurred, what was its inner momentum or laws of motion, and probable future course of development. And they made use of the comparative method to classify all known institutions of mankind—both historical and contemporary into a time series, representing successive stages of development, from the most primitive to the most modern (western). For Morgan and Tylor, the stages were, savagery, barbarism and civilization. For Spencer the movement was from primitive simplicity to civilized complexity, incoherent homogeneity to coherent heterogeneity.⁴

³ See articles referred to at 2 above, 12 below, and also Paul A. Baran, *The Political Economy of Growth*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1957; Paul A. Baran and P.M. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968; Samir Amir, *Unequal Development*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1976; Sweezy, Paul M., "A Crisis in Marxian Theory", *Monthly Review*, Vol 31 No 2 June 1976.

⁴ This discussion of classical evolutionists draws upon M. Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* London, Routledge, Kegan Paul, 1969, pp 180-216; Robert A. Nisbet, "Developmentalism" in J. C. McKinney and E.A. Triyakin (Eds), *Theoretical Sociology*, New York, Appleton Century Crofts 1970, pp 167-204; Ankie M.M. Hoogvelt, *The Sociology of Developing Societies*, London, Macmillan Press, 1976; Eisentadt, S.N., "Social Differentiation, Integration and Evolution", *American Sociological Review* Vol 29, No 3 June 1964, pp 357-386.

Like these contemporaries, Marx too attempted to set-up an evolutionary scheme, although his theoretical approach and method diverged from theirs, and are said to have even anti-historicistic and anti-revolutionistic implications. Instead of stressing the slow cumulative nature of the evolutionary process, Marx emphasised the rapid qualitative transformation and the resulting discontinuity between the successive stages. For him, the main developmental impulse was the class struggle arising from the contradictions between the forces and the relations of production and the sequence of stages: Primitive communism, Ancient slave society, Feudalism, Capitalism and Socialism—communism.

While they disagreed with each other about stages, the criteria used for classification, whether the dominant evolutionary impulse was specialization, differentiation or class struggle, and in their selection of institutions for study—marriage, family, property, religion, technology, mode of production—the evolutionists were of one mind in several important respects. For them, it was an objective fact that contemporary Europe represented the highest stage of techno-economic and moral development, and, what is more, this achievement was no accident of history; it represented actualization of an inner potential, a natural necessity, at once factual and desirable, in the same way as a child grows into a man.⁵ They had little to say about the actual mechanisms guiding this stage-to-stage movement. They were rather uncertain about how far the developmental process was subject to conscious human control and open to modification, by external environmental factors and vicissitudes of history.

Evolutionary conceptualizations of stages of development came under attack from cultural relativists, who found them vitiated by their characteristic Euro-centric value bias, from functionalists in general, who found their generalizations too abstract, lacking in contextual specificity and mechanistic and their method of comparison, too superficial in that apparently similar cultural forms performing totally dissimilar functions were classified together for the purpose of comparison.

While evolutionism receded to the background, structural functional studies of specific societies as autonomous systems came to the fore, and 'adaptive integration of the elements of the social system into each other and with the system as a whole became the central concern. Even

5 Robert A Nisbet, 1970, loc cit.

so, the conceptualization of change and development continued to bear the impress of evolutionary thought. Development was now viewed as a transition between a number of such ideal, typical bipolar states, as mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, status to contract, folk culture to urban, community to society, tradition to modernity.⁶

Soon however, evolutionism reasserted itself. Carrying forward the work of such cultural anthropologists, as White and Steward, Sahlins and Service put forward their explications of the evolutionary theory, stressing an increase in allround adaptability of culture as the criterion of evolutionary progress.⁷ Similarly, Parsons, combining structural functionalism with evolutionism, distinguished five stages of differentiation and integration (i) primitive, (ii) advanced primitive and archaic (iii) historic (iv) seed bed, (v) modern—the first two together being designated primitive and the next two, intermediate, with each stage representing certain “evolutionary universals” or breakthroughs, leading to a higher level of “adaptive integration” of society than the preceding stage.⁸ Specificity of the developmental process varied from society to society. Some failed to advance beyond a certain stage. Others made rapid progress and managed to skip a stage or two, through diffusion of evolutionary universals, such as literacy, bureaucracy, money and markets from the more advanced societies.⁹ For the neo-evolutionists, as for their predecessors, progress is an objective fact not a moral judgement, though they are willing to concede, progress is not “necessarily good” nor the greater “adaptive capacity” necessarily the highest human value.¹⁰ Whether leaping or crawling, proceeding in a straight line or in a zigzag pattern, development is oriented towards the industrial societies of the west.

6 Alejandro Portis, “On the Sociology, of National Development” *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol 82, No 1, July 1976 pp 55-85; Robert A Nisbet, 1970.

7 M. Sahlins and E.A. Service (Eds) *Evolution and Culture*, Arbour University of Michigan Press 1960 pp 12-44; Ankie M.M. Hoogvelt, 1976 loc cit.

8 This section has drawn upon Talcott Parsons’ two slender books devoted to the subject : *Societies, Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives*, N. J. Prentice Hall 1966, and *the system of Modern Societies*, Englewood cliffs, 1971; Andrew Dfralt, “Social Change and Development”, in Jan J. Loubser et al, (Eds) *Exploration in General Theory in Social Science*, The Free Press, Collier Macmillan New York, London, Part V, “Introduction”; Ankie M.M. Hoogvelt, op. cit, Chapter 2 and 3 pp 20-62.

9 Parsons T. “Evolutionary Universals” *American Sociological Review*, Volume 29, No 3, June 1964 pp 339-357, reprinted in A.R. Desai (Ed) *Modernization of Developing Societies*, Bombay, Thacket & Co, Vol I 561-588.

10 M. Sahlins and E.A. Service (Eds) 1960 p 30; Parsons T. 1971, p 3.

Parsons' structural functionalism, with its elaborate classification of four functional pre-requisites of societies, six evolutionary universals, five pattern variables, differentiation, integration and adaptive upgradation, as principal mechanisms of development, provided the main theoretical base for a number of theories of change and development in the Developing societies. The Parsonian schema placed special emphasis on autonomous cumulative processes of growth and change within individual societies in the context of diffusion of evolutionary universals, advanced technology and other elements of culture. It, however, failed to take into account the role of differential economic control of markets and political domination, as factors structuring relations between societies and promoting and retarding both diffusion and endogenous growth. Though Parsons did not ignore techno-economic factors—which he included among the functional pre-requisites—his scheme of development highlighted the crucial role of such evolutionary universals, as the stratification system, cultural patterns legitimising the growing differentiation of functions, particularly the separation of political organization from the social core, a written language, a money and market system and an administrative bureaucracy, a universalised legal system and democratic form of association, as instruments for ensuring an advanced level of integration of the continually differentiating structures, thus ensuring adaptive upgradation. The crucial evolutionary test was not so much the growth of new more specialized structures, but rather their adaptive integration, without which there could be no development.

The Parsonian theoretical scheme thus reaffirmed the position of the industrialized west as the most advanced form of human societal development. Viewing societies as relatively autonomous systems, it attributed their lack of development to their own failure to invent or acquire, through diffusion, certain techno-economic, organizational or cultural elements found in advanced societies. Thus, it presented the developed countries as exemplars and pace-setters of development, through transfer of technology, technical training, trade, financial aid and cultural diffusion. Further, it diverted attention from the existing inequalities of economic and political power in the world order and their structural role in ensuring the underdevelopment of the developing countries. On grounds of structural compatibility, it viewed the acquisition of technology, development of specialized structures, institutionalization of a formal legal system, a bureaucratic administrative structure and a shift in the structure of roles and associated role expectations from ascription to achievement, particularism to universalism, diffuseness to specificity and affectivity to affective neutrality, as

interdependent parts of a multi-faceted developmental process. Thus, development was not just industrialization, increase in gross national product, or sustained economic growth, it was the development of a new kind of societal structure (with continually increasing specialized parts and corresponding new modes of integration), a new kind of culture and a new kind of personality structure among men; models for these were of course already available in the developed world, for creative adoption, if not necessarily for mechanical copying.

The scheme emphasized that, at least in the European context, the differentiation of techno-economic complex followed the differentiation of political, religious and judicial functions from each other and the societal core.¹¹ In other words, science and technology were seen as embedded in a cultural context, which gave them relative autonomy from political, religious and social pressures and permitted free play to the principle of economic and instrumental rationality, that is, the most profitable use of labour, land, capital and specialized technological and entrepreneurial skills, in the context of a pervasive market and money economy.

This brought to the fore the question, whether or not some prior modernization (westernization) of developing societies was not a necessary condition for their successful promotion of economic development. Also there was the implication that if the developing countries wanted to ensure economic development, they would have to give up their traditional values, particularly those that impeded mobility of crucial human and material resources and prevented their most rational instrumental use; in fact, nothing less than a wide ranging transformation in polity, society and culture, together with the economic organization would serve the purpose. In this way the Parsonian schema is able to assert the moral and cultural superiority of the west, not just techno-economic, combat Marxist views of economic determinism "in the last instance" of superstructure, both of the 'vulgar' and not so vulgar varieties, legitimize the current unequal distribution of economic and political power in the world order, explain away the growing gap in the economic development of the developed and the developing countries as rooted in difficult-to-dislodge irrational traditions, and send the developing countries on the wild goose chase of a total transformation, which bids fare to elude them indefinitely.

Such is the theory, which provided the framework for a variety of general conceptualizations and concrete empirical studies of development

¹¹ Ankie M.M. Hoogvelt, op cit pp 39-49.

as modernization, with its various dimensions—economic, political, social, cultural and technological—becoming subject to both discipline-specific and inter-disciplinary studies; the latter being more popular with the funding agencies. Soon the available literature became so extensive that each recognised social discipline developed specializations or even sub-specializations in Development Studies. Also inter-disciplinary centres, devoted to the development problems of specific nations, and supra-national regions (such as Africa south of the Sahara and South Asia) developed. The studies varied with respect to the extent they allowed for the divergent conceptions of developmental paths, despite taking into account structural constraints, differential weightage assigned to techno-economic, demographic and other material factors, recognition of the role of tradition as a transformative, even modernizing, force and scepticism regarding the desirability and feasibility of copying western models. Since the emphasis was on the internal interdependence of system parts and their functional adequacy, the studies contributed a good deal to deepen the understanding of internal developmental processes and system environment relationships. They also made possible the collection and classification of a rich variety of empirical data, in respect of most developing societies, making possible not only low level empirical generalizations, but also some useful middle range theorising. Despite the inherent confirmatory biases of the method of data collection, study after study resulted in the piling of many contradictory findings, which just could not be accommodated within the modernization frame, notwithstanding much ingenious ad-hoc tinkering. The basic Parsonian theoretical framework proved as refractory to modernizing transformation, as the favourite objects of the theories of modernization. Soon the theories came under severe attack from radical Marxist-oriented theories of dependency.

Perhaps the most uncompromising critic of modernization theories is Andre Gunder Frank, who puts forward an alternative dialectical structuralist conceptualization of “development is of underdevelopment” in the Third World¹². For him, underdevelopment is not a state of underdevelopment (absence of industry, urbanization, markets etc), or a stage anterior to development; but it is part of the same process of capitalist

12 This account is based on Andre Gunder Frank, *Latin America: Under development or Revolution*, (First printed by Monthly Review Press 1969) and later as a Modern Reader Paperback edition, New York and London, 1970, and, in particular, “The Development of Underdevelopment in Latin America”, pp 1-17; “Sociology of Development and Underdevelopment of Sociology” 21-94; “Dialectic, Not Dual Society” pp 221-230; “Capitalist Latifundio Growth in Latin America”, pp 231-247; “The Mexican Democracy of Pablo Genzalez Casanova”, pp 318-332;

development which, from the mercantile to the colonial and the present neo-colonial stage, has reorganized the economies of the world in such a way, that the development of the few has simultaneously generated underdevelopment of the many. The process is viewed as a flow of unequal economic, political and social exchanges in a metropolis—satellite relationship chain, extending from the world metropolis, to the regional and local commercial metropolises, down to the peasants.¹³ Although economic surplus is expropriated upward, the bourgeoisie, at every rung of the metropolis-satellite ladder, benefit enough from the upward metropolitan connection, to develop a mutual interest in perpetuating the system. The system has produced growing inequalities of income and social power, both internationally and within nations, resulting in a steady decline of the real income of the poorest satellites. The chain also provides the main channel for cultural diffusion, technology, ideologies, styles of life, fashions, etc.

Thus, economically, politically, socially and culturally the individual developing societies cannot be viewed as autonomous systems and, as such, their development process cannot be understood, except in their historical specificity as dependent structural appendages of the world capitalist process.

Frank takes issue with Boeke and others, who invoke structural dualism i. e. disarticulation between a modern industrial sector and a traditional rural sector—as an explanation for the continued underdevelopment.

¹³ "Destroy Capitalism, Not Feudalism", pp 350-361; and "Capitalist Underdevelopment or Socialist Revolution", pp 371-409. Other main sources used include: (i) Ivar Oxall et al (Eds) *Beyond the Sociology of Development*, London Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1975, in particular: Philip J.O. Brien, "A Critique of Latin American Theories of Dependency" pp 7-27; David Booth, "Andre Gunder Frank: An Introduction and Appreciation", pp 50-85; Harold Wolpe, "The Theory of Internal Colonialism: the South African Case," pp 229-252; Norman Long, "Structural. Dependency, Modes of Production and Economic Brokerage in Peru" pp 253-282; (ii) Clammer John (Ed) *The New Economic Anthropology* London, The Macmillan Press, 1978, in Particular; papers by Norman Long, and Paul Richardson. "Informal Sector, Petty Commodity Production, and the Social Relations of Small Scale Enterprise", pp 176-209; Aiden Foster Carter, "Can We Articulate Articulation?", pp 210-249 Clammer John, "Postscript: Economic Anthropology and Development: Some Issues", pp 250-255; (iii) Ankie M. M. Hoogvelt, 1976, op cit, pp 65-95; (iv) *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism*, UNESCO, 1980, in particular: Bipin Chandra, "Karl Marx, His Theories of Asian Societies and Colonial Rule", pp 383-451; Stuart Hall "Race Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance", pp 305-345.

13 Frank 1969, "The Development of Underdevelopment" op cit, pp 4-8.

Similarly, he rejects such Marxist notions as persistence of feudal, semi-feudal or archaic elements in the underdeveloped economies¹⁴. For him the economies are already capitalist and yet continually underdeveloping and so they cannot achieve development through a bourgeois democratic revolution, which would amount to a further push backward.¹⁵ Hence the urgency for a revolutionary overthrow of the regional and national bourgeoisie, to get off the down acceleration.

Frank has been accused of vagueness in the use of such terms as metropolis, satellite, capitalist development, exploitation, etc. of paying more attention to external influences and not enough to variations in the internal development process, of over stressing forms of exchange while neglecting to give due attention to the production relationships and structural problems of the coexistence of modern and traditional forms of production. Of particular interest, in this context, is the work of Marxists, such as Terray, Dupre, Rey, Poulantz and Bettelheim, who have tried to deal with problems arising from the continuing failure of capitalism to replace traditional forms and the range of possible relationships among disparate coexisting modes of production.¹⁶ Intensification, even reemergence of the traditional modes, the different forms persisting as structured parts of a differentiated, non-dualistic whole, complex forms of conservation-dissolution, an initial reinforcement of traditional modes, followed by a stage of capitalist domination, and finally complete destruction (Rey) of traditional modes, articulation of different modes—are some of the variety of concepts used to describe this situation within a Marxist mode of production frame. However, it is now generally recognised, that “the ‘extraverted’ nature of the Third World’s original insertion in the capitalist world economy, is not just of historical interest : it is a continuing and defining feature not to be abstracted from, of the very essence of what we mean by ‘underdevelopment’.”¹⁷

Alavi’s¹⁸ and Banaji’s¹⁹ characterizations of the colonial mode of production, in respect of India, in their own variant ways, attempt to take into

14 Frank 1969, “Dialectic Not Dual Society” op cit; David Booth, op cit.

15 Frank 1969, “Destroy Capitalism, not Feudalism” op cit.

16 Aiden Foster Carter, op cit; Stuart Hall, op cit.

17 Aiden Foster Carter; op cit, pp 229-230.

18 Hamza Alavi, “India and the the Colonial Mode of Production”, *Socialist Register*, London, Merlin Press; “Structure of Colonial Formations”, *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol XVI, Annual No 1980, pp 475-486.

19 Jairus Banaji, “For a Theory of Colonial Mode of Production”, *Economic and Political Weekly* Vol VII, No 52 (Dec 23, 1972) pp 2498-2502

account issues relating to the dependency relationship, uneven development and an apparent coexistence of different modes of production. Frank criticises Pablo Gonzalez Casanova for his thesis that contemporary Mexico is a dual or plural society, semi-capitalist or pre-capitalist in nature and characterized by internal colonialism—social, cultural, political and incomewise—of the advanced Mestizos over the Indians. While Frank has no doubt that “internal colonialism” really exists, but he, contrary to Casanova, feels that it is “essentially and primarily economic and not cultural or social”, and that the system is “fully capitalist”, with such “essential characteristics” as “class structure, the colonialist metropolist-satellite structure, and contradictory and uneven development, in which the metropolis develops at the expense of generating underdevelopment among its foreign and domestic satellites—”.²⁰ For Frank, therefore, to understand internal colonialism, it is essential to understand the “exploitative” and underdevelopment generating structures, within which the satellised bourgeoisie exploit the people to maintain themselves. Despite this emphasis on economic relations, Frank’s use of the term “exploitative” (‘surplus expropriation/appropriation’) and metropolis-regional satellite polarisation, as Booth points out, “could be employed, and were employed, with equal facility, to refer to relations between spatial (national or regional) entities and relations between social groups and classes”.²¹ Thus Frank and Casanova—and Leninist concept of multi-nationality—with their various modifications, have permitted a wide variety of Marxist or neo-Marxist conceptualizations of internal colonialism. In India, as elsewhere, the term has a special appeal for all sorts of ethnic racial, regional and sub-regional groups who are, or feel for some reason, that they are culturally dominated, economically exploited or deprived and politically oppressed.

Our initial question, what is Development, provided a point of departure for a brief survey of the main theoretical approaches, which are usually drawn upon, for describing, analysing or theorising about development in the developing societies of Asia, Africa and Latin America. I have selected for emphasis only a few theorists who, I believe, have acted as trend-setters, instead of dealing extensively with the contribution of those who, in various ways, have explicated, utilised, modified and further extended these initial approaches, to illuminate the various dimensions of development, economic, social, political and cultural.

20 Frank, “The Mexican Democracy of Pablo Gonzalez Casanova” op cit pp 328-330.

21 David Booth, op cit pp 78-80.

It is hoped that such a procedure would help sensitize the reader to the basic issues involved and provide the necessary theoretical background to place the papers collected here in perspective. The papers were not written in accordance with any specific guidelines regarding the selection of problems, theoretical orientations, etc., and as such represent the particular scholarly orientations of the individual authors which, as is to be expected, show convergence and divergence in approaches, as well as similarities and difference on particular issues.

The Northeast Region—Papers and Issues

The Northeast Region was selected for the Seminar discussion for several reasons: (i) the region is rich in natural resources, yet relatively less developed economically; (ii) it is characterized by a great deal of racial, linguistic and ethnic diversity, presenting complex problems of regional integration (ethnic conflict and adjustment within individual states and across state and national borders), as well as the integration of the region with its immediate neighbours and the nation as a whole; and (iii) most of the states in the region, particularly Assam and Tripura, have been in turmoil because of the problems relating to the assertion of national or sub-national identity and the influx of foreign nationals. Thus, the region is not only of immense interest intrinsically, but also provides an excellent point of departure for considering those wider theoretical, as well as practical "problems of social, political, economic and cultural engineering of our diverse society", to which both P N Haksar and T N Kaul draw our attention, in their respective addresses.

Despite every effort to ensure a balanced coverage of different states and important problems of the region as a whole, inevitably some states, like Assam, and some issues (foreign nationals' issue and Assam agitation) received greater attention. For one thing, the number of scholars interested in some of the small and more recently established states is not large and not all those, who were invited, could come with a paper. Nevertheless, the response from the distinguished participants was quite encouraging and the papers, on the whole, present a fairly wide and comprehensive coverage of the major developmental problems of the region, as well as the individual states.

The book is organised into four parts, of which the first contains addresses or messages by the chairman of the Seminar, T N Kaul, the Chairman of the Governing Body of the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, P N Haksar, and the Director of

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the Centre, Rashpal Malhotra. In addition there is the preface by P N Haksar and this introduction by the Editor.

The second part group together six papers, dealing with a number of interrelated issues, centring on three major themes; demographic transformation in the context of the influx of foreign nationals and the increasing pressure on land and other economic resources; inadequate and unbalanced economic development and its causes and suggested remedies; and social tensions rooted in the demographic and development processes. Taken together, the papers also provide a general introduction to the region, its natural and human geography and political and administrative divisions. The papers by P C Goswami, Atul Goswami and Jayanta Kumar Gogoi, and P D Saika provide statistics, corroborating indirect evidence to show that the region's population has been increasing at an abnormally high rate; that the increase is due mainly to the immigration of foreigners from Bangladesh and Nepal and migrants from the other states of India, rather than to a higher natural growth rate of the local population; that, although the actual number of foreign nationals is difficult to establish with certainty, the influx is large enough to cause serious economic and social problems and pose a grave threat to the cultural identity of Assam. The pressure of population on land is already very high in the plains; even in the less densely populated hill areas there is a scarcity of land, due to the low carrying capacity under the traditional Jhum cultivation. The economic development in this region is not only inadequate but unbalanced, relying mainly on the exploitation of natural resources, timber, oil, etc., rather than industry. Most of the trade and commerce, tea estates, plywood factories, transport, etc., are controlled by immigrants, who have skills, strong financial support and business links outside the region. While pleading for the deportation of the foreigners, the authors assert that they are not for discrimination against Indian nationals from other states. P C Goswami stresses the need for ensuring an accelerated economic development of the region, with the full involvement of the local people. Saika draws attention to the differential problems of the plains and hill people and the slow rate of the agricultural and industrial growth. He is particularly concerned about the political and economic danger posed by the presence of increasing numbers of non-tribals in the tribal areas.

Atal and Sarma stress the key role of Assam State in the economic development of the whole region and, after outlining the major structural features of Assam's economy, suggest an integrated strategy for promoting rural and industrial development. They note the "over-

whelming agrarian characteristic without diversification" of the economy and the near-stagnant growth rate in both agriculture and industry. Like P C Goswami, Goswami and Gogoi and Saika, too ascribe the lack of development to an abnormal growth rate of population, small holdings, a low crop intensity and the colonial character of the economy (emphasis on exploitation of natural resources, rather than promoting manufacturing, poor communications, and outflow of economic surplus and bank deposits to other regions). The narrow base of industrialization, small market, lack of entrepreneurship, poor infrastructure and high cost of transportation and inputs and lack of skilled manpower are some of the major constraints affecting industrial development. Their suggested strategy for development includes harnessing of rivers (to prevent flooding, ensure water supply for crops in winter, and generate electricity), promotion of power intensive industries based on natural resources, strengthening of the public distribution system, uniform concessional freight rates, more aggressive role for public enterprises, manpower planning, training of artisans and technicians, etc.

J. B. Ganguli, in his more comprehensive review of the economic and social developments of both the tribal and non-tribal areas of the region, refutes the view that the current troubles in the region are due to insufficient transfer of resources from the Centre for economic development and public welfare. He however, concedes that despite a considerable flow of resources, there has been no reduction in disparities in consumption and income levels, between this region and the rest of the country. He particularly stresses how the development process itself—including the tribal welfare and development programmes of the Centre and State governments—has given rise to new economic, political and social forces and institutions, that generate the present social and political tension. The wrong educational and social welfare policies of the government, including a disproportionate emphasis on higher education, buying of loyalties through generous welfare grants, special incentives, concessions, etc., have led to the destruction of certain tribal institutions and values, that are important for mobilizing their initiative and energies for creating "productive assets for the general welfare of the people". The development of social and economic inequalities, especially the rise of the propertied "middle class" elite, who are particularly sensitive about their cultural identity, and who deflect the internal economic and social dissensions within tribal societies to non-tribals and the government to maintain and enhance their own privileged position.

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Ganguli agrees with Atal and Sarma and others about such structural weaknesses of the economy of the region, as the colonial type repatriation of surpluses, a lack of "perceptible agglomeration" in economies, and the backwardness of agriculture and industry. He particularly blames the absence of such "universal intermediaries", as basic manufactured goods such as cement, iron, steel, chemicals, machine tools, power and transport, for the continued lack of economic growth. He is in favour of the promotion of animal husbandry, poultry, pisciculture and horticulture to improve agriculture, and would like the use of the public sector undertakings, industrial licensing and fiscal and financial incentives to ensure the preferential promotion of labour-intensive, rather than capital-intensive industries. Like P.C. Goswami, he too feels the urgent need to devise suitable economic management systems, that ensure peoples' active participation in the decision-making and implementing processes. While none of the above authors makes explicit his own conception of development, the eclectic use of frames of modernization, neo-colonialism, internal colonialism and economic growth with social justice is clearly reflected in the analyses.

A.C. Sinha tries to work out, both theoretically and empirically, the attributes and consequences of smallness, in terms of developmental potential, economic, social, political, cultural, etc., of small states, regardless of whether they are sovereign units or such non-sovereign administrative units as the states of the Indian Union. While presenting a classification of the developmental strains, contingent upon small territorial size—in terms of ecological distinctness, political insularity—he concludes that the states do not appear to have a good enough social base for a stable politico-administrative setup. Torn between a "particularistic ethnic-centred political culture" and the "desired universal economic progress", their rudimentary middle class elite complain of economic, political and ethnic exploitation by outsiders, while themselves benefiting from the "exploitative, unequal, discriminating system". The paper is stimulating and thought provoking, but would need further working over, to disentangle the developmental logic of smallness from the empirical correlates of smallness in specific ecological contexts.

Part three brings together eleven papers, devoted to the theoretical and/or empirical examination of a variety of issues related to social and cultural diversity and quest for national integration. Of these, two—one by S.M. Dubey and the other by Mrinal and Sujata Miri—are directly and explicitly addressed to theoretical issues, while the remaining nine are more empirically oriented, dealing either with the general develop-

mental problems of the Northeast Region as a whole, or with more delimited specific sub-regional or state issues.

S.M. Dubey provides a bird's eye view of the historical development of Indian civilization and present-day Indian society and polity, to place in perspective the issue of foreign migrants and "interrelated question of cultural identity, group interaction and differentiation, ethnicity, regionalism-nationality, deprivation, regional imbalance-and the bearing of these questions on national integration, Centre-State relations, the development process and national security". His main aims are to show the limitations of the frame derived from the theories of socio-cultural plurality and of multi-nationality, to conceptualize the process of socio-cultural development and nation-building in India, and to put forward an alternative and, hopefully, a more adequate frame, which takes into account fully the integrative structural contributions of the cultural mechanisms of "fusion, interaction and conflict resolution", inherited from the past and post-Independence "strategy, goals and ideology of nation-building".

The theory of socio-cultural pluralism is the one, which was initially developed by Furnival, to deal with a special type of extremely unintegrated society, characterized by a great social, cultural and structural diversity and mutual avoidances. The colonial political domination and economic exchange in the market were viewed as providing the necessary external pressure that held it together. The fact, that such a minimal society was not primitive and in part, a creation of western political and economic colonial domination, posed some uncomfortable conceptual problems for most social theorists, Marxists and non-Marxists. Furnival, influenced in part by Boeke's concept of dual economy characterized by the side-by-side existence of the capitalist and pre-capitalist modes of production, emphasized the determining role of economic exchange. But later reformulations by M G Smith and others, in contradistinction, stressed the role of social and cultural pluralism as the major determinant. Subsequently, Pieterse Van Den Berghe and Leo Kuper and others came to see certain advantages in viewing social and cultural pluralism, as a continuum, as distinct from a special defining characteristic of an extreme type of unintegrated society.²² Thus the theory of social and cultural pluralism, atleast in some of its forms, after shedding its economic or class deterministic characteristics, became just another variant of the general theory of modernization of developing societies that are characterised by primordial and affectional ties of

22 Leo Kuper and M.G. Smith, (Eds) *Pluralism in Africa*, Berkeley University of California Press 1969.

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race, language, ethnicity, religion, region and the like. The ideological appeal of such a theory for the leaders of nativistic and 'sons of the soil' movements and advocates of regional and ethnic autonomy and particularistic cultural identities is not difficult to understand.

The orthodox Marxist Leninist theory of multi-nationality, similarly abstracted from its Russian context and conceptually liberated from the constraint of proletarian internationalism and association with some form of democratic centralism, has been similarly extended to Indian society. The theory has been used to support the claims of religion and, more recently, state based nationalities, without paying due regard to, as Dubey quite rightly points out, the historical specificity of the Indian situation in particular the "artificial" character of states as administrative units. The more recently developed neo-Marxist theories of uneven economic development and internal colonialism, which have a vaguer and more broader concept of economic exploitation linked to ethnicity, region, nationality, etc., than to class appropriation of surpluses, would appear to be more useful for explaining or justifying diffused local regional and ethnic discontent. Hence, they are gaining increasing popularity as multi-purpose political and theoretical explanations in both Marxist and non-Marxist circles. Dubey makes a convincing case that these conceptualizations of Indian development process oversimplify and distort Indian reality.

Theory is a vision of reality, as well as a prescription for action and, to the extent the action transforms the vision into reality, a self-fulfilling prophecy. In view of "the growing competition for power, resources, services, development benefits and attempts by sections of the middle class to evolve a narrow, parochial and occasionally chauvinistic political culture, as referred to by Dubey, it may just be possible that the hitherto continuing historical processes of socio-cultural integration may be seriously deflected from their course, through theoretical practice and social mobilization. In these circumstances, the predictive power of the theorists of social-cultural pluralism or multi-nationality may prove to be greater, than their ability to read correctly the historical reality of the developmental process.

Mrinal and Sujata Miri raise the question, how can the phenomenon of cultural diversity in India be truly conceived as an organic unity? They attempt to provide an approach and a partial answer, by delimiting their enquiry to language and religion and asking the question, what should be our attitude towards a language and a religion, other than our own? Drawing on Kant, Wittgenstein, Chomsky and others, they try to establish that all languages have a fundamental unity; the

same basic structure of a priori categories (space, time, negation, substance, etc), without which no conceptual thinking at all is possible and a similarly complex interconnection with a distinct form of life, which they embody in their domain. The presence or absence of a developed literature, specialized vocabularies, a script and other such surface differences do not make one language inferior to another, in the basic sense of embodying "a form of life", or form of the "soul" of a people.

Similarly Miri and Miri try to establish the fundamental unity and equality of all religions based on the essential substratum of truth they all embody. For this Miri and Miri reject, as crucially mistaken, secularism and related concepts of religious relativism, relegation of religion to the private sphere, and religion as a form of irrational belief. They find equally unsatisfactory the "self laudatory" and "other deprecatory" theological comparative approaches. Their complex, philosophically sophisticated argument finally leads them to the Gandhian concept of proper relationship between all religions, as one of "international fellowship", based on mutual respect and "a grasp of the rock bottom unity of all religions". Gandhi views all religions (their "network of beliefs doctrines, theories and stories") as conditioned by particular cultural traditions, and necessarily incomplete and imperfect pointers to the truth of God's existence. They are, therefore, in constant need for transformation, through mutual respect for and willingness to learn from each other's contributions to the common quest for truth and inter-faith emphasis on love and mutual helpfulness, rather than group affiliations, exclusiveness and partisan criticism and conversion of others.

The main point that Miri and Miri make, if I interpret them correctly, is : tolerance of any kind—linguistic, religious cultural—to be genuine, socially productive and lasting, necessarily needs to be based on the solid ground of shared truth, rather than a mutual recognition of each other's right to his own delusions. They thus make an implicit plea for the recognition of the socially transformative potential of the Gandhian vision of "secularism" and national integration and the need to rescue it from the currently more popular vulgarisations.

The next five papers provide a general profile of the region and its socio-cultural diversity, and highlight specific problems and general issues relating to conflict, cooperation and mutual understanding among a variety of groups and categories, social, political, economic, religious and cultural. Despite individual variations in selection, emphasis and styles of presentation of data, and differences in conceptual orientations and professional affiliations, there seems to be a good deal of general

agreement about the salient facts and issues, analyses and policy prescriptions regarding regional and national integration. Some of the common elements, selected for emphasis, include : extraordinary diversity of racial types, cultural forms, languages and dialects and traditions of origins; historical links of some ethnic groups across national borders; lower per capita income and industrial and agricultural backwardness and a general lack of development of the region, in terms of communications, power supply, and other infrastructural facilities; a feeling of long neglect of the region on the part of the central government; people's attachment to their traditional values and pride in their ethnic identities; comparative isolation of the region from the rest of the country; and the varying strength of the cultural links and sense of solidarity with the rest of the nation.

Roy Burman, viewing nation-building as a "continuous process", stresses the need to assure the optimum voluntary participation of the people in determining their destiny. He feels "there has been wrong developmental strategy of dissociation of growth from social justice as a critical input of growth process". He would also like a close look at the question of developing an appropriate machinery for planning, monitoring and guiding the regionalization process.

Omen Deori feels that national political parties have been apathetic to the region and the regional political parties have been exploiting parochial issues for short term political gains. The press, which has been preoccupied with sensationalism, violence, disturbances, etc., has failed to give a balanced coverage. She makes a number of suggestions for improving communications, and ensuring economic development and emotional integration among the people of the region and the country.

M. Horam would like to refute the view that the main problem of the north east region is economic. For him "the problem basically is a purely and simply political one". He feels an attempt should be made to settle all the differences with fairness, honour and affection. The administrators, policy makers and planners should assist the people to cope with the growing problems of increasing modernization by encouraging them "to retain and use as much as possible of their culture". He concedes that the area "has its share of embryonic break-away groups", but he feels they should not "just be ruthlessly suppressed", but won over through patience and political dialogue. For Horam, following Kuhn, a "borderland is cut off from the centre of power in his own country, not just by physical distance, but also failure of

communication". In this situation of natural suspicion of the 'foreign' government based in the national capital, it is all the more essential to make conscious efforts to improve communication, trust and understanding.

A. J. Qadri also makes a plea for a "meaningful dialogue with open heart and mind" to remove the gaps in understanding created by different perceptions of the issues among the different sections of the people, indigenous and migrant, as well as between the State Governments and the Centre, with their divergent regional and national perspectives. Similarly, General Mohan Lal, who traces the historical causes of the current disharmony to the British policy of neglect of the region, after creating Tibet as the buffer between India and China, suggests the taking of positive and constructive steps to remove emotional alienation and bring about willing cooperation. Pointing to the urgency of making proper administrative and security arrangements for the defence of this sensitive frontier region, General Mohan Lal advocates the withdrawal of our defence forces from the counter-insurgency operations to their primary role of defending the borders. This would also ensure confidence and due respect for them among the tribal people. The problems of ethnic insurgency should be tackled primarily by political means and with the help of para-military forces, such as the Border Security Force, Assam Rifles, Central and local police. He also calls for the need to ensure flood control and prompt assistance in the case of other natural calamities, such as earthquakes. He emphasizes, more strongly than Horam, the economic basis of national integration in the region and calls for the preparation of a list of priorities and other necessary steps to ensure the economic development of the area with peoples' involvement.

Of the remaining four papers, the one by B. Chakravarti provides a comprehensive study of the problem of linguistic, cultural and racial prejudices, with special reference to the north-east region, analyses the causes and suggests remedies, based on his extensive professional experience and intimate knowledge of the functioning of the Inter-State Youth Programmes, National Integration Samities and special projects introduced in schools and colleges, to link education with productivity, provide knowledge and experience of other regions, and to promote national understanding. He particularly stresses the need to replace the "rebellious child" traits with "creative child" and "rational adult" traits and recommends the "restructuring of syllabi to add projects, work programmes and demonstrations...with a view to applying the class room knowledge, concepts and ideas and link them with life, living productivity and creativity".

Gangmumei Kabui, while giving a historical analysis of insurgency in Manipur, identifies three early political groups, the peasant revolutionaries, the urban elitist Congress leaders, seeking integration with India and Meetei nationalists trying to retain an independent status for Manipur. He traces later communist influences, the setting up of the Revolutionary Government of Manipur (RGM) and the subsequent formation again of three distinct groups, the Manipuri nationalists—divided into moderates and activists, and the Marxists, whose leaders consisted of R G M members in Tripura Jail, converted to Marxism. The Maoist groups, led by N. Bisheshwar and Lhasa, formed the People's Liberation Army (PLA) in eastern Manipur while another revolutionary group, called the People's Revolutionary Party of Kanglipak (PREPAK), was formed in the valley. The PREPAK members are now being absorbed into the P L A, which is now the dominant group in Manipur valley, and the Kanglipak Communist Party (K C P). The PLA is now seeking collaboration with other revolutionary groups in other parts of the region and in upper Burma.

Kabui asserts that insurgency in Manipur is an urban phenomenon, the insurgents being mostly urban youths, who receive the active support of the urban middle classes and intellectuals and sympathy from the masses. The Meetei crisis of identity, the weakness of the Indian political system, economic exploitation and Indian political domination, a highly corrupt bureaucracy, increasing unemployment among the educated youth and the influence of some foreign powers and ideology appear to be some of the salient socio-political factors underlying the movement.

C. Narayana Rao provides an account of the contemporary crisis in Mizoram, in the context of the Union Territory's 630 miles long border with Burma and Bangladesh, and kinship and ethnic ties of the Mizos with tribal groups across the borders. Rao feels Mizos are not anti-national; not enough has been done by India to develop among them a feeling of loyalty to the nation. Development planning in the territory has been poor and uncoordinated and, despite most generous funding by the Centre, some of the basic facilities, such as drinking water, and electricity are very poorly developed. Mizoram also has to depend on outside sources for the supply of food. The people are one of the most highly educated and there is a very high rate of unemployment among the educated youth. Rao feels that the lack of amenities, and unemployment and other hardships already mentioned, as well as the fear of loss of cultural identity and poor communications between the Mizos and the Indian leaders, are the major factors contributing to the current crisis. Rao is optimistic about the return of peace and stability to

Mizoram. He maintains that a "psychological approach, based on goodwill, mutual trust and understanding..... could alone help to solve the problems". As a step towards it, he would like Mizoram to be declared a full-fledged state.

D. Khathing, an educationist from Meghalaya, deals with a specific developmental problem, that of science education in Meghalaya and Nagaland. He points out that facilities provided for science teaching—equipment, number of properly trained teachers etc.—are very inadequate. He stresses the educational value of a proper demonstration of scientific laws and properties, with suitable aids and, where possible, by using locally available materials. In addition, he would like the syllabi for schools, colleges and universities to be rationalized, training courses provided for science teachers to keep them abreast of the latest developments in their fields, and timely sanction given of book grants to schools, to enable them to purchase books after careful selection.

In relation to the general problem of unity in diversity raised by Mrinal and Sujata Miri, the contributors generally appear to view diversity as an important resource for nation-building and they seem to share a varying commitment to ensure its preservation, while at the same time, strengthening and transforming the historically developed bonds of deeper unity.

The fourth part, consisting of nine papers, is devoted to the Assam Movement and the inter-related issues of influx of foreigners (mainly from Bangladesh, erstwhile East Pakistan, and Nepal), and the complex problems the influx has given rise to, of cooperation and competition, opposition and identity and conservation and change in the demographic economic, social, political and cultural structures. The movement, which has by now been in existence for about three to four years, has continued to attract a great deal of professional academic, journalistic, political and general public interest.²³ The scale of its mass mobilization, the sense of unity among the leaders, its ability to withstand political opposition and government pressure, its amazing power to survive, its general avoidance of violence (despite some attributed lapses) and the issues relating to ethnicity, minority-majority relations, regional and sub-regional and national identities and economic, political and constitutional issues regarding Indian citizenship, Centre-State relationship, preservation of cultural homelands which it directly (through

23 S.M. Dubey, "The Assam Movement: A Preliminary Study in the Sociology of Politics and Development" *Man & Development*, Vol II No 3, September 1980 pp 65.

its own ideology or action), or indirectly (through responses generated in others) gave rise to—all these have made it a most talked about and written about movement. The papers presented here carry forward the ongoing scholarly debate, taking a stand for or against already demarcated positions, or providing new facts, formulations or lines of inquiry.

P. S. Reddy praises the movement for its remarkable capacity to mobilize the masses, and for the sense of unity and steadfastness displayed by its broad-based leadership, representing the All Assam Students Union, All Assam Gana Sangram Parishad and other state-wide political and non-political organizations. He defends the movement against the charges that it is “anti-national, anti-Bengali, anti-Muslim, patently chauvinistic and even secessionist”. After giving a historical account of immigration into Assam, in particular from the present day Bangladesh, he concludes that the abnormal increase in population, due to the influx of foreigners, “has had a crippling effect on the economy of the state” pointing out the “ominous” possibility of a certain section of immigrant population rallying themselves on the basis of language and religion, he pleads for a quick solution to the problem of foreign nationals and the need “to reassure the Assamese people of the safety of their language, culture and identity through appropriate legal and constitutional guarantees”.

B.K. Bhattacharya, provides a brief account of the cultural background of Assamese nationalism, stressing the role of the Ahom, Tai and Kocha kings and the great Vaishnava awakening, led by Sankardev, in giving Assam a well-developed language and a distinct “culture, in terms of dance, drama, painting, poetry, literature, music and egalitarian social codes”. Assam’s participation in the freedom struggle promoted the blending of this local nationalism with Indian nationalism. Emphasizing the serious threat posed by the influx of foreign nationals and defending the Assam movement against charges of secession, chauvinism, etc., he asserts “Assam has already a national mind, which is not in conflict with the regional mind. Assam also wants to save its identity, interests and population structure”. He makes a strong plea, invoking Gandhiji, for the provision of constitutional safe-guards regarding “(1) unbridled immigration, (2) language, culture and other issues of identity, (3) transfer of land and property rights to foreigners, (4) majority status for the indigenous people in the State Assembly, (5) maintaining a permanent register of citizens, (6) citizenship duties in respect of assimilation, (7) population structure, and (8) other rights accruing from the fundamental nationality right”. The list

would seem to suggest that Bhattacharya would favour the consideration of instituting safeguards, not only against the foreigners but also against nationals from other states. In view of the vital importance of the issues raised, it is to be hoped, Bhattacharya would put forward a more systematic exposition of his ideas to concretize the Gandhian vision of "equality of citizenship", to which he refers with respectful approval.

For Maheshwar Neog and Debo Parsad Barooah, the main problem, the people of Assam and the northeast region are faced with, is that posed by the influx of foreign nationals. Their presence is not only a danger to the linguistic, social and cultural identity of Assam and some other states in the region but also a threat to the security and integrity of India. Both Neog and Barooah strongly defend the non-violent, secular character of the Assam movement. They consider it sheer motivated propaganda to say that the movement is secessionist, chauvinistic, foreign-inspired, or in any way directed against non-Assamese Indians. They strongly assert that inter-ethnic violence in Tripura was not inspired by the Assam agitation. Barooah describes in detail the general industrial and economic backwardness of the region, the predominantly rural character of its economy, the poor road, rail and other forms of transport, the colonial type exploitation of natural resources and very high rates of unemployment among the youth. The presence of foreign nationals, says Barooah, has served to aggravate the economic problems of the region and inter-ethnic conflict, a view which Neog endorses. Neog feels that the issue of foreign nationals demands an urgent solution and should not be mixed up with issues of economic imbalances and social injustice, to which it is itself a contributory factor. Barooah calls for "steps for restructuring Centre-State relations, as in a true federation, in the interest of political stability, substantial economic development and social harmony", but he, unlike B.K. Bhattacharya, does not spell out the changes.

Bhaben Barua presents a detailed brief for a "Permanent solution on a rational and realistic basis" of the complex Assam problem. He discusses at length the complicated legal, political and human issues involved in the detection and deportation of foreigners and the implications of the various suggested cut-off dates. He tries to make a case for the separation of Cachar from Assam and discusses the kinds of constitutional changes, he would like to see, instituted to protect the economic, political, social and cultural identities of the Assamese, without injustice to the rights of the immigrant minorities.

Udayan Misra is particularly unhappy with CPI, CPI (M) and other Marxists and radicals. He feels, they have been insensitive to the national question in Assam and accused the middle class leadership of the movement of having thwarted the growth of Assamese nationality by their reactionary, chauvinistic, communalist and authoritarian approach to ethnic minorities. The movement, they feel, has alienated the Bengali poor peasants from the Assamese belonging to the same class. Misra, on the other hand, argues that being divided by strong feelings of nationality and having no political or organizational tie (a la Marx), these peasants do not constitute a "single class". In fact, in the predominantly rural society of Assam—semi-tribal, semi-feudal and largely lacking in bourgeois and landed classes—they are strongly tied to their respective middle classes by bonds of nationality. For Misra, to understand the Assam movement and the role of the middle class leadership in it, it is necessary to "see the mass upsurge centred on the foreign nationals issue..... as the outburst of a nationality, which has had a long history of neglect, suppression and exploitation". Misra points out several major obstructive factors that seriously reduce the possibility of the assimilation of the Bengali immigrants into Assamese society and culture. In view of the seeming departure from the conventional Marxist usage, further elaboration of Misra's notion of class would perhaps facilitate a deeper appreciation of his analysis of the class structure of Assamese society and the class base of the Assamese movement.

Apurba Barua discusses the role of the Assamese middle classes. His emphasis is on the fear they betray of outsiders and which they have successfully passed on to the lower strata of Assamese society. Thus, it is their ability to articulate fear, rather than positive aspirations, that Barua selects for emphasis. Barua wants to understand this fear, and for that he considers it essential to bear in mind (a) the uneven development of the Indian economy that has rendered Assam, like other backward regions, into a colonial hinterland; (b) the influx of outsiders, which now endangers the ethno-linguistic balance of the Assamese society; and (c) the near absence of the bourgeoisie, and hence the middle class exercise of hegemony as the most powerful group. After tracing the development of the fear of outsiders, Barua concludes that "it is the result of a bitter conflict over jobs, land and cultural hegemony".

Pritam Singh and Parmod Kumar put forward a preliminary framework for understanding the Assam problem. They emphasize the need to keep in mind both the general nature of development in India and the specific changes occurring in Assam. They particularly stress the role

of the "blocked and the low level development of India as a whole" and the "uneven development" of different regions, as forces contributing to social and regional tension. In Assam, in addition to the above two factors, they note, as additional contributory factors, the "decline in the legitimacy of the system as well as of political leadership" and the influx of immigrants. The last factor and the related question of national and cultural identity characterized the specificity of the Assam problem and are important to understand, but to confine analysis to this level, is to remain at the level of superficiality. A lasting solution lies in removing the causes of blocked and uneven development. For Parmod Kumar and Pritam Singh, there is a "direct and necessary correspondence between the degree of blocked development, the intensity of uneven development and the occurrence of movements" of the Assam type; the "character, frequency and intensity" of the movements are also affected by the "level of political and cultural consciousness".

Shanti Swarup is also mindful of the need to understand the underlying general causes in addition to the specificity of the Assam movement. The broader context, to which he would like to relate the present movement, is the other movements and agitations in Assam, during the last three decades. He would like to look at the economic and social and political contexts of these movements, the groups constituting major support bases and their main targets. Following this approach, it becomes clear that agitations have become an "endemic feature of Assam politics" and that the society has been living from "crisis to crises". Underlying these crises is the failure of the Assamese elite to handle the major problem of Assamese identity: how to strengthen the sense of Assamese identity against Bengalis, Marwaris and others, without evoking among the plains and tribals apprehensions about their identities. The sense of exploitation and neglect—which all societies have, where the principal push for development comes from outside—heightens the sense of identity; open competition and mass politics make the problem all the more difficult to handle.

Shanti Swarup points out the contribution of outsiders to Assam economy, though, at the same time, he concedes that the Assamese have some genuine reasons to feel exploited or neglected. It is the linkage between the genuine grievances of the people and middle class demands that enables the middle class leaders to gain mass support. He debunks Marxist explanations of Assamese discontent and asserts that student agitations succeed because they have the tacit support of the masses, and the students' fight for demands, with which the politico-administrative elite have sympathy. Thus, unlike Udayan Misra, Apurba Barua

and Pritam Singh and Parmod Kumar, who make use of Marxist or neo-Marxist economic deterministic frames, Shanti Swarup's approach is more eclectic and empirical, emphasizing the socio-cultural and political factors, no less than the economic.

The broad general discussion of the theoretical issues pertaining to development given at the beginning of this introduction has necessarily been arbitrary, representing, as it does, my personal sense of selection. I am fully conscious of the fact that certain issues have been left out, which are important enough to be included and the treatment of some others has been less than adequate. Similarly, the brief summaries have, I fear, failed to do justice to the wealth of concrete data and the sophisticated intricacies and the subtle nuances of the theoretical formulations of the learned authors.

I do hope, however, that the selection is relevant enough, to give a reasonable idea of the contents of this volume and their theoretical and practical significance, for an in-depth assessment of the nature and direction of the development and change in the northeast region, as well as of their potential contribution to the study of the development process in other parts of India.

OPENING REMARKS BY CHAIRMAN OF THE SEMINAR

T. N. Kaul

WE are fortunate in having with us eminent educationists and scientists, historians and philosophers, economists and sociologists, scholars and students. I count myself in the last category of students. Students are playing an important role, especially in the Northeast.

We have gathered together not to score debating points or indulge in polemics, not to do propaganda or appeal to the gallery.

The Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development is a non-party, non-profit making, non-governmental organization, devoted to studying the problems facing India in particular and the developing world in general. It is one of our main objectives to enable different points of view to meet, through dialogue and discussion, analyse and identify regional issues and problems in the larger perspective of national security and development.

India has survived the vicissitudes of history through the ages, in spite of both internal and external threats. At times we have been conquered by foreigners, but in most cases we have absorbed the conquerors, culturally and ethnically. Hence the diversity of races, religions and cultures in our country.

And yet, in the midst of all this diversity, we have maintained a basic unity, because of our innate nationalism, geographical and geo-political forces and the need for economic development and social justice.

The British exploited our diversity and divided us on religious and other grounds. They developed only those areas which were of benefit to them in their own industrial revolution and imperial strategic interests. The Northeast was one of those regions which they badly neglected, because they did not see any threat from China at that time.

However, with the advent of independence and the emergence of a strong, strident and unified China, the government became more alive to

the problems of socio-economic development and strengthening the security and communications of this important region.

But, four wars with Pakistan, and the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962, drained our resources and retarded the development of this border region. Social, ethnic, regional and economic pressures have built up and are demanding urgent solution.

It is time, therefore, we devoted serious attention to these problems, not only in their regional aspect, but in the wider perspective of national security and development and safeguarding the integrity and independence of our motherland.

It is significant that the Ashoka Chakra or the Wheel of Dhārma is the centre-piece in our national flag. The spokes in the wheel symbolize, to my mind, the various states and regions and on their strength depends the strength of the whole Chakra. The wheel gives the different spokes the strength of unity, while the spokes give the wheel its power to move forward. The wheel and the spokes have to remain together and strongly bound to each other—only then can the whole move forward.

I would, therefore, appeal to you, to look at each problem and issue—not merely in its local or regional perspective but also in the wider context of the whole country and the deteriorating international situation. We are all Indian citizens, with equal rights and duties. I hope there are no infiltrators among us.

Tensions are building up all around us, in South, South-East and South-West Asia, in the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. We have to be vigilant and wide awake, and stand together as one nation against any external threat, as we have done in 1947, 1962, 1965 and 1971. But, for this, it is necessary that we must remove obstacles, both internal and external, that hamper our national solidarity and integration. It is, therefore, essential that we tackle and solve the problems of the north-east region, speedily and successfully, through friendly and frank exchange of views, through a constructive dialogue, without heat or passion, dispassionately and objectively.

It is not the purpose of this Seminar to pass resolutions or take votes on any issue. The purpose is to create a channel of communication between the people of the northeast and the rest of India.

We have in our midst eminent people from the seven areas of the north-east and the rest of the country. If we can talk on the same wave

length and tune our antennae to a common objective, there is no reason why the government and the people should not be able to do the same.

This is the first venture of its kind at this Centre and on its success depends, to some extent, the success of the efforts of others in the same direction. A heavy responsibility is therefore cast on our shoulders to steer the discussions meaningfully and constructively in a positive direction.

As I said, at the outset, we do not aim at drawing conclusions and passing resolutions. We are meeting as friends and colleagues in search of a common path to take us to our common destination, which is a happy, prosperous, strong, stable and united India, where each state and territory, and each individual within them, feels and is equal to others—socially, economically and in every other way, where foreigners are welcome as guests but not as masters or oppressors, where, as Tagore said in his immortal poem :

*“Where the mind is without fear and the
head is held high
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into
fragments by narrow domestic walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards
perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its
way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by Thee into ever
widening thought and actions;
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my
country awake.”*