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Editorial

We stand, with the publication of this issue at the end of a journey, and at the threshold of another. It is the third, and therefore, the last issue of this volume. A volume that has been marked by greater changes than in the previous two, what with the move to a new website, and the concomitant changes made in the e-magazine format. Thus, this issue marks the end of possibly the most eventful year in the short but lively history of the *Sephis e-Magazine*.

But, that is not all. This is the last issue that will follow the four-monthly cycle. From the next volume, we will pop-up even more frequently in the mailboxes of our subscribers, as we become a quarterly. And, that too, is of course, a major change.

As befitting the issue that marks the closing of a chapter in *Global South's* fledgling career, the current presentation we bring before you is possibly the most varied in terms of both interests expressed and the regions covered.

Patricio Batsikama delves into the origins of the kingdom and people of the Kongo by examining, in great detail, the oral traditions that have survived, as well as etymological readings of the language of the people. Shamsiddin S. Kamoliddin's work deals with the first military confrontations between the Chinese Empire and the Arab Caliphate. His work brings to light many recently uncovered details.

As promised, we continue with Nitin Varma's work on the Chergola exodus. This is the second and concluding part of his article on this upsurge against colonial planters in an obscure corner of India that carries significant meanings for the reading of the Indian national movement. And, continuing with the project of threads spread across issues, we publish the first part of Edsel L. Beja's work on capital flight, where he tries to set an agenda by (re)introducing it in the public domain, so as to effect policy decisions, a matter that closely concerns developing nations.

As the G8 meets with the self-proclaimed leaders of the world, ignoring health hazards, carrying out their heavy duty (remember the White Man's Burden) of deliberating over the future of mankind, amidst many protests, and the Bolivarian path for development is proposed by Hugo Chavez as a serious alternative way, we also seek to examine, from two quite different positions, methodological and otherwise, one such alternative, the extremely controversial Special Economic Zone policy in China and India. Samira Junaid deals with the Chinese experience and gives a balanced view, pointing out pros and cons and the evolution of this policy. In a more theoretical exploration, Soumitra Bose deals with the notion in theory. His exposure of the SEZs put them in line with the colonial penetration of South Asia in the eighteenth century and that of China in the following one, and seems to justify Balzac's often quoted maxim, "Behind every great fortune there is a crime."

In *Across the South*, we have two essays connected by their dealing of history and memory. The famous opinion that each time the Irish Question is solved, the question is changed is perhaps even more true about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Munir Fasheh makes his contribution to a discourse, where 'determining truth' is perhaps more impossible than even other arenas of conflict. Adekeye Adebajo deals with the current efforts to mix the names of the much-hated imperialist Cecil Rhodes with that of Nelson Mandela, one of the twentieth century's truly heroic figures in the struggle against Apartheid. Here, he calls for the separation of the two legacies that their politics demands.

The reviews too present a varied reading, as they are drawn from various regions and experiences, from a women writers' collective to the experience of a porous border to that of slave revolts and the importance of these in anti-slavery discourses.

We hope the readers will enjoy this issue. We also await your suggestions as to how to run the next volume, with its new appearance and format.

Articles

The Origins of the Kingdom of Kôngo



Patrício Batsikama

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He is the author of several articles published in National Journals, Magazines and reviews. His areas of interest include Aesthetics, Anthropology of African Religion, Language Metamorphoses of Angolan Peoples and ethno linguistics groups among others.

Abstract

The old History of Africa is not well known, because it is based on Oral Tradition. Is this source doubtful or sure? We are going to try and respond. The Oral Tradition about the origin of the Kongo Kingdom seems confused. Several specialists have defended that "it's not safe to write the earlier History of African societies". But according to the philology compared with the Oral Tradition, Kongo people are from the South. The Kikongo language and its idioms substantiate this largely.

The Origins According to the Oral Tradition

According to the various versions of the ancestral Oral Tradition, the point of origin of the Kingdom of Kôngo appears to be greatly confused. They recognise nevertheless that "Nsûndi tufila ntu, Mbâmba tulâmbudila malu" or "Ntu kuna ntându, malu kuna mayânda mya nzâdi", or, "Mpânzu ku ntu, Kyângala kunnima".

These quotes constantly repeated by the depositors of Tradition—although in the early access it seems confused in the current language—indicate the downward movement followed by the Ancestors during their different migrations. Duarte Lopes, Bernardo Gallo da, Lorenzo Lucca da, Antonio Cavazzi etc. merely reproduced these Oral Traditions.



In conformity with the geographical map of the earlier Kingdom of Kôngo, established and commented on by several authors, Nsûndi is in the North and Mbâmba in the South (and Mpêmbe in the Centre). The anthropological literature indicates other synonyms of Nsûndi— Mpûmbu, Mpânzu etc. The equivalents of Mbâmba are Kyângala, Mayânda etc.¹ Here is the value of the semantic plot of these sentences:

Nsûndi²

- sûnda: To settle, to get settled, to

reside,;

- sûnda: To finish, to stop, ending;

- sûnda: To surpass, to pass; to be preferable to, superior to, better than; to be the first, to be on the first line during the contest; to cross a river while swimming.

Ntându - north:

- tânda: To swim, to pass while swimming or to be going here and there, to walk;

- tânda: Who is big;

- tândaba: To go here and there, in a certain place, in a country;

- tândula: To enlarge, to widen, to pull in rubber band, to increase, to surround the country etc.

Mbâmba:

- bâmba: Coler, to fix by the cement, to keep with his fingers, to close, to stick;

- bâmbakana: To associate, to mix (in a work); tranquiliser (friendship);

- bâmbakasa, enriched by

bambakana: To separate, to split up, to go each to his/her/its path.

Yânda:

- (ma)yânda: Beginning, origin, principle, reason, foundation;

- yânduka: (yândula), to feel the heat, big heat; to warm up and flow as the butters (under the sun);

- yândula: To spill, to propagate, to reveal; etc.

KyângalaA:

- ky-ângala: Sweat, perspiration heat, suffocating atmosphere;

- yângala: What is big;

- yânga(la)kana: (doesn't exist in the dictionary of Laman): to spread, to recover like a rampant plant.

Synonymous of yânza(la)kana, that Laman note): to spread like a rampant plant, variant of yânzama.

- yângama: From yângika: To flow on a liquid surface; visible, to be raised, gigantic etc.

- yângama: To move away.



These linguistic approaches— taking account of the shape according to the position of terms and their relationship grammatically and phraseologically— make us believe that the world of the Kôngos seems to begin in the South. Such reads itself besides in their thought. Usually the term Mbâmba will replace the South after the territorial structure has been established. In fact, in the Kôngo cosmogony, Ma(yânda) not only means "South" but also refers to the origin, the reason, the foundation etc. And as the semantic plot indicates, the Kôngo people seem to believe that the South would be where the country began, and this country of origin had hot climate (yânduka, Kyângala). Otherwise an originary abstract named *mayânda* followed Mbâmba as substance. Also the Traditions collected by Bernardo Da Gallo, Jérôme De Montesarchio in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by Jean Cuvelier, Joseph Of Munck etc. and lastly in the twentieth century, relate quite unanimously that the first land established or funded was in the NZÂNZA NKATU³ another term that is the equivalent of *mayânda*.

¹ J. Cuvelier, *Nkutâm'a mvila za makânda mu nsî'a kôngo*, Tumba, 4^e Edit., 1972, pp. 8,24,39,57; J. de Munck, *Kinkûlu kya nsî'eto'a Kôngo*, Tumba, 1953, p. 27

² For the verbs see K.E Laman, *Dictionnaire Kikôngo- français*, I.R.C.B., Bruxelles, 1936.

³ Cuvelier, *Nkutâm'a*, pp. 12, 17, 21, 33, 37, 38.

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A literal translation of this expression (Nzâza nkatu), would be "Without the World". The translators of the Bible use a neighbouring term that is "Nsi'a Nkatu" or Nzâ(nza) Nkâtu in the editions posterior to 1983. These terms mean "desert". The African Continent accounts for two deserts. In this way we opt the Kalahari because it is in the South, or as one would say in Kikôngo "Kuna Mayânda".

Talking about the toponymy of this region, some authors mention the toponym of MBÂNGALA⁴, located precisely in the southern part of Angola. And yet, in Kôngo's language, the word "mbângala" designates the *time of big heats marked by the missed rains* (August-September).

Also, the expression *kuna mbângala* is translated as "There is a very long time". It seems that the word *mbângala* preserved more nostalgias of its old sense. Reason for which, authors such as Jean Cuvelier, Joseph Of Munck, Jean Van Wing, Rafael Batsíkama affirm was that Kôngo-dya-Mbângala was the *country of origin of the whole Kôngo society*. But where would this country be located in concrete terms?

According to the elements of the language analysed, their origin appears to lie in the lower Kalahari, where we come across a region

named MBÂNGALA by the ethnographers (Delachaux, De Pedrals for example). Today, this region is populated by the Ovimbundu, Cômwe, Nyâneka-Nkûmbi. The words once spoken are well diagnosed: *mbângala* although it is taken here for word or toponym or a climatic reality indicates what could be the "origin *première*" of the people of the earlier kingdom of the Kôngo.



Of the other terms, *Mbâmba* makes us believe– in addition to Mbângala– that the South (in the country of big heats) would be the first home where the country would have been formed, and, it is subsequently through extension that it that seems to have resulted in the Kôngo kingdom later.

In other words, Nsûndi or Ntându according to the enumerated roots, (sûnda: to settle, to get settled, to finish; tândaba: To go here and there,...) demonstrate a sequence and at the same time conclusion dealt report with Mbâmba or Mayânda.

Denise Paulme says: The indigenous traditions are confused, and indicate meanwhile that the kingdom of the Kôngo was founded as several kingdoms by the same families who crowd since Setté Cama until the High Zambeze⁵. Of course, the linguistic analysis confirms that.



Conclusion

In fact, the Oral Tradition is reliable. It needs its own method, analytical instruments, and principles. And in accordance with the method used and the kind of historic sources cited, the origins of Kôngo kingdom may be located in the South of Angola. Next time we shall continue looking at the affinities between Kôngo and several southern peoples of Angola.

⁴ Delachaux, *L'éthnographie de la region de Cunene*, Neuchatel, 1936, pp. 8-9.

⁵ D. Paulme, *Les civilisations africaines*, P.U.F., Paris, 1961, p. 54.

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New Data on the Early Attack of the Arabs on China



Shamsiddin S. Kamoliddin

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Abstract

The work of Gevond, who lived in the eighth century, and other Armenian historians, has thrown new light on the relations between the Arab Caliphate and the Chinese empire. The close familial relation of Muhammad ibn Marwan, the Arab commander with the reigning Umayyad Caliph shows the importance attached by the Caliphate to this enterprise. This essay details the various aspects involved in the motives of the various participants in the momentous events that shaped the history of Central Asia in a turbulent phase.

Before the Arab conquest, Central Asia was a part of the Turkish *kaganate*, and was included within the sphere of influence of the Chinese empire. In the first half of the eighth century, at the time when the Arabs were most active militarily in Central Asia, China was busy in a long and costly war with Tibet, which continued until 133 A.H./750-51 A.D. During that period, China made the first and last attempt to win back Central Asia from the Arabs¹. In July that year the Arab commander Ziyad ibn Salih crushed, near Talas, a Chinese army of thirty thousand, capturing a great number of them as prisoners². The commander of the Chinese army, Gao Sian-chji, escaped back to China with the remnants of his army³. After this bloody battle, which continued for five days, the Chinese gave up their claims on Central Asia, where the Arabs gained complete control⁴.

There is information in the Arabic literary sources about the campaign of Qutayba ibn Muslim to Kashgar in 96 A.H./714-15 A.D. and his embassy to "the king of as-Sin"⁵. However, as revealed by the Uygur version of the work of al-Tabari, "the king of as-Sin", who is mentioned in the text, does not refer to the Chinese emperor, but to the governor of Khotan, who also governed the Kashgar region⁶. It is also stated, that Abu Muslim prepared for a military campaign to China in 134

A.H./752-53 A.D. But he could not undertake it because of his death⁷.

There is information in the Chinese sources about some Arab embassies to the Chinese Yard, the first of which was sent in 651 A.D. by the Caliph 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. The envoy arrived before the Chinese emperor with gifts and gave him a letter from the Arab Caliph, stating that their family had ascended to the throne thirty four years ago and had reigned for three generations. After that the Caliphs regularly sent their envoys to China, and the last one was from Harun al-Rashid, who sent three envoys at once⁸. Every one of the Arab envoys, about fifteen in all, presented various gifts to the Chinese emperor— usually thoroughbred horses and jewels⁹. However, the Chinese government never returned the gesture and considered the envoys coming to their capital as a mark of respect and submission, and their gifts, similarly, as tribute. The envoys usually arrived in China with caravans; therefore the arrival of a caravan is spoken of as "an embassy" in China even today¹⁰.

There is no other reference of any other contact between the Arabs and the Chinese in medieval Arabic and Chinese textual sources; however, they do find mention in medieval Armenian sources.

In the historical work of Gevond, an Armenian author of the eighth

century, there is information about a previously unknown campaign of the Arabs to China and their embassy to the Chinese emperor. According to this work, in the reign of the Caliph al-Walid (86-96 A.H./705-715 A.D.) the Arab commander Mahmet, the former governor of Armenia, asked the Caliph to give him a powerful army to invade the country of the Chinese and force the Chinese emperor to submit. The Caliph granted his request and equipped him with an army of two hundred thousand. From Damascus, Mahmet made his way through Syria, Persia and Khorasan, to arrive at the borders of *Chenastan* (the Chinese empire). Having set up camp on the banks of river Botis, he sent an envoy to the king of Tchens, i.e. the Chinese emperor, with a letter, wherein he wrote: "Why have you alone not submitted to our lord, whose name makes all the peoples tremble? What are you hoping for by not resigning to our power? Perhaps you consider us as girls and imagine yourself more beautiful? Now, if you do not submit to our power as a slave, you ought to know that we shall destroy all of your country and end your reign. Do not be light-hearted and slow to answer and let us know your decision as soon as possible."

After the Chinese king, called Djenbakur in the sources, had read the letter, he held a consultation with

¹ L.N. Gumilev, *Drevnie turki*, Leningrad, 1969, pp. 361,369.

² Ibn al-Athir, Abu-l-Hasan 'Ali ibn Muhammad ash-Shaibani al-Jazari, *Al-Kamil fi-ta'rikh, fi 12 ajza'*, Misr, 1883 - 1885, vol. 5, p. 212; O. G. Bol'shakov, "Kistorii Talasskoi bitvy" (751 g.) in *Strany I narody Vostoka*, vypusk 22, Moscow, 1980, pp. 132-136.

³ E. Chavannes, "Documents sur les Tou-Kiue (Turks) occidentaux", in: *Sbornik trudov Orkhonskoi ekspeditsii*, vypusk 6. SPb., 1903, pp. 142-143.

⁴ V. V. Bartol'd, "Turkestan v epohu mongol'skogo nashestviya", *Sochineniya*, v 9 tomah, T. 1, M., 1963, p. 200; Y. V. Èàrev, "Politicheskaya situatsiya v Maverannahre v seredine VIII veka", in: *Srednyaya Aziya, arheologiya, istoriya, kul'tura. Materialy mejdunarodnoi konferentsii, posvyashennoi 50-letiyu nauchnoi deyatel'nosti G.V.Shishkinoi*. Moscow, 2000, pp. 208-209.

⁵ Abu Djaraf Mohammed ibn Djarir at-Tabari, *Annales*, M. J. de Goeje (ed.), I - III series, E. J. Brill, Lugduni-Batavorum, 1964, ser. II, pp. 1275-1280.

⁶ At-Tabari, "Tarikh ar-rusul va-l-muluk , perevod s arabskogo Sh.Zakirova, perevod s uigurskogo" in M. Kutlukova, *Materialy po istorii Srednei I Tsentral'noi Azii*, vol. X-XIX, Tashkent, 1988, pp. 11-16.

⁷ Kàrev, *Politicheskaya*, pp. 210-211.

⁸ N. Y. Bichurin (Iakin), *Sobraniye svedeniy o narodah, obitavshih v Srednei Azii v drevnie vremena*, v 3-h tomah, M.;L, 1950 - 1953, vol. 2, pp. 332-333.

⁹ E. Shefer, *Zolotyè persiki Samarkanda. Kniga o chuzhezrmnykh dikivinkah v imperii Tan*, perevod s angliiskogo, M., 1981, pp. 579-583.

¹⁰ Bartol'd, *Istoriya kul'turnoi zhizni Turkestana*, Sochineniya v 9 tomah. T. 2. Chast 1. È., 1963. p. 185.

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his bodyguards and high officials to discuss a suitable response to the letter. The response they agreed on was: "Is it true that you are the most glorious of all the kings who have reigned from the beginning of the world up to the present— the kings of Babylon, Macedonia and Persia— who subdued the world? Know this, that you are as shameless as a dog. You have only lust and foul voluptuousness. Tales of the beauty of my girls is forcing you to sacrifice yourself and the lives of your soldiers, who have arrived here with you. It appears that there was no room in Damascus for your graves. You should know, that our country has never been subdued by anyone, and I cannot agree to your demands. If it is gifts that you seek, I will give them, according to the custom of kings, and then you shall go back to your country in peace".

Mahmet sent a second letter, to Djenbakur: "Give me thirty thousand beautiful girls, then we will go in peace, otherwise, I will go to war". The Chinese king appeared to agree to Mahmet's demand and sent him an envoy to inform him that he should stay in his camp and wait till his demand was fulfilled. Meanwhile, he ordered his troops to build cloth-covered chariots, and armed riders were hid inside these instead of the girls. It was aimed at entrapping the enemy.

They arrived at the river bank opposite to Mahmet's army and camped there. There were forty thousand riders inside the chariots, and Djenbakur himself remained at a distance with a few riders. He then sent word to Mahmet: "Come and take your thirty thousand girls, which I have selected for you from all over my country. Select an equal number of deserving men from your army and cross the river. Then I will distribute the girls by drawing lots, and ensure equal distribution. Thus, a quarrel among your troops will be avoided." Along with the letter he sent ships for Mahmet's troops to cross over to the other bank.

The selected troops of Mahmet crossed the river on the ships. When

they arrived on the other bank, the Chinese king ordered his horsemen to attack the Arabs. As soon as the battle began, the riders hiding inside the chariots launched a surprise attack. They surrounded the Arabs and put them to the sword. Nobody could save themselves, even by flight. Meanwhile the ropes of the ships were cut, so that the troops could not cross the river. Only Mahmet and a few of his riders forded the river on the back of their horses. Thus, they were humiliated by the Chinese king and returned to their country, never daring to go back to China¹¹.

A shorter version of the same story can be found in the work of another Armenian historian Stepanos Taronetsi (tenth-eleventh century), who adds, that Mahmet had been contemplating the conquest of China for a long time.¹²

This information has great value for the history of the Arab conquests in Central Asia, and opens a new page in the history of the early campaigns of the Arabs in the East. From these accounts it follows that the first campaign of the Arabs to China was undertaken in the reign of the Umayyad Caliph al-Walid (86-96 A.H./705-715 A.D.) by a commander named Mahmet, who was earlier the governor of Armenia¹³. There is some other information in the same work of Gevond, which allow us to determine accurately the profile of the Arab commander Mahmet. According to him, in 701 A.D. Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65-86 A.H./685-705 A.D.) ordered Mahmet to conquer Armenia, then in 703 A.D., he suppressed an uprising of the Armenian princes, and in 705 A.D., carried out a bloody reprisal on them. After that, the new Caliph al-Walid ordered him to leave Armenia and appointed 'Abd al-'Aziz in his place. After that Mahmet asked the Caliph for an army to undertake a campaign to China¹⁴.

According to the Arab sources, in 73 A.H./692-93 A.D., Muhammad ibn Marwan ibn al-Hakam, the brother of the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, was appointed the governor of Armenia and the Northern part (*wilayat*) of the caliphate

including Azerbaijan, al-Djazira, Mosul and a province (*ath-thughur*) at the borders of the Byzantine empire. He remained at that post up to 91 A.H./709-10 A.D.¹⁵. All the events, described in the history of Gevond regarding the participation of Mahmet correspond exactly with the chronology of the military-political activity of Muhammad ibn Marwan, as mentioned in the Arab sources¹⁶. Consequently, we can conclude that the Arab commander, who undertook a campaign to China in the reign of the Caliph al-Walid, was Muhammad ibn Marwan, who was the son of the Caliph Marwan I (64-65 A.H./684-685 A.D.), the brother of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (65-86 A.H./685-705 A.D.) and the father of the last Umayyad Caliph Marwan II (127-132 A.H./744-750 A.D.).

About Muhammad ibn Marwan it is known from the sources, that in 65 A.H./685 A.D., he was appointed the governor of al-Djazira by Caliph Marwan I, just before the latter's death.¹⁷ In 71 A.H./690-91 A.D., Muhammad ibn Marwan came from al-Djazira with his troops to help the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik in the battle against the internal enemies of the Umayyad dynasty¹⁸. In 73 A.H./692-93 A.D., 'Abd al-Malik appointed him as governor of Armenia and the Northern part of the caliphate¹⁹. In the same year he went from al-Djazira to a campaign against the Byzantines²⁰. In 75 A.H./694-95 A.D., he again marched against the Byzantine Empire²¹ and defeated the Greeks²². Around 80 A.H./699-700 A.D., Muhammad ibn Marwan organised few campaigns against Armenia²³. In 82 A.H./701-02 A.D., he was at war with the enemies of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik in Iraq²⁴, and then he undertook a punitive campaign to Armenia, and finally subdued that country²⁵. In the same year he captured the city of Dvin and became the master of the entire country²⁶. In 84 A.H./703 A.D., by the order of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik, he cruelly suppressed the anti-Arab uprising in Armenia²⁷. In 86 A.H./705 A.D., in the first year of the reign of Caliph al-Walid, he went against the joint forces of the Byzantines and the

¹¹ K. Patkanian, *Istoriya khalifov Vardapeta Gevonda, pisatelya VIII veka, perevod s armyanskogo SPb.*, 1862, pp. 25-26; Ter- L. H. Mkrtychian, *Armyanskie istochniki o Srednei Azii, VIII-ÖVIII, vv, Moscow, 1985, pp. 54-55.*

¹² Ter-Mkrtychian, *Armyanskie istochniki* p. 58.

¹³ This Mahmet is identified with the Arab commander Muhammad ibn 'Uqba, and the battle, which had been described in the Armenian sources with the battle on the Talas river, which took place in 133 A.H./750-51 A.D. See P. A. Gryaznevich, "Istoriya khalifov" *anonimnogo avtora XI veka, facsimile rukopisi, predislovie, Ioscow, 1967, p. 12*; Ter-Mkrtychian, *Armyanskie istochniki, p. 56.*

¹⁴ Gryaznevich, "Istoriya khalifov", 12, pp. 25-26; Ter-Mkrtychian, *Armyanskie istochniki, pp. 54-55.*

¹⁵ Abu Muhammad Ahmad ibn A'sam al-Kufi, *Kniga zavoevaniy (Izvlacheniya po istorii Azerbaidjana VII – IÖ vv.)*, *perevod s arabskogo yazyka, Z. M. Bunyatova, Baku, 1981, p. 12.*

¹⁶ About him see, at-Tabari, *Annales, ser. II, pp. 592, 804-808, 853, 863, 887, 889, 1073-1075, 1096, 1871, 1873, 1876.*

¹⁷ *Ibid, p. 592.*

¹⁸ *Ibid, p. 804.*

¹⁹ al-Kufi, *Kniga zavoevaniy, p. 12.*

²⁰ at-Tabari, *Annales ser. II, p. 853.*

²¹ *Ibid, p. 863.*

²² Ibn Wadhih qui dicitur al-Ja'kubi, *Historiae, part I-II, ed. M. Th. Houtsma, E. J. Brill, Lugduni-Batavorum, 1883, vol. II, p. 281.*

²³ A. N. Ter-Gevondian, *Armenia I Arabsliy khalifat, Yerevan, 1977, p. 73.*

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Armenians, defeated them and inflicted bloody reprisals on the Armenian princes²⁸. After that the Armenians sent an envoy to the Caliph complaining against Muhammad ibn Marwan and asking him to change the ruler of their country. The Caliph answered their plea favourably and recalled Muhammad ibn Marwan and appointed in his place 'Abd al-'Aziz ibn Hatim al-Bahili (86-91 A.H./705-709 A.D.)²⁹. As to Muhammad ibn Marwan, he saved his other post as the supreme ruler of the Northern part of the caliphate, including Armenia until 91 A.H./709-10 A.D., when Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik (91-114 A.H./709-732 A.D.)³⁰, the brother of Caliph al-Walid was appointed in his place. After that in the Arab sources the information on Muhammad ibn Marwan comes to an end, and the Armenian sources tell us about the above-mentioned campaign to China³¹.

It is known that at that time Caliph al-Walid had been inspired by the swift successes of Qutayba ibn Muslim in the East and of Maslama ibn 'Abd al-Malik in the North, and cherished some hopes of a conquest of China, which was at that time the only great power still not subdued by the caliphate. These trends became apparent particularly in 92 A.H./710-11 A.D., when another Arab commander, Muhammad ibn al-Qasim ath-Thaqafi, reached the mouth of the Indus and conquered Sind³². At that time al-Hajjaj bin Yusuf, the supreme ruler of Iraq, Khorasan and the whole Eastern part of the caliphate, who was earlier

opposed to the Umayyad Caliphs, declared, that he would appoint as ruler of China the first of the above two commanders to reach that country³³.

It should be remembered that Caliph al-Walid, who was on bad terms with al-Hajjaj, also had for a long time nurtured the thought of undertaking a campaign of his own to China, and may have wanted to take the lead over al-Hajjaj in the conquest of that country and appoint there a ruler of his own choice. With this aim, probably a long time before the campaign itself, he suggested this to his uncle Muhammad ibn Marwan, who was one of the most reliable of his commanders and was greatly experienced in the art of war through his campaigns against the Byzantines and Armenians. The Armenian authors testify to this: "... (W)hen Mahmet had been instigated against the Chinese"³⁴ and "...nourished for a long time in his heart the designs on the land of the Chinese"³⁵.

Consequently, this information gives us the basis for supposing, that the campaign of Muhammad ibn Marwan to China had been undertaken in 91 A.H./709-10 A.D., or 92 A.H./710-11 A.D., when he had been relieved of his post as Governor of Armenia and asked Caliph al-Walid for the command of an expeditionary army for a campaign to China. As we know in this year the ruler of Khorasan was Qutayba ibn Muslim, who was at that time busy suppressing the anti-Arab uprisings in Sijistan, Tokharistan

and Southern Sogd³⁶. Therefore Muhammad ibn Marwan, having the charter of the Caliph, could pass through Khorasan without any difficulties and reach the borders of the Chinese empire.

The second problem, which can be settled from the Armenian sources, is the location of the Botis river, on the banks of which the battle between the Arabs and the Chinese was fought. According to the Armenian sources, Mahmet left Damascus with his army and passed through Syria, Persia and Khorasan, and reached the borders of Chenastan.³⁷ The Botis river has been identified alternatively with Jayhun, i.e., Amudarya river, or with Talas river in the Chu valley³⁸. However, in the Armenian sources "Chenastan" or "the country of Chens" does not refer to Central Asia or Western Turkistan, but it denotes China, and the title *Djenbakur* is only used for the Chinese emperor, while Eastern Turkistan is referred to as "the land of Sin"³⁹. Apart from this, Muhammad ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi's tenth century work, "Surat al-ard" ("The Face of the Earth"), mentions that the greatest river of China was named Botis, which had been identified with the Lower Huanhe in China⁴⁰. The same river was fixed in the map of Ptolemaeus (second century) as Bautisos⁴¹. Thus it can be concluded, the Arab army under Muhammad ibn Marwan in fact reached the borders of the Chinese empire and made contact with the Emperor.

²⁴ at-Tabari, *Annales*, ser. II, pp. 1073-1075, 1096.

²⁵ Ter-Gevondian, *Armenia* p. 73.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 74.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 75-76.

²⁸ at-Tabari, *Annales*, ser. II, pp. 1177, 1181, al-Ja'kubi, II, p. 272, al-Kufi, *Kniga zavoevaniy*, p. 14.

²⁹ Ter-Gevondian, *Armenia*, p. 78.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 79, 85, 271.

³¹ There is information that he died in 101 A.H./719-20 A.D. See al-Kufi, *Kniga zavoevaniy* p. 79, note 16.

³² According to at-Tabari, this event took place in 90 A.H./708-09 A.D. See at-Tabari, *Annales*, ser. II, p. 1200.

³³ al-Ja'kubi, II, p. 346; Bartol'd, *Turkestan*, p. 243.

³⁴ Gryaznevicha, *Istoriya khalifov*, p. 25; Ter-Mkrtichian, *Armyanskie istochniki* p. 54.

³⁵ Ter-Mkrtichian, *Armyanskie istochniki* p. 58.

³⁶ at-Tabari, *Annales*, ser. II, pp. 1218-1235.

³⁷ Gryaznevicha, *Istoriya khalifov*, p. 25; Ter-Mkrtichian, *Armyanskie istochniki*, p. 54.

³⁸ Ter-Mkrtichian, *Armyanskie istochniki*, pp. 54, 58.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 58, notes.

⁴⁰ A. Ahmedov, "Svedeniya o turkskih narodah v trudah Khorezmi", in *Obshestvennye nauki v Uzbekistane*, 1987, No. 3, p. 58.

⁴¹ *Tabulae Geographicae Cl.Ptolemaei ad mentem auctoris restituta et emendatae, per Gerardum Mercatorem illustriss.*, Colonia Lalendis Julij, Ducis cliviaecsmographum, 1583, Asiae, VIII Tab.

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Chargola Exodus and Collective Action in the Colonial Tea Plantations of Assam: 2¹

Nitin Varma

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Chargola in History

K. N. Dutt's '*Landmarks of the freedom movement in Assam*', a classic text in the nationalist genre of history writing, in writing about this period in Assam, tries to establish the contribution of Assam to the nationalist freedom struggle. The established chronology of all the significant Congress led movements also becomes the chronological framework of discussion for showing how the Assamese people furthered it in their province. The non-cooperation movement in Assam was said to be occasioned by a very enthusiastic response to Gandhi's call in which even the coolies from tea gardens joined in. The entire episode is uncritically appropriated and homogenised in the annals of the Indian national movement:

One of the noticeable effects of the movement was the awakening it caused amongst the labour population working in the tea gardens and other industrial concerns in Assam. *The labourers began to feel an urge for emancipation from the exploitation to which their employers subjected them. Gandhiji's name cast a spell over them and it became the starting point of a new labour movement in Assam.*²

In another work of the same genre, entitled '*Nationalist upsurge in Assam*', and sponsored by the Government of Assam, once again the episode of the Chargola exodus is used to stand as testimony to Gandhi's messianic powers:

To the simple, poor people, Gandhiji was an avatar and they fondly believed that he had come to Assam to deliver them from their age-old bondage. Gandhiji's visit to Assam gave the tea workers an opportunity to take part in the Congress programmes. In May 1921, the historic labour exodus from Chargola and Longai valleys of Chachar district began when thousands of labourers of (the) thirteen tea gardens left their

gardens, shouting *Mahatma Gandhi ki Jai*.³

In her zeal to establish the direct role of Gandhi in the episode the author actually plays around with the chronology of the events. For example, Gandhi's visit to Assam in September 1921 is appropriated in the cause-effect sequence where his calls to involve the coolies in the Congress programme, leads to the historic exodus, a full four months back in May of that year!

Sanat Bose's treatment of the event in his book *Capital and Labour in Indian Tea Industry* printed under the aegis of All India Trade Union Congress (A.I.T.U.C), is extremely sensitive to the nuances of the economic downside and the general political condition. Specific examples of gardens from where the coolies left during the time of the exodus are closely analysed to show how the wages and remuneration provided on gardens fell far short of what should have been a minimum living wage. The economic conditions argues Bose, induced the coolies— already charged with the spirit of the times— to launch a struggle against conditions of oppression. However, in Bose's work too the element of passivity manifests itself in his use of the 'trickle down' paradigm which is emphasised here regarding the reception of ideas— Socialist or Nationalist. Thus he writes, that the anti imperialist sentiments and success of the Russian revolution leading to the creation of the first socialist state "gradually spread and ultimately touched even the distant borders of the country in the province of Assam and awakened the downtrodden tea garden labourer from his age-old slumber."⁴ Moreover, in his final analysis the lack of organisation of the coolies against the highly organised planter lobbies, and the failure of the Congress party to lead their struggles eventually made their attempts a "failure".

Sukomal Sen in his study of the '*Working class of India*' saw this event

as a new moment in the progressive hierarchy of struggles of the plantation workers. He writes,

Development of trade union consciousness and organisation among the tea plantation workers was a comparatively delayed phenomenon. Horrid isolation far from their homes, their ignorance, want of education, and difficulty of contact with the outside political and trade union workers, added with sharp vigil and revengeful attitude of the employers against any attempt for combination were factors responsible for the delayed process. *Yet their elementary passion for resistance against exploitation, humiliation, physical torture, and many other sorts of sadism committed by the British planters matured in gradual course into a higher consciousness to safeguard their interests collectively. Their collective abstention from work and their determined decision to abandon the tea gardens as happened in May 1921 actually climaxed the manifestation of this consciousness.*⁵

The transition from elementary passions in the early days in the plantations to higher forms of collective bargaining as witnessed in Chargola, is analysed as the "maturity" of the forms of protest. The delay in Sen's analysis is ascribed to the late development of trade union consciousness and associations among the tea workers of Assam. Protest and its modes are situated in an ahistorical teleological hierarchy where it only matures with the advent/contact of "higher" forms of ideology like socialism and nationalism. This is very symptomatic of Guha's reading, where he analysed the exodus as a '...a primitive rebel action against legitimised condition of serfdom— a product of an interaction between the Gandhian impact on primitive minds and the incipient class militancy.'⁶ Here the militancy of class and Gandhian impact is contrasted and

¹ The previous part of this paper was published in the previous issue of *Global South*. As promised, we continue with the rest of the paper here.

² KN Dutt (ed.), *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, Gauhati, 1958 (emphasis mine).

³ Shrutidevi Goswami, "The Nationalist upsurge: Its impact on peasants and tea garden workers", in Arun Bhuyan (ed.) *Nationalist Upsurge in Assam*, Guwahati, 2000, p. 194. For similar writings see Sujit Kumar Ghosh, 'Labour Strike in the Surma Valley Tea Gardens' in *Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 7th Session, Pasighat, 1986-87.

⁴ Sanat Kumar Bose, *Capital and Labour in Indian Tea Industry*, AITUC, p. 96.

⁵ Sukomal Sen, *Working Class of India*, Calcutta, 1977, pp. 60-61. Emphasis mine.

⁶ Amalendu Guha, "Formation of a Working Class in Assam Plantations: A Study in Retrospect in North East India" in *Problems of tea industry in North East India*, Calcutta, 1981, p. 94.

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kept separate with an action that is 'rebellious' and minds that are 'primitive'. The distinction is not just terminological but shares a fundamental sense of evolutionary logic.

Both nationalist histories and those dealing with labour written thus far have therefore failed to address those stereotypes that the contemporary writings have managed to perpetuate. The coolies unproblematically assume the identity of a labourer in conflict with capital or a nationalist resisting the forces of imperialism in these renditions. Passivity again comes out as the hallmark of the coolie action where these 'larger processes' and 'deeper ideologies' somehow have an undeniable sense of inevitability— a pre-given process in history. This is in no way to suggest that 'pure autonomy' is the central characteristic of coolie consciousness and action, but to forcefully make the point that it was not predetermined either.

Having analysed the reading of the exodus in the historical literature— both colonialist and the nationalist— in the following section we may take a look at the specificities of the development of the plantation in Surma Valley especially with reference to Sylhet and try to open up the our discussion on the Chargola exodus specifically addressing the problems we posed in the very beginning.

Plantations in Surma valley and the Recruitment of Coolie Labour

Wild tea was discovered in the Surma valley in 1855 and the first garden was opened in Sylhet, Malnicherra in 1857. The progress of industry though was slow, especially in comparison to Assam valley and Cachar. The development of Sylhet as a major tea-producing district vis-à-vis the other tea districts of Assam valley took shape only in the later decades of the nineteenth century.

By 1895, Sylhet was in fact the largest tea-producing district and at the turn of the century almost produced 4,000,000 pounds more than any other district of the province.⁷ An overwhelming majority of the coolies who were employed here were from UP, and accounted for almost 28 per cent of the total labour force unlike the Assam Valley plantations, which showed a preponderance of coolies coming from Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas. Interestingly, these 'up-country' coolies from UP were highly detested in the Assam valley because over a period of time they had come to acquire a notorious reputation of being very weak in constitution, showing high mortality rates and in general having poor labouring abilities. They were said to be 'afflicted' by an irresistible propensity to desert and seemed to find a virtually mandatory mention in the annual Labour reports. The coolies from NWP thus stood at one extreme of the spectrum of the racialised discourse of labour, while the perfect coolie came to be epitomised by the 'Jungles' of Chotanagpur and the Sonthals. In fact, by the mid 1870s the question of putting a blanket ban on 'up-country' emigrants in the Assam valley plantations was finally raised in light of the excessive mortality observed among them.⁸ Strangely however, in the case of the Surma valley especially the Chargola valley area these very terms of criticism for the NWP coolies were reversed and were used as a confirmation of their suitability as coolies.

" In case of Chargola valley... contrary to the general opinion elsewhere, *NWP coolies are considered the best available*, both in regard to work and ability to stand the Sylhet climate... coolies of this nationality formed a striking contrast to those found in other parts of the province (Assam)."

The Report of the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1906 gives a plausible explanation for this apparent anomaly for it says that "preferences are formed for some classes more because the planter is familiar with them than because others are really inferior." To some extent the late development of the industry in Sylhet might have been one of the overriding reasons for this pattern. There has been a fair amount of evidence suggesting a decline in importance of certain 'catchment areas' of labour for the overseas plantation, and a simultaneous increase in labour immigration to some inland destinations. Chotanagpur region which supplied 40-50 per cent of colonial emigrants during the 1840s and 1850s became an important source of labour supply to Assam in the following decades. A similar trend was observable in the labour supplying districts of Azamgarh, Ballia, Ghasipur and Jaunpur of NWP, where there was a decline in supply of indentured labourers to the overseas plantation in the last decades of nineteenth century.⁹ Surma valley plantations especially the plantations of Sylhet, which were coming up most rapidly during this period, drew upon this source of supply of labour.

So there were important differences in procedure both as regards the mode of recruitment followed and the form and period of the contract under which the labourer was placed in the two valleys. The pattern of labour recruitment through the agency of sardars in the Surma valley was most characteristic of the Chargola valley.

The table published in the Special report shows the sharp variance of prices of coolies arising out of different recruitment methods, which interestingly gets racially defined.¹⁰

[Table1]

COST	METHOD OF RECRUITMENT ACCORDING TO CHEAPNESS	NATIONALITY OF COOLIES IMPORTED ACCORDING TO CHEAPNESS
Rs.17-Rs. 50 (1-3)	1. FREE SIRDARI, {the sirdar working independently}	1. NWP, including Behar and Oudh and CP
	2. FREE SIRDARI {under the control of an agent}	1. Bengalis, including Uriyas and Ganjamese
	3. ACT SIRDARI	1. Junglies, Chotanagpuris and Sonthals
Rs.50-Rs100 (4-5)	4. MIXED SIRDARI	
	5. CONTRACTOR	

⁷ J.B. Bhattacharjee, *Cachar under British Rule in North-East India* New Delhi, 1977, pp. 199-200 and *Assam District Gazetteers, Sylhet District*, p. 136.

⁸ There was a lot of ambiguity regarding upcountry emigrants but taken to be generally the ones coming from beyond the Rajmehal Hills. Revenue and Agriculture Department, Emigration Branch, A Proceedings, May 1875, Nos. 18-20 and Revenue and Agriculture Department, Emigration Branch, B Proceedings, May 1877, Nos. 8-11, NAI.

⁹ Pradipta Chaudhury, "Labour Migration from United Provinces, 1881-1911", *Studies in History*, 1992 (8,1), pp.13-14; Gyanendra Pandey, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*, New Delhi, 1990, p.77.

¹⁰ Special Report On the Working Act I of 1882 in the Province of Assam During Years 1886-89, p. 19.

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The interesting point to note is that the different catchment areas were characterised by the preference of a particular type of labour recruitment strategy, which costed differently to the employer. The sardar working outside the Act almost typical of the coolies coming from North West Provinces to the Surma valley, being the cheapest mode of recruitment, while the contractor or sardars working under the ambit of the legal and official procedures procuring coolies at the higher rates.

Thus drive for a cheap labour force meant a growing preference for Sardari coolies obtained outside the Act. However, simultaneously, Act XIII of 1859 was brought in to diminish his bargaining powers and execute control over labour and life.

Act VI has been practically discarded (in Surma valley), and many labourers work without agreements of any sort, though the *bulk of labour force is under Act XIII of 1859 and cannot therefore be described as free in the sense that labour in Duars is free...* The existence of Act XIII agreement steadies the labour force and gives the planter some guarantee of its permanence... the coolie is to a certain extent regarded as tied to his garden; if he goes away on leave for two three days, he carries with him a leave chit from his manager.. that it is a fair one that the *hold which a manager has over his labour force is comparable to that which a strong zemindar has over his ryots in backward parts of Bengal.*

A significant fallout of the Sardari coolies recruited in the Surma valley—mostly without recourse to the Act—was that it ensured a strong “community sense” in the coolies recruited. It also ensured a certain degree of continued family life among the new immigrants, for a larger number of married couples and families were being imported. In the Assam valley, on the other hand, the upcountry coolies were mainly isolated men and women with no family or other acquaintances recruited through unlicensed contractors, unlike the Sardari recruitment in Surma valley.

The construction and settlement of the coolie lines was done in such a way so as to ensure that each line housed coolies of the same “stock”. Interactions across these ‘ethnic’ coolie lines were sharply limited because of the strict monitoring done

by the *chaukidars* policing these lines. Communication barriers, because of the fact that coolies coming from disparate area spoke different languages, could also have been a critical factor in maintaining this distance. Even at the work in gardens and factories located in the plantations, the coolies were placed under the supervision of the very sardars who had recruited them restricting the inter community exchanges. Therefore there was this continuous reproduction of natal solidarities, and the workplace came to be geared along the axis of community, which had an important bearing on the expression of collective behaviour in the colonial plantation.

However by the turn of the century the ‘*unassisted sardari*’ recruitment was coming under increasing pressure and checks. The debates arising out of the maladies of the process of ‘free recruitment’, most significantly the rising incidence of cholera and the scandals of the abduction of women. The 1901 Act tried to redress to the concerns by making the process of recruitment more stringent.

This had a negative bearing on the *sardari* recruitment the valley was used to. C. W. A. Trevor, the manager of the Chargola Tea Estate clearly highlighted these concerns before Labour Enquiry Commission of 1906:

My labour force is entirely North West. With the abolition of the Act, I hope to be able to recruit successfully through sardars, as there will be no interference with the men I send down. Upto 1898 I used to have no difficulty in recruiting through sardars in Ghazipur and Ballia; they went down and brought up their own relatives and acquaintances as third class passengers.¹¹

This Labour Enquiry Commission was primarily concerned with removing the prejudices concerned with the *coolie* emigration to Assam. It was in favour of *sardari recruitment* which it described as ‘the best way of working with natives of the coolie classes is... through headmen who understands their likes and dislikes in a way no European can do.’ This was reflective of the general mood of the British administration from the late nineteenth century of adhering to the native norms of morality and hierarchy.¹² *Sardari* system of recruitment therefore was thought to fit most into the scheme of things. By the legislation of 1908, control over contractors was tightened, recruitment by unlicensed contractors abolished and increased

facilities given to recruitment by garden *sardars* working under the local agents of TDLA. By 1915 the Assam Labour and Emigration Amendment Act (Act VIII of 1915) was passed, under which the system of recruitment by contractors was abolished, and a Labour Board for the supervision of local agents and of the recruitment, engagement and emigration to labour districts of natives of India was constituted.

World War I and the Recruitment Drive

However it is important to bear in mind the specific context of the exodus especially the changes introduced in the wake of the First World War. The war had sparked off a boom in the industry with a spurt in demands, with over 100,000 *coolies* recruited in the 1915-16 season. The next two seasons however showed a sharp dip in the *coolies* travelling to Assam, with only 19,000 coolies being recruited in 1917-18 season. The end of the war meant that there was a stoppage of this abnormal demand of the labour within the recruiting districts.¹³ The existing workforce however was also getting depleted by the influenza epidemics raging in the tea gardens, and certain gardens of South Sylhet were facing a persistent problem of desertions to Independent Tiperrah. In 1918-19 and 1919-20 seasons more than three lakh coolies were recruited to the gardens of Assam.¹⁴ It was the newer coolies, who formed the bulk of the coolies leaving the plantations during the exodus. This was confirmed by most of the managers interviewed by the Enquiry Commission, and can be seen clearly in the statistics given in the Labour Enquiry Reports. There were also reports of over four to five thousand of the coolies returning to the two districts of Gorakhpur and Basti from where most of the recent recruits came.¹⁵

These new recruits were seriously impacted by high mortality during transit, due to cholera and the influenza epidemic prevailing in the labour districts. What is also interesting is that there were numerous instances of violence against and oppression of these new lower caste coolies by the older ‘caste’ coolies of Chargola¹⁶ from Azamgarh and Ghazipur, which had earlier been the major “suppliers” of recruits for these inland destinations.

Based on this the Deputy Commissioner established a connection between newer/bad quality coolies and the coolies leaving, and in his state-

¹¹ *Proceedings of Assam Labour Enquiry Committee*, 1906, p. 144.

¹² The perceived accommodation between West and East, market and custom, capital and labour, was characteristic of the mood of British administration towards the end of the nineteenth century. See the introduction of Peter Robb, (ed.), *Dalit Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India*, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 17-22.

¹³ The all-India area under tea had risen from 624,000 acres in 1914, to nearly 692,000 acres in 1919. P. Griffiths, *History of the Indian Tea Industry*, London, 1967, p. 177.

¹⁴ ALECR 1921-22, p. 103.

¹⁵ *Report of the Revenue administration of UP for the year ending 30th September 1921*. Reproduced in ALECR 1921-22, p. 15.

¹⁶ Fortnightly report of 1st half of May and ALECR 1921-22, p. 12.

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ment two factors for the coolie exodus are articulated. First, that most of them were new, of bad health and physique on account of indiscriminate recruiting and in a state of abject poverty and second that these were the perfect conditions for them to be manipulated and in the words of the officer 'bad recruiting made the non-co-operation propaganda easy.'¹⁷ The transition in this explanatory strategy, from factor one to factor two— as if they were stages— shares in the depoliticisation of coolie action, for any action with slight inclination of politics has to be attributed to an external agent— in this case the non-co-operators.

However a fragmentary look into the 'voices' shows that the coolies were extremely alive to the prevailing political situation and economic condition and were not simply reacting to the economic depression or non co-operation propaganda. Moreover, the 'bad recruiting/'new recruit' theory did not explain why only the new recruits of Chargola and to an extent Longai valley left the gardens? Also how does this explain the nature of the exodus, which was not restricted to a particular garden and at times not just to the newer coolies?¹⁸

The fact that the eighteen gardens were in close proximity (all the gardens were located within the distance of 15-20 miles) opened up possibilities of interaction, association and circulation of information outside the strict confines of the colonial enclaves. The district of Sylhet, being a densely populated area, the tea gardens and the surrounding village population had significant overlaps in their social and geographical space and were not as divorced as the 'enclaves' of Assam valley plantations may suggest. Ganj, a very common suffix used in Sylhet district, indicated the place to be a market place. The 1906 Report indicates to this fact:

Bazaars are numerous (in Surma Valley); besides the public markets nearly every tea garden has its weekly or bi-weekly hat, to which crowds of villagers and tea garden coolies may be seen streaming either to make purchases or with supplies or goods for sale.¹⁹

These markets were "a strong bond of union between the two parties [villagers and coolies], as the villagers derive[d] profit from the sale of commodities, which the garden coolies

are only glad to buy."²⁰ But bazaars and hats were sites where not just economic relationships were established but also significant information networks were forged, which could not deprive the coolies of news about the general situation in the locality and region. In this a very crucial role was played by the presence of a large body of time-expired coolies who were settled outside the garden grants in the neighbouring villages. They frequented the bazaars and hats to sell their products but also acted as important conduits of information and news as they shared ethnic and more importantly linguistic affinities with the coolie population. These emerged as sites where the colonial claims of absolute control were contested. More importantly, the bazaars emerging as an arena of disorder in the colonial imagination, giving rise to voices of dissent and 'rumour', actually revealed the state's inability to police it. This becomes all the more interesting if we take into account that most of the new labourers were coming from the Eastern districts of Gorakhpur and Basti, where Gandhi of late had assumed cultic status and rumours around him were very much in the air.

Stop this Nasty Chat! Anxieties and Initiatives of the State and the Nationalists

One of the first measures taken by the Assam administration, during the exodus, was the application of Section 144 prohibiting meetings and speeches within seven kilometres of the gardens. However, the Labour Enquiry Committee soon recognised that, even after this prohibition, 'an insidious campaign was being conducted surreptitiously on some gardens'.²¹ Therefore, it was not the regular meetings and speeches of the non co-operators but bazaar talk and gossip which were creating all the trouble. There was in fact also a proposal by the government of Assam, to apply the Seditious Meeting Act X of 1911 to the districts of Sylhet and Cachar and declare Karimganj subdivision as a proclaimed area.²²

A story titled Non-Co-operation written by a manager describing the unrest in a tea garden during this period articulates similar sentiments.²³ In the story, Pano, a Santhali woman who was a maid at the Manager's bungalow is the narrator relating to her friends the coming of "trouble" in her garden. She says, "there are

strange tales going around these days. They say that the Angrezi Raj [British Raj] is at end in India, and that Ghandi is the King of Hindustan.... A rumour has also been heard that the coolies on all gardens in Sylhet have gone on strike, and that several Sahibs have been severely beaten, and bungalows and tea-houses have been burnt down, and the coolies demand to be sent back to their country. It is great *zoolum*, [injustice] sister, indeed, and all this may have happened and be true; but do these stupid Ghandi-wallahs think they will get better of Sahib-logs." The very use of a coolie woman as the narrator is a confirmation of it being the "authentic" voice of the coolies. Speaking about the Ghandi-wallah's *zoolum* Pano says that a Fakeer of late was seen moving in the lines of her garden and when confronted by the Burra Sahib salaamed him and called down blessings on him. "...but scarcely had he gone out of sight, when the evil one started inciting the coolies to go on strike and murder the feringhi as he called the Sahib." This suspicion of Pano is finally vindicated when a gang of "drunken" coolies, incited by the Ghandi agents, assault her for being the informer and lay siege at the Manager's Bungalow armed with daos and heavy sticks. The use of the character of a Fakeer establishes the covertness of their activity— information and news was not being propagated through "conventional" channels of meetings and speeches by the non co-operators but through distorted manipulative rumours circulated by the disguised fakeers, which was creating the nuisance. Fakeer in this account also facilitates in establishing the externality of this voice of dissension, once again denying agency to the coolie, which validates his docile apolitical stereotype but at the same time uneasily expresses the gaps in the information grid of the plantation and the inability to effectively police it.

This unease was also reflected in the measures taken by the colonial administration to tackle the situation. Attempts were made to strengthen the armed police, intelligence system was beefed up and counter propaganda work was undertaken.²⁴ Special assistance was sought from the United Provinces Government to this end, and they accordingly sent two men to conduct counter— propaganda work amongst tea garden coolies from

¹⁷ ALECR 1921-22, p. 12.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 11.

¹⁹ The Report of Assam Labour Enquiry Committee, 1906, pp. 66-69.

²⁰ Annual Report on Labour immigration into Assam for the year 1885.

²¹ ALECR 1921-22, p. 19.

²² Strike of tea garden coolies in Assam, Proposal of the Government of Assam to apply the Seditious meeting Act X Of 1911 to that province. Home Department, Political Branch, June 1921, pp. 143-146. NAI.

²³ Maurice P. Hanley, *Tales and Songs from an Assam Tea Garden*, Thacker, Sphinx & Co., Calcutta, 1928, pp. 58-63.

²⁴ Political situation in Assam— Increase of the strength of troops in the province for internal security purposes. Home Department, Political Branch, File no. 534, 1922, NAI.

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United Provinces. Assam rifles were augmented in affected areas so that the continued authority of the British Raj could be impressed upon the coolies.²⁵

The desire to control information was not limited to the colonial state; the nationalists also realised their shortcomings. A very familiar and often quoted explanation given by the coolies of Chargola valley for their decision to leave was that it was *Gandhi ka Hookum*. However making this as a case for simplistic connection with the Non co-operation movement and as an evidence of following the Gandhian creed falls flat on its face when one looks at the matter closely. A former non-co-operator from Silchar testifying before the Enquiry committee said:

When I was in the non-co-operation movement I was deadly against the coolie exodus.... When Mr. Gandhi visited these parts some coolies were produced before him and he told them that they had no complaints to make and that they had better go back.... Mr. Pandey [Ratabari meeting] spoke to the coolies: he did not however directly make any suggestion that they should go, but his speech did infuse a spirit of independence and free will into the minds of the coolies.²⁶

The fact that the individual having changed his political predilections was now on the payrolls of the Indian Tea Association might have induced him to take such a polarised view of things. Nonetheless, the whole idea of leaving the garden in a body as being organised or even tutored, to the coolies, by the non-co-operators does not stand the test of evidence.

Gandhi's first reaction to the exodus is very symptomatic in this regard:

I should be sorry if anybody used my name to lead the men to desert their employers, it was clear enough that it is purely a labour trouble. Das and Andrews informed that the trouble is purely economic.²⁷

In another issue of *Young India*, in a reply to a planter accusing him and his men of inducing the coolies to strike, Gandhi goes on to write:

I can assure him (the planter) that

I never advised a single coolie in Assam to strike. I do not profess to know the problem of labour there. He should moreover know that there is no non-co-operation going on with capital or capitalists. Non Co-operation is going on with the existing Government as a system. But there is bound to be non-cooperation wherever there is evil, oppression and injustice, whether anybody wishes it or not. The people, having found the remedy, will resort to it. If they do stupidly or unjustifiably, they alone will be the real losers.²⁸

A yearning to give a distinctive orientation to the movement among the tea coolies is evident from Gandhi's statements. However the agencies to make that happen were not in place, and therefore the claims to own up or disown the movement appears to be of no consequence in this context. Gandhi, in his visit to Surma Valley in September 1921, particularly expressed his disapproval of the coolie strikes and hartals and censured them for indifference to what he regarded as the more important matters of boycott and the use of spinning wheel suggesting such desires and their failings.²⁹

The introduction of the Gandhian message in this context, often at variance with the dictates of Gandhi and the official Congress creed, suggests a lack of control over the information networks within the plantation area (which covered a number of gardens) and suggests that the circulating population of coolies had a peculiar dynamics of operation. The general climate was one of defiance, anticipating a possible end to the British Raj and the imminence of Gandhi's Raj. The frequent demonstrations, public meetings and hartals in the nearby Subdivisional headquarters of Karimganj and the Sylhet town and the extreme low rates of realisation of land revenue in the adjoining villages could have played an important role in the circulation of such ideas. The coolies bound by a rigorous work-schedule with various checks on their movement, could not have personally attended the public meetings and speeches in large numbers, but nonetheless the interactions with villagers, ex-coolies and even the non-cooperators at these market places could not deprive them

of the 'buzz in the town'. But this does not warrant a case being made that these networks could have been effectively manipulated by any of these agencies, so as to be able to authenticate what was official 'news' and 'information' and what was the distorted 'propaganda' and 'rumour'.

Gandhi Baba ka Hookum: Fall of the Sahib, Rumour of Gandhi

What then were these rumours that were in circulation in the gardens of Chargola valley? Were these also informed by the specific context that coolies lived and worked?

The projection of the relationship of manager-coolie within the garden as analogous to zamindar-ryot masks the controls that the managing agencies, positioned in Calcutta, exercised over vital decisions like the fixing of wages. The manager who claimed almost unrestrained power within the plantation was sometimes not more than a mere "employee" executing the decisions of superior authorities.³⁰ Such concerns were raised from the turn of the century evident from the statement made by the Commissioner of Assam valley.

... Private concerns are giving place to companies, and private owners are disappearing. Control is being removed from managers on the spot to absentee Agents and Directors. The cost of production (local cost- I cannot say about Calcutta charges) is being reduced...³¹

However some leverage and autonomy was available to him so as to be able to effect any changes that would steady the workforce and create a good moral hold over them. Authority within the plantation showed strong paternalistic inclinations most clearly seen in the person of the manager (the *Burra Sahib*). It was therefore no surprise that a particular garden was often identified with its manager and the discharge of wage and non-wage benefits on it was seen to be his prerogative and obligation. The fulfilment of such responsibilities and obligations was not just a part of the job of the manager, rather it was the basis of his legitimacy.

But in this period of economic boom in the tea industry, managers were left with little discretion in effecting wage hikes or giving out

²⁵ Fortnightly report for the Second half of July for the Province of Assam. NAI.

²⁶ Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 74.

²⁷ *Young India*, 8 June in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XX. Emphasis mine.

²⁸ *Young India*, 29 June in *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XX, pp. 299-300. Emphasis mine.

²⁹ Khan Bahadur Saiyid Abdul Majid, a minister who visited Sylhet during the period said, "[that] the people were quite unanimous in thinking that Gandhi unseen was a far greater personage than Gandhi seen... and the common people's observation was that he was only a *kaya*". Fortnightly report for 1st half of September 1921. Even during Gandhi's visit to Cuddapah district in Andhra in September 1921 he was greeted by "enormous" crowd of villagers who believed that he would get their taxes reduced and forest regulations abolished- many returned home greatly disappointed. Quoted in Sumit Sarkar, "Primitive rebellion and Modern Nationalism: A note on Forest Satyagraha in the Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience Movements", p. 19.

³⁰ Sharit Bhowmick, *Class Formation in the Plantation System*, New Delhi, 1981, See Chapter 3.

³¹ Letter from P. G. Meltius, Commissioner of the Assam Valley Districts to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam. Dated 6th May, 1904. Rev A, 77-117, Aug 1904, ASA.

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other remuneration to the coolies. Concerns were raised about the prestige of managers being undermined by the 'hard and fast' decisions as regards the wage rates by the Calcutta agencies. There were cases of coolies writing directly to the agencies for relief, which was said to be 'most subversive of discipline and the very necessary patriarchal control of the manager.'

In such a situation, consider the scene on the morning of the 3 May in the Anipur tea estate described by the manager, from where it all began:

... On the morning of 3 May a number of coolies demanded an increase of wages, i.e., 8 annas and 6 annas for men and women. Previous to this an increase of wages had not been asked for. I [the manager] told them it was impossible for me to give them the wages demanded... some one amongst them shouted *Gandhi Maharaj ki jai*. They left the muster ground in a body and in half an hour were leaving the garden.

It is important here to repeat the decisions taken in the meeting of the managers and local officials held at Dullabcherra Club on 6 May— just four days into the exodus and already one thousand coolies had left. The extremely tense and nervous body of the planters most reluctantly agreed upon a hike of wages but emphasised that such a decision should be communicated to the coolies at the earliest to stop the spread of the unrest.³²

However the delay in implementation and the withdrawal of concessions on many gardens, after being announced led to their not being ratified by their Calcutta agents. This could not but have seriously eroded the credibility, legitimacy and sense of authority of the managers among the coolie population and therefore they found it futile to engage in a negotiatory process with him.

Some managers on the other hand, complained against the submission of the government to the demand of wage hikes under the pressure of strike on a later date. This they believed proved counterproductive as coolies now thought it was on account of Gandhi's orders that the wages have been increased. Therefore the decision to hike wages did not necessarily reinvigorate the sense of authority as expected by the employers and the local administration. The

extra Assistant commissioner of Karimganj Subdivision, for example, ventilated the complaints of several managers that even with those increased wages the coolies were doing just as they liked and were not working satisfactorily.³³ The manager of Singlacherra Tea Estate related the case of a male returnee who said that he would not have stayed back at the time of exodus for even a rupee a day!³⁴

This bankruptcy of legitimacy probably also stemmed from a kind of scepticism towards European medicine and hospitals. Dr. Dunlop, of the Chargola Valley, read this 'resistance' as a part of the 'Gandhi propaganda' used to induce people to have nothing to do with hospitals and Western medicine.³⁵ However, this was not a simple case of tradition versus modernity but reflective of their general ineffectiveness given the high rates of mortality seen during this period which evoked a deep sense of cynicism. More than one and half lakh people lost their lives in the tea estates of Assam in the 1917 to 1921 period. It is important to bear in mind that gardens in Surma valley traditionally plucked coarse, unlike the gardens of Assam valley where fine plucking was carried out. By the time the War ended, in order to equate supply and demand garden agents realised that the remedy lay in resorting to fine plucking. This lessened the opportunities for overtime work dramatically. Secondly, the precision demanded in fine plucking meant an obvious fall in the quantity plucked, calling for a revision in the daily task for plucking. However these changes were not always taken into consideration and many managers steadfastly stuck to their old rates.

Wages and tasks often formed the reason for collective grievance and action. The coolies on some gardens demanded the reduction of *nirikh* (task) or *nal* (measurement).³⁶ Coolies of the Lungla Tea Estate during the exodus went on strike for three weeks in April, asking for the same rates as given in the neighbouring gardens. But when the new rates with the increased hoeing tasks were offered they refused, continuing with their strike.³⁷ The fall in volume of leaves plucked and no necessary amendments in the tasks, aggravated by the oppressive practices in gardens in weighing leaves meant a sharp decline in the daily earnings of the coolies.

Deductions were made for the weight of the basket, for wet leaf and the quality of the leaf plucked. Not only did the managers find nothing wrong in deducting for the "wastage" in manufacture of tea called the 'factory charges', but one manager went to the extent of penalising the coolies an additional two pounds in peak seasons to make up for the loss on plucking early and late in the year when leaf was scarce!³⁸ No rules were observed in regard to these deductions and in some gardens in Surma valley the deductions were as high as fifty per cent.³⁹

Later, a novel practice of payment called the 'ticket-system' became quite common in the Surma valley tea gardens. In this system, the previous day's work was paid in brass tokens of different face values at the morning muster. There was a feeling among managers that it encouraged a good muster ensuring better attendance and discipline among their working population. This meant pressing difficulties for the coolies, who was practically without any money in hand to buy his daily provisions and forced to take more credit from the local *kayas/mahajans*. The gardens generally cashed these tokens on a weekly basis— by the time, which the coolies might have already been gravely indebted to the mahajans. The Superintendent of Police of Sylhet, observed that a coolie who took a ticket worth four annas (twenty five pice) to the mahajan got only fifteen pice in return.⁴⁰

Therefore the cutting down on the expenditure and changed working practices within the garden meant that certain "norms" were not honoured— coolies in many gardens were not given the usual agreement bonuses, *ticca* amount was reduced, and they were forced to take leave. In addition, land, which was an important feature on the plantations of Surma valley, was increasingly becoming a scarce commodity due to heavy influx of newer coolies. Also the mad extensions during the time of war could only have intruded into the land held by coolies for cultivation or grazing lands for their cattle.

The South Sylhet gardens, which were in close proximity to the independent state of Tipperah, saw a substantial number of coolies moving into the new gardens being opened there, and were being offered not just higher

³² Conference of Chargola Valley Tea Planters and Government Officials, 6 May 1921.

³³ Rai Bahadur Panchu Gopal Mukherjee, Extra Asst Com, SDO, Karimganj and H. A. Wray, Manager, Singlacherra T. E. Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, pp. 61-63 & p. 56.

³⁴ H. A. Wray, Manager, Singlacherra T. E. in Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 55.

³⁵ ALECR 1921-22, p. 97.

³⁶ Ibid, p. 65.

³⁷ Evidence in *ibid*, p. 42.

³⁸ Warner, Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 42.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Evidence, *ibid*, p. 31.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 87-88.

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wages but land too, for cultivation free of rent for a term of two or three years.⁴¹ In making such a decision to move, the coolies show that they were extremely alive to the situation, made evident from statement of the manager of Madhabcherra tea estate:

They [the coolies] put forward their grievances... for instance they have been telling me that such and such garden and such garden is paying 8 annas for a day whereas we give them 4 and 5 annas only. During the last 4 or 5 years about 50 % of the coolies on one garden gradually but peacefully absconded to Tipperah, without causing any commotion... coolies are attracted to Tipperah because they say that they would get 8 annas for each *hasira* and also plenty of paddy fields.⁴²

However the local tea bodies and the planting community signatories to the 'anti-enticement' agreement did not take this merely as a case of the coolie exercising a better choice. In an illustrative case from the Naraincherra garden of Sylhet district in the year 1911, warrants were issued against certain coolies under agreement who had left for the adjoining Balacherra garden. The assistant manager along with his sardars and two constables proceeded to apprehend the 'absconding' coolies. Two of them were caught on the way. However the news of their arrest agitated their 'fellow coolies' and other coolies of the Balacherra garden who came out in force armed with sticks and bamboos. The arresting party was attacked and the prisoners rescued.⁴³

The management, at times of scarcity and high prices, used to arrange for the supply of rice and clothing at concessional rates. But the arbitrary usage of Act XIII and contracting budgets of the gardens were inadequate to satisfactorily live out these obligations even when prices were showing a sharp rise. An oft

repeated complaint of the departing coolies as *Pet nahi bharta*⁴⁴ in this instance appears to be a better "indicator" of the disenchantment of the coolies with the life in the plantations than the cold figures of falling wages and rising cost of living.⁴⁵

These conditions of a bankruptcy of legitimacy and a general sense of changed conditions in life exacerbated problems within the plantations, which were increasingly articulated during the period. Grievances and at times purposeful action was directed against the structure of authority within the plantation. During the April strikes in the Burtoll and Lydiacherra gardens, the coolies complained of babus cheating them in payments and drove out some of them. On being interrogated the coolies said that they wanted to get rid of the babus first and then deal with the manager.⁴⁶ J. W. Hallan, the manager of Phulcherra Division, talked about the "absurd" demand made by his coolies that no Europeans speak to the women and no Babus speak directly to them either and that everything be done through their sardars.⁴⁷

The mechanism of discipline and punishment within the plantations needs to be emphasised. The coolies though were "free" in the legal sense with the abolition of Act VI in 1908 but the use of Act XIII to "steady" the labour force was a very serious impediment to their claimed freedom. The practice of private arrest not included in the Act was exercised. Cases of coolies returning from jail to complete their contract on the garden was not entirely unheard of either. The Manager of Bidyanagar Tea Estate in the Chargola valley brought to notice a case in which the Manager of a neighbouring garden sent *chowkidars* to his garden to bring back a woman whose husband had left in the Chargola exodus.⁴⁸ The managers thus tried their best to maintain their claims to exercise unrestrained power, which was no longer as compulsive

and invincible. The authority exercised by the babus was also resented, especially for their corrupt practices in maintaining the accounts of coolies.⁴⁹ In addition to this the sexual exploitation of the 'coolie women' by the managers also drew deep antipathy. The Khoreal shooting case where a manager shot a coolie who was resisting his daughter being forcibly taken by him was widely publicised. The fact that the Manager got away with a small fine could not but have drawn deep resentment.⁵⁰

The loss of legitimacy, oppression and the generally depressed material and living standards was inscribed in the message and person of Gandhi. There were reports from the garden staff, that letters had been received by certain coolies from the United Provinces that said that Gandhi would arrange free conveyance of coolies to their homes. Some of the departing coolies claimed that Gandhi has sent a steamer to Karimganj to take them back to their home districts where they would be given land for free. There were also rumours of food without work, and land now under tea to be given to them to cultivate. In some cases the garden and hats were said to be Gandhi's, and that the manager had no right over them, and that they could cut out the tea and plant paddy and sugarcane instead.⁵¹ While in some gardens hearing that the wages in the nearby garden have been hiked agitated coolies stated that Gandhi has increased wages and demanded similar hikes.⁵²

Gandhi Ka Hookum symbolised the yearnings; anxieties and the general spirit of defiance of the coolies expressed and legitimised through cultural/religious idioms, which very were much in circulation. That the coolies of the valley came from similar ethnic/regional background could also have been a strong factor in the effectiveness of mobilisation along such idioms. During the time of the exodus there were reports of a boy in

⁴² Babu Rajniranjan Deb, Madhabcherra, Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 29.

⁴³ Home Department, Police Branch, April 1911, 56, Part B.

⁴⁴ The rough translation as 'there is not enough to eat' fails to capture the embedded social and cultural meanings of *Pet nahi bharta*. It does not merely suggest hunger and deprivation of the speaker but legitimises her/his actions taken as a consequence of it. Action manifested in variegated forms and could lead to violent attacks, food riots and the collective desire to leave as evident in our case.

⁴⁵ Sumit Sarkar in his study of conditions and nature of 'subaltern' militancy argues that the concept of breakdown of the authority structure, real or often rumoured was central to the most outbreaks. This breakdown, he argues, can have two dimensions- a sudden change in the conditions of life and the rumours of weakening of authority structures. Ranajit Dasgupta has analysed a fascinating instance of agitation in the Duars tea plantation region in 1916, drawing upon symbols and idioms of the Tana Bhagat movement in Chotanagpur but definitely showing the specificity of the locale. The rumours of the falling British Raj and the coming of the *German baba* could be understood in the immediate historical context. The dislocating impact of the war on the economy and the German victories in its early years gave rise to the rumour that the British Raj was not only in crisis but also coming to an end. Sumit Sarkar, "The Conditions and Nature of Subaltern Militancy: Bengal from Swadeshi to Non-Cooperation, 1905-22", in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies III*, p. 305; Ranajit Das Gupta, "Oraoon Labour Agitation: Duars in Jalpaiguri District, 1915-16", *Economic and Political Weekly*, September 30, 1989.

⁴⁶ Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 72.

⁴⁷ J. W. Hallan, Manager, Phulcherra division, Consolidated Tea and Lands Company, Evidence, *ibid*, pp. 38-39.

⁴⁸ Evidence, *ibid*, p. 86.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 31.

⁵⁰ The local press most extensively covered the Khoreal Shooting case and even news articles in Calcutta were published in evidence of the oppression of coolies by the planters and complicity of the state in it.

⁵¹ Panchu Gopal Mukherjee, Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 62.

⁵² Mukherjee, Evidence, *ibid*.

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one of the gardens of Anipur proclaiming that the spirit of Gandhi had come upon him and asked all the people to gather around and listen to what he had to say (in effect what Gandhi had to say or, *Gandhi ka Hookum*). He was placed in a Hindu shrine along the lines and worshipped by coolies for two days. Another man made similar claims in the Singlacherra gardens.⁵³ There were reports of coolies taking oath over a bowl of holy water not to disobey *Gandhi Ka Hookum* of leaving the gardens in a body, else they would be turned into mud or stone!⁵⁴

Religion has at times been seen as playing a specific role in a predominantly peasant society untouched by secular creeds where the breakdown of the world could only be perceived in supernatural terms.⁵⁵ This Secular/

Religious divide in modes of articulation of protest fails to appreciate the 'culture' of protest and the idioms through which they are expressed. The use of religious/cultural metaphors, stories and idioms did not necessarily mean that they were conceptualised in the spiritual rather than a material domain. Such a dichotomy creates a false distinction and simplifies the complex of no necessary essentials.

Victory cries of *Gandhi Maharaj ki Jai* [Hail King Gandhi] manifested that defiance into collective action, which was after all justified. Legitimacy of the act and its collective nature played on this self-perpetuating interplay that it was justified because it was collective and that it was collective and so

justified. Many coolies interrogated by their managers and sardars during the exodus said that they were leaving because their brethren had decided to go.⁵⁶ Formal discharge certificates were needed to be obtained for coolies leaving the gardens serving under an agreement of Act XIII.⁵⁷ The Subdivisional officer of Karimganj who met many batches of the coolies pointed out this "illegality" of their action, but agreed upon the practice of coming to Karimganj and applying for discharge in the 'usual' way.⁵⁸ Coolies admitted to the practice being observed in the past but now that as they were willing to leave in a body, they were not prepared to follow the 'norms' and more so they claimed it to be *Gandhi Baba ka hookum*.⁵⁹

⁵³ Evidence, *ibid*, pp. 57 & 64.

⁵⁴ Evidence, *ibid*. See also P. C. Bamford, *Histories of Non cooperation and Khilafat*, p. 61. Shahid Amin in his fascinating study of 'Gandhi as Mahatma' argues that Gandhi's *pratap* and appreciation of his message derived from popular Hindu beliefs and practices and the material culture of the peasantry. What the peasants thought about the Mahatma were the projections on the existing patterns of popular beliefs about the 'worship of worthies' in rural north India. The stories of the Mahatma from the *Swadesh* journal that he analyses falls in four distinct groups— testing the power of the Mahatma, opposing the Mahatma, opposing the Gandhian creed and boons granted and/or miracles performed. We do not have access to such vast and continuous accounts in the region of our study but the last three categories broadly apply to the evidence of our case. Shahid Amin, "Gandhi as Mahatma: Gorakhpur District, Eastern UP, 1921-22," Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies III*.

⁵⁵ Sarkar, "The Conditions and Nature" pp. 309-310.

⁵⁶ C. Townsend, Superintendent of the Longai Tea Company and H. A. Wray, Manager, Singlacherra T. E. Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, pp. 51-52, 56.

⁵⁷ Out of 8,799 coolies leaving 3,715 were under agreement, 2,286 were not under agreement and 2,798 were dependents. *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁵⁸ Coolies frequently came to Courts and applied for a discharge certificate on the ground that they had finished their agreement. There was no such provision in the Act, which entitled the applicant such a certificate, but it was a well established practice.

⁵⁹ Mukherjee, Evidence, ALECR 1921-22, p. 63.

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Capital Flight: An Introduction¹

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Abstract

The title of this paper states the main objective: We introduce a research agenda on capital flight. In the following sections, we explain why it is important that researchers study capital flight; then end this essay with an outline of a research agenda.

Why Capital Flight?

Early researches suggest that capital flight is not a new issue. These studies document capital flight from Europe and the United States in the early twentieth century or, in the case of Europe, even during the seventeenth century and earlier². In the 1930s, and after World War II, there were concerns about capital flight from Europe to the United States. In fact, this was a subject of the debates at the Bretton Woods meetings³. Even in recent periods, studies have documented capital flight from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) member countries⁴.

But capital flight is an important concern particularly for developing countries for at least three reasons. The first is the issue of capital scarcity. Basically, capital flight aggravates this problem. In addition, it also restricts developing countries' ability to mobilise domestic funds or access foreign resources. Consequently, capital flight retards growth and development.

Second, as capital flight sets in, a negative feedback process can start, especially during periods of crises and instability. As resource constraints become binding, the additional possibility of being cut off from external sources of funds, growth will be further limited and more capital flight could occur as a result. In such a situation, economic policies become more difficult to implement and raising the social conditions of people become

a heavier burden to address. In short, capital flight makes the twin goals of growth and development much more challenging to pursue. Thus, when developing countries are already lagging behind on the economic ladder, capital flight knocks them several rungs down.

A third reason concerns economic justice, particularly the distributive impacts of external indebtedness and capital flight, as well as the legitimacy of external debt itself. When external debts are being squandered by elites or inappropriately used to benefit only a few in the form of capital flight, the rest of society suffers. More importantly, the non-trivial costs of indebtedness and capital flight are imposed on the majority of society. Thus it is important to question the legitimacy of external debt itself and the rationale for continuing to honour debts that society on the whole did not benefit from.

Recent interest in capital flight was triggered by the 1980s Latin American debt crisis. At that time, there were two foci of research on capital flight. One focus was that scholars wanted to understand the relationship between capital flight and external borrowing because capital flight undermined the ability of highly indebted countries to repay or service their mounting external debts⁵. The other focus that scholars examined whether or not external debt fuels or propels capital flight, and vice versa⁶.

After the 1980s debt crises, capital flight became less of an issue. At the same time, there was a flow of capital

to developing countries, perhaps with the exception of Africa. Scholars in turn stopped paying attention to capital flight. By the latter half of the 1990s, however, there was a resurgence of capital flight as developing countries faced frequent and more intense financial crises. So once again, scholars are re-examining the issues.

We argue that there are at least three reasons why a reconsideration of capital flight is needed today. The first reason is, as in the past, external debts. In particular, national indebtedness remains a big problem to developing countries and many of these countries are again becoming vulnerable to debt-related crises. Some evidence suggests that increased indebtedness is positively correlated to increased intensity and frequency of debt-related economic cycles, a problem that is especially significant in Africa⁷. The 1997-98 Asian Crises, for instance, were in part rooted in the accumulation of external debts, albeit private external debts.

Another reason relates to the economic policies that have been adopted or, in some cases, forced upon developing countries. Since the 1980s, neo-liberal policies brought about wide scale and aggressive economic deregulation and financial liberalisation without ensuring, or in some cases neglecting, effective governance and administrative capacities and have thereby created an environment that is more vulnerable to financial swings, crises, and contagions. In fact, some scholars argue that economic crises are inevitable in

¹ This is the first part of an extensive research on the phenomenon of capital flight in its various aspects. We will publish further articles in subsequent issues.

² See for example C. Kindleberger, "A Historical Perspective" in Lessard and Williamson (ed), *Capital Flight and Third World Debt*, Institute of International Economics, Washington DC, 1987, pp. 7-28.

³ See for instance E. Helleiner, *States and the Reemergence of Global Finance: From Bretton Woods to the 1990s*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1994.

⁴ H. Gibson and E. Tskalotos, "Testing a Flow Model of Capital Flight in Five European Countries," *Manchester School*, 61, 2, 1993, pp. 141-166.

⁵ D. Lessard and J. Williamson, *Capital Flight and the Third World Debt*, Institute of International Economics, Washington DC, 1987.

⁶ J. K. Boyce, "The Revolving Door? External Debt and Capital Flight: A Philippine Case Study," *World Development*, 20, 3, 1992, pp. 335-349.

⁷ H. M. Leung, "External Debt and Worsening Business Cycles in Less Developed Countries," *Journal of Economic Studies*, 30, 2, 2003, pp. 155-168.

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such contexts⁸.

Moreover, as developing countries face a surge of capital flows, they find it much more difficult to pursue economic policies that engender growth and human development. The debate on policy trilemma is a case in point, which says that open economies find it difficult to simultaneously achieve three policy targets of capital mobility, independent monetary policy, and exchange rate management⁹. Put simply, only two of these targets can be met when a country opens up. This difficulty therefore poses a related issue, which is to what extent should developing countries follow the often prescribed path of development of liberalising economics, particularly capital flows and investments.

And thus we stress that the longer a country remains in a vulnerable situation, and the longer it postpones the re-introduction of the financial governance, the higher are the chances that economic crises will occur. We furthermore argue that crises will, progressively, become more intense and their social costs very significant. In this perspective, neo-liberal policies have made the developing world more vulnerable to capital flight.

The third reason for reconsideration is that capital flight means lost resources to the domestic economy, thus it also implies lost opportunities. It is paradoxical that resources are flowing out of the developing countries rather than to them, where resources are most needed to finance growth and development. Indeed it is surprising that even very poor countries have become creditors to the rest of the world. Such lost resources do not contribute to the expansion of domestic economic activities and to the improvement of social welfare of domestic residents. Such lost resources, or more precisely, the accumulated lost resources, imply lost tax revenues. Given that developing countries face fiscal constraints, lost tax revenues can mean foregone public goods, infrastructure and services, among others, that are essential to produce and sustain growth. Of course, it can also mean lost resources for debt servicing, contributing to worsening the social burden of external debts, which affect many in society. Because capital flight is typically undertaken by elites, the rest of society therefore carries a disproportionate burden of the exter-

nal debt and capital flight. So again, from an economic justice point-of-view, there are distributive impacts that should not be ignored.

We are revisiting capital flight because of old and new issues. The lessons from the past remain relevant to the current context. But with new dimensions to the same problem, new lessons have to be learned as well. We hope that this paper contributes to that end.

Before proceeding to outline the research agenda, there is an item that needs to be clarified, and that is the difference between normal capital flows and capital flight. Indeed, some scholars are sceptical about investigating capital flight in the present trends towards economic deregulation and liberalisation and global integration. But it is precisely in this context that we have to focus on the problem.

We note that capital flight is of course a type of capital outflow but only because these two have a common feature, which is that both are movements of capital across countries. The similarity however ends there. Capital flows represent portfolio decisions typically undertaken to exploit favourable returns to capital, among others. Capital flight, in contrast, represents a decision to take capital out and take refuge in another country to avoid social control.

Put another way, normal capital flows are like two-way streets in which the traffic of capital is dual-directional and presumably recorded in the official statistics. In contrast, capital flight is more like a one-way street in which the traffic of capital is moving out and typically unrecorded. Sometimes capital flight is financed by capital inflows like external debts. At other times, capital flight itself finances the capital inflows, returning in the guise of foreign investments (often to avail of the incentives extended to overseas investors). In fact, it is possible to have large volumes of capital flows across countries and there is no capital flight involved. It is also possible to have no capital inflows to a country yet there are huge amounts of capital flight.

We further note that when this capital flow perspective is employed, there will be a problem in understanding capital flight because the notion of optimal portfolio allocation precludes the consideration of unrecorded capital flows. Indeed, in two-way streets capital flows, there should not be any

unrecorded capital flows, especially when the economic environment has been deregulated and financially liberalised. When there are unrecorded capital flows, they are to be considered integral and normal and, whatever their outcomes, including the adverse impacts on society, it is presumed to be an optimal situation. Clearly, such perspective ignores and does not see the social impacts of capital flight, which can be significant and shouldered by the majority in society. Therefore, while both capital outflow and capital flight share a common feature, there are in fact unique characteristics to capital flight. As such, it may mean that countries take up policies that address capital flows but, at the same time, include policies that address capital flight itself.

A Research Agenda

We now proceed to outline our research agenda. In the next essay, we will present a survey of the literature on the definitions of capital flight and the measurements. This essay serves as the groundwork for the subsequent essays, covering issues like: Estimating capital flight from some developing countries, analysing the determinants of capital flight, and lastly, estimating the cost of capital flight. It is hoped that with the second essay, scholars will take up the research as well and examine capital flight in their own countries, hopefully, leading to policy advocacy. Crucial to policy advocacy is modelling the determinants of capital flight; that is, what fuels and/or drives it? Estimating the economic impact(s) of capital flight is important, too, because we need to support the claim that capital flight is welfare-reducing, given that capital is already limited in developing countries. But it is also essential to estimate such costs because we need to determine the size of the potential gains should policy action were undertaken. Alternative policy guidelines are important and we hope that researchers open the debate on how to manage capital flows in general and capital flight in particular. We also hope that the debate will go into more challenging issues of deregulation and financial liberalisation and international cooperation. Finally, we also hope that this research will lead to case studies, particularly to an investigation of the behaviour and motivation of capital flight at the level of firms and individuals, etc.

⁸ G. Palma, "The Three Routes to Financial Crises: Chile, Mexico and Argentina [1], Brazil [2]; and Korea, Malaysia and Thailand [3]" in H. J. Chang (ed.), *Rethinking Development Economics*, Anthem Press, London, 2003, pp. 347-376.

⁹ M. Obsfeld, J. Shambaugh and A. Taylor, "The Trilemma in History: Trade-offs Among Exchange Rates, Monetary Policies and Capital Mobility," Working Paper No. 10396, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2004.

Special Feature

Special Economic Zones in China



Samira Junaid

Samira Junaid is a research student working on the history of Delhi in the nineteenth century at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Kolkata. Though she completed her undergraduate and graduate studies in Delhi (DU and JNU), her beloved hometown, she is enjoying her stint in Kolkata as she takes in the sights, sounds and roadside culinary delights of the city.

She is deeply passionate about her music, her tastes spanning all genres and continents, with her latest discovery being the late Ali Farka Toure from Mali.

The recent arrival of China as an economic player of consequence is no doubt a result of the economic reforms undertaken by her in the late nineteen seventies and the eighties. The transition from a planned economy to what was called a 'socialist market economy' required China to open its doors to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This was sought to be achieved by the setting up of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), which allowed the Chinese government to enter into the realm of market economies with some degree of control— by opening up a few select areas to investment, rather than the country as a whole, which might, for example, have had an unsettling impact on the political situation in the country. In addition to attracting foreign investment to fuel the economy, the Chinese government was hereby implementing another shift in policy— moving from a conscious policy of equal allocation of resources to the various provinces to allowing more autonomous regional development based on efficiency as defined by market forces. Equipped with adequate infrastructural facilities, tax exemptions and other fiscal attractions, China's SEZs have today become an investment hotspot for the whole world and have spearheaded China's growth which was pegged at a rate of 10.5 percent per annum for the year 2006 according to *The Economist*. The success of SEZs in China, have made them an economic model that other developing countries, such as India, are now trying to emulate.

It was in December 1978 that the Communist Party of China embarked on their course of what are known as the "four modernizations": Of agriculture, industry, defence, and science. Interestingly enough, it was the overseas Chinese communities which were the first to react to these changes, followed thereafter by investors from the Western world (American and European), who were attracted to the possibilities offered by the huge Chinese domestic market, abundant and cheap labour, flexible environmental regulations, closeness to raw materials and low construction costs. Of course, the process itself took shape gradually, in multiple stages, with various adjustments and alterations being made to the regulatory framework. The sites for the location of the first SEZs were carefully chosen by the central government

based on several important criteria. These selected sites benefited, for example, from a good multi-modal transportation infrastructure, were already well connected to some expatriate Chinese communities located within the region (such as in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Macau), and strikingly enough, were also located at a distance from the political capital of Beijing. The importance of this proximity to nearby investors cannot be overstated, given that much of the financial capital and technical know-how that China received with the establishment of the SEZs came from the overseas Chinese community. In addition to these factors of course, the Chinese government ensured that all the bureaucratic procedural aspects could be expedited, ridding the investors of the headache of bureaucratic red tape.

China first experimented with economic reform and attracting FDI by establishing SEZs in the cities of Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shantou, and Xiamen in 1979. These followed from the coming into force of the Equity Joint Venture Law (1979) which allowed the legal entry of FDI and provided a statutory basis for the establishment of joint ventures in China. As investments grew, it became apparent that additional laws on FDI were needed, and in 1983 yet another law was passed which provided greater details on all aspects of joint venture operation. The following year, in 1984, the government agreed to extend investment beyond the five original SEZs and in order to do so legally they at last granted private enterprise legal status. In the same year the government opened fourteen coastal cities— Dalian, Qinhuangdao, Tianjin, Yantai, Qingdao, Lianyungang, Nantong, Shanghai, Ningbo, Wenzhou, Fuzhou, Guangzhou, Zhanjiang and Beihai— all of which were former treaty ports and seven open coastal belts (such as the Yangtze River Delta, Pearl River Delta, Xiamen-Zhangzhou-Quanzhou Triangle, and Shandong and Liaodong peninsula). In addition, fifteen free trade zones, thirty two state-level economic and technological development zones, and fifty three new high-tech industrial development zones have been established in large and medium-sized cities. The government also reformed their regulatory framework through the passage of the Foreign Exchange Balance Provisions

and the Encouragement Provisions of 1986. In 1994, there was yet another round of foreign exchange management reform, abolishing the official exchange rate and adopting a market rate. They also abolished the exchange quota retention system. And in December 1996, China announced that it would adopt IMF article A, removing all remaining restrictions on foreign exchange transactions. All these reforms strengthened the regulatory framework and increased investor confidence in the market.

Of the many incentives that China provided, perhaps the most important is the preferential tax treatment. The income-tax rate is fifteen per cent in economic zones, high-tech industrial zones, and economic and technological development zones. The enterprise income-tax rate is twenty four per cent in the coastal areas and provincial capital cities. Foreign enterprises can enjoy tax exemption in the first two years after they begin making profits, and income-tax reduction by half in the following three years. Foreign high-tech enterprises enjoy tax exemption in the first two years after making profits and income-tax reduction by half in the following six years. In addition to these policies, the export-oriented enterprises enjoy having their income tax reduced by half as long as the volume of their annual exports accounts for more than seventy per cent of the general sales. Enterprises enjoy additional benefits if they purchase domestically made equipment within the volume of the total investment. Foreign enterprises are exempt from business tax if they transfer technology. Since 1991, the Chinese government has reduced its import tariff several times. Furthermore, all equipment imported for self-use is exempt from tariff and import-stage value added tax. Since the middle of the 1990s, China has significantly liberalised its credit and foreign-exchange policy making the Yuan fully convertible in 2005.

It has been argued that it is the Chinese political system, being essentially a one-party Communist state where policy is set at the central level and there aren't any other strong competing actors at the stage of either policy formation or implementation, which allowed for this kind of reform. This is critical to understanding the formation of China's regional development policy and establishment of the

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SEZs. Subsequently however, it has also been noted that the growth process was accompanied by considerable delegation of authority to the provincial governments. Each was allowed to introduce its own legislation to govern investment relating to foreign investments and local tax concessions. Local authorities could clear foreign investment proposals without referring to the Centre and were also allowed to retain a large share of incremental taxes generated as a result of the increased economic activity, and invest that in infrastructure as well as equity contributions to joint ventures with foreign investors.

Of the various SEZs that China now has, it is Shenzhen's story that captured the imagination of economists and policy makers the world over. When Shenzhen city was established in 1979, it had a total of 314,000 inhabitants. By the year 2000, it boasted of around four million inhabitants. In fact, while China experienced a strong growth rate of 8.2 per cent (in terms of her real GDP) from 1980 to 1997; the real GDP of the Shenzhen SEZ grew at a staggering 28.5 per cent. In the early phases of its development, Shenzhen saw the establishment of some legal preconditions for the existence of a special economic regime in the SEZ, but saw only slow changes in the level of actual economic activity. In 1984, with the setting up of a more comprehensive economic framework for the SEZs, as "windows to technology, management, knowledge, and foreign policies," by Deng Xiaoping a second phase in their growth was inaugurated. The inflow of foreign capital, coming in the main from Hong Kong, slowly accelerated but production processes, contrary to expectations, were mostly characterised by low technology intensity and were based on the comparative advantage of Shenzhen's low labour costs. It is the 1990s, which can be called the takeoff period for Shenzhen, with foreign companies from all over the world rushing in, and by 1997, fifty one of the world's top five hundred enterprises had taken root in Shenzhen. The export volume of Shenzhen had increased to around one-seventh of China's total at \$26 billion by 1998 itself and more than thirty five per cent of Shenzhen's production was now in the high- and new-technology sectors.

Another success story is that of Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP), created in 1994, which has been touted as one of the fastest-growing and the most competitive industrial development zones in the world. It is sometimes referred to as "one of the nine new-tech cities in the world" and the "New Silicon Valley". SIP enjoys high authority in project approvals. It takes three working days to complete the incorporation process. It can approve independently all foreign investment projects as long as they are in line with national policy. It can

even assist foreign investors in obtaining Chinese visas. Equipped with a complete and modern logistics system, the park hosts an independent customs zone and a bonded logistics centre—the first centre of its kind approved by the Chinese central authorities. SIP also has one of the first fifteen export processing zones (EPZs) approved by the State Council, China's cabinet. Located in the Yangtze River Delta, the park enjoys an excellent transportation network of highways, railways, waterways and airports. Besides the advantage of an EPZ and special treatment of exports, in general the park encourages exports of locally manufactured products and imports of high-tech products by providing various tax incentives. Raw materials and semi-finished products can be transferred or traded freely within the EPZ. Tax is exempt for products, machinery and equipment transferred between it and other EPZs. Suzhou thus strives to attract high-tech industries, such as software, biological technology, gene engineering and various design and R&D (research and development) institutes, and has the following investment structure: Forty two percent Europe and America, eighteen percent Singapore, thirteen percent Japan and Korea, and twenty seven percent Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and other regions.

Despite these investment figures and galloping growth rates, China's policies with regard to the promotion of industry and foreign investment through Special Economic Zones have come in for a lot criticism as well, especially on account of diverting a large amount of farmland from agriculture to industry. China has to feed twenty two per cent of the world's population on only seven per cent of land. In July 2005, China's countryside had over 26.1 million people living in absolute poverty and was home to eighteen per cent of the world's poor, according to Chinese Minister Li Xuju quoted in the People's Daily. Every year, an additional ten million people have to be fed. Despite this daunting target, between 1996-2005, "development" caused diversion of more than twenty one per cent of arable land to non-agricultural uses, chiefly highways, industries and SEZs. Per capita land holding now stands at a meager 0.094 hectares. In just thirteen years, between 1992 and 2005, twenty million farmers have been laid off agriculture due to land acquisition.

As more arable land is taken over for urbanisation and industrialisation, issues relating to changes in land use continue to become a major source of dispute between the public and the government. Protests against land acquisition and deprivation have become a common feature of rural life in China, especially in the provinces of Guangdong (south), Sichuan, Hebei (north), and Henan province. Guangdong has been the worst

affected. Social instability has become an issue of concern. In 2004, the government admitted to 74,000 riots in the countryside, a seven-fold jump in ten years. Whereas a few years ago, excessive and arbitrary taxation was the peasants' foremost complaint, resentment over the loss of farmland, corruption, worsening pollution and arbitrary evictions by property developers are the main reasons for farmers' unrest now.

While rural China is up in arms against acquisition of land, the SEZs themselves are beset with their own problems. After growing at a phenomenal rate of around twenty eight percent for the last twenty five years, Shenzhen for example, is now paying a huge cost in terms of environment destruction, soaring crime rate and gross exploitation of its working class, mainly migrants. Foreign investors were lured to Shenzhen by cheap land, compliant labour laws and lax or ineffective environmental rules. In fact, in 2006, the United Nations Environment Programme designated Shenzhen as a 'global environmental hotspot', meaning a region that had suffered rapid environmental destruction. In 2004, China consumed 4.3 times as much coal and electricity as the United States and 11.5 times as much as Japan to generate each US\$1 worth of GNP (The Taipei Times). According to Science in Society some twenty per cent of the population lives in severely polluted areas and seventy percent of the rivers and lakes are in a grim shape (People's Daily). Around sixty percent of companies that have set up industries in the country violate emission rules. And according to the World Bank, environmental problems are the cause of some 300,000 people dying in China each year. The Chinese government itself has admitted that pollution costs the country a staggering \$200 billion a year—about ten per cent of its GDP.

While export-driven policy for economic growth has helped China touch record growth figures, the income gap is widening and rapidly approaching the levels of some Latin American countries. Going by a recent report by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, China's Gini coefficient—a measure of income distribution where zero means perfect equality and 1 is maximum inequality—touched 0.496 in the year 2006. In comparison, income inequality figures are 0.33 in India, 0.41 in the US and 0.54 in Brazil. Further, the rural-urban income divide is staggering—annual income of city dwellers in China is around US \$1,000 which is more than three times that of their rural counterparts.

In April 2004, the State Council, halted the ratification of farmland for other uses and started to rectify the national land market. The Minister of Agriculture, Du Quinglin, promised "not to reduce acreage of basic farmland, change its purpose or downgrade its quality". China also abolished agricul-

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tural tax in 2006 and increased subsidy for food grain production by ten per cent. To boost rural incomes, the selling price of grain was increased by sixty per cent in 2005. In 2004, out of a total 900 million farmers in China, 600 million received US\$ 1.5 billion as direct subsidies. Fifty two million of the Chinese farmers have joined in the rural old-age insurance system and 2.2 million received pensions in 2005. More than eighty million farmers had participated in the rural cooperative medical service system by the end of 2004, and 12.57 million rural needy people had drawn allowances guaranteeing the minimum living standard by the end of 2005.

With all these debates and controversies surrounding Special Economic

Zones in China itself, the attempt to introduce similar economic measures in other parts of the developing world, notably India, are being met with stiff resistance, with no quick or ready solution in sight. In China itself of course, it is now being argued that now that the structure of a command economy has been dismantled and investment is possible anywhere in the country, Special Economic Zones have lost their original rationale. Moreover, China's WTO membership has limited its ability to offer preferential policies to outside investors and business. The US, for example, is contemplating anti-dumping laws against Chinese manufactures. Even SEZs like Shenzhen are now facing competition from other

parts of China and the rest of the world, as labour costs rise firms migrate to cheaper locations. The mushrooming of SEZs and the introduction of open ports and special zones for technological development as well as general economic reforms in China have made competition for FDI harder.

The future of SEZs in China is unknown if not uncertain. For the time being however, riding piggy-back on its economic success story, China prepares itself for the Olympics to be hosted by Beijing in the summer of 2008. The whole world will have their gaze fixed on China.

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Special Economic Zones in Theory



Soumitra Bose

Soumitra is rather hastily catching up with the half century mark of enjoying the springs and still he longs for a second chance of another Spring thunder- the first one just nodded and effaced, he was too young! For about now thirty years striving to bring the Crimson Sun of collective sharing and revolution in India he still longs, he still dreams and he still walks on....

An activist of the ultra-left dreaming for a people's participatory republic, Soumitra prepares for that while earning his livelihood as a daily wage slave of our great and sole Empire... oiling the state-of-the-exploitation engine called IT. Soumitra joined the march of the people in his teens and while his hair not changed colours so he has not changed colours either. He hopes to see himself in there as long as he can dream.

Soumitra edits a theoretical marxist journal, pulls up his sleeves in organising the informal sector workers, is building a hawker's collective, peasants' collectives. Soumitra prepares the have-nots for a not too distant time when they will lead Soumitra.

RED is passe to him, he yearns for CRIMSON!

A Specially Enclosed Zone for forming Capital through production or services within a nation-state and without the encumbrances of law of the native land is what gets called Special Economic Zone (SEZ). What speciality of economy this zone is going to provide is hazy- and not only from the content point of view.

Can a nation-state, by definition, have multiple "economies" within its territorial boundary? Can an economy be quantified through any stretchable definition of qualification as one co-existing with "others"? Is the usage of "Economic" over determined by factors other than "Economic" or if not then where is the line drawn to distinguish the exchange mechanism or production process or even production relation with the regulating rules relating to human rights, social benefits and even simple polity of the nation-state?

The concept of enclosed space has changed. Marx saw an enclosed space as a catchment area from where cheap labour will be evicted and herded into industries. Labourers, not necessarily specialised, but from specially charted out areas will be brought into the most "advanced" type of production relation or at least that is how it will be touted. In reality, it will never be the most advanced type of production relation but will entail the most advanced type of surplus extraction. In Marx's day, the entire nation-state's territorial space was the hearth of capital, spaces were enclosed and insulated to extract labour power- evict them, make them readily available for the capitalist sector. Today in SEZs the enclosed space is the special sector of capital, for which labour will be uprooted and made available.

The specific change in the nature of enclosed spaces requires a large space or many middle-range spaces to be declared as SEZs. Here "advanced" capitalism will establish the most advanced form of labour extraction, rent extraction and super-profit accumulation. Let us not harbour any illusion that "advanced" means sophisticated. Sophistication would have

brought in a more organic composition of capital, that in turn would have meant a more advanced organic composition of both fixed and variable capital. That is, along with adding more machines to the production process, different technical skills will have to be imparted to labourers. But clearly such is not the case within the production process of the SEZs. We must not overlook however that the SEZ may not have any production at all. It could be even a centre for hospitality or entertainment. We might call that production, but, undeniably no capacity is generated: No means of production may be produced. In such cases Special Economic Zone justifies its nomenclature, as it is a very different economic animal where profit and super-profit can be garnered from activities other than production.

Primitive accumulation of Marx's description has come back and is alive. Capitalism has created within itself sub-sectors and shows partiality to one over the other. Today, agriculture is not outside the capitalist project, neither the small scale industries nor even the Sunset or traditional industries. Capitalism is becoming more restricted, where capital formation in one or two preferred sub-sectors takes place at the cost of other sub-sectors. The idea of the moribund nature of capital is still convincing because the project of capital has become more skewed and differently focussed.

Agriculture had just started to form capital with newer machines and factor inputs. Agricultural production was getting forwardly linked to other processed products and even giving rise to large scale mass consumer products. The agro-industry was on the brink of a dangerous turn through genetic modified (GM) food industry. It could equally have taken a rather desirable route of developing retail-food consumer industry. In the most conservative estimates retail industry in India is estimated to reach Rs. 28 billion in the next two to three years. The potential of augmented production and processing may have called into

question the idea of the so called traditional near-static realm of food production. Cereal had shown all signs of becoming a viable and very important cash crop. Economies based on agriculture showed a promise of spreading out and becoming the most popular industry. This development included even heavy industry. The production of agricultural equipments necessitates capital-intensive industry. Storage and preservation, processing and distribution and 'just-in-time' supply chains- had the promise of being most optimised network in human history. Capital, and especially capital in the third world, has chosen to ignore that route and to go for what it perceives to be a faster track- SEZs for low grade and low skill assembling plants and the hospitality industry. It has chosen to erode existing capabilities of agriculture and agro-industries and all for the sake of realty industry- like the famous python eating off its own tail. That is the very specific nature of moribund capital.

For capital accumulation labourers had to be provided with more jobs, leading to more distributed income and in turn to more small savings. The present day SEZ-patterned neo-modern primitive capital (or what we may term predatory capital) is evicting producing farmers, snatching their land, gradually rendering them without jobs, provision or skill. In these SEZs the only aim is to extract labour as cheaply as possible. The reversal of the logic of enclosed spaces is guided by this narrow objective of extracting the cheapest possible labour without bothering about the provisions given to them for keeping them alive and work-worthy for the next day. As a result, the traditional definition of wage comes into question. In the SEZs workers wages face a constant downward pressure. This downward shift in wage or remuneration may be in real terms or in nominal terms, meaning it may be in absolute terms or adjusted for inflation. Enclosing is done also to avoid the competitive wage war between different companies within one industry- that is why it can be

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called predatory. The enclosure ensures physical insulation from intra-industry competition, intra-market vagaries and cross-industry side effects. Enclosure establishes a corporate fiefdom on the production process, isolated from the rest of society, the production environment and the nation-state in consideration. This is the crux of the benefit that globalised capital gets from any SEZ—regardless of the ontological position of the industry, its standard, organic composition, technical composition, labour law, democratic polity, comparative advantage or disadvantage or general labour market, any enclosed zone can be prepared with the exact desired level of input-mix and then package it as one single product exactly right for maximum profit extraction. SEZ is one package comprising the product that is sold in the market [service, solution or material product], and the service that goes along with it. The market, however is usually not the open market; it is a specific market in a distant territory or a link in the forward chain of an end product. The SEZs therefore can not stand on their own, dependent as they often are on a parent firm in some distant metropolitan country. The product is the optimised output-mix with the lowest variable capital or labour involved. SEZs abhor, among other things, any kind of normal market competition and therefore SEZs go against the classical liberal or neo-conservative concepts of the market. Here comes the specific import and necessity of SEZ as distinct from any producing firm. The enclosure moreover extends to every aspect of life of the labourer, whose entry to and exit from the enclosure is governed by the profit consideration of the owner of the SEZs. Labourers may pour into the SEZ every day and pour out at the end of the work-day or they may be interned within.

Colonisers colonised the native land through gradual occupation of cities and then moved on to the hinterland for the city markets and eventually the whole country. SEZ is a mechanism very similar to that kind of project with the only difference being that every SEZ is different in its own way and for its sustenance has to depend on the unenclosed area— the “other”. Capital is a social relation, according to Marx, in that it transforms every human relationship. SEZ does the same thing and more comprehensively.

This then brings us to a perusal of the model of business to be followed in the case of SEZs. The all-engulfing market lies “outside” the SEZ— it lies out there— out in the “other”. Even if we take up a hypothetical situation where there is an infinite number of individually insignificant SEZs [an individual SEZ is not capable of changing the nature of the overall SEZ scenario within a nation state] {Please note the recent statement of Karan

Singh, a leader of the Congress Party, which leads the coalition government at the Centre— he wants the whole of India to become a conglomeration of SEZs} even then, there would be a virtual SEZ market where each individual SEZ would be a product by itself. In that condition each individual SEZ would not have required any protection or special insulation from the others, it would have had to compete with the other SEZs. That is the paradox here. So the number of SEZs cannot be infinite. Thus it has to survive by primitive accumulation of labour power from the “other” sector— or the normal economy of the nation-state. This is the reason why even the great Capitalist China, with its firm double digit rate of growth of GDP has now restricted the number of SEZ to only six big ones. China is also slowly tightening the leash on SEZs through promulgating more and more restrictive laws. Latin America has abandoned the very concept of SEZ. It is only India and especially the so-called parliamentary left that is going ga-ga over this concept. The dependence of an SEZ on the “other” for its sustenance not only limits its growth, but this dependence is also its nemesis. The growth rate in a SEZ project is bound to go down over time and eventually head towards the negative, after crossing effortlessly the ‘zero’ mark. Not only are SEZs bound to go bankrupt in time, but it will take down along with it the entire area, the ecology, the productive potential, and aggravate chaos and anarchy exponentially. In any analysis based on medium to long term potentialities, SEZ is a proposition for quick and permanent decay. Any product has a life cycle. Even if it is insulated from the competition that normal market operations would have exposed it to, the life span of a product can only be extended to a certain degree. A SEZ, as it depends on one product or one service or one type of solution or even combinations of these, has to share the same fate, that of an inevitable doom. In the long run, SEZs are nothing but bankruptcy generating, devastating devices creating social, political, cultural and demographic land mines. After a couple of bouts or life cycles of a set of SEZs, the whole land, including the labour force will lose its recyclable capacity. Thus, the future value of capital is lost forever. The marginal productivity of each unit of capital will progressively decline. Whatever short term gains might apparently be made for the nation-state, this feature will cause the gradual loss of all the accumulated resources of years and decades. Short-term spurts might baffle statisticians (and stock-market watchers) for a while, but over a period of time, it will result in capital deformation!

The entire concept of creation of ancillary industries along with the production unit of the principal product is also a chimera. If the main produc-

tion unit had itself been sustainable, then, and only then, could the possibilities of profitable forward integration have come up, and then we would have had a return to the conglomerate behemoth model of the mid-twentieth century. The separation of the core production unit from the ancillaries can be successful only when the ancillaries cater to various competitive firms within the same industry. The very principle of SEZs inhibits that. Even if some intermediate products are allowed to develop, the transportation advantage and an optimum supply chain cannot be generated. The concept of down stream production chain can never survive long by supplying to merely one or a few pre-ordained customers. Any change in the order pattern would jeopardise the organisation and sustenance of the ancillary firm and would bankrupt it. With the collapse of the feeder chain, the main firm will go through a spiral which can end only in its own demise and bankruptcy.

SEZ is an enclosed space subsidised by the government and exempted from paying the excise duties and various other normal taxes. If the number of such SEZ units grow then the nation-state will lose out on valuable potential income, while financial institutions and private or public venture concerns will invest in these. After the SEZs reach a critical number, the marginal returns will start to diminish for each invested dollar. No country can sustain this as the public coffers will soon be exhausted, or will reach near-exhaustion. It will then have to borrow from external financial institutions at high rates of interest. This interest will be nothing more than the portions of the super-profits generated from regular capital operations. Over time, and with the increase in the amount, the super-profit will turn into an almost permanent rent and will be siphoned off from within the borders of the nation-state. Thus, the nation-state will lose its economic, and effectively, its political sovereignty.

An SEZ needs a continuous inflow of capital unless all its products are to be bought back.

If its products are bought back the firm will lose the flexibility provided by the market price, and will inevitably move towards a decelerating growth rate. In an inflationary nation-state economy even a static growth rate is a declining one, when considered in real terms and over a longer period.

In case there is no such obligation of being bought back, the firm will have to depend on the outside market, and the cost of acquiring new businesses is continuously going up as more and more SEZ firms located throughout the world pour in their various products. Here too, therefore, the rate of return is actually diminishing and the advantages provided by protection and subsidy will soon die off. We must however note that this is not the general neo-conservative logic of

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free markets, because in a SEZ the only USP of the final product is the cheap labour involved in its production, that does not grow in quality or value. Going down the value chain never fetches any medium to long-term guarantee to the producing firm. In a normal competitive market in a nation-state, protection offered at the time of inception helps to stabilise the company giving it enough time to develop its value proposition, become capable of competing with the external open market- that is the primary interest pursued by nation-states in building up their own army of competing industries. In the case of an SEZ, on the other hand, the native-nation-state subsidises revenue and does not build up any value proposition. That aspect remains underdeveloped and eventually dies outside the incubator.

In any nation-state economy, competing in the international marketplace, revenue earned strengthens the native currency against the international standard currency or the SDR. This is because repatriation is inward within the native state. In an SEZ, however, a major part of the revenue generated are either repatriated abroad or are used to pay for the import of foreign goods. Moreover, hard currencies push up the country's forex reserve for a very short while and can get depleted just as fast as they come in. We must remember that foreign direct investments (FDIs) come in a normal market as well as in a SEZ with many strings attached. For unless the domestic market is very strong and demanding finished industrial products, FDIs are always traps. Companies will only come to the native country if they find high marginal returns to their dollars and that again entails their getting lured by the strength and volume of the native-market. The entire credit money of the west would require a producing economy outside the credit capital or debt capital generating sector that can serve the credit offered- this is the monetary aspect of primitive accumulation- the (M3-M1) of the west will be served by the M1 of the east.

The FIIs extract interest that gets compounded. The serving potential of a native country's operative profit goes down with every additional dollar earned through one more unit of labour spent in the native economy.

The metropolitan market or the market in the west uses the native space as a space sub-serving its main product that is either produced or designed within the west and the biggest chunk of the sales revenue minus the operating cost goes over to the Western owner either through patents, or through owning IP or through design consultancy fees. The smaller portion that comes to the native country is used to pay for the labour and acquisition costs. With every such unit sales-revenue, the gap between the allocation of revenues between the east and the west increases and its allocation becomes more and more skewed. The absolute value of the production-sales-repatriation cycle looks exciting from the native stand point only in the early years till one figures out that in fact the native country is losing the relative value proposition competing with the western peer or co-producer. The value game becomes, if not all-out war, then definitely one of attrition.

What is the benefit of getting into SEZs then? If it is so gloomy, then why are all comprador corporates native to the nation-state rushing towards this obvious doom?

There is indeed some gain, however effervescent and fleeting. There are some thrills, but they are there only as long as the overall picture is ignored, as long as the collective is not taken into consideration, as long as individual rivalries enthrall the individual players without any heed to the collective doom. The euphoria of chaos, the ecstasy of anarchy, the elixir of contrasting interests and the motto of contention, of killing others to survive, living for a short while, for a fast buck and a cravenness for speed is what SEZs would offer- it is the same attitude that goads homo sapiens to consumerism, to over-accumulation and need-less possessiveness. People live it up as if there is no tomorrow, and capital leads every human relationship generating from humans into a simulacrum of no-tomorrow! Capital is the only tomorrow!

The faster a third world producing and thriving economy would SEZise itself the longer would the WEST survive and the 'bigger' would it get. We saw the vapourisation of the Asian

tigers with ample surplus reserves into basket cases, slipping down to mere tourism destinations that exist only to provide solace to the worn heels and tired minds of the WEST. The collective experience of the South also has the case of how famous industrial centres of countries like India [Durgapur-Asansol-Ranigunge belt, Gaziabad belt, Old Mumbai belt, Steel plant colonies etc.] turned from high skilled settlements into veritable deserts within the last four decades or so. We experienced how new and promised lands lost their crowns to even newer aspirants. We are even now witnessing how producing economies and sectors are giving way to the service sector and entertainment hubs and gizmos are eating away the best of brains and bringing about a new sort of brain and skill drain.

The SEZ offers its owners a nice prelude to the capital flight they would carry out to stash these gains in financial institutions abroad, to have a nicer life for may be one life time [without any consideration to their progeny]. They search for a lifestyle comparable to their western compatriots before the native country ever dreams to have a convertible currency regime. The owners do not want to take any chances- if the native country sinks they are still afloat, transmigrated and transmuted into citizens of the world and in particular of the western world. If the country shores up for a while then they can always come back to reclaim their ancestral rights as sons and daughters of the soil. They will then enjoy the fruits of their dubiously earned profits in an economy they have made cheaper, by depleting it. They do so safe in the knowledge that the moment the signal turns amber they would take the next flight out. SEZ is that space, which ensures a safer proposition of capital flight from the native land to the promised metropolitan. Who paid for all these? Don't even dare to ask.... Of course those half clad, half fed, lesser children of the native land, those who never could wake up to comprehend their rightful claim. Here speed is the *mantra*- the faster you can fly fooling the producers the smarter you are! SEZ is that smart contraption that takes the owner places and leaves the producer-labour to pay for the trip!

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Exploring New Ideas and Forms: "Exploring Masculinities, a South Asian travelling Seminar", CIEFL, 30-31 March 2007



Jishnu Dasgupta

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When not in the thick of political fray, he is an aesthete, lover of book and music, old things and this city of joy.

As gender becomes more and more the focus of academic discourses, the questioning of the very categories and their construction also proceeds apace. *Exploring Masculinities: A Travelling South Asian Seminar* is an effort in that direction. At the end of March, this travelling seminar arrived in Hyderabad, with its array of papers, presentations, discussions and films. In the seminar organised by The Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages (CIEFL) in that city, jointly with Aakar and Anveshi, academics and others from various parts of South Asia mingled, creating quite a heady cocktail for participants. I was there too, covering the occasion for the e-magazine.

Aakar, a Delhi-based trust that organises this series has been engaged in producing and supporting research, films, visual materials etc. in varying areas of gender, culture and politics. It is a platform to look at current theories and practices on the themes of masculinities, with violence, health, discrimination and equality, and a range of other issues thrown in. As part of that, the Travelling Seminar started its rounds in 2002 and went to universities in Shillong, Baroda, Delhi and Chandigarh. It was visualised as a pedagogical exercise to inform the theory and practice of masculinities and was a resounding success. Encouraged by this, Aakar is now planning a much wider sweep in the second series, covering ten universities in Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan. As such, it is an important exercise in sharing across this oft-troubled region.

As I arrived in CIEFL, the host institute on the day before the seminar I immediately realised that this was not going to be (thankfully) a stuffy affair, with "oh-so-propah" formalities. My own offer to help out with the arrangements were taken up with an astounding degree of seriousness and I was put to work, hanging up banners, moving furniture, and eventually, to receive people at the airport. This suited me fine, as it gave me the chance to launch into conversations with the participants and the organisers, many of whom were old friends.

But when the guests arrived, it was

apparent immediately that they too were tuned into the atmosphere. Chats about Imran Khan's politics and his religious vies spun off the discussion of the image of the great masculine sporting star of Pakistan, now trying to eke out a political career. The seminar had already started, and without the pulpit.

On 30 March, Rahul Roy of Aakar kicked off the seminar by telling the audience of the 'why' and more importantly, the 'how' of the travelling seminar. A noted documentary filmmaker by profession, Roy spoke of the need of weaving disciplines like history, film studies, sociology etc. together, rather than creating one more niche discipline, Masculinities. The idea of advancing by "bouncing ideas of each one another" definitely did not smack of academic vanguardism. Between them, Roy, Uma Bhrugubanda and A. Suneetha set the tone quite nicely in the opening session, the only possible complaint against which could be its slightly protracted length. Bhrugubanda of the Centre for Cultural Studies, CIEFL, stressed this very need for collaboration in such endeavours, and made all present feel even more a part of the goings-on. A. Suneetha of Anveshi Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad, spoke of the need of "developing women's studies focussed not solely on women". She also raised the important questions of the role of the state, opening up of governmental space for women, and the importance of other signifiers, such as caste, in women's identities.

After the introductory session, the first paper of the conference was presented by Muraleedharan Tharayil of St. Aloysius College, Thrissur. His paper, 'Chandu Pottu: *Subaltern Masculinity and the Queering of Visual Pleasure*', was a fascinating study of a recent Malayali film that steps out of, and yet conforms to, the norms of masculinity in popular Malayali cinema. The hero, called by a feminine nickname, Radha, displays markedly non-masculine habits and traits, while the villain is placed in deliberate, masculine contrast. Even the heroine is shown to have adopted phallic symbols, and displays manners that are more masculine than the hero's. At

the same time, the agent of modernity in the film, an English-speaking fisherman called Freddie, is a hyper-masculine figure. The director himself sent a message that called into question the politics of the film, when he, in a televised interview, attributes Radha's effeminacy to "faulty upbringing" (emphasis mine). Tharayil critiqued the film for portraying the feminine as funny. He noted that a queer group filed a suit, as there were quite a few instances of 'masculine 'men beating them up to' correct them, as Freddie had tried to do to Radha.

The collapsing, in the film's scopoc regime, of the 'effeminate' with the 'gay' also is an interesting indicator of its politics, as Tharayil saw effeminacy in the film as a possible "codeword for gay", or alternatively, as "a psychic conflict between bio-sexual identity and the socially given". Following this, Madhava Prasad, of CIEFL raised the question of comparing the psychic dilemma for Radha with those possible for Freddie and the other properly masculine characters in the film.

Shashank Pereira, of the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo, spoke at length of the politics of the depiction of the Sri Lankan army. His 'The Male Body and the Politics of Masculinity: Constructions of Bravery in Times of Combat in Sri Lanka' was an exploration of this politics, and the cultural mores that went into building this up. He brought in a range of cultural symbols, from the chronicles Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa to the more recent fascination with the 'Rambo' films, to the advertisements that always depict the male soldiers as engaged in martial tasks, or being engaged as helpful, good men, (such as in rescue operations) to make his point of how the male body of the soldier is brought into the gaze of the Sri Lankan public, and how it informs the discourse of nationalism and valour in the decades-long civil war. He tied this with the employment of women in the army only in desk jobs or at check posts that went well with this discourse of the masculine character of the state's armed forces.

Radhika Chopra's 'The Male Veil? Interrogating a Discourse' was an engaging study of "dominant dis-

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courses of modernity [that] have produced the veiled figure of the anonymous woman and the veiled Jehadi". The alternate uses of the veil as marks of passivity and of agency threw up interesting pointers about its role in relation to power. The feminine veil- the *chaddar*, the *niqab*, the *burqa*- all have a muting effect, while the male veil carried the exact opposite messages of violence, assertion and rioting. Her paper, spanning the Middle East, North Africa and India, raised several questions about traditional notions of the veil and the politics that informs such notions. She pointed to the role of the veil in marking positions in a society too, both among the nomadic Tuareg of Sub-Saharan Africa and in Oman, where the male *Khanith* performs this role. She raised similar questions about veiling practices in India, pointing to the use of veiling or the lack of it as markers of social position in Indian households and society. And, Chopra, who is from the Department of Sociology, Delhi University, also talked of the role of the hood as the male veil, deflecting the state's gaze from (what it sees as) terrorists.

The last paper of the day was 'AIDS, Masculinity and the National Demagogy', where Dilip Das of CIEFL talked of the politics of morality and sexuality that informed the Indian state's first forays into raising awareness about AIDS. The campaign targeted certain sections as carriers, and generally saw them as people to blame. Thus, the middle class housewife could only be the passive victim while the sexually free woman was a dangerous spreading agent. Thus, enemies of moral normativities collapsed seamlessly into threats to the very lives of people. He contrasted the 'sexy' Kama Sutra advertisements with those of the government brand of condoms, safe fun taking precedence in the first, while the latter harped on the need of family planning. The discussant, Veena Shatrughna, Deputy Director of the National Institute of Nutrition, pointed out how physicians had been replaced by NGOs in the front-lines of the battle against AIDS in India, which provided an interesting dimension to the state's reaction to the disease.

If the conference dinner could have dulled the senses of some participants on the second morning, Shohini Ghosh's (AJK Mass Communications Research Centre, JMI, New Delhi) paper was just the right dose to wake them up. Her 'Forbidden Love and Passionate Denials' was a masterful foray into the politics of a film representing the apparently more sexually free genre of recent Bengali films. She pointed out how these films were in conversation with other recent films

too. What made the paper even more engaging was how she pointed out the inconsistency of the narrative closure with much of the film, thus enabling not just different readings of the film than that offered by the ending, as the whole film refutes the end, but that the disappointment of the lovers not meeting at the end is mitigated by the possibility of other narratives and other endings.

Close on the heels of politics of love, came that of the equally passionate hate; communal hatred, in this case. In 'Words that Wound: Archiving Hate in the Making of Hindu and Muslim Publics in Bombay', Dipak Mehta, also of the Department of Sociology of the Delhi University, talked of texts that were calculated to provoke hatred in the 'other' community in Bombay/Mumbai. He marked the resonances in the hate-literature of the city, drawing from sources taken from the 1920s to the 1990s, to problematise the relationship between the 'high' and the 'low' discourses of communal politics. These discourses on both sides of the communal divide, often feed off each other. They are further strengthened by mixing stories of valour and honour with those of the depravity, more often than not sexual, of the other. Mehta pointed out the close relationship that these discourses enjoyed with official disciplines such as history, particularly of the colonial variety, and even the legal apparatus, both colonial and post-colonial.

The next session was a panel discussion featuring three young researchers. CIEFL's M. Phil. student Samata Biswas discussed the role of women in a masculinised workplace, through three mainstream Hindi filmic narratives. Her paper, 'Women Characters in a Gendered (Masculine) Workplace: *Fanaa*, *Corporate* and *Dhoom 2*' analysed the role of women in these films, either as a tough cop, or in the corporate world, to be that of sacrifice and other such qualities assigned to women by patriarchy, often embodying the nation-as-mother. It was this sacrificing character, she also pointed out, that often gave the film its ethical charge. Independent researcher Jenny Rowena sought to "examine the present debates on masculinity in order to problematize the primary 'object' of men's studies." She pointed to the different, stereotyped portrayals of men from different social backgrounds (caste, community,

class) in popular Indian cinema in her 'The "Object" of Men's Studies in India: An Inquiry through Cinema'. She raised the question of performance in terms of these masculinities to bring "forward pointers towards a re-articulation of the questions of masculinity(-ies)." The last speaker on the panel was Mohammad Shafeeq, also of CIEFL. His paper, 'The Muslim Man: Masculinity as Pathology' showed how the treatment of Muslim masculinity was informed, in popular filmic representation, by its opposition to Hindu men and also Muslim women. There were either (pathological) excesses of the masculinity of Islam, or the secular state's masculinity, which again were put up as contesting categories- to determine the destiny of the women of the state.

The last paper of the seminar was from Pushpesh Kumar of the SRTM University of Nanded. His paper, titled 'Disorderly Body in a Middle Town' was an exploration of the marginalised masculinities and the interplays informed by the positioning of these bodies in an ethos strongly tinged by caste, community and kinship ties. It is in this context that he situated the *Kothis* "the non-English speaking effeminate gay males in the Maharashtra middle town.

The seminar was enlivened also by other forms of presentations. There was an excellent slide show and discussion by C. S. Jayaram, titled 'Man Made: Negotiations of Masculinity in Art'. There were also two films Rahul Roy's *The City Beautiful* and Deepa Dhanraj's *Love in the Time of AIDS*. With the power of the audiovisual medium, they brought home, to many of the participants, the various points raised during the engaging two-day exercise.

But, to come back to the beginning; the seminar was special not just because of the quality of the papers and other presentations, but with the whole way that the exercise was run. And the participatory atmosphere, essential to this continuing exercise of reaching out to various places and sections with a concept that is still quite new, was evident from the day before the seminar, through the phases in the auditorium, the (customary) dinner, and the end. Kudos to all involved in this.



Shohini Ghosh



Rahul Roy

Technology Cannot Wipe Out MEMORIES



Munir Fasheh

Munir Fasheh is the Director of the Arab Education Forum at Harvard University, Cambridge, where his responsibilities include organising annual meetings for people from the Arab world working in various fields. He was founder and director of the Tamer Institute for Community Education in Jerusalem, Israel, the aim of which was to create learning spaces, especially for youth, through activities, projects, and seminars. Dr. Fasheh is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jerusalem School of Economics and Diplomacy and of the Board of Trustees and the Steering Committee for the Arab Resource Collective, an inter-Arab group working on networking and communication among Arab NGOs. Dr. Fasheh holds an M.S. in mathematics education from Florida State University, Tallahassee, and an Ed.D. in administration, social policy, and planning from Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Dr. Fasheh is an alumnus of the Salzburg Seminar's Universities Project, Symposium 20, The Meanings of Autonomy, 2002.

The recent events in Lebanon and Palestine brought back a long chain of memories. It reminded me, in particular, of when I was four or five years old. I was born in Lower Baq'a quarter in Jerusalem in 1941 (i.e., before Israel was created). There was a Jewish settlement- Mekor Haim- next to our neighbourhood. What is happening in Lebanon reminded me of the nights when my parents (as a result of shelling from the Jewish settlement) would make my sisters and me stand under doorframes, believing it to be the safest place, in case a shell fell on our house. Like all Palestinians, we did not have shelters. What is happening today reminded me very vividly of those days and nights. It is not easy to forget standing for several hours over a period of time, totally terrified by the possibility that a shell may fall down any minute. Such memories cannot just disappear, especially when they are accompanied by feelings of unfairness and injustice. Unfairness and injustice at that time were felt more towards the British who gave the promise to the Zionist organisation to help them build a Jewish state in Palestine- contrary to the mandate given to them by the League of Nations, which was to "help" Palestinians build their own state. Not only did they not help us build a state but made us lose more than eighty two per cent of the land of Palestine¹ and take refuge in neighbouring countries- exactly like what is happening to hundreds of thousands of people today in Lebanon. One difference between then and now is that Britain is replaced by the US. All subsequent attempts and wishes to make us forget only succeeded in making the memories sink deeper and become more alive. They stayed alive not because Palestinians are stubborn people but because pain, destruction, and feelings of unfairness and injustice can never go away. They may recede for a while, but as soon as something like what is happening in Gaza and Lebanon takes place, they become again very vivid. In response to what happened in 1948, Ben Gurion, the PM

of Israel in the 1950s, said, "the fathers will die and their children will forget". John Foster Dulles (then US Secretary of State) when asked in the mid 1950s "what about the Palestinians", he repeated the same sentence: "Fathers will die and children will forget". [The same relationship still persists today: Condolezza Rice (US Secretary of State) merely repeats whatever Olmert (PM of Israel) says!] Ben Gurion and Dulles may have been able to forget, but not those who went through the pain, destruction, and terror. Probably, the only memories lost are those of the perpetrators, for they don't feel the pain of what they have done. Jews, out of all peoples, should understand the power of memories, but it seems that when people become militarily powerful, they forget the role and depth of memories in forming people. It was a sixteen-year-old Lebanese girl who said to her science teacher, "we are made of stories, not atoms". Every person and every community is made of stories, experiences, memories, dreams, and of what embodies hope and captures the imagination in terms of inspiration and dignity. That's why, when I hear people talk about Palestinian identity in an intellectual abstract sense, I feel the shallowness of the concept compared to memories and dreams. That's why I felt Israel was so shortsighted to claim, for several decades, that there is no such thing as Palestinians; "they did not exist"- as Golda Meir insisted in 1970! More than any one else she knew the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who were forced out of their homes, and more than four hundred villages that were totally destroyed between 1948 and 1952. Just like what is happening now, those false words were for the ears of Westerners so that Israel could go on doing what it was doing. At that time, there was no Hamas or Hizbullah to justify the attacks. The way to deal with the facts then was to deny that Palestinians ever existed!

My parents became especially scared about our lives as a result of

the acts of terrorist Jewish organisations. I remember when my father took my sisters and me to see the King David Hotel and, later, the Samiramis Hotel (both not very far from our house) that were blown up by Jewish organisations. My family knew personally the Abu Suwan family (husband, wife and their five children) who were killed in the Samiramis Hotel massacre. On 9 April 1948, the Deir Yassin massacre was committed, where most of the inhabitants of that village were killed. As a result of that massacre and the threats that the same would happen to those who would not leave, my parents decided to take us to Jericho, believing it would be only for a week or two. Two months later, they took us to Ramallah.² During that summer, the inhabitants of Ramla and Lydda were evicted from their homes; many walked all the way to Ramallah in the heat of July. They lived in the fields under trees for a while. We played with their children. In 1967, more than another quarter of a million Palestinians were forced to leave the refugee camps near Jericho and become refugees (for the second time) in Jordan.

What is happening, in Lebanon today, brought back to my mind all those massacres and exoduses. Between 1948 and 1967, I lived in Ramallah, which is less than ten miles away from our house in Jerusalem, but could never go there. After the 1967 war, when Israel occupied the rest of Palestine, I was able to go and see our home in Jerusalem, but the people in it did not allow me to go in and see the inside, where I had a lot of memories of playing with my sisters and toys. My mother and my aunts, however, could not make the trip; it was emotionally too painful for them. They worked for more than twenty years (sewing clothes) in order to build it. It was completed in 1933.

The current events in Palestine and Lebanon will add new memories to new millions of people. If I were an Israeli, I would be more worried about memories that the current Israeli

¹ In this sense, Palestinians should demand from Britain to give them back what was entrusted to them under the mandate by the League of Nations: Palestine.

² Even UN officials were not spared by Jewish terrorist acts, such as what happened to Count Bernadotte who in September 1948 was assassinated one day after he wrote his report that Palestinians should be allowed to go back to their homes.

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onslaught will create than about falling missiles. Missiles will eventually end but memories will remain to determine a lot of what will happen in the future.

That feeling of the power of memories was confirmed in my mind during a trip I took in 2001, to visit my friend Gustavo Esteva in Oaxaca, Mexico. There, for the first time, I came face to face with memories that extended over 500 years (not only sixty). The story of the indigenous populations of Oaxaca and nearby Chiapas³ (where the Zapatistas have been busy transforming their memories into inspiring and beautiful dreams and visions of "a world that embraces many worlds"— as they put it) was a very inspiring and hopeful story for me. What struck me most was the fact that all attempts to completely wipe out memories and cultures of indigenous peoples in the Americas failed. Education was a key element in trying to wipe out memories and cultures. The motto that was coined by Captain Richard Henry Pratt, who founded the first Native American Boarding School, Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, was "Kill the Indian and Save the Man," the purpose of which was "to reject their Native American culture". In the 1840s, the "Gradual Civilizational Act" was introduced in Canada. It is a very revealing story of how the state, church, business, and education collaborated in tearing apart families and communities and in trying to make children forget their cultures: The state enacted the policy, education designed the curriculum, business provided the money, and the church took care of the execution!⁴ The role of education in dismantling communities, belittling cultures, and occupying minds was manifested in different ways in different places and different times. In most cases, it was done in ways that were subtler than in residential schools. It was done, not only by imposing certain curricula but also, and more importantly, by devaluing what people have. When the World Bank was allowed to get into Palestine in 1993 after the Oslo agreement, one of the first things it got involved in

was education! Similarly, after the occupation of Iraq, "winning the minds and hearts of Arab and Muslim youth" was launched by the US— through education, TV, newspapers, and books. The main difference between the various attempts to dismantle societies— through "helping" them— is in the words used and the actors accomplishing the task. The church in the case for Native Americans was replaced by the World Bank (in the case of Palestine) in overseeing the process of imposing a certain view of the world on students. And, instead of using 'saving' and 'civilising', which the church used, the World Bank uses 'developing' and 'empowering'. The logic is the same. In the words of Black Hawk, a Sauk chief, in 1832: "How smooth must be the language of the whites, when they can make right look like wrong, and wrong look like right." The World Bank has been much more successful than churches and armies in shattering societies, devaluing cultures, and stealing resources: They do it through 'national' states, 'national' banks, and development projects! It is safer, subtler, and more effective. The distractions it uses are harder to detect. Again, it is history that is crucial in understanding the modern world, and it is history in the form of memories that can protect us from falling once again for false promises— such as the promise given to the PLO in 1982 that if they leave Beirut, the US would protect the Palestinians, which the Sabra and Shatilla massacres proved false. Not a single promise by Britain or the US was honoured. Soon, we will be hearing many promises being made by Rice.

Technology can wipe out villages and towns, and can kill and silence people; it can destroy fields and distort facts in official books, journalists' reports, and experts' presentations, analyses, and debates. But it cannot wipe out memories; it would only make them sink deeper.

While bombs destroyed what was around us, words destroyed what was inside us, by devaluing our ways of knowing, learning, relating, and living.

Although I experienced bombardment by shells since I was a little child, over the years I felt we have also been bombarded by words. Bombs and words have been bedmates. Words are crucial in forming perceptions, conceptions, and meanings. Monopolising who is a terrorist is just one example of how words shape perceptions and control minds. However, words such as "underdevelopment" and "reform" have done much more harm than obvious ones, because they are subtler and go deeper. It was at this level— the level of bombardment of words— that I personally put my effort to respond to onslaughts from outside. As a person who worked most of my life in education and learning, and with children and youth, dealing with such bombardments, and healing and protecting us from them, have constituted my thinking and work for many years.

Finally, I would like to mention an aspect that is part of my memory— though ignored and forgotten from most discussions about Palestine. It is an aspect that I consider extremely crucial: The fact that 1948 was the first time in history when Jerusalem was practically emptied of its Christian inhabitants. The creation of Israel uprooted what (in my opinion) is the most special and precious Christian community in the world.⁵ We are special and precious not in any intrinsic, superior, or privileged sense, but in the sense that we are the only indigenous Christian group in the world. What I mean by this is that we are the only group that embodies the spirit of Jesus, through living it from one generation to another since Jesus walked on the land of Palestine. Most Christian families from Jerusalem went to Jordan, Lebanon, the US, and Europe.

No one can predict where what is happening today is going to lead to but, judging from past memories, I can say that the following is almost certain:

- The current Israeli assault on Gaza and Lebanon will not solve any problem; if anything, it is

³ One of the books that I read (and which I believe everyone should read, because it really shows part of the roots of what is happening in the world today) is *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, which was written, about the atrocities in the Indies, in 1542 (fifty years after Columbus invaded the region) by a Dominican brother, Bartolome De Las Casas. In the words of Columbus (when he and his sailors came ashore, carrying swords, speaking oddly), the Arawaks ran to greet them, brought them food, water, gifts. Columbus later wrote: "They brought us parrots and balls of cotton and spears and many other things, which they exchanged for the glass beads and hawks' bells. They willingly traded everything they owned.... They were well-built, with good bodies and handsome features. They do not bear arms, and do not know them, for I showed them a sword, they took it by the edge and cut themselves out of ignorance. They have no iron. Their spears are made of cane. They would make fine servants. With fifty men we could subjugate them all and make them do whatever we want". In another letter, Columbus was full of religious talk: "Thus the eternal God, our Lord, gives victory to those who follow His way over apparent impossibilities."

⁴ Reading what happened in history will help us see what is happening today. As a result of the failure to make indigenous peoples leave their cultures and forget what happened, they resorted to a scheme which used education as its main tool: Residential schools. [See, for example, http://www.shannonthunderbird.com/residential_schools.htm] It is worth mentioning that I am not talking about distant history, the last residential school in Canada was closed in 1990— only seventeen years ago!

⁵ See the following link <http://www.sabeel.org/pdfs/Cornerstone%2040final%20Spring%202006.pdf> In addition to www.sabeel.org see also www.annadwa.org

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going to add new ones... and huge ones for that. It is going to add more pain, more misery, more refugees and, thus, more memories— not only for Arabs but also for Israelis.

- What is happening is going to stick as vivid memories in people's minds, just as what happened in 1948, 1956, 1967, 1982, 1987, 1996, 2000, and 2002 and all in between stuck in my memory. Memories are swelling all the time, and feelings of unfairness and injustice are deepening all the time. My guess is that this time, feelings of unfairness and injustice will go deeper than before because, while in 1948, most people around the world didn't know what was happening, no one can make such a claim today. The indifference and silence that the official world showed today is too much to bear.
- Just like in the past, every time Israel thought it succeeded in eliminating one group, other groups came into being. As long as the grievances are not addressed, the problem will keep emerging in different forms. People are incredible and unpredictable. Hope cannot be wiped out from people's lives. It is probably the strongest human emotion.
- Israel's technological capacities have advanced a lot over the years. In terms of political visions, however, it seems it is still stuck with what was there since the 1940s, which itself is a

leftover of European dreams of building empires. A society that has no visionaries other than those who seek more control and more means of destruction is doomed.

- People are moved by memories, dreams, and by what captures their imagination. Current events are increasingly making Islam central in such a capturing of imagination. No matter what happens, my guess is that Islam is going to be a main inspiration. Any attempt to crush that imagination will be naïve and short sighted. Unlike national and socialist movements, which lacked rootedness in people's lives, Islam is rooted very deeply in people's ways of living. Israel and the US have been very ignorant by dealing with Islam the same way they dealt with nationalist and leftist movements. Western and Israeli experts on Islam seem to be only interested in how to defeat Islam the same way they defeated communism and national movements. Islam is not just a movement and not just a religion or an ideology, it is a way of living that is very deep in millions of people and communities. When communism was made illegal in Russia, few hundreds of people went to the streets to protest. No one can make Islam illegal or reduce it to a vision of having a nation state— like what happened to the Palestinian dream.
- Human problems require human

solutions; insisting on rational and military solutions is unwise and self-defeating.

- Dominating others is increasingly becoming a disastrous project. This leaves us with two options: The one that comes from the depth of five hundred years of memories, articulated by the Zapatistas in the words "a world that embraces many worlds", i.e., a world that embodies respect, dignity, fairness, and pluralism OR— which is the second option— continue to try to dominate others, which most probably will lead to destroying life on this earth.

A basic fact about life and about people, in all places and at all times, is that the human spirit is undefeatable. This timeless spirit is very rarely talked about. It stands in contradiction with the logic that is increasingly invading societies around the world, the logic of winning, control, greed, and profit. Humanity can be suppressed in some places at certain times but, as long as there is injustice, it will always be boiling underneath the surface, and it will erupt by various peoples, taking various forms, depending mainly on the living culture of the people. Injustice cannot last. Just like a volcano where boiling energy has to come out, and like an earthquake where a fault has to be corrected and the earth has to rest, humanity will erupt and shake somewhere, somehow, until justice is regained. There is no way to suppress it completely. This is the beauty and miracle of life.

Across the South

Mandela and Rhodes: A Blissful Marriage?*



Adekeye Adebajo

Adekeye Adebajo is Executive Director of the Centre for Conflict Resolution, Cape Town, South Africa. He served as Director of the Africa Programme of the New York-based International Peace Academy between 2001–2003. During the same period, Dr Adebajo was an Adjunct Professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. He previously served on UN missions in South Africa, Western Sahara and Iraq. Dr Adebajo is the author of *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau*; *Liberia's Civil War: Nigeria, ECOMOG, and Regional Security in West Africa*; and co-editor of *Managing Armed Conflicts in the Twenty-First Century*; *West Africa's Security Challenges: Building Peace in A Troubled Region*; *A Dialogue of the Deaf: Essays on Africa and the United Nations and South Africa in Africa: The Post-Apartheid Era*. He obtained his doctorate from Oxford University, where he studied as a Rhodes Scholar.

On winning the single Rhodes Scholarship from Nigeria to study at Oxford University in 1990, an alarmed uncle exclaimed: "That thing is dripping with blood. Cecil Rhodes was a bloody imperialist!"

My thoughts at the time were more practical: To get a good education at a world-class institution, and if the money of a robber-baron who had plundered Africa's wealth was paying for it, then at least a slice of the treasure was returning to the continent. I remember my stomach churning at dinners at Rhodes House in Oxford when the assembled dignitaries would turn to a large portrait of the colonialist and raise their glasses to "The Founder". My own silent protest involved refusing to partake in this strange ritual of the most secret of societies. Still struggling to come to terms with my own personal discomfort with this association a decade later, I was shocked to discover the creation of the Mandela/Rhodes Foundation in South Africa in 2002. The Rhodes Trust in Oxford contributed ten million pounds over a decade to scholarships, child healthcare and sporting facilities to disadvantaged communities. I wondered, however, whether this was not a tragic perversion of a genuine African hero. As Paul Maylam, the author of a recent excellent book, "The Cult of Rhodes", noted: "The arch-imperialist colonizer of the nineteenth century was being conjoined with the great anti-imperialist freedom fighter of the twentieth century."

Mandela— one of the greatest moral figures in the twentieth century— was effectively rehabilitating a grotesque and cruel imperialist of the Victorian age. In launching the new foundation, Mandela noted: "Combining our name with that of Cecil John Rhodes in this initiative is to signal the closing of the circle and the bringing together of two strands in our history." It is shocking to visit Rhodes House in Oxford today, and to see Mandela's picture with a white bust of Cecil Rhodes lurking behind him, as well as a painting of both of them hanging side by side. Surely, Jews would not create a Herzog (founder of the Zionist move-

ment)/Hitler Foundation— so why have Africans accepted this monstrosity? Has Mandela perhaps not taken reconciliation too far in rehabilitating an evil figure that Africans should really have condemned to the pit-latrane of history?

Rhodes, who died in 1902, undoubtedly remains the greatest individual historical symbol of imperialism. Zimbabwe tore down his statues after independence in 1980. Zambia toppled a statue of Rhodes on achieving independence in 1964, and both countries— formerly named Southern and Northern Rhodesia respectively— sought to remove the imperial stain by re-baptising themselves. South Africa has not yet started a proper debate on the numerous Rhodes memorials that litter its post-apartheid landscape. Today, Rhodes' obsessive quest to achieve immortality can be seen in Cape Town (statues, street names and a grandiloquent memorial at the University of Cape Town); Kimberley (a statue on horseback); and Grahamstown (Rhodes University). An effort by the academic, Roger Southall, to change the name of Rhodes University in 1994 was soundly defeated in the university senate.

Rhodes harnessed both political power— as Prime Minister of the Cape Colony— and economic power, as a diamond and gold magnate. He used his economic wealth to buy political power; and used political power to protect and extend his wealth. He headed the De Beers mining firm and dispossessed black people of their ancestral lands in modern-day Zimbabwe and Zambia through brutal and often treacherous means, stealing three-and-a-half million square miles of black real estate in one of the most ignominious "land-grabs" in modern history. Rhodes was an often-unscrupulous businessman as well as a crude racist. He infamously said: "I prefer land to niggers..."; "...the natives are like children. They are just emerging from barbarism."; and "One should kill as many niggers as possible." Even before apartheid was passed into law in 1948, Rhodes was its forerunner, taking away the vote from black

people in what had hitherto been considered the relatively "liberal" Cape Colony; forcibly removing blacks to native reserves (through the Glen Grey Act of 1894); and passing draconian labour laws (including the legal flogging of 'disobedient' black labourers) that facilitated the continued supply of human fodder to his mines.

The Rhodes Scholarship is the most enduring legacy of this arch-imperialist. The South African scholarships have been particularly controversial since they have effectively served as a form of white "affirmative action" for a century. Students from schools listed in Rhodes' will— Diocesan College ("Bishops"), St. Andrew's College; the South African College Schools (SACS), and Stellenbosch boys' high school (Paul Roos Gymnasium)— that neither admitted blacks nor girls until the 1980s continued to obtain four of the nine scholarships. The first Afrikaner scholar declined the scholarship in 1903, as the scheme was seen as privileging "Anglo-liberal whites". As Apartheid South Africa became increasingly isolated, American Rhodes scholars led petitions and protests to increase black representation on the scheme and even to cut off scholarships to the country altogether. The pressure eventually led the Rhodes trustees to take the four "whites only" boys' schools to court in 1985 to force them to admit blacks and girls. Only in 1976 were the first black Rhodes scholar (Ramuchandran Govender) and the first woman Rhodes scholar (Sheila Niven) chosen— seventy two years after the first South African scholars went up to Oxford. Four black scholars were elected in the first eighty years of a scheme that still appears to be more albinocratic than meritocratic. Even today, there is no systematic plan in place to attract the "best and brightest" black talent to the scholarships.

Based on Rhodes' sordid historical legacy, a debate on the wisdom of yoking the saintly Mandela to a colossal imperialist seems to be long overdue.

* An earlier version of this paper was published under the title "A most Unsavoury Rehabilitation". This is published here by kind permission of *The Mail* and *The Guardian*.

Reviews

The History of a Frontier



Joya Chatterji

Dr. Joya Chatterji was educated at Lady Sri Ram College, Delhi, and Trinity College, Cambridge. Her main research interests lie in the history of Modern South Asia: communal conflict, partition and independence, and the transition to democracy. Her major publications on these themes include *Bengal divided. Hindu communalism and partition, 1932-1947*, Cambridge University Press, 1994; and *The spoils of partition. Bengal and India, 1947-1967*, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Dr. Chatterji has also published widely on the themes of borders, refugees and religious minorities, and is currently leading a major AHRC-funded project inquiring into 'The Bengal diaspora. Bengali settlers in South Asia and Britain: a comparative and interdisciplinary study'. Dr. Chatterji is presently a Reader in International History at the London School of Economics, but will be taking up a position in the Faculty of History at Cambridge later this year.

Willem van Schendel, *The Bengal Borderland: Beyond State and Nation in South Asia*, Anthem Press, London, 2005, pp. 429, £16.99

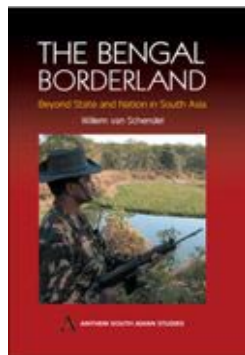
Since 1945, the world has been shown on maps as a congeries of nation-states separated from one another by clear and impenetrable borders. These states, according to conventional wisdom, exercise absolute sovereignty and have a monopoly of the use of force within their territories. But when the reality is investigated, as recent research has begun to do, this view has come to be challenged in significant ways—territorial sovereignty is seen to be ambiguous and borders both fluid and contingent. Willem van Schendel's study of *The Bengal Borderland* is an important example of this new scholarship; it is also a model of how hard facts and subtle analysis deepen our understanding of the subject.

This is an ambitious work that raises many interesting questions about the nature of states and their control over borderlands. As the title suggests, its focus is on the new frontiers that, after the partition of India in 1947, carved up territory between West Bengal and Assam in India and Eastern Pakistan, later to break away as Bangladesh. How and why Bengal got its particular borders, and the politics, which lay behind them, are not the burden of this work—the borders are assumed (inaccurately in my view) to be the sole handiwork of Sir Cyril Radcliffe. Instead van Schendel focuses on a different topic: How these new borders actually worked out on the ground, and how the new nation-states of South Asia tried to establish, manage and police them. One of the book's most exciting achievements is to show the complex processes by which the governments of these nations, in seeking to secure their borders, were drawn into protracted and inconclusive arm-wrestles with borderland communities. Partial and imperfect resolutions of innumerable local skirmishes between border-dwellers and the agents of the state are shown to have left their mark on the evolution of these borders, underlining the vital role of the border-dwellers themselves in determining what sort of frontiers have emerged in the eastern arc of the Indian subcontinent.

Far from being straightforward and undisputed lines of division, the borders, as van Schendel shows, have assumed different characteristics in different parts of their four thousand kilometres, and over time have undergone many

metamorphoses and mutations. Some stretches remain unmarked to this day; others are fenced off and are relatively well delineated and well guarded. Nowhere, however, have these eastern borders proved impenetrable—none of the states of the region have had the will, the manpower and the resources to close them effectively. On the contrary they have been porous in varying degrees: In some parts they are borders in no meaningful sense of the word; in others more sponges than walls; and even the few Zones which are relatively well guarded, they have shown themselves capable of being penetrated by stealth, bribery or force.

The book powerfully illustrates the impact of these borders on the communities whose habitat they bisected: the new borders brought these people up against—eyeball to eyeball as it were—the most brutal and ugly aspects of state authority. India and Pakistan alike recruited their border security forces not locally but from afar, in order to ensure that these guardians of the border were insulated and aloof from local life and politics in the borderlands. These agents of the state do not come out well from van Schendel's account. Venal, bullying and trigger-happy, they imposed a low-level reign of terror on borderland communities, their victims in the main being hapless border-dwellers who strayed, usually by accident, across the frontiers. All too readily gunning down local people with little cause and against all the rules, these enforcers turned a blind eye to smugglers, at times even renting out their weapons and identity papers to those ready and able to pay the price. This was 'Rifle Raj' in the borderlands, and van Schendel's account of it makes grim, if fascinating, reading.



The book has some surprising findings. One is that, despite all the violence and instability of the border zones, dwellers along the frontiers have over time learnt to live in the shadow of the border, and somehow to negotiate its hazards. Indeed some borderlanders have managed to do quite well in these bizarre circumstances by making smuggling a way of life. Van Schendel is at his best when he describes this clandestine economy—smuggling turns out to be one of the most profitable and widespread economic activities along all four thousand kilometres of the borders. As he demonstrates, the very different economic policies pursued by the newly-independent states in South Asia all provided fertile ground for a mushrooming trade in contraband. By giving priority to import substitution and by protecting domestic industries more determinedly than Pakistan, India created in its own territories a hunger for goods from outside and an environment conducive to smuggling. 'Phoren' consumer commodities were much more readily available in East Pakistan than in India, and so these goods flowed ever more vigorously and in ever-increasing volumes into India—an illicit trade from which some borderlanders derived great profit. In the reverse direction, Indian manufactures and consumables—as varied as table fans, silk saris, razorblades and medicines—made their unlawful way into East Pakistan. In 1980, after Bangladesh decided to make its economy more liberal, this illegal trade grew in size, and the methods of the dealers in contraband became more sophisticated. Ten years later, by 1990, raw jute was being smuggled through each and every one of the thirty policed transit points along the Bangladesh/ West Bengal border. But so too were less innocuous items. As van Schendel shows, drugs and guns now began to flood into the borderlands to meet the demand from all manner of bandits, criminals and insurgents. With their detailed knowledge of the terrain and their personal connections on both sides of the line, border-dwellers were ideally placed to act as mules in these burgeoning and only semi-clandestine, but increasingly dangerous, transactions. So too were the border-guards, who had few qualms about flouting the laws of the land and

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subverting the control of their masters in far-away Delhi or Dhaka.

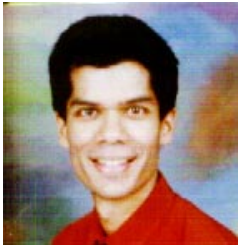
So any notion of a nation-state with effectively sealed borders ring-fencing a self-contained polity and economy, as van Schendel shows, is a chimera in eastern South Asia: An ideal which has never been realised, nor even systematically pursued. But this work has a relevance beyond South Asia. By showing just how superficial was the

control of these new states over their citizens, and indeed even over their own paid agents, *The Bengal Borderlands* tells us a great deal about the limits of authority in nation states— limits familiar to historians of imperialism, but usually not recognised by political scientists who analyse the successor states. Indeed, it should encourage comparative studies of the kind of power and control exercised by empires and nation-states, as

well as of the differences and similarities between 'imperial' and 'national' borders— subjects of great potential interest. This is an exciting and novel study, rich in information and insights, which calls to be read not only by students of the history of modern South Asia but by all those with an interest in empires, nations and their borders.

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Religion and Rhetoric in Caribbean Slavery: Revolts and Abolition



Jerome Teelucksingh

Jerome is a lecturer in the Department of History, University of the West Indies, in Trinidad and Tobago. He has taught at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and the Cipriani College of Labour and Co-operative Studies. Teelucksingh has presented papers at international conferences dealing with Afro-Caribbean personalities such as Henry Sylvester Williams, Eric Williams, CLR James and George Padmore.

Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement*, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, 2006, pp. 197, ISBN: 0-8071-3131-8, \$42.95.

Gelien Matthews has brilliantly examined the impact of slave revolts in the British West Indies on the anti-slavery abolitionist movement. There is a focus on the slave uprisings in the colonies of Barbados (1816), Demerara (1823) and Jamaica (1831-1832). The author argues that the abolitionists were acutely aware of the complementary role that slave revolts played in strengthening their antislavery efforts.

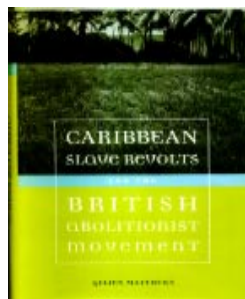
The historiography on slavery can be divided into two schools of thought. The first argues that it was economic factors including the unprofitability of slavery that led to its demise. The second group of historians, to which Matthews herself belongs, is of the opinion that the rationale for abolition of slavery was due to the influential role played by politics and various religious/humanitarian persons and groups.

Undoubtedly, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* dissects a tumultuous period of slave protests in the pre-emancipation era. Some of the antislavery personalities and groups highlighted in the book are William Wilberforce, Thomas Buxton, Thomas Clarkson and the Anti-Slavery Society. The author commended Clarkson for providing "...the abolitionists with a practical demonstration of how best to combine antislavery rhetoric and tactic to achieve their objectives" (p. 102).

Despite their brave fight there were many shortcomings, which plagued the humanitarians and abolitionists. For instance, in Chapter Two "Agitating the Question", Matthews argues, "What the abolitionists did not seem to understand was that in the last years of slavery, improved conditions did not make contented slaves" (p. 40). In Chapter Four "Loaded with Deadly Evidence" one of the revelations brought to light by this work is the manner in which abolitionists used deaths of the enslaved, following the Demerara outbreak, "...to pressure Parliament and the public to rethink and take corrective action on the regime of slavery" (p. 118). This was done despite the fact that there were many previous incidents, which the abolitionists could have utilised as

poignant illustrations in their anti-slavery campaigns.

Interestingly, the author makes the case that the abolitionists felt that the enslaved "would find motivation from outside the system if the impetus for change was not coming from within" (p. 139). It seemed obvious that the sheer brutality of slavery would have been sufficient "impetus" for widespread and continuous resistance, be it covert or active. A minor oversight of Matthews is ignoring the role of African religious beliefs of the enslaved would have certainly influenced the outbreak and course of these uprisings. This shortcoming might have been as a result of abolitionists who underestimated or ignored the influence of religions as voodun (voodoo) among ringleaders and its ability to suddenly transform fearful or wavering slaves.



Matthews contends, "Slaves were attuned to and curious about discussions on the slavery question taking place in the colonies and across the Atlantic..." (p. 80). Furthermore, that the abolitionists were aware of the existence of the influence of the educated element among the enslaved domestics. Monumental developments in nearby St. Domingue also influenced the abolitionists' commentary on the rebellious conduct of the enslaved. This has been emphasised in the subsection titled "The St. Domingue Bogey" in Chapter Three "The Other Side of Slave Revolts." Likewise, in Chapter Five "Apocalyptic Warnings" there is mention of the forthright abolitionist- Clarkson, who was adamant that this former French West Indian colony could be used as a model. He felt British West Indian Blacks, "...like their Haitian counterparts, were peaceful and industrious

once they had made the transition from bondage to freedom" (p. 146).

The extent of religion being effectively wielded to undermine British West Indian slavery seems difficult to assess given the mixed signals emanating from the religious advocates of abolition. This is revealed in Chapter Three, in which the abolitionists are portrayed as holding views that were contradictory and hypocritical. Matthews used the illustration of the Demerara revolt and focused on Henry Brougham's claim that Christianity among the enslaved contributed to the relatively peaceful course of the revolt. In analysing the role of the abolitionists Matthews argued that they were "not being true to their over-all assessment of the relationship between Christianity and slavery" (p.83). Additionally, she also noted Buxton's perception of the Jamaican revolt as being partially due to the religious persecution of the enslaved by the planters. This is indeed accurate since many irresolute abolitionists sought to maintain an element of decorum juxtaposed to their sympathies for the violent revolts among the enslaved.

Matthews has meticulously explored the multidimensional aspects of the abolition discourse and perceptions emanating from the British public, planters and West Indian colonists. In this regard the author must be commended for incorporating a wealth of primary and secondary sources. Among these are journals and newspapers like the *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, *Edinburgh Review*, *Baptist Magazine*; also relevant tracts, sermons and Parliamentary speeches.

The author's lucid writing style coupled with cohesive themes and logical arguments will certainly appeal to scholars and students. In hindsight, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* is an asset to the ongoing debate on the abolition of slavery. Indeed, the author has successfully overcome the challenge of shedding new light on a critical phase of the turbulent antislavery movement. The outstanding merits of the book could be easily compared to that of Eric Williams's *Capitalism and Slavery*.

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Sangtin Writers



Sujata Guha

A mother of three children, Sujata Guha is currently working towards an M.Phil. degree in Women's Studies at Jadavpur University. She also has a Ph.D. in molecular genetics from the State University of New York, and has been a research scientist for the last seventeen years and a visiting assistant professor at the University of New Mexico, USA. She has a diploma in Ayurveda.

Her varied interests range from ethics and science to women's spirituality.

Richa Nagar, *Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India*. Sangtin Writers: Anupamlata, Ramsheela, Reshma Ansari, Richa Nagar, Richa Singh, Shashi Vaish, Shashibala, Sarbala and Vibha Bajpayee, Zubaan, New Delhi, 2006, Rs. 395.

For quite some time, I wanted to start a women's collective, but didn't know how exactly to go about it. Having read this book I think I know how. *Playing with Fire* is about the lives of seven village women from Sitapur district of Uttar Pradesh, who were grassroot workers for the NGO *Nari Sahay Yojana* (NSY). These seven women were brought together by the two authors, Richa Singh and Richa Nagar, in a collective called Sangtin Yatra, where they wrote diaries documenting their lives and which served as a journey of self-discovery and analysis. Richa Singh was their overseer at NSY while Richa Nagar teaches at the University of Minnesota, USA.

Having started on a positive note, one discovers soon that the book is really one of complaints— those of the Sangtin writers and the two Richas against NSY. A shorter version of this English rendition was originally published in Hindi. The Sangtin writers' primary grievance against NSY is that though it is the grassroot workers who do the real fieldwork their voices are not heard. Instead, based on their fieldwork, it is the educated, city-bred, starched sari-clad, English-speaking bosses whose voices, interpretations and opinions are broadcast and on whose opinions funding decisions are made. The Hindi book apparently created a furore in Uttar Pradesh with NSY accusing the Sangtin writers of breach of professional ethics. The controversy as well as the seven writers' narratives can be heard through Nagar's voice in *Playing with Fire*. Not only did she translate their stories, but the narratives are replete with her analyses and comments which do not lend any feeling of a connecting thread which might weave together the nine lives as she claims. In fact, we know scant little about the Richas' lives. The Sangtin writers' stories are followed by a section where Nagar airs her version of the argument that NSY had with her and Sangtin Yatra and a theoretical analysis of development work.

Nagar adopts the style of the universal "we" in the book where the voices of the nine women unite seldom, diverge often, or are entirely absent. This use of "we" is in the tradition of Rigoberta Menchu, the

indigenous Guatemalan woman who talks of her village in the plural "I", such that she narrates the experiences of the whole village on a personal note. Similarly Nawaal-el-Saadwi's, *Woman at Point Zero*, uses this even more powerfully where the reader is left with the feeling that the protagonist's personal story has not only merged with the author's but also with that of all women in the world. Unfortunately, despite relying on the same technique, in this book the use of the universal "we" is confusing at first and even ludicrous at times because certainly the more sophisticated of the two Richas could never have experienced some of the hardships that the Sangtin writers face. The fact that she has to deliberately point out that "we" is used because all women's experiences merge weakens the impact of the collective "we" that ought to have arisen naturally. Each of the seven women's stories is told separately, there is no one merged body or voice that speaks. Instead of a one-woman story, it remains seven different narratives, while those of the two Richas are conspicuous by their absence.



What is even more painful about this book and the Sangtin collective is that although Richa Singh, the supervisor from NSY, must be fairly sophisticated, they still needed the other Richa, the highly sophisticated one, to come all the way from the US to organise them into the Sangtin collective to complain against NSY. The seven Sangtin writers then get doubly used: They are used first by NSY and then Nagar uses them a second time around to push her own agenda and uses their writings for padding her own CV. The benefit that these women gain from these writings is surely small compared to what Nagar gains from them.

While the book bemoans the hierarchies that exist in NGOs, Nagar herself and the Sangtin itself, albeit to a lesser degree, can be accused of the same. The chosen seven are a bit ahead of their counterparts because they can first of all write, and they can write in not just their local *Awadhi* dialect but in the more standard Hindi *khadi boli*. So these seven are also among the elite in their peer group. All of the above criticisms notwithstanding, this is not to say that these women did not gain anything out of their experience of NSY and Sangtin. By their own admission, having a job with NSY, earning money and travelling and talking to women for their assigned roles at NSY, has been liberating and empowering, both psychologically and economically.

The seven Sangtin authors write about their childhood, caste, class, marriage and work as NSY workers. Unfortunately, in the copy that I received the chapter on marriage had, in at least four places, pages from previous chapters inserted instead of the correct ones. This was very jarring because whenever one reached the crescendo of an experience the narrative abruptly stopped. For people who might have gotten inspired by these stories, this is very disappointing. Repeated attempts to contact the publisher led to no response. These copies should certainly not be sold.

Unfortunately, when NSY objected strongly to the publication of the original Hindi version of the Sangtin writers, Nagar herself brought the outsiders down on NSY. NSY had written to the university with which Nagar was attached complaining of a breach of professional ethics instigated by Nagar. Interestingly, a strong letter condemning NSY from Nagar's US university silenced the objections! Nagar, therefore, can herself be squarely accused of using the same top-heavy outsider-from-abroad at-ease-with-the-dominant-language-and-culture influencing tactic that she accuses development NGOs of using. The version of the war that was fought between Sangtin Yatra and NSY is the one presented by Nagar. She makes it international and then calls it trans-world feminism such that the structure of the dominant North suppressing the South remains.

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Despite all this, I would still praise Nagar for trying out an alternative approach to women's empowerment. Development work does need handholding. The bottom-up approach, where village women identify their own problems that need addressing, is without a doubt a commendable

method. Just as NSY claimed in their "trans-world" letter that the NGO had trained the seven Sangtin women and empowered them so that they could become strong writers aware of their rights, so too do we need more Richa Nagars in the world, notwithstanding

their starched-saris or trousers, and their English language or their trans-world jobs, to strengthen the world's "invisible half".

After having read the book, I still want to start that woman writers' collective.