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Cover Page

Durga Puja Celebration at
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Amrit Manthan during Amrit Mahotsav

For sometime past, especially after the BJP came to power, a sense of sanatani pride seem to have seen an upsurge in the minds and psyches of all Indians who believe themselves to be the sons and daughters of this land. So long we only boasted about being free from the yoke of foreign rulers, but never thought about what we were thousand years back, what were our traditional treasures and heritages, how innumerable groups of people originating from different corners of the vast Asiatic region managed to live together peacefully in Akhanda Bharat and shared their traditional values and knowledge for the benefit of all. It is sad that our post independence masters and public leaders during the initial periods of our independence were more concerned about the material gains and their minds were so clouded by the machinations of the British aided Islamic designs that our social and religious values as well as our knowledge and economic prosperities were badly sidelined. We forgot to take pride in our past and never tried to arise and awake from our slavish slumber.

It is very heartening to note that Prajna Pravah, a nationwide intellectual movement rooted in Bharatiya ethos, has taken upon itself the task of destroying forever the veil of ignorance and confusion about our heritage of knowledge, unity, practice of public discourse and intellectual brainstorming. As revealed by the organisers, 'Lokmanthan', the unique intellectual child of Prajna Pravah was conceived with the sole purpose of discovering the cultural and traditional treasures hidden in the various corners of our country. The motto of the organization is truly a monumental initiative for rediscovering Bharat in its glorious image of Jagat Guru. Like the gods who churned the ocean for Amrit, the Lokmanthan intends to churn the Bharatiya intellect that would provide a chance to all ethnic groups and communities to bring forth their traditional knowledge in various spheres which are entwined in their cultural practices. It is evident that Lokmanthan's primary aim is to act like a platform to all thinkers and practitioners for whom the national interests are primary. Its avowed aim is

to motivate the intellectuals and practitioners to connect with our present as well as the past and thus create a future which can secure our cultural heritage.

When we look back at the journey of Lokmanthan by Prajna Pravah, which was started only five years back in 2016, we can see that it evoked spontaneous response from all quarters. In 2016, the first Lokmanthan was held in Bhopal with the theme of "De-Colonising Indian Minds". Large and active participation by intellectuals, commoners and various Janajati communities across the country proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the initiative is on the right track. In 2018 Lokmanthan was held in Ranchi with the theme "Bharatbodh: Jan-Gan-Man" and attracted fruitful participation. Our first hand experience with Lokmanthan that was held in Guwahat on and from 21st to 24th September, 2022 was sort of an eye opener. The theme chosen for this year is "Lokparampa". The reason behind selection of this theme is to highlight the unparalleled ethnic diversity of the northeastern region in particular and our country in general, who are having their unique life style, food habits, tradition, customs and way of life. The selection of the theme is also prompted by the reason that many of these ethnic groups are endangered as the various socio-economic, religious groups and NGOs in the name of socio-economic development are jeopardizing their culture.

In conclusion it must be admitted that the deliberations taken up and the intellectual presentations made in the course of Lokmanthan 2022, the Colloquium of 'Nation First' were of the highest order and were most relevant to the contemporary issues of our country that not only influences home but also the world. It is expected that the present and the future Lokmanthans will effectively act as confluence of evolving nationalism, aspirations, social justice and harmony through empathy and sensitization culminating into social mobility using development as an instrument of progress. □□

Romen Chakraborty

Chief Editor

Durga puja Musings

► Dr Ranga Ranjan Das

In Indian context, various pujas (worship) have transformed into festivals due to large scale participation and anticipation of a segment of populace in different regions. Durga Puja has turned into festival long back. Since our childhood, we are waiting for Durga Puja for various reasons. There is gradual seasonal shift from intolerable summer to mild weather. We also availed new outfits on the eve of puja. We used to be happy to roam one puja pandal to another with family. Those were really enjoyable days. There was huge traffic in the city. Public transport system were curtailed. We had to walk around to a reasonable distance. We got the taste of *garam jelebi* that were quite available in the temporary stalls erected by the roadsides. *Astami* and *nabami*, are the two days when we used to go out in the evening hours. Mothers were more enthusiastic than father. He always had his own ideas to stay back home instead of going in the crowd. He always remained back home and advised us give him company. We liked the company of mother during that period. In our neighborhood, there were puja pandals where we had to contribute. On *astami*, we offered a *sarai* (grams and seasonal food) at the feet of Maa Durga and sought her blessings. We loitered around the puja pandal until the priest started the chants of the vedic mantra for offering *puspanjali* (tribute of flower). We tried to recite whatever priest uttered in Sanskrit. It was the time where mantras had a great effect on our minds. The effect was spiritual but still mind was in search of material gains. Toy guns, Soft toys, balloons, chocolates, sweets were the main attractions. Parents' always offered us edible items as also some playing goods. However, We gleefully managed the toy gun with reel of dotted chain of explosive, found in extra packets, fixed in the gun and made booming sound after pressing the trigger of the gun. Toy gun were normally effective for two to three days. Thereafter, it became useless. Guns are mostly common. Later on it become diverse with new designs and mechanism. Toy guns have taken shape with modern real life sophisticated

weapons, that is more attractive and caught attention of young ones. By that time, we graduated from childhood and reached teenage, left the company of mother. It was a great experience to visit the most prominent locations like Maligaon, Kumarpara, Billpar, in our surroundings. It was the phenomena that I have always noticed is that the people selected some specific spots for special or added attractions. During childhood, we had financial limitations, so purchase of items were limited. Even there were no concept of pocket money in those days. Whatever, we need, parents' used to fetch for us.

Time never stops. Eternally it moves on. Many things became crystal clear to us and helped us understand the discourse of Durga Puja in a wider manner. People like to enjoy Durga Puja as a festival by following religious mandates and enjoy the crowd environment. The local puja pandals normally remained empty during mid day but the evening hours saw the rush of pandal hoppers. Pujas of such locations have a distinction of organizing puja by applying modern technological appliances, ultra-modern effective lighting arrangements, innovative idol patterns. Idol of durga, generally is made of clay. In Rihabari (near our locality), raw materials change from year to year. Matchstick, coconut shell, glass pieces, are some of the materials with which expert craftsmen made their idols. The demon king Mahisasur, idols of Ganesha, Kartikeya, Lakshmi and Saraswati are other idols are placed on both sides centering Mata Durga. We have seen it since our childhood and immensely enjoyed them. *Dashami*, the last day of Durga Puja is more vibrant because of the immersion rituals at different locations of the city.. It was same in the past, immersion of idols in the river water of Brahmaputra by carrying different idols in vehicles in procession. We loved to visit the river bank where idols are immersed. At present people just stand by the roadside and bid final farewell to 'Maa' for the year, with a hope to see her again in the next year with same enthusiasm. Before final farewell, Bengali Hindu women engage in

playing 'sindur'. Womenfolk smear sindur to the face of each other as a part of custom. There is tear and happiness in their eyes. The final procession is remarkable. Devotees and puja committee enthusiasts follow the vehicle carrying their idols and many of them dance to the beats of music. Various TV channels provide a live telecast from various river bank where spots are fixed for immersion by local authorities. Puja season also bring smiles among the people who are engaged in garments and apparel business. People throng to the markets to purchase new dress materials. In Guwahati, Fancy Bazar has always been a hotspot for marketing. No doubt, new shopping malls have carved a wonderful niche in the markets of Guwahati. Various hotels, lodges, restaurants and roadside food stalls attract a section of people. People are coming out again after the hiatus of long two years of Covid terror.

Durga Puja for us is an occasion of spiritual enlightenment, funfare, holidayibg and exchsng of bonhomie. We always pray for better life, well being of near and dear ones. Some people also enjoy the holidays by visiting various tourist destinations in India and abroad. In Assam, Durga Puja turns into a popular festivals, where people irrespective of caste, creed and religion enjoy together. Big cities, towns become more vibrant and spend lots of money in organizing the same. Money is mostly raised by public subscriptions and spent for decorations, lighting, making temporary pandals with innovative designs. There are undeclared competitions among some of the puja committees to attract people as much as they can. In some of the parts of Assam, like Nalbari, Belshor, Ugratarata temple (in Guwahati), Sibasagar, various shrines (thaan), puja is held where people can feel the spiritual vibes of shaktism. Sacrifices of domesticated animals are also offered in some shakti peeths. Many people offer sacrifices of their choice other than animals .

Durga Puja in Kolkata is more vibrant than the rest of the country. Puja committees come with huge budget estimates and are supported by the state government. It is also reported that a move is gaining ground to try for obtaining the world heritage tag for Durga Puja festival in Kolkata. There is no doubt about the fact that within the Hindu religion, which

is an amalgam of diverse faiths and beliefs, Durga Puja is one of the most important festival which is widely participated, in onw form or other, by a large section of Indians. It is difficult to understand to what extent people really understand the significance of Durga Puja. Despite this doubt, the unwavering faith in the powers of Mata Durga as a destroyer of evil, is being nurtured by millions of Hindus through centuries.

During our childhood we just enjoyed Durga Puja as a festival without understanding its' real purport. Now, we can understand to some extent, the real message and meaning of Durga worship. In Indian context, when we go through our ancient scriptures and Vedic literatures, we find that women in India were never a second fiddle to men; they were worshipped and respected not only for mothering the humanity but also for their wisdom and home making skills.

Durga Puja generally symbolizes the power of shakti capable of subjugating the evil in all form. In the Durga myth, details are provided about the origin, creation and assigned function of Durga as armed by different Gods and goddess of Hindu pantheon. Literally, it is also symbolized as woman power. In the male dominated patriarchal setup of Indian societies, there are various instances of woman domination by imposition of various restrictions against them since ancient times. Earlier, there were customs of child marriage; satidah system and woman were confined to child bearing and domestic chores. With time, social enlightenment and enactment of appropriate legal provisions, these evils were eliminated. Unfortunately, a section of the women in India are still combating the humiliations of dowry torture, honour killing, witch hunting, rape and molestation etc. Now, the time has come to realize the dignity of woman and their inherent 'shakti' to sustain the human race. We must understand that where women are abused and neglected, there cannot be real progress, the society will only digress. We must come out of that digression and march towards a sane, civil and progressive society. Worshipping 'Maa Durga' will be meaningful only when we start respecting woman and allow them to show their holistic empowerment. May Maa Durga bless us all for achieving that goal.□□

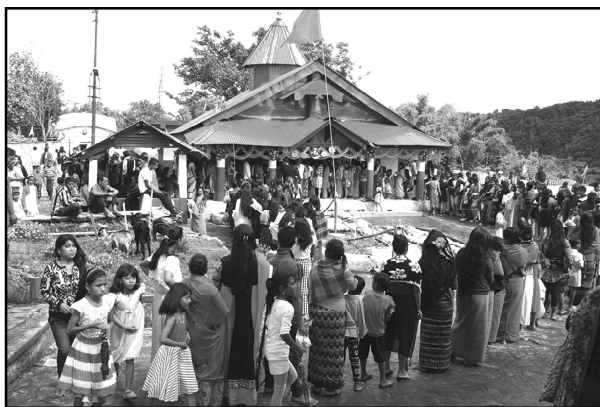
Hinduism in Jaiñtia Hills & Celebration of Durga Puja in Nartiang

► H H Mohrmen

Come October and people wake up to the fact that there are Pnars who celebrate Durga Puja and although these people have themselves converted to another religion, yet this is something they cannot comprehend. Along with other traditional festivals, Durga Puja is one of the festivals which is celebrated by a section of the indigenous Pnars in Jaiñtia hills particularly those in Nartiang. Many ask how come the Pnars in Nartiang follow Hinduism. To this my response is that it is a long story.

Perhaps it is not wrong to say that the second oldest religion in the Jaiñtia hills is Hinduism, second only to the traditional Niamtre religion. And unlike Christianity or Islam, Niamtre is not an organised religion and its core is the family and only certain aspects of the religion are connected with the Raid or the Chnong. But the situation in Nartiang and Jaiñtiapur is unique because the Pnars in this area simultaneously celebrate Puja along with traditional rites and passages, and also follow the Pnar customs and traditions.

Uttam Deshmukhya, Pandit (wamon) of the Durga temple in Nartiang who died some years ago told this scribe that of the four pujas that are celebrated in Nartiang, namely Holi, Bishari (Manasha puja), and Kartik puja – Durga is the most popular festival. Records mention that there are altogether five ancient Hindu temples in Jaiñtia hills, two in Nartiang the Durga and Shiv temple another in Syndai and another in Muktapur on the Indo-Bangladesh border and the last temple is at Borkhat. It may also mentioned that apart from the Pnars in Nartiang, those who stayed back and lived in



Jaiñtiapur the capital of the erstwhile Jaiñtia Kingdom which is now part of Bangladesh continue with the tradition of blending traditional Niamtre custom and practices with Hinduism, but this needs further study. As per tradition, the Jaiñtia Kingdom was earlier known

as ‘Ka Hima Sutnga’ and the Kings were commonly called ‘Ki Syiem Sutnga, but the question is how and when and why the Kingdom changed its name from Sutnga to Jaintia or Jayantia? The question is why they adopted the title of the Jaiñtia kings. Tradition has it that the Jaiñtia king adopted the name of the kingdom they had conquered instead of keeping the original Sutnga title, after they had captured Jaiñtiapur. After the victory the capital of the kingdom was also moved from Sutnga to Jaiñtiapur and the kingdom was also named after the new capital.

The other reason could also be because Sutnga or Nartiang as the case may be was located in the hills and in a very remote region while Jaiñtiapur is much closer to the outside world and it was easily connected via water ways and land ways. Jaiñtiapur was easy to access and the people were much more advanced and also the court was run by literate people. Perhaps it was also because Jaiñtiapur was a much bigger Kingdom than Sutnga, that they adopted the title. Hence the name Jayantia got preference over Sutnga in giving the name of the new kingdom after the two were merged. These factors also contribute in making the Jaiñtia kingdom one of the mightiest kingdoms in the region which even had the capacity to issue its own coins. Numismatists of the region are also not certain if there are Khasi kings other than the Jaiñtias who issued coins.

There is a general consensus amongst most of the scholars that before Jayantia was captured by the Sutnga, it was a Brahmanical Kingdom which is believed to be in existence since the 13th century till the Sutnga kings came to power in the 1500, (Bhathacharjee JB, forward in the book (N.G. Rhodes & S.K. Bose The Coinage of Jaintiapur P-1) It was after the Sutnga king was able to subdue the rulers of the Kingdom that it was merged with Sutnga. And when the Jaintiapur Kingdom was annexed by the British in 1835 its boundary extended from Surma to the South (Sylhet in Bangladesh), Gobha –Sunapur on the North (Assam) and it also included the hills which are now part of the Jaintia hills District of Meghalaya. (Bhathacharjee JB, forward in the book The Coinage of Jaintiapur P-1 by N.G. Rhodes & S.K. Bose)

It is worth mentioning that the Jaiñtia royal family did not convert entirely to Hinduism, but adopted only the tantric aspects of the religion while keeping with their culture as the Pnar. The Pnar or Synteng are ethnically kindred to the Khasis, an offshoot of the Austro-Asiatic speaking Mon-Khmer race of Southern Asia. It was not clear when the ruling family of the Jaiñtia Kingdom who were Pnars from Sutnga converted or rather adopted certain aspects of Hinduism as part of their religion. S.N. Lamare attributes the beginning of the influence of Hinduism on the people of Jaiñtia in general and the Royal family in particular to the time of the king whose name is Bor Kuhaiñ (Lamare SN the Jaiñtia Studies and Change P-73). However S.M. Ali pointed out the Jaiñtia King as well as maintaining their culture and tradition also adopted certain aspects of Hinduism when they became the rulers of the grand Jaiñtia Kingdom. He further stated that it was the daughter of the Koch king who came from a ‘supposedly’ more enlightened kingdom who introduced Hindu customs of worship in the Royal family. (SM Ali, the History of Jaintia Hills P-14).

It must be reiterated that till the last of the Jaiñtia Kings, the Kurs remain and continue with the Pnar tradition as well as adopting certain aspects of Hinduism in their day to day life. There are three factors which help us to conclude that they kept the tribal tradition even if they were greatly influenced by the religion and the culture of the plains people. The

most important point in justifying this argument is with regard to the inheritance to the throne. Unlike other dynasties in the region, the crown did not pass from the father to the child, but true to the matrilineal system of lineage to the last, it is either the nephew or the niece who inherits the throne from their uncle. The throne was always inherited by the nephew, the son of the youngest sister from maternal uncle who was the king (Shadap-Sen Namita Catherine, The origin and early history... P-90). Except for Raja Bor Kussain/ Bar Gossain generally the uncle who took on the mantle to rule the Kingdom remain unmarried, just to keep the throne for their nephew or niece (SM Ali P-33). The royal family continues to follow the matrilineal custom of inheritance. They even continue with the tradition of inheriting property in which the youngest daughter gets the lion’s share of the family property. The Jaiñtia royal family keep this tradition even after the Kingdom was annexed by the British and the family remained in Jaiñtiapur and was paid a pension by the British. Visitors to the place also corroborated the fact that they continue to follow the Pnar culture (H.K. Singh, Na Jowai sha Jaintiapur, Ki Diengjat u Longshuwa). The fact that there are also monoliths in and around Jaiñtiapus which are still standing tall till today also validates the argument that ‘ki syiem Jaiñtia’ continue with their tribal customs and tradition even after they have inherited a Kingdom which has a strong Brahmanical tradition.

The reason that the Pnars in Nartiang celebrate Durga puja and other Hindu festivals is because the Jaiñtia Kings practiced certain aspects of Hinduism and the people who are close to them also followed their king’s ways and customs. One hopes that this write up will help those who are not conversant with the subject to understand why and how the Pnars in Nartiang celebrate Durga puja. They are the remnants of the people who are close to the royal family; it will however be interesting to study the religious practices of the Pnars who live in Jaiñtiapur which is now in Bangladesh and understand the religion and customs they follow till date. It may be mentioned that although most of the Khasi Pnars who live in Bangladesh have converted to Christianity, the forty odd families in Jaiñtiapur continue with the tradition. □□

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The Colour and Contours of Vedic Literature

■ Dayananda Pathak

About the color and contour of Vedic literature the scholars all across the world appear to be intoxicated. The entire corpus of what we call Vedic range of literature is the autobiography of Indian thought and perceptions of life and living. The word 'Veda' is rooted to Sanskrit word 'vid' (to know). Thus the general meaning of Veda is construed to be knowledge or consciousness. In other words, Veda means the unending storehouse of knowledge and wisdom- both material and spiritual. Veda is a gigantic range of ancient literature. It cannot be ascribed to any single author or group of likeminded authors. Such writings are considered to be divine revelations. So they are called *Apaurusheya*, i.e., not being composed by any individual human hands. They are handed down from generation to generation in diverse forms. Such writings are also described as *nitya*, that is, permanent and eternal. It is, however, a fact that our ancient sages composed them under the direct inspiration from some divine authority.

Some scholars hold the opinion that the process of writing came much later. The composition of the Vedic hymns took place much earlier, and they existed in the form of *shruti* (hearing) and *smriti* (remembering), handed down from generation to generation as a holistic legacy.

There are different views regarding the time of composition of the Vedas. A group of scholars hold the opinion that the Vedas were composed during 3000- 2500 BC. While another section holds the view that the sacred books are written 5000 years BC. We, however, have the feeling that the opinion of such scholars have some truths and supportive reasons. A single year or century cannot be fixed for Vedic literature. This must also be borne in mind that Vedas are the literary expressions of varied colors, composed in different times of Indian civilization. Scholar like J. Hartel believes that Rig-

Veda must have originated in Iran, and not in India. Such views and observations have considerably mystified the Vedic period and the literary manifestations of the period.

Vedic literature is stated to have three major periods. The first period refers to the **Samhitas**. The second period refers to the **Brahmanas**. The third period refers to the **Upanishads, Aranyakas**, and **Sutras**. All the three taken together constitute the vast expanse of Vedic literature. **Samhitas** refers to the bare texts of the four Vedas – **Rig-Veda, Samveda, Yajurveda** and **Atharvaveda**. The structure and the volume of each Veda is well designed to suit the contents. For example, the **Samhitas** of **Rig-Veda** has about 1000 or 1028 hymns. They are arranged into ten *mandalas* (chapters), depending upon the name of the sages who composed them. Such *mandalas* are also arranged on the basis of the subject matter.

The **Samhita** of **Samveda** has 1810 hymns. It is often described as a book of chants, meant to be chanted at the time of Soma sacrifices. Barring only 75 hymns the rest of the hymns are stated to have been drawn from **Rig-Veda Samhita**. Musical elements tend to make **Samveda** is quite interesting to a special class of people. It narrates how sacrifices are to be performed. **Atharvaveda** is often considered to be an extension of the **Rig-Veda**. One can notice close resemblances between the two Vedas. Atharvaveda contains hymns meant for the control and taming of the evil spirit and demonic powers. It is structured into 20 books with 73 hymns.

Samhita period is followed by the **Brahmana** period. This phase is marked by its own distinct features. The **Brahmanas** are commentaries on different hymns. They also explain the significance of sacrifices and about the ways of their performances. Each **Brahmana** is basically an extension of the **Samhita**. Say for example, scholars

point out that **Aitareya Brahmana** and the **Kanshitaki Brahmana** relate to **Rig-Veda Samhita**. Whereas jaiminiya Brahmana, Tandyamaha-Brahmana and Sadvinsa Brahmana relate to Samveda Samhita. The Sadapatha Brahmana is connected to Yajurveda Samhita. Similarly, Gopatha Brahmana relates to Atharvaveda Samhita. Such Brahmanas make exhaustive narration about sacrifices and ways of making them. Apart from that some of the Brahmanas speak volumes about the cultural and social life of the non-Aryans. How a non-Aryan could be Aryanised is also being explained in some of the Brahmanas. These Brahmanas narrate the specific functions of the specific class of priesthoods, such as Hotri priests, Udgati priests, Adhvaryu priests and so forth. In fact, specific performance is fixed on specific class of priests.

The Brahmanas, although considered to be an integral part of the Vedic literature, they are often looked down upon as mere non-sense by a group of scholars. Max Mueller considered them to be mere 'theological twaddles'¹. Again, according to Dr Winternitz the Brahmanas constitute an important segment of Vedic literature. The general readers may not enjoy the Brahmana part of the Vedic literature. But they are considered to be important social documents of the Vedic society and civilization.²

Aranyakas, considered to be 'forest books', makes the summing part of the **Brahmanas**. This part deals with what may be described as mystic philosophy, specifically covering the sages engaged in serious contemplation in the deep forests, away from the mundane part of human life. The ritualistic part of life is detached in the **Aranyakas**.

The **Upanishads** virtually strikes the culmination of the Vedic literature in terms of philosophical and spiritual musings. The thoughts embedded in the pages of the **Upanishads** mark a significant leap-forward in the history of man's spiritual journeys. According to Schopenhauer, the great German philosopher, every sentence of the **Upanishads** is "deep, original, and sublime thoughts arise, and the whole is pervaded by a high and holy and earnest spirit. Indian air surrounds us, and original thoughts of kindred spirits. And Oh, how thoroughly is the mind here washed clean..."³ He further said, "It (**Upanishads**) has been the solace of my life – it will be the solace of my death."⁴

The philosophical exploration of life as adumbrated in the **Upanishads**, numbering 108, mark the zenith of human thought and spiritual consciousness of the highest order. Scholar like Will Durant compares **Upanishads** with **New Testament** of the Christendom.⁵ Not to speak of ordinary followers, even persons of eminence like Schopenhauer and Emerson also were deeply touched by the Upanishadic doctrines.⁶

Dr Winternitz feels that the entire gamut of Indian philosophy is rooted to the Upanishadic doctrines. In his words – "In fact the whole of later philosophy of the Indians is rooted to the **Upanishads**. Their doctrines formed the foundation of the Vedantic sutras of the Badarayana."⁷ He also refers to how sages like Sankaracharya and Ramanuja got inspired by the philosophical doctrines enunciated in the **Upanishads**. All the philosophical systems of beliefs, developed in India at a later time are also found to be firmly rooted to the **Upanishads**. This Upanishadic ways of looking at life and universe have given a specific orientation to the Indian mind.

The **Upanishads** do not plead for a sky-high philosophy. It deals with all the practical and down-to-earth human truths of life. It pleads for a balanced life, wherein even the material aspects of life are also not ignored in preference to spiritual issues. Dr Winternitz further adds saying "The **Upanishads** do not contain superhuman conceptions, but human, absolutely human attempts to come nearer to the truth – and it is this which makes them so valuable to us."⁸

The essence of the **Upanishads** covers the best elements of Sufism as developed in contemporary Persia, neo-Platonism of Greek civilization, and also partially to what we find in mystic Christianity. In fact, it anticipated the best parts of every human thought, subsequently projected by the different philosophical schools the world civilization ever produced.

The Upanishadic thoughts, however, took time to settle down. The Vedic hymns were considerably unsettled for historical and political reasons. From the Vedic thought pattern to its subsequent Upanishadic expressions, routed through **Brahmanas** and **Aranyakas** occupied a major space in Indian history. The growth of Indian thought, and every aspect of Indian civilization, is routed through Upanishadic systems of beliefs. In the language Amaury de Riencourt "The Upanishadic era

represents the zenith of India's cultural growth."9. But over the past millennia we have not been able to surpass or equal the depth, height and width of the Upanishadic thoughts. Now we have the feeling that India had already enjoyed its best parts of life during the Upanishadic era.

The Vedic pattern of thought takes us to a world of joy and celebration of life. We began to learn that life can be enjoyed fully if we remain deeply attached to land, environment and natural human relationships. The Vedic pattern of thought has all been secular. It does not imply adherence to any specific religious order. But over the millennia we move on to the Upanishadic era and step into a world of new spiritual awareness that is crystallized in the **Upanishads**. We have begun to feel that mere celebration was not the be-all-and-end-all of the Upanishadic teachings. We must also be in a position to have a ringside view of life. What life is all about? Where does it lead us to? What is the shape of truth beyond this apparent truth? These elemental questions of life began to emerge in Indian minds when a phase of maturity started taking shape through Upanishadic thoughts.

By the way, **Upanishad** implies 'sitting near' – meaning sitting together with truth. That was possible under the situation of nearness between the teacher and the taught directed towards spiritual communion. It is the communication relating to the secret (*rahasya*) of existence. It is the communication of truth relating to the creator (The Supreme being) and the created ones (being).

The **Upanishad** is not a single piece of composition by any single author. We have as many as 108 **Upanishads** authored by different sages covering a period from 800 BC to 500 BC. Every sage author had his own ways of looking at things. Since it is not a consistent whole, it requires a thorough and intensive study by the serious researchers. Nevertheless, we find a unifying cord that passes through all the 108 **Upanishads**. The unifying cord can be described by saying "The universe is the Brahma, while Brahma is nothing but *atma*". In short, Brahma is nothing but God, while the soul within man is nothing but God. Thus the soul of every man is a reflection of the Supreme Being.

The idea of the universe in relation to man or any living being is being addressed by each of the

108 Upanishads in its own language and rhythms. The Upanishad tells us to assert our existence and also to negate it as and when situation so requires. Every man is advised to behave like Brahman and also as a child. Childlike innocence can lead us to a state of deeper realization that cannot be done by mere erudition. Frederick Nietzsche, the great German philosopher, also reflected on the quality of childlike innocence. The Supreme reality can be felt only under that blessed condition. One cannot go too far only by virtue of intellectual gymnastics as much as we can go by sheer childlike innocence and devotion. The Upanishad teaches us to internalize our knowledge. Only through this process of internalization and deep self-introspection we can feel the reality beyond the apparent reality. Our ancient sages are painted as lost in trance with their eyes and ears closed, and all their sense organs deactivated. They realized the truth of existence only through internalization of thoughts and feelings. The tragedy of ours is that we see ourselves as totally isolated beings. That we are already integrated with the soul divine is outside our normal perceptions.

The **Upanishads** believe in transmigration of soul. It is closely linked with the belief in rebirth. The soul is always in the process of migration, from one life to the other. This process is endless until the soul merges with the Supreme Soul. As and when the human soul gets released from the chain of births and rebirths the journey continues. Raja Janaka wanted to know from Rajarshi Yajnavalka how to get rid of the chain of births and rebirths. To this the Rajarshi replied that only by total surrender before the Lord and by liquidation of all material desires one could internalize his thought and get united with the Supreme Being. It is just as a river loses its identity as and when it meets the sea, a person loses his individual identity as and when he gets merged with the Supreme Being.

The entire gamut of Indian thought is rooted to this Upanishadic belief. After the **Vedas** we have the **Vedangas**. They are considered to be subsidiary Vedas. We have six very important **Vedangas** - Siksha, kalpa, Byakarana, Nirukta, Chanda and Jyotisha. Siksha deals with pronunciation of words, considered to be very sacred in Vedic literature. Kalpa deals with religious and social rites and rituals. Byakarana deals with grammar of the language, while Nirukta is concerned with meaning of words, i.e.,

etymology. Chanda covers rhythms and meters of a language. Finally, Jyotisha addresses the astronomical issues.

Then we have the **Upavedas** like Dhanurveda, Ayurveda, Gandharvaveda, Shilpaveda and so forth. Dhanurveda deals with the art of warfare. Ayurveda deals with medication. Gandharvaveda deals with music and fine arts. Shilpaveda deals with art of construction and architecture.

The domain of Vedic literature also includes six **darshanas**. They mean six schools of philosophy. They are Sankhya darshana, Nyaya darshana, Yoga darshana, Vaisheshika darshana, Purva Mimamsa darshana and Uttar Mimamsa darshana.

These darshanas are projected to circumvent the philosophical mess let loose by the protagonists of Buddhism against the cardinal spirit of the Vedic philosophy. Believed to have been authored sometime in the 6th century BC when Emperor Ashoka was engaged in disseminating the ideals of Buddhism across India and the south east. The darshanas are brief aphorisms or *sutras*. All the darshanas advocate the idea of purgation of soul (*chittasudhi*) and unattached work culture (*niskamakarma*). The liberation of the soul called *moksha* is possible only through the above ways and means.

Thus the Vedic literature covered the entire gamut of man's material, physical, intellectual, social, spiritual and human aspects. Post-Vedic literatures touched only some specific issues of life. In short, our all-comprehensive heritage was built up by the vast expanse of Vedic literature. It wanted to build up man with all the qualities necessary for his purposeful, elegant, and decent existence. □□

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Assimilation of the Rabha community with other Ethnic communities

► Charumohan Rabha

The Indian state of Assam is a home to so many castes and ethnic communities. Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Jain - all live here. It may be called a micro edition of India. There are more than one hundred ethnic communities in Assam. Among them Bodo, Karbi, Tiwa, Sonowal, Deuri, Mising are prominent. The Rabha is one of the prominent Janajati communities in Assam. In Assam, the Rabhas live in Goalpara, Kamrup, Kokrajhar, Sonitpur, Baksha, Odalguri, Dhemaji, Golaghat, Bongaigaon. Apart from this, Rabha people reside in Meghalaya and West Bengal as well.

Modern times has brought lots of changes but the Rabhas continue to maintain their traditional social system in modern times as well. Rabha community has faced hurdles, has been victimized in the past but they have maintained their own way of life. They have contributed to the greater Assamese society while maintaining their unique identity.

The Rabhas have always maintained cordial relationship with other communities. Through peaceful co-existence with other communities and mutual co-operation in the hour of need, the Rabhas have been contributing to enrich our national life. A section of the Rabha community is engaged in business activities. In the Rabha community women are entitled to equal rights and opportunities with their male counterparts. Women can also engage themselves in business etc. Rabha women are marching ahead in the field of education, business and politics.

The Rabhas have their own unique culture and language. But in communication with the rest of the Assamese society they use Assamese as the



has to pay a fine of Rs 50,000 and if the husband indulges in an affair with another woman, the husband has to pay a fine of 50000 to the head of the village. Because of such strict rules, there is no adultery in the Rabha community.

Earlier when the Rabhas were lagging behind in education, market economy did not evolve in the Rabha community. There was no market in the nearby to sell

medium of communication. Almost all the ethnic communities in Assam communicate in Assamese.

The Rabha children don't take the title of the father; they take the title of the mother. Marriage is prohibited between the same titled persons. Inter community marriage was prohibited in Rabha community. But along with the passage of time some flexibility has been visible. Now-a-days, inter community marriage is seen among the Rabhas as well. However, there has been still some rigid restriction in having marital relationship of the Rabhas with some communities. Preference is given to marriage within the community.

The Rabhas have been able to establish themselves in the field of law, medical science, engineering etc. Education is the pillar of success. To move ahead in life, education is essential. The Rabhas have progressed a lot in the field of technical education. However there is need to do more in the field of education. Nobody should left out of education.

The Rabha community maintains strict code of conduct on certain aspects. No unethical act is permitted in the Rabha community. For example, according to the rules which are enshrined in their community's codified document, if a wife maintains secret relationship with another person or if the husband maintains a secret affair with another woman, then there is a provision for penalty. The wife who maintains an affair with another person

their traditional products. Communication was difficult. People had to travel for a long time to reach the town where they could sell their products. In 4/5 villages there was only one cart to carry their products to the market in the town. They faced huge problems in buying and selling their products, mostly agricultural products. The barter system was prevalent in the Rabha community. Now a days the system has improved a lot. New opportunities have come, market facilities are coming to the doorstep. Market economy has evolved. Business activities have developed among communities. This has contributed to cultural exchange among different communities. Internet facilities have made things smooth.

The Rabhas were much advanced in cottage industry since ancient time. From the cotton, the Rabha women could make cloth within a night. The women prepared shield from the cotton for their husbands. Now a days Rabha girls don't need to work hard like they used to do. The Rabha women have mastery over the art of weaving. Till today, seven Rabha weavers have been able to win medals from the President of India. This shows the Rabha women's adroitness in weaving.

Let the Rabhas make their future more bright. Let them work hard and take the community to the pinnacle of glory. □□

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Remembering Horrors of Partition

► Prof Raghuvendra Tanwar

In 2008, the University of Southampton (UK) had organized an international conference to commemorate the sixty years of India's Independence. At the plenary session, I discussed the Partition of India with emphasis on its horrific events and implications. As the paper was opened for discussion, an Indian historian based in the UK sought to know why historians from India keep harping on the disaster and trauma of 1947. In doing so the scholar sought to suggest that the tragedy of India's partition was just 'extra baggage' that came along with the 'grand story of India's struggle for freedom and needs now to be forgotten'. This point of view did not surprise me as I was aware of such historical perspectives being part of the historical narrative that has been made to dominate historical discourse in the decades that followed Independence and Partition.

Even a cursory review of history readings prescribed in the past for schools, colleges and even competitive examinations would show that the Partition story has merited a paragraph or at most two paragraphs in most readings. The attempt to oversight and understate the unfolding of the tragedy is in fact just one part of this carefully crafted narrative which has also propagated the view that the decision to Partition the country enjoyed mass support. This reading of the Partition story has also argued the process was the result of historic circumstances which created conditions which Partition was the only option. This gross misrepresentation.

The fact is and Jayaprakash Narayan too, had said the decision to Partition to country was taken at a personal level by few leaders and did not

represent the people's will. The only public forum where the issue was debated as we know was the All India Congress Committee that met on June 14, 1947.

Clash between Nehru and Gandhi

Several leaders of the time including Dr Rammanohar Lohia and Jayaprakash Narayan had said that the 400 members of the AICC were all nominated and in no way were representative of the people's will. Only 200 of the total actually attended the session and even as 129 of them supported the Partition resolution, in their speeches there was huge opposition to the proposal almost without an exception. Most speakers opposed the idea but were unable to vote against it. The bitter exchange that took place between Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru during this AICC meeting has been documented by Dr Lohia. As Gandhi said, he had not been consulted while Nehru insisted he had done so. The exchange was heated and left the gathering shocked.

The Partition plan was widely condemned. As the Tribune noted : "We accuse those whom providence has made the architect of our destiny...of accepting the two nation theory...of describing the unprecedented suffering as the price for freedom..." (Oct. 1, 1947). Likewise Sardar Ajit Singh, the great freedom struggle hero, noted : "The champions of partition will not escape condemnation in history" (June 9, 1947). The Punjab Congress leader Gopi Chand Bhargava, too, said : "The Punjab is ruing the day when Indian leaders compromised with communalism...The Punjab lies prostate and bleeding...India stands divided". This list is unending.

Devastation and Horror

The one key story that emerges from 1947 from whatever section of society, it may be from the masses, the official system, the influential and well-connected, the press, and so on is that, the 'story of Partition' is one of horror, devastation and sadness.

Let us look at what the use of the term Partition actually means. It is estimated that about 17 million people were forced to move out from age old homes in the West and the East- Punjab, Sind, Bengal and other parts so as to cross borders. This remains the largest peacetime forced migration in history. Even conservative estimates suggest that the number of deaths that took place in this communal madness is in excess of 500,000. Some credible sources take this figure upto even a million. This tragedy manifested itself most for the manner in which women were especially targeted. Here too, the most conservative of estimates suggest that over 100,000 women were violated and abducted. The actual figure would be many times more.

Humongous Tragedy

The horror of Partition to which Prime Minister Narendra Modi drew the Nation's attention last year and spoke of commemorating the tragic happenings on August 14 every year also has another side. The statistics of the killings apart, it is the nature of violence that even today has almost no comparison. The Nazis and dictators like Joseph Stalin and Mao Tse Tung have had the blood of millions of innocent men, women and children on their hands. But this was the power of the State against unarmed ordinary people. The Partition violence was extra tragic because it was a conflict between people who had co-existed for centuries and suddenly took upon themselves to outdo each other in terms of the harm they could inflict on the 'other' community. The idea was to make conditions so impossible that migration was the only option. In today's terms the economic impact could be in the range of 3.00 lakh crores.

The horror of Partition also stands out for the fact that the perpetrators of the violence sought to remove not only the physical presence of the other community but also cultural as well. Insanity became common place, enabling people to freely violate age old taboos and norms. The common man, the small peasantry, petty traders, shopkeepers and those that followed ancestral professions were the ones who suffered the most. The vast majority had no idea of what was happening and why it was happening. The trusting mass of humanity on both sides just followed the line. Most of the wielders of governmental authority, the owners of large land holdings, the wealthy barristers and bankers and the political class of all kinds had taken the early call to move and safeguard their interest. This led Gandhiji to comment on the unfortunate manner in which the 'rich had left the poor behind'.

Seventy five years have now passed and interest in why and how it happened only seems to grow. The impact of the tragic unfolding of the Partition decision on the individual psyche is seated deeply and cannot be wished away however hard one may try. The fact also remains that for the vast majority of people with memories of Partition, it remains a monumental disaster in terms of human lives lost and most importantly for the manner in which it ended a shared way of life.

Having spent over 30 years studying the tragedy, I have yet to meet one family that lived through the partition trauma and would now wish to forget it. 'Purists' and sections of our academia may have chosen to stay away and understate the horrors of 1947 by downsizing and downplaying important parts of the tragedy but the question remains- can or should such events be forgotten and wished away.

It is important to commemorate a tragedy of such unprecedented scale to keep in mind and instill in the national psyche the memory of those that experienced and lived through this monumental disaster and horror. □□

Higher Education in India and National Education Policy 2020 : **A discourse on Bhartiya**

■ Dr, Raktim Patar

The cabinet approval of National Education Policy 2020 on 29th July after incorporation of the suggestions from all the stake holders is a significant event in the history of modern education in India. With this, the road map for a comprehensive reform and revamping of the education system is laid out. It will solve much needed and long encountered problems in all stages of Indian education be it the school level or higher education level. It is to be noted that even after more than 70 years of independence and appointment of several commissions' Indian education system still lacked the basic requirements and capabilities to compete with the ever changing world. This article looks into the issues and challenges on higher education that were long pending and eagerly waited for a comprehensive reforms and how the National Education Policy will resolve it. It also provides a historical perspective on the glorious Indian education system and how it was made to suffer during Muslim and colonial rules.

India is the land where first formal education system was developed in the form of Gurukul system. In the Gurukul, the knowledge seeker pupils learnt all the basic subjects such as warfare, diplomacy, arithmetic, philosophy, astronomy etc while living a humble life at its mentor's monastic homes called Ashrama. In the subsequent period, Indians developed a well structured and robust higher education system which resulted in the world's oldest universities namely Takshashila, Nalanda, Vikramshila and many more. In these universities thousands of students used to learn from astronomy, mathematics to basic science and technology. During the Muslim rule in India from the early 13th century to mid 19th century, the Bharatiya tradition of teaching, learning and innovation was forcefully dismantled. During this period, ancient universities and pathsalas were ravaged, scholars and gurus were beheaded and whoever dared to promote Indian

culture were either killed or severely punished. Indian education system suffered a tremendous setback. It is worthwhile to mention that since time immemorial India has been the pioneers in the fields of technology, astronomy, mathematics, civil engineering, chemical science, botany or biotechnology and medical science. There are several treatises and theorems on different subjects composed by great Indian sages that testify that their inventions and discoveries were incomparable and far ahead of their times. Out of innumerable scientist and innovators some of the well known names like Aryabhata, Barahmihir, Brahmagupta, Charak, Susruta, Pattanjali etc are immortal in the realm of modern science.

During the colonial rule Indian education system gradually uprooted in a systematic way to facilitate the establishment of western education system based on imperialistic designs. The English education act 1835 authored by T.B. Macaulay which envisaged creating 'a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in Taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.' It is no doubt that the British were very much successful in implementing their scheme of education in India and even after several decades of Independence the curriculum of our education system still meeting the objectives of the long gone colonials. Our education system is full of curriculum, syllabus, study materials, text books which encourages adopting western values, showcase western religion, philosophy, science and technology greater than their own. It still full of flaws academic mismanagements. Our college and universities are still producing job seekers but not job givers. According to global studies on employability of educated individuals, Indians are still in lowest at bottom of list. In the last several decades after independence no Indian university could make a place in the top of 100 universities of the world. Further our universities could not produce much honored Nobel laureates

except one or two which is insignificant compared to capabilities of Indians in the field of research and innovation.

In appreciation of the attempt for a realistic rejuvenation of the Indian education system embodied in the National Education Policy 2020, the Government of India approved the same for implementation throughout the country. In this comprehensive policy all the challenges so far encountered by Indian Education System has been resolved. The challenges were -

a) a severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem

b) less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes;

c) a rigid separation of disciplines, with early specialisation and streaming of students into narrow areas of study;

d) limited access particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with few higher educational institutions (HEIs) that teach in local languages

e) limited teacher and institutional autonomy;

f) inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders;

g) lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines;

h) suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs,

i) an ineffective regulatory system; and

j) large affiliating universities resulting in low standards of undergraduate education.

In order to address these challenges the NEP incorporated the following objectives :

a) to develop good, thoughtful, well-rounded, and creative individuals

b) an education system based on Indian ethos

c) providing high-quality education to all, and thereby making India a global knowledge superpower

d) the curriculum and pedagogy to develop a deep sense of respect towards the fundamental duties and Constitutional values, bonding with one's country, and a conscious awareness of one's roles and responsibilities in a changing world,

e) to instill a deep-rooted pride in being Indian, not only in thought, but also in spirit, intellect and deeds, as well as to develop knowledge, skills, values and dispositions that support responsible commitment to human rights, sustainable development and living and global well-being, thereby reflecting a truly global citizen.

To meet the objective, the policy emphasized some fundamental changes in the current education system in higher education :

a. Creation of multidisciplinary universities and colleges, with more HEIs across India that offer medium of instruction in local/Indian languages. By 2040, all higher education institutions (HEIs) shall aim to become multidisciplinary institutions, each of which will aim to have 3,000 or more students.

b. To establish at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district by 2030.

c. Provide faculty and institutional autonomy.

d. Establishment of a National Research Foundation which will be to enable a culture of research to permeate through our universities.

e. Governance of HEIs by independent boards having academic and administrative autonomy;

f. A stage-wise mechanism for granting graded autonomy to colleges, through a transparent system of graded accreditation, will be established. HEIs will have the autonomy and freedom to move gradually from one category to another, based on their plans, actions, and effectiveness

g. HEIs will support other HEIs in their development, community engagement and service, contribution to various fields of practice, faculty development for the higher education system and

support to school education.

h. Single-stream HEIs will be phased out over time, and all will move towards becoming vibrant multidisciplinary institutions or parts of vibrant multidisciplinary HEI clusters.

i. The present complex nomenclature of HEIs in the country such as 'deemed to be university', 'affiliating university', 'affiliating technical university', 'unitary university' shall be replaced simply by 'university' on fulfilling the criteria as per norms.

j. A holistic and multidisciplinary education would aim to develop all capacities of human.

k. beings- intellectual, aesthetic, social, physical, emotional and moral in an integrated manner.

l. Even engineering institutions such as IITs, will move towards more holistic and multidisciplinary education with more arts and humanities. Students of arts and humanities will aim to learn more science and all will make an effort to incorporate more vocational subjects and soft skills.

m. The undergraduate degree will be either 3 or 4 year duration, with multiple exit options within this period, with appropriate certifications, e.g. a certificate after completing 1 year in a discipline or field including vocational and professional areas, or a diploma after 2 years of study, or a Bachelors' degree after a 3 year programme. The 4 year multidisciplinary Bachelor's programme, however, shall be the preferred option.

n. HEIs shall move to a criterion-based grading system that assesses student achievement based on the learning goals for each programme.

o. HEIs shall also move away from high-stakes examinations towards more continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

p. To meet the challenges of 21st century the present government approved internationalization of higher education. As per the policy India will be promoted as a global study destination providing premium education at affordable costs. An International Students Office at each HEI hosting foreign students will be set up to coordinate all

matters relating to welcoming and supporting students arriving from abroad. High performing Indian universities will be encouraged to set up campuses in other countries. Similarly, selected universities e.g. those from among the top 100 universities in the world will be facilitated to operate in India. This step will certainly go a long way in fulfilling the demand for international university campuses in India, at the same time establishment of campuses of Indian universities across the globe will facilitate promotion of Indian language, culture, history, art and philosophy. Besides, it will help establishing academic and cultural contacts with the students and youths of various countries.

The NEP also stresses the need for vibrant faculty for the success of higher education. It has instructed all the HEI to equipped with the basic infrastructure and facilities, including clean drinking water, clean working toilets, blackboards, offices, teaching supplies, libraries, labs and pleasant classroom spaces and campuses. Faculty will be given the freedom to design their own curricular and pedagogical approaches within the approved framework. According to the NEP the HEIs will have clearly defined, independent and transparent processes and criteria for faculty recruitment.

Another significant feature of the NEP 2020 is the emphasis on vocational education. Vocational education will be integrated into all school and higher education institutions in a phased manner over the next decade. Higher education institutions will offer vocational education either on their own or in partnership with industry and NGOs. 'Lok Vidya', i.e. important vocational knowledge developed in India, will be made accessible to students through integration into vocational education courses. MHRD will constitute a National Committee for the Integration of Vocational Institute (NCIVE), consisting of experts in vocational education and representatives from across Ministries, in collaboration with industry, to oversee this effort. Indian standards will be aligned with the International Standard Classification of Occupations maintained by the International Labour Organization. It is to be noted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been consistently working on the National Policy of Skill

Development and Entrepreneurship. Greater stress on vocational education will meet the demand of still workforce not only in India but across the globe.

In the NEP, the functioning of regulatory authority has been revamped with several changes. Regulatory system of higher education will ensure that the distinct functions of regulation, accreditation, funding and academic standard setting will be performed by distinct, independent and empowered bodies. These four structures will be set up as four independent verticals within one umbrella institution, the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). The first vertical of HECI will be the National Higher Education Regulatory Council (NHERC). It will function as the common, single point regulator for the higher education sector including teacher education and excluding medical and legal education. The second vertical of HECI will be a 'meta-accrediting body', called the National Accreditation Council (NAC). Accreditation of institutions will be based primarily on basic norms, public self-disclosure, good governance and outcomes, and it will be carried out by an independent ecosystem of accrediting institutions supervised and overseen by NAC. The third vertical of HECI will be the Higher Education Grants Council (HEGC), which will carry out funding and financing of higher education based on transparent criteria. The fourth vertical of HECI will be the General Education Council (GEC), which will frame expected learning outcomes for higher education programmes, also referred to as 'graduate attributes'. A National Higher Education Qualification Framework (NHEQF) will be formulated by the GEC. The professional councils, such as the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), Veterinary Council of India (VCI), National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), Council of Architecture (CoA), National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET) etc, will act as Professional Standard Setting Bodies (PSSBs).

Indian culture is deeply rooted in its rich tradition of art culture, dance form and music. In order to promote vibrant Indian language and culture, the NEP has given great importance on promotion of Indian language, art, dance and culture. Sanskrit and

all Indian language institutes and departments across the country will be significantly strengthened. National Institute (or Institutes) for Pali, Persian and Prakrit will also be set up within a university campus.

It has long been felt that the healthcare education needs to be re-envisioned so that the duration, structure and design of the educational programmes need to match the sole requirements that graduates will play. Given that people exercise pluralistic choices in healthcare, our healthcare education system must be integrative meaning thereby that all students of allopathic medical education must have a basic understanding of Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha and Homeopathy (AYUSH) and vice versa. There shall also be a much greater emphasis on preventive healthcare and community medicine in all forms of healthcare education.

In the recent years it has been observed that the government funded universities have gradually transforming into a hub of political activism. It is very unfortunate that these universities have utterly failed to compete with the other universities in the world. Rather billions of tax payer's money has been wasted on the students and faculties without much desired results. In the backdrop of these concerns on the HEIs in Indian, the much anticipated NEP has been placed. It is expected that this policy will transform into a guiding principle to bring back the long lost glory of 'Bharatiya' tradition and heritage of education and innovation which envisage on multidisciplinary, humanistic and holistic development. With the implementation of National Education Policy 2020, it is certain that the deep rooted colonial influence on Indian education will come to an end. It will usher in an era of great scientific discoveries and innovations with humanistic approach in India and led the world in different fields of academics. □□

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LEST WE FORGET: THE MANY PARTITIONS AND THEIR LEGACIES IN NORTHEAST INDIA

► Prof. Binayak Dutta

(Contd. from September Issue)

F. Conclusion

In sharp contrast to what is now in focus as the proposed centre of connectivity between East Asia and Southeast Asia as part of India's 'Act East' and 'Neighborhood First' policy, Northeast India has persisted as a borderland of an expanding colonial empire and post-colonial interests. We need to come to terms with India's colonial past and the making of this region's colonial character, if we are to have a way forward in the logjam that the region suffers from in the disconnect between the 'Act East' policy and the disruptive voices on the ground, that appear oblivious of the statist policy perspective enshrined in the North Eastern Region Vision 2020 document that calls for taking an imaginative leap in foreign, defence and internal security policies beyond the bottlenecks imposed by the Partition of India. The decision of the Supreme Court of India to monitor and ensure the updation of the NRC as a mechanism for identification of and deletion of foreigners from Assam in its judgement on 17th December 2014 and the subsequent preparation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) for Assam whose final list was published on August 31, 2019 has only helped to revive the importance of engaging with the Partition of India. The Central Government has contributed to further confusion by first issuing a notification by the Ministry of Home in September 2015 which exempted the Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationals belonging to the minority community entering India on or before 31st December 2014 without proper relevant documents from being declared as illegal entrants or foreigners, and exempt from the Passport (Entry into India) Act 1920 and the Foreigners Act of 1946, and then proposing a bill to amend the Citizenship Act of 1955.

None of these decisions have actualized into any closure of the antagonisms or the misery that was set loose in this region by the politics of Partition. In reality, the antagonisms have only aggravated over time with newspaper reports indicating gross mismanagement of the NRC enlistment process on the ground, a number of people committing suicide, thousands being pushed into detention centres and

countless people being harassed in the name of detection and identification of foreigners.[40] Partition continues to fester in our lives despite the lapse of more than seven decades since the event of 1947. Over years, the unresolved boundary question in Northeast India and the continuous acrimony over the legality of migration across the created state-nation boundaries has become a pointer to the assertion that Partition is not an event but a process which is far from its closure. This needs serious engagement by politicians, policy makers and academics alike. This is something that is yet to happen till now.

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Agricultural Development in Assam through Horticultural Production and Business Activities

By

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(Contd. from September Issue)

▶ Designing high internal& low external input intensive production system

The production system of the GP- based FPO will be high internal & low external input intensive in nature structured on the sustainable rural livelihood (SRL) framework suggesting efficient utilization of natural, physical, human, financial and social capitals available in the vicinity. While designing the way forward, the principles & recommendations of UN sustainable development goals (UN- SDG) will also be adhered to.

▶ Attaining self sufficiency in seed & bio-input production

The GP- based FPO will have to have a robust mechanism for producing horticultural seed & planting material to fulfill its own requirement as well as trading. Likewise, it must have a massive system for production of bio- inputs for nourishment & protection of its own crops.

▶ Emphasis on soil & water testing facility, small farm mechanization, pack house and primary processing unit

In order to enhance crop productivity through efficient utilization of resources and reduce production cost, the FPO needs to be supported with soil & water testing facility and further empowered to adopt small farm mechanization technologies. The FPO shall be mobilized to install Custom Hiring Facility for benefitting the member farmers and fostering revenue generation. In addition, due effort will be made to facilitate the FPO with pack house and primary processing unit for efficient handling of

farm produces, minimization of post production losses & addition of value to the raw products. A facility like Panchayat Pack house & Primary Processing Plant (PPPPP) may be put in place for diffusing the flavour of horti-business at grass root level. This may serve as a feeder unit for large processing plants functioning at the district or state level. It could be amply expected that sooner or later the FPOs with sound raw material base may be able to show their footprints in the premises of the large processing facilitation centres like Mega Food Park for embarking on commercial ventures.

▶ Bringing market down to the farm front by provisioning Rural Auction Platform

The GP- based FPOs under a particular Block may federate themselves to address the critical issues of volume, quality and supply chain consistency pertaining to a specific commodity/product leading to creation of Rural Auction Platform at Block level. They may further federate beyond a particular Block in accordance with the demand from the market.

▶ Emphasis on production and marketing of specialty items including quality tagging

GP-based FPOs should lay prime focus on production of specialty items in order to realize better market response. Nutritious bananas, pungent chillies & black pepper, low fibred ginger, highly coloured turmeric, indigenous fruits & vegetables with high antioxidant & nutraceutical properties etc. are the examples of specialty products of the state. Acquisition of tag (organic, GAP, natural & GI) denoting quality & uniqueness of the products would prove to be tremendously advantageous while

playing round the market. Each & every FPO should market their products under a definite brand to keep up the identity while connecting a broad spectrum of consumers.

► **Undertaking IT- enabled mapping of indigenous horticultural bio- resources**

The FPOs may take up an IT- enabled mapping of the horticultural bio-resources under their jurisdiction leading to coverage of all 27 lakh homesteads in the state in a collective effort. This would help creation of an authentic primary database on the type, quantum & availability latitude of raw material for designing processing ventures. This may open up further avenues for building partnership between FPO and established processing house for intensification of food processing activities in the state.

► **Horti- Industrial Catchment Farming**

FPOs falling in the vicinity of the 175 Growth Centres under Assam Industrial Development Corporation may be involved in Horti- Industrial Catchment Farming (HICF) for catering to the raw material requirement of the established and emerging food processing units. The production plan of the FPOs involved in AICF may be tailored to match the raw material type (both in quantitative and qualitative terms) and processing schedule of the unit. Availability of raw material of desired type in adequate quantum would not only help in upscaling the activities of the existing units but also open up avenues for intensification of horti- processing through establishment of new ventures.

► **Intensification of activities in beekeeping**

The FPOs will be technologically empowered to intensify the beekeeping activities in integrated manner with horticulture to derive the twin benefits of high fruit productivity resulting from bee- mediated pollination and enhanced production of quality honey resultant upon ease of bee foraging for nectar in orchards in the vicinity. The horti- apiculture integrated system may help the farmers to raise the level of income significantly.

(IV) Strategies for retention of human capital in the rural sector

► **Identification of vulnerable section of rural youth having a tendency for migrating to non- farm sector**

It will be necessary to make a comprehensive drive for mapping the vulnerable section of the rural youth who are losing interest in farming and getting inclined toward non- farm livelihood options. The root causes of such phenomenon need to be critically assessed in a given socio- economic environment.

► **Empowerment of the vulnerable section for change of mindset and confidence building**

It will be necessary to devise strategic measures to empower the vulnerable section of the rural youth for regaining confidence to keep actively engaged in farming. It will also be necessary to explore the scope of provisioning horti- farming based livelihood options for the particular bunch of rural youth who had returned home during the Covid- hit period. Attention should also be paid to ensure horti- based livelihood options for the school drop outs. Based on the availability of skill & expertise and interest shown, the vulnerable group may be trained to pursue either production or farm service related activities. An innovative system of Farm Internship may be thought of under which the rural youth may be placed in a successful farm to acquire experiential learning over a definite period. A mechanism may be devised to support the internee with a **Livelihood stipend/fellowship** to cover the expenses on food & lodging during the farm internship period. Schematic provisions should be created to provide assistance to such internee for starting up own ventures on completion of internship.

(V) Scope of imbibing the benefits of the ongoing central as well as state schemes for addressing the constraints & challenges encountered in total value chain management

Noteworthy is the fact that numerous schemes under central and state sector are in operation for promotion of horticultural sector, viz., HMNEH-

MIDH (inclusive sectoral development), MOVCD (development of value chain in organic horticulture), PMKSY (irrigation support), PMKFBY (crop insurance), SAMPADA (agri- horti processing), PMFME (food processing), CMSGUY (rural development) etc. The Technical Support Group may explore the possibility of deriving the benefits from these schemes.

(VI) Anticipatory and futuristic plan, strategy & measures for long term sustainable development of the sector

The rapidly growing population, shrinking farmlands and changing socio-economic, agro-climatic and dietary patterns have challenged the scientists, producers and policymakers to critically assess the current food production system and augment it accordingly to feed 7.5 billion plus global population currently and the day ahead. To address this challenge, we as a country, are to produce sustainably, trade abundantly and progress harmoniously. The GP- based FPOs being the grass root production & business unit can play a pivotal role in crop as well as product diversification to respond adequately & smartly to market signals. The FPOs need to be provided with constant technological support enabling them to confront the upcoming & anticipatory challenges including the fallout of global climate change. Further, they need to be adequately empowered to acquire

competitiveness in terms of price & quality in order to dive deep and stand alive in domestic as well as overseas markets. Product novelty is always viewed with high esteem in the market. FPOs should try every nerve to venture into production and marketing of novel products which may offer specific benefits pertaining to human nutrition, prevention & curing of maladies and upkeeping the health of environment.

(VII) Anticipated outcome

Implementation of the project could be expected to trigger a massive & organized movement on part of the farming community of Assam to transform & redesign the existing horticulture into business mode for strengthening the rural economy in the smallholders' domain. Intensification of activities in the crop production & processing as well as farm service sector would foster employment generation. Other expected deliverables would encompass conservation of the invaluable horticultural bio-resources, unlocking of the hidden horti- potential for synthesizing items of commerce, pledging of nutritional security, retention of rural youth in the farm sector, fostering development of a self reliant industrious production platform at the rural front, promotion of horti-ecotourism and enhancement of the contribution of horticulture sector to the growth of state GDP. □□

□ “For to be free is not merely to cast off one’s chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.

Nelson Mandela

□ “Freedom of mind is the real freedom. A person whose mind is not free though he may not be in chains, is a slave, not a free man.

BR Ambedkar

□ “I say it is not your pride that you are a Madrasi, it is not your pride that you are a Brahmin, it is not your pride that you belong to South India, it is not your pride that you are a Hindu, that it is your pride that you are an Indian.

Sarojini Naidu

□ “If yet your blood does not rage, then it is water that flows in your veins. For what is the flush of youth, if it is not of service to the motherland.”

Chandra Shekhar Azad

Inter-Community Relations of Northeast Bharat, Past and Present

► Naiwang Konyak

The eight north eastern states of India - Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Tripura, and Sikkim command special importance in our country not only because of their location but also because of their cultural and historical uniqueness. The landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity make these states quite different from other parts of the country. Even within a single state the magnitude of diversity is immense. Each community in every state practice their own cultural custom, uses different languages, celebrate their own festivals.

The history of North-East India is very rich with some states finding their names in the likes of Mahabharata, and written records of the Mughals. In most states, history is passed down to next generations through oral traditions. Though there were conflicts between different communities or states in the past, for power and territory, but there is also evidence that the people in the past maintained peace and harmony with each other for the sake of trade, alliance and other political reasons. Some evidences that the communities contacted each other are like that of Ita hills in Arunachal Pradesh where we can find bricks and pottery which date back to medieval Assam. These people of the hill of Meghalaya were in contact with the Bengali people (present day Bangladesh). They adopted their coins and literature. The Nagas and the Ahoms had also had good relations. They traded salts,

livestock, spices, cotton etc. During wars, Ahom kings used to take shelter in the Naga Hills. The present day Meiteis of Manipur is the mixture of people from west of

Manipur and the old nomadic tribes. With the coming of British, education was introduced and the people started to know the importance of unity. Prior to the British, there were practices of head-hunting and raiding between communities in many of the hill states. But it was abolished by the British and peace was implemented between communities. In the mid of 19th century, when there was a wide range of wide revolt against the British Empire, there was an immense unity among communities in the North-East India. Through this process, their relationships grew more.

In Present day, due to modernization and good transportation, people belonging to different religion, caste, creed and race live together in peace and harmony. Education, sports, businesses, festivals, music, social media etc. bring people together and create a feeling of oneness. A good example would be the Hornbill festival where every tribe from Nagaland comes together to celebrate their festivals. The first N.E. Olympic Games, 2018 was held in Imphal where every state participated. These kinds of events and activities boost the relationship of the eight states.

The people make mistakes and there are still plenty of works to be done to maintain good relation with the neighbouring states or communities. The government, Social activists and individuals are trying the best to mend the wounds of the past bitterness and to create a better and peaceful society for present and future. □□

Seven teachers from NE states selected for National Awards

The awards were conferred to the selected teachers on the occasion of Teacher's Day on September 5 by President Droupadi Murmu at Vigyan Bhawan in New Delhi. Seven teachers from the Northeastern states have been selected for the National Awards to Teachers (2022). The seven selected teachers from Northeast India include two from Sikkim and one each from Manipur, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura and Assam. A total of 46 teachers across the country have been selected for this award.

National Awards to teachers celebrate the

contribution of teachers in the country and also honour those teachers who have played an important role in improving the quality of school education and enriching the lives of their students, the Education Ministry said in a statement. A national-level function is organised by the Department of School Education and Literacy under the Education Ministry every year to confer the National Awards to the best teachers in the country. The teachers are selected through a transparent and online three-stage selection process, the statement said. □□

Part of Borjuli T.E. of Assan gets Biodiversity Heritage site tag

The Assam government has declared two new Biodiversity Heritage Sites – ‘Borjuli Wild Rice site’ and ‘Hajong Tortoise Lake’ About 0.41 hectares in Borjuli Tea Estate where wild rice: *Oryza rufipogon*, also known as brown beard rice was found was declared the second Biodiversity Heritage Site (BHS) in Assam. In a gazette notification on August 10, the Assam government declared two new Biodiversity Heritage Sites – ‘Borjuli Wild Rice Site’ of Sonitpur district and ‘Hajong Tortoise Lake’ in the Dima Hasao district. “With this declaration, Assam has now three Biodiversity Heritage Sites, the first one being ‘Majuli Biodiversity Heritage Site’ declared on March 29, 2017,” said KSPV Pavan Kumar, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Biodiversity and Climate Change and Member Secretary of Assam State Biodiversity Board (ASBB).

“The ‘Borjuli Wild Rice Biodiversity Heritage Site’ is located at Borjuli Gaon Panchayat in Sonitpur district inside a private tea estate. The total area is 0.41 ha. It holds a viable population of a unique, water-logging resistant, wild-rice variety (‘landrace of the rice’) called ‘*Oryza rufipogon*,’” Kumar said. This site is also not part of any Protected Area (National Park / Sanctuary). The ‘No Objection Certificate’ for allotment of the said land for conservation of Wild rice germplasm was obtained from the Borjuli Tea Estate Management on July 7, / 2021. “The proposal for declaring this site as a BHS was submitted by Borjuli Gaon Panchayat Biodiversity Management Committee on the recommendation of ICAR-National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR), New Delhi for conservation of the concerned ‘Rice Variety’. The Borjuli Gaon Panchayat BMC will be responsible for

the management of this BHS with assistance from Assam State Biodiversity Board,” he said. Under Section 37 of the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, the state government may, from time to time in consultation with the local bodies, notify in the official gazette, areas of biodiversity importance as Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS),” Kumar said. Biodiversity Heritage Sites (BHS) are unique ecosystems having rich biodiversity comprising of the richness of wild as well as domesticated species or intra-specific categories, high endemism, presence of rare and threatened species, keystone species, species of evolutionary significance, wild ancestors of domestic/cultivated species or their varieties, past pre-eminence of biological components represented by fossil beds and having significant cultural, ethical or aesthetic values and are important for the maintenance of cultural diversity, with or without a long history of human association with them.

“The ‘Hajong Tortoise Lake Biodiversity Heritage Site’ is situated in the Langtang Mupa Reserved Forest of the Dima Hasao district. The total area covered is 526.78 ha, which also includes the surrounding area of the Lake. The ‘Hajong Tortoise Lake’ which is the natural lake habitat of freshwater turtles in Assam, where critically endangered species such as ‘Black Softshell turtle’ and endangered species like ‘Indian Peacock Softshell turtle’ breed naturally,” Kumar said. “It is not part of any Protected Area (National Park/Wildlife Sanctuary). The proposal for declaring this Lake as a BHS was submitted by the Maibang Biodiversity Management Committee, who will be responsible for management of the Hajong Tortoise Lake Biodiversity Heritage Site with assistance from Assam State Biodiversity Board,” he added.

“ Education is never taught, but is only caught. Therefore the right atmosphere is to be created by the exemplary teachers for the pupils to unfold their latent abilities. Unselfish and loving teachers with their education and example help the student evolve themselves to great heights.”