Chapter I
INTRODUCTION

The Concept

The state as a specific kind of social organisation and its origin and development to its modern sophisticated character, have occupied the minds of all social thinkers since the days of Aristotle followed by Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu and Rousseau. However, there was refreshingly a new approach to this most intricate problem and a significantly new light was thrown by L.H. Morgan and F. Engels which till now could be considered as the ground work in the studies of state formations. At present, the issue has assumed wider dimensions in view of the fact that the social scientists of different disciplines have put their heads together to arrive at an understanding of this very unique phenomenon in the annals of human civilisation.

The works of European scholars have produced endless theories and definitions on the process of state formation. But curiously enough, there is yet to be one which can be accepted universally. Each case study has produced different variations and generalisations. This is due to the fact that the process of state formation is varied in point of time

---

and space. In a recent work, some of these theories and generalisations have been put to test by taking data covering some major parts of the world.

Two distinct categories of states have appeared from the researches so far covered. One is the 'Modern State' which is complex, industrialised and developing while the other one is the 'Early State', simple, non-industrialised and pre-capitalistic. This division is apparently based on the stages of development that the societies have passed through a historical process. The studies on the process of state formation relate to this second category of states which is termed as 'early' as these emerged out of egalitarian tribal bases.

It can well be said that in India, as well as in the North Eastern region too, this area of study is less explored. Surajit Sinha, who in his Presidential Address to the Anthropology and Archaeological Section of the Forty-third Indian Science Congress, held at Cuttack in 1962, for the first time, had spelled out about the significant prospects of research in this area of study. The Centre for studies in Social sciences, Calcutta, sponsored a project in 1981 on 'Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial


and Northeastern India, which resulted in the important contributions from scholars. Such works have already laid the foundation for further enquiries into the factors and processes of state formation of this region, because all the states, viz., the Chutiya, Dimasa/Kachari, Koch, Tripuri, Meitei (Manipur), Khasi (Khyrim), Pnar (Jayantia) and the Ahom state, have emerged from indigenous tribal bases in pre-colonial medieval Assam. The last named one, while migrating into Assam from Upper Burma, landed themselves into a valley of immense size where there was a seemingly political vacuum. There being no centralised political authority, the valley was in a ring of some tribal and tribal-like states as named above. Except the Chutiyas, who were conquered and absorbed by the rising power of the Ahoms by 1523, the other remaining tribes continued the elaboration and sophistication of their respective state systems until they came under British subjugation.

The emergence and growth of a large number of polity formations during the period from the thirteenth to sixteenth century is the key feature of the medieval history of Northeast India. The social organisation of these sedentary as well as segmentary states were dominated by their traditional customs and culture pristine in its form.

5 J.B. Bhattacharjee, Ibid.
They gave away to a coercive authority which was separated from and placed above the totality. At what point of time, and why and how this has come to happen, is the pertinent question to be answered. Further, another imperative issue is that of identifying the retarding or accelerating factors connected with it in course of the emergence of these states corresponding to their ecology and economy which may have largely determined the forces at work in such socio-political formations.

Almost in all such state formations, some common elements are found in the factors and processes. These generally are:

(i) Appearance of private property in terms of differentiated land-holding or acquiring political control resulting in social stratifications and leading to the strengthening of the position of the chiefs.

(ii) Military adventurism - arising out of direct conquest or subjugation of neighbouring tribes or their voluntary submissions for protective authority.

(iii) The hydraulic culture - spread of wet rice cultivation giving rise to Oriental Despotism - Asiatic mode of productions.

(iv) Surplus productions leading to hierarchical structures and eventual centralization of authority.

(v) Contributions from immigrants.

(vi) Hinduisiation/Sanskritization and the Brahmanical influence in the legitimization of the rule through divine origin and the creation of myths for further consolidation.

(vii) The trans-cultural variations - language and culture based on inter-dependency and congruency values.

(viii) Marriage policy and political incorporations.

(ix) Charismatic and commanding dispositions of a chief or ruler.

---

The circumscription issues - population growth and pressure.

Growth of petty commodity production in a limited scale.

Such elements in some measure, in some specific cases, may appear prominently while in some others may not.

Moreover, Claessen and Skalnik have formulated some functional and structural models of the emergent states. Functionally, the 'early state' is a continuous process in the regulation of the relations between the emergent social classes of the rulers and the ruled, while structurally, it is an independent socio-political organisation with a bounded territory and a centralised government; its economy is primarily agricultural, the surplus of which constitutes the income of the government; its population consists of two strata - the upper and the lower; the upper one includes the sovereign, his relatives and the aristocracy while the lower includes the common masses. The access to resources is based on inequality and the inequality comes out of birth, and in which the ideology appears to be based on reciprocity.  

The same source further suggests that (i) the population growth and its pressure, (ii) war, the threat of war or raids, or conquests, (iii) improved means of production leading to

Claessen and Skalnik, n. 3, pp. 640-41.
surplus and tribute, (iv) ideology and legitimation and (v) the influence of already existing states, are some of the important factors to mention amongst others, contributing to the rise and growth of tribal-like early states to full-fledged statehood in most cases.

To what extent and how far these elemental factors contributed to the emergence of these states to full-blown statehoods and how far these influenced the processes in course of time, shall be the main line of investigation in our study. State formation is varied in point of time and space. It had to go through several stages before reaching the stage of statehood in an acceptable term. These states have been broadly categorised into 'inchoate', 'typical' and 'transitional' as per the characteristics present in them. ⁸ We would look into such categorization when necessary, comparatively on similar models but with economic content, suggested by Engels in his analysis of the stages to civilization. ⁸ But before this, we may look into the genesis of the state, and then, into some of its definitions and theoretical problems, to take up the whole issue in a broader perspective.

⁸ Claessen and Skalnik, n.3, p. 23 & p. 641
⁹ F. Engels, n.2, pp. 23-29 & 154-175.
The Genesis of the State

In the simplest term, the state is a human organisation comprising of a number of people, a certain delimited territory, and a specific type of government. Why and how states were formed, involves the problems of social evolutions raising moral and politico-philosophical issues. The state is the most unique organisation of mankind that has emerged in course of time with the progress of human civilisation from the most primitive, pristine and archaic times. As a socio-political system, the state gives way to greater iniquity within its population and the fundamental issue is, why men give up or forced to give up so much local and individual autonomy to become part of and subordinate to despotic, sometimes quite cruel forms of government. Why the state becomes the most powerful social organisation that alone creates and destroys?  

It literally moves mountains and redirects rivers, and it has on occasion sent untold thousands, even millions, to their deaths.  

How does such an organisation come to exist and shall continue to exist as long as the human race continues to exist in future amidst increasing human contradictions is the most point which has been drawing the attention of all social scientists today. Indeed, it is so complex that it is

---

11 Ibid.
not possible to say conclusively as to when and precisely at what point of time the state began.

It is no longer possible to think of the state as a conscious invention, suddenly introduced as an antidote to confusion and chaos. The state must have evolved from rudimentary and inchoate beginnings, by a process of growth that was so slow as to have been all but imperceptible... Even if the full record of that development were available, we would not be able to say precisely when the state began. 

So the state as an organisation of the human society, by itself, is a complex phenomenon involving as it is, various forces which interacted and finally led to the birth of the state through the stages of development and of course, in time and space.

Apart from this, we are confronted with different kinds of states. For example, there are city states, empire states, oligarchic, autocratic, feudalistic and democratic states, stratified by class, caste and social status. We shall have to trace the general form in which type of these states and how far back in time, it manifested.

On some definitions of the state

To define the state covering its entire facets which would be commonly acceptable to all, is indeed a difficult task. However, we have at our disposal some definitions generalised by scholars through their intensive researches so as to have a basic concept for our working purpose. So

---


we find that the state is distinct from the society. It maintains its political authority within fixed territorial limits. It acts through a governmental machinery with defined agencies and divisions of functions. It is formed out of a people conscious of its unity and identity as such. It is embedded in a type of society which is stratified by wealth, prestige, and power and is divided thereby into classes. The source of moral judgment lies outside the state. When a central authority establishes a monopoly of coercive force in a society, the limits of extension of that force which may have been vague until then, at this point, is precisely determined. Thus the state is the ultimate organ of highest political authority and power in which it is found. It is an organ for social integration, internal regulation, and common external defense. Societies lacking the state accomplish these same ends by other means, but the state performs these services for society and in doing so also serves its own ends. ¹⁴

There are also definitions based on classification such as (a) stratifications (b) authority structure, and/or information processing (c) diagnostic traits. Definitions based on stratifications are commonly associated with Marx and Engels emphasizing the formation of social classes in which the ruling class obtains control over the means of production. ¹⁵ Fried also accepts this view. ¹⁶

¹⁵Ibid. p. 25
Definitions based on authority structure throw light on the structure of governmental system. Herbert Spencer, L.H. Morgan and Henry Maine were the advocates of this approach. But Hobhouse, Wheeler and Ginsburg have applied it more clearly and defined the state as a centralised hierarchical system of authority relations in which local political units lose their autonomy and become subordinate to the central government. 17 With minor additions, Evans-Pritchard has used the same approach in outlining the state and non-state forms in the study of the African polities. 18 Service also holds the same view when he says that the centralised government has a monopoly over the use of force. 19

Another approach to define the state is that of information processing. The state as a hierarchical political structure calls for the means by which information is processed and energy is obtained and utilised. 20 The socio-political

life focuses on such information or transaction flows where-
the decision of the higher levels affects other levels in the authority structure. Thus based on archaeologists' data, the state is also defined as that type of hierarchical political organisation in which there are three or more hierarchical levels from the centre to the peripheries.

Cohen has shown that the key of diagnostic feature is that of fission. The enormous potential of states emanates from the capacity to co-ordinate human efforts to carry out public policy. To do so, states evolve a 'ruling class' or, in structural terms, a governing bureaucracy. 22

However, all these definitions bring home the point that the state is a specific kind of social organisation, expressing a specific kind of social order in a society. According to Radcliffe-Brown, it is:

a collection of individual human beings connected by a complex system of relations. With that organisation different individuals have different roles, and some are in possession of special power or authority. 23

By the term 'state' then we understand that it refers to the existing relations in a society and to ideas relating to power, authority, force, justice, property and many other issues. But it is society's own creation to solve out the


contradictions and antagonisms. As Engels has succinctly shown:

... it is a product of society at a certain stage of development; it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it becomes necessary to have a power seemingly standing above society that would alleviate the conflict, and keep it within the bounds of "order"; and this power, arising out of society, but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the state.

And following Engels, we have Krader's view that the state is no one's discovery, no one's invention:

The state is the product of particular social conditions, whereby society divided into opposed social classes produces a central organism of political authority within its midst: the entity in its abstract form which arches over the entire society. Concretely, historically, the state controls and regulates the relations between and within the social classes by means of particular agencies.

It is to be noted that all the definitions widely vary. This is due to the fact that different types of states exist and are existing in different places in different times all over the world. The data from which such definitions have been derived by different scholars do not point to a universal in different state systems. However, the basic concept of the state is clear from these definitions, as to what the state is.

on some Theories of state Formation

There are endless theories mostly advanced by European scholars. These theories have been formulated at different times in different places by scholars of different disciplines based on data covering almost all parts of the globe. Each new theory has thrown new light on each different aspect of the factors and processes of state formation.

It is Marx and Engels who occupy the foremost place in scientific investigations in the field of research based on the materialistic conception of history.²⁶ Engels traces the origin of the state owing to the growth of private property in human society, which in turn, leads to the rise of classes accompanying all the conflicts, contradictions and antagonisms within the society, and finally to preserve this class interest, the state emerges.

The state arose from the need to hold class antagonisms in check, but because it arose at the same time, in the midst of the conflict of these classes, it is as a rule, the state of the most powerful, economically dominant class, which, through the medium of the state, becomes also the politically dominant class, and thus acquires new means of holding down and exploiting the oppressed class.²⁷

Engels has also shown that sometimes in particular cases, the influence of military force, of war and conquest, play a considerable part in the origins of the state. Thus to him,

²⁶F. Engels, n.2, pp.5-6.
²⁷Ibid., p.168.
the German state was born directly out of conquests in which the subjugated tribes were exploited by the conquer­ing group and in which the gentile constitution became incompatible to rule over the subjugated people. But in case of Athens, the state sprang up mainly out of the class antagonisms in a classical form.

To Engels, slavery is another aspect of class formation. According to him, slavery not only leads to the growth of exploiters and exploited to obtain surplus productions but also gives rise to the distinct classes in society which he finds in the formation of the Greek state. Thus by taking data from the Greek, Roman, Athenian and German history, Engels has singularly demonstrated the fact that how class formation and with it state power came about, and thus leading to the necessity of a political organ in confirming the lasting supremacy of the dominant class.28

The rise and growth of medieval states, to Marx, is dominated by the 'Asiatic mode of productions' to use his own terminology. He highlights the dichotomic relations between agricultural communities and the state organisation conditioned by the necessity of constructing and maintaining irrigation systems. What he found in these agricultural communities is that they were not exploited because of the existence of private property/ownership of the means but

28 Ibid, p. 106.
but because of inexplicable allegiance to a deified despotistic ruler in whom the state is personified. Thus there was a flow of regular or irregular tributes in kind, or even in cash which was meant for the state and its public purposes. In Marx's view, this was the first form of class society representing the transitional stage from the pristine to the early type of civil societies. This was the first economic formation of the society and the beginning of the political society and economy. Thus the substance of his theory is the growing class conflict represented by the village agricultural communities with communal land tenure on the one hand, and the organization of the state with political, ideological and economic power on the other. The other aspects like the irrigation works and deified despotism are but secondary issues. 29

Oppenheimer, the German sociologist, developed the 'conquest theory' in the origins of the state. Like Engels, he too believes that the state is an instrument of oppression to maintain social inequality but he finds this inequality arising out of conquest and subjugation of one people by another for the sole purpose of economic exploitations.

... at all places on this planet where the development of tribes has at all attained a higher form, the state grew from the subjugation of one group of men by another. Its basic justification, its raison de être, was and is the economic exploitation of those subjugated. 30

In an evolutionistic approach, rather than historical, he further observes,

The moment when the first conqueror spared his victim in order permanently to exploit him in productive work, was of incomparable historical importance. It gave birth to nation and state, to right and higher economics, with all the developments and ramifications which have grown and which will hereafter grow out of them. 31

The theory was further developed by Thurnwald and Westerlund. However, scholars find it untenable since there were states which emerged without conquests and moreover, the theory does not take account of the internal factors. Some states might have been affected by this on their way to statehood but its universal acceptance is out of question. 32

The 'irrigation' or 'managerial' theory, according to stewards, needed organisation, power and co-ordination, leading to a large concentration of people, in the process of the formation of the state. 33 Wittfogel also says that the

31 Ibid, p. 68.
32 Claessen & Skalnik, n. 3, p. 10.
effective management of the irrigation works largely
depends upon efficient organisation. Its main feature is
hydraulic economy with intensive cultivation and co-opera-
tion on a large scale leading to the division of labour.
Thus the managerial role invariably becomes an important
factor. Similarly, Hunt and Hunt have shown that when an
area is predominantly marked by irrigation dependent ecolo-
gy, the co-ordinating activities tend to influence the pro-
gress. It becomes a major force of political action lead-
ing to the birth of elite power. But Hunts have also said
that it relates primarily to the strengthening of the cen-
tralised authority and not necessarily a cause of state-
hood. As such, the theory does not seem convincing since
there were states emerging without irrigation.

In dealing with the issues of stratification and unequ-
ial access to resources, Fried says that the moment commu-
nal property is replaced by private property and with it
a growing population pressure, stratification is the natural
outcome. The state then emerges out of the necessity to main-
tain the unequal access, if required with force. If this

34Karl A. Wittfogel, Oriental Despotism, New Haven, Yale
35R. C. Hunt & E. Hunt, Canal Irrigation and Local Social or-
ganisation, Current Anthropology, 17, see Cohen & Service,
10, p. 9.
power is not developing, there may be the retarding factors as demonstrated by Leach in his study of the Kachin soci, 

Carneiro elucidates this population pressure factor by combining it with war and conquest, and argues that these factors are mechanisms that would lead to statehood after specific conditions created by either environmental circumscriptions or social circumscriptions. The first is related to a growing population in a territorially confined area delimited by mountains, jungles, deserts or seas, while the second refers to a situation in which the extension of the territory becomes impossible without subjugating the neighboring population, and in which case, the conquered tribes would have only one chance of survival, that is, total submission to the conqueror.

Service, on the other hand, disagrees with the theory of economic inequality. To him, the beginning of political leadership is more concerned with the personal qualities of charisma and outstanding personality of the leader rather than with economic differences. Inequality is institutionalized in case of hereditary rule. It is only a chiefdom and

36 M.H. Fried, n.16, also see Claessen & Skalnik, n.3, p.12.
not a state, as long as the rule remains peaceful and within theocratic norms. But the moment it gives way to secular sanctions backed by force or threat, the state is bound to appear. Thus relegating other conditions, he emphasizes more on the benefit of being part of the society. 39

These theories reveal two aspects of state formation. Firstly, the state emerges out of inequalities in the human society and secondly, that the state was formed on the basis of a social contract. Engels and Fried belong to the first category while service to the second. Oppenheimer, Thurnwald and Carnero added the external factors to the first, while service not totally denying the factors of inequality and exploitation would still maintain that the state could emerge only through a useful association of the people or social groups deriving benefits from the effective central authority. 40

To this, the archaeologists and the social anthropologists have made a common system approach. They see state origins as multiple feedback system in which pre-state polities in various situations respond to their selective pressures by changing some of their internal structures, or by subduing a competing group, or by establishing themselves

39 Elman, R. Service, n. 19, see in: Claessen & Skalnik, n. 3 p. 15-16.
40 Claessen & Skalnik, n. 3, p. 16ff.
dominant in a region, or by gaining control of water re­s­ou­r­ces, or whatever. The initial shift produces a chain of reactions on other changes that leads ultimately, whatever might be the beginning, to the same end—the state. 41

In short, there is no end to the arguments and explanations of this kind in the theories of state formation. Since state formation is a complex issue varied in point of time and space, and with unfathomable complexities in human relations both individually and in groups, such analyses and interpretations are, but natural. However, to our understanding, and following Wright, we may broadly catego­rize these theories: 42

I The Irrigation/Hydraulic/Managerial theory, 43
II The Synthetic theory, 44
III The Internal Conflict theory, 45
IV The External Conflict theory. 46

43 Karl A. Wittfogel, n.34.
The details of the variables, their total relations leading to the birth of the state, has been drawn graphically in these theories by Wright.\textsuperscript{47} Thus we find that in hydraulic societies, the ruling class and the managing bureaucracy are identical with professional governments. The hydraulic activities require a certain kind of management and any change in such management leads to the involvement of increasing professional administrators or say increasingly despotic rulers. In theory II, the synthetic view of state formation is projected. It admits the necessity of a monopolized force to maintain a balance in the society arising out of the external conflicts and the managerial issues. The substance of the theory is that the state is a territorially and hierarchically organized society in which the 'order' is maintained with a monopolized force. In theory III, it has been shown that differential access to wealth, conflict or threat of conflict and the growing inequalities necessitate a sort of mediation which comes out of the state organization. Theory IV refers to the social conditions in which a certain social group seeks to dominate over the other social groups to control the means of production. The organization which maintains this domination is the state.

\textsuperscript{47}Henry T. Wright, n. 42. See the graphic illustrations of Wright at the end of the chapters in Appendices.
We see a Fried - Service debate in the conflict theory. Fried maintains that the external theory is based on competition of groups leading to the centralisation of authority which might occur through conquests, through increasing population density that presses on resources to be unequally possessed by one group over another. To him, this unequal access to resources is the fundamental cause in the birth of the state which has to maintain the stratifications arising out of this. 48

Service, on the other hand, argues that social stratifications are co-extensive in range with the development of the state. Thus in the conflict theory, the appearance of stratification is the first premise. In this way, Service also disagrees with Marx and Engels, and says that stratifications might be a result and not, in fact, a cause of state formation. 49

These theories and definitions lead us to certain conclusions:

1. The state has been defined in various ways. But the most common definition appears to be that the state is a kind of government or a kind of society with a hierarchical structure and some specialised functions. Some speak of the maintenance of a monopoly of force by the state.

48 M.H. Fried, n.16, see Cohen & Service, n.10, p.6
49 Elman R. Service, n.19, see Claessen & Skalnik, n.3, p.51.
2. That in the formation of the state, a number of variables interacts and some such variables are specified as prime movers amongst others.

3. The theories refer to the implicit or explicit multi-feedback variables in the emergence of the state, but not to the stabilizing or retarding factors.

4. The theories do not make it clear as to the interrelations between management and internal conflicts, external conflicts, and others. The other variables governing the growth and stability are also not specified. However, Wittfogel, Diakonoff and Adams have specified the investment in irrigation while Carneiro adds the military capacity variable leading to the rise of stronger governments.\(^5^0\)

**Theoretical Limitations in Ahom's Case:**

And yet, to formulate a general theory of state formation in case of the Ahoms, some limitations\(^5^1\) appear before us. One is that the Ahoms already had some sort of social organization as their gentile constitution would suggest. Further, they were literate and had the capacity for surplus production. They were somewhat politically organized and,

\(^{50}\) Henry T. Wright, n. 42.

\(^{51}\) Amalendu Guha, n. 5, p. 11.
Sukapha\textsuperscript{52} the founding father of the Ahom state was already a successful ruler in his paternal state in Mong-Mao for about eighteen years.\textsuperscript{53} The other limitation is that they landed in a region which was not politically void. The existence of the petty Bhuyan chiefdoms in a fragmented political structure still carried the political heritage of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa. In addition to this, there was the emerging powerful states of the Chutiyas in the eastern corner of Upper Assam, followed by the Kacharis at the centre in a scattered manner, and the Kamar/Koch states of Kamarupa in the west, all throughout the Brahmaputra valley in the plains of Assam.

Therefore, the interactions of the variables in the factors and processes appear enormously complex.\textsuperscript{54} However, it remains to be seen in the subsequent chapters as to how far we can relate these definitions and to what extent we can put these theories to test in case of the Ahom state formation from the available data.

\textsuperscript{52} We have followed here the common orthography after Bhuyan Gait and Guha in keeping with the norms of pronunciation in the Assamese language. To avoid possible confusions, we have not followed the orthography of P. Gogoi (n.53) and of J.N. Phukan (see Lik Phan Tai, the Journal of the Tai Historical & Cultural Society of Assam, Guwahati, Vol. III, 1986, p.27).

\textsuperscript{53} P. Gogoi, The Tai and the Tai Kingdoms, Guwahati University, 1968, p.255.

\textsuperscript{54} See our discussions relating to secondary state formation at the end of the next chapter.
The Ahom state, in many ways, resembles the rise of the Magadhan kingdom of ancient India. Both had gold-bearing rivers, a large number of elephant population in the extensive forests and were naturally fortified with surrounding hills and mountains. Both produced a highly centralised authority by doing away with petty principalities, wiped out foreign invasions and gave birth to a cohesive unity of the land and its people.

The thirteenth century Assam not only witnessed the advent of the Ahoms from the east but also of the Muzzalmans from the west. The Ahom-Mughal relations mark an important epoch in the history of Medieval Assam. While the first made Assam their permanent home by braving repeated invasions, the second failed to make a permanent footing although their contributions were no less in the socio-political history of Assam.

The appearance of the Ahoms in the political scene of medieval Assam produced far-reaching effects in the history and culture of the Northeast India. Eminent authorities on Indian history largely agree to this fact.
On Historiography

The study on state formations obviates a multidisciplin-55­holistic approach. Researches so far done on the Ahom or Tai-Ahom56 point only to a factual history, setting the records straight in respect of places and dates, in arranging and chronologising the dynastic sequences, in depicting the biographical sketches of the kings and of the war leaders and thus, our historical knowledge is further limited in knowing only the events and deeds, 'the great moments', plus the customs of the ruling classes. In fact, the people in general, hardly find any mention except as a backdrop reduced to the cruel derisive role in the exploitations of their kings and his nobility. In case of the other general tribal people of both hills and plains, the works have been mostly confined to ethnographic descriptions of the crude aspects as elements of caricature which are, sometimes not palatable to many of us.57 Therefore, the extant historiogra-


56. The most commonly used term is 'Tai-Ahom' in keeping with the Tai ancestry and heritage instead of 'Ahom', while in general, both terms convey one and the same meaning.

handed down to us is insufficient, inadequate and above all unscientific. Because this was mainly based on the personality cult of the rulers, followed by communal/imperialist historiography of the British colonial historians and then the nationalist historiography of the nationalist historians emphasizing and encouraging revivalist tendencies based on past tradition and culture, particularly in the post-independence period. 58

But the historian's craft is to show how the grass grows beneath the ground and since the state was founded, however, not by the group with power over resources but by those denied access to the resources, the sort of historiography fails to quench our thirst for historical knowledge.

Of course, of late, a new trend is emerging in the study of the history of medieval India. It does not start from the top, but on the contrary from the bottom i.e. from the society's lowest end. It involves the study of actual labour processes in the various fields. In turn, it emerges in complex interactions in the areas of study. It begins with the ecology of a region, the nature and fertility of the soil,


availability of water irrigation including the given technology, the shape and size of the plough, the use of other implements such as and with the knowledge and practice of agricultural technique such as crop rotation, preparing manures etc., and finally with the study of the organisations of labour utilisation. This new trend has evoked much concern among the historians and scholars and sometimes a doubt is raised as to its total acceptability in as much as it involves the study of the past in its present framework and also perhaps for its apparent linkage with the committed ideological overtones. However, its relevancy somewhere and

60 Harbans Mukhia, n.50, pp.63-64.


Barpujari is critical of this approach particularly in case of ancient and medieval history writing which he considers as Marxist interpretation of history. He observes that in its proper perspective, this may be highly useful but it remains as an open question whether this would be applicable to our ancient and medieval times inspite of the exploitation of the masses by the privileged few. Moreover the economic factor, though an important one, is not the sole factor to be taken into consideration. Barpujari is very clear about the role of the historian when he says, 'He is to lay bare facts without fear or favour; under no circumstances should he suppress or distort facts to suit interests or fictions. He says finally, 'His only mission is the exploration of truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.' He has already made a point of this in his article in Assamese, Yajeelaw Pipratom ary Mominia Bidroh convincing with regard to the 'mass upsurge' of the Mominia rebellion (see our last chapter, our reference is to the artificiality of the Ahom civil constitution) as claimed by Marxist historians. See for the article the Assamese monthly Praksh, Publication Board, Assam, Guwahati, February, March and April issues, 1985, pp.62-67; pp.73-79; pp.86-91 respectively.
sometimes, of course without 'historicism' if we may use the term so, is not altogether ruled out since "History cannot be written unless the historian can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he is writing" and since "to promote our understanding of the past in the light of the present and of the present in the light of the past". And therefore, our approach to the problem would be a combination of all these aspects, where and when necessary.

It is here that the most ardent duty of the historian is called for. To quote E.H. Carr once again in conclusion:

The duty of the historian to respect his facts is not exhausted by the obligation to see that his facts are accurate. He must seek to bring into the picture all known or knowable facts relevant, in one sense or another, to the theme on which he is engaged and to the interpretation proposed.

The fact is the people and their doings. The 'political animalism' is the ultimate truth out of which all history and civilisation of mankind has come into being.

---

65 Ibid, p.22.