TRIBAL POLITIES AND STATE SYSTEMS IN PRE-COLONIAL EASTERN AND NORTH EASTERN INDIA
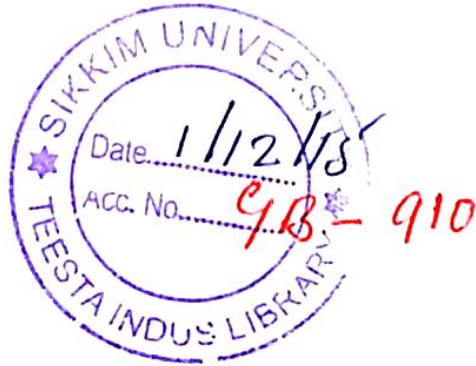
Editor . SURAJIT SINHA

TRIBAL POLITIES AND STATE SYSTEMS
IN PRE-COLONIAL
EASTERN AND NORTH EASTERN INDIA

Editor

Surajit Sinha

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INTRODUCTION

Surajit Sinha

I

BACKGROUND

In 1962 I published an article 'State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India'[1] which attracted the attention of some historians and anthropologists in India and abroad. This paper was mainly based on my field study on the Bhumij tribe of former Manbhum District in Bihar at various periods between 1950 and 1959. I have described elsewhere that in the course of studying the process of acculturation of the Bhumij, primarily on the basis of conventional intensive study of a village, I realised that the process of acculturation, hinduisation and social stratification within the village could not be properly understood unless the data were examined in the broader context of the formation of the principality (Rajya) of Barahabhum (also known as Barabhum) covering an area of 635 square miles and 596 revenue villages.[2]

In the process of initial study of the situation I deliberately looked at the formation of Barahabhum kingdom as the product of endogenous evolutionary thrust, from tribal chiefdom to a kingdom and from clan to territory as reference of political dominance. It was indicated that the formation of the Rajya provided the decisive socio-political structural framework for the transformation of the tribal system into the regional caste system and for the development of a regional pattern of culture with tribe-caste/peasant continuum. In spite of the endogenous evolutionary emphasis in my approach, I did hint at the factor of 'stimulus diffusion'[3] of a model of Rajput-Kshatriya kingdoms (Rajyas) and the significance of the presence of interconnected social hierarchy of Rajyas forming strata of inter-marrying lineages. It was also indicated that emergence of these Rajyas was significantly linked with surplus extraction based on settled plough cultivation, *bund* irrigation, specialisation in crafts and varying degrees of participation in pre-industrial market networks.

I still stick to the endogenous evolutionary proposition. But it now appears to me that the historical reality of emergence of the kingdoms in the hill-forest tribal regions of eastern India cannot be properly understood unless specific kingdoms or principalities are placed in the wider context of interaction with the neighbouring tribal-linked kingdoms in the forest regions and the larger state and civilizational systems of the plains.

I was interested in comparing notes with other scholars, mainly historians and anthropologists, who were engaged in research on the problem of state formation in the different tribal regions of India. When I joined the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta in 1980, Professor Barun De suggested that I might organise a workshop where a number of scholars in anthropology and history could be invited to present their case studies on state formation in different tribal regions in India.

After an initial meeting in November 4 and 5, 1980, we decided to present a few case studies on tribal polities and state systems in pre-colonial eastern and north-eastern India in a workshop at our Centre from July 24 to 28, 1981. Eleven case studies were presented by four anthropologists, one sociologist, a political scientist and five historians. They include the following polities : Chotanagpur Raj in Bihar, ex-princely states of Orissa, Barahabhum[4] and Mallabhum in Western Rarh Uplands in Eastern India and Khasi and Jaintia, Dimasa, Ahom and Meitei States and Mizo chiefdom in north-east India and Sikkim State in the Eastern Himalayan mountains.

II

LEVELS OF POLITIES : DEFINITIONS

Anthropologists place 'tribes or tribesmen' in a position in cultural evolution above primary hunters and gatherers moving around in bands, among whom lineage or clan organisation are not developed or are feebly developed.

The standard constitutional units of tribal society make up a progressively inclusive series of groups : families are joined in local lineages, lineages in village communities, villages in regional confederacies ; the latter making up the tribe or

'people'. They may form a segmentary hierarchy. A tribe tends to remain egalitarian in that no one of the families is politically superior or more powerful in hereditary rank than any other. In a tribal system differentiation of structure, however, has not been carried to the point where separate bodies of political control, full economic specialization or true full time religious specialization have developed.[5]

In contrast to the ideal egalitarian tribal system we find cases which involve rise in the prestige of the person holding the office of chief. 'Chiefdoms' are thus characterized by hereditary ranks. Chiefdoms are closely related to redistribution as a mode of common exchange, whereas in the tribes it is typically reciprocal. The chiefdoms provide a centralized direction to a hitherto tribal society and gives greater productivity without necessarily any change in technological methods. But they do not have true government. The chiefdom is a development of the segmentary tribal system to higher level of integration. A chiefdom is, however, not a class society.[6]

A 'state' has a true government, public and sovereign, structurally separated from the underlying population and is set above them.

So far I have given abstract definition of levels of polities in a universal evolutionary sequence.

In most of the case-studies presented in this volume there is not only co-existence and interaction of tribal organisations, chiefdoms, archaic states and larger state systems of the pre-colonial period, there are even bands of hunters and gatherers co-existing in the same field. We are therefore dealing with complex interacting fields of secondary primitive hunters and gatherers, secondary tribesmen and chiefdoms and secondary pre-modern principalities and states overlain by colonial rule and later formations of modern multi-state sovereign federal political formation since Independence. It is important to consider that the overriding social structure and ideology of the caste system give a very special dimension to the study of the formation of principalities in the tribal regions. The caste system draws the tribal systems, including the tribal based principalities, within the broader frame of the civilizational and state systems of the plains. The structure of the

caste system as a confederation of ethnic groups provides a natural framework for accommodating the tribal ethnic groups which are well adapted to the environment of the forest principalities.

III

MODELS OF STIMULUS DIFFUSION

The above case studies represent two major types of social and political formations :

(i) Eastern India—principalities or states operating in a situation of tribe-caste/peasant continuum,[7] correlated to an ecological base of hill-plateau-plains continuity.

(ii) North-eastern India—tribe caste/peasant contrast in socio-political formations and correlated ecology of hill-plains contrast.

The frontier mountain kingdom of Sikkim offer a special situation on account of its sharp isolation from the plains of India.

The case studies described in this volume represent mainly three distinct historically designed models of 'stimulus diffusion' :

(i) Chattisgarh[8] and Garhjat Orissa model of Kshatriya-Rajput kingdoms[9] : Chotanagpur Raj, Ex-princely states of Orissa, and Mallabhum ; (ii) Southeast Asian model[10] : Ahom-Tai/Shan model—Ahom and Meitei states ; (ii) Tibetan-Bhotiya model[11]—Sikkim.

The Khasi and Jayantia polities (particularly, in the hill regions) exhibit a unique pattern with their matrilineal succession and elaborate operation of participatory 'tribal' democracy.

It is interesting to note that both the former Jayantia state in Meghalaya and the former Dimasa state in Cachar combine two levels of social and political systems : tribal democratic chiefdoms in the hills and hinduised monarchial/feudal rule in the plains. The Rajas of the above two states used to strike a balance between cultural communication and political liaison with the tribal people and their chiefs in the hill areas and with the Hindu castes of the plains.

The kingdom of Sikkim was established in 1642 by a group of Tibetan adventurers on the endogenous base of the pre-Lamaist Kirati tribes—the Lepcha, Limbu and the Magar, who mainly followed a subsistence forest economy of hunting and collecting, and fishing. Ultimately the immigrant Lamaist pastoral Bhotias emerged as the master of the land and political system was shaped on the basis of Lamaist theocracy. A. C. Sinha presents Sikkim as a case of state formation in the frontier of three cultural-political areas—Tibetan, Nepalese (Hindu) and tribal. The Terrai and Duars swamps isolated Sikkim from the Indian core. Sinha describes the emergent Sikkimese polity as 'frontier feudalism'. Sikkimese ruler was a sovereign in his territory and a vassal in Tibet. It is interesting that feudalism in Sikkim was not based on agriculture, but primarily on pastoralism and control over wide topographical niches. The ruler had direct control over the entire land, which was divided into territorial units Dzong and the estates were put under vassals, the Kazis. The land was cultivated by bonded families and slaves. The king attempted to accommodate the interest of both the endogenous Lepcha chiefs and his associate Bhotia warriors.

IV

PRIMARY OR SECONDARY STATES

In the study of early state formation a major issue was raised whether the cases studied represented primary (pristine) or secondary formations.[12] None of the kingdoms or states described in this volume are 'primary states' in the sense that the states emerged primarily out of endogenous ethnic based evolutionary process. In the case of most of the kingdoms and states, the polities were built by conquest or have been significantly influenced by 'stimulus diffusion' of models from earlier periods or from outside the specific territories under consideration. The Khasi Siyems, however, provide a unique pattern which is partly explainable in terms of their relatively isolated location on the hills. They do not seem to have been seriously influenced by clearly definable external models like Rajput-Kshatriya, Tai-Shan or Tibetan. It will,

however, need more detailed comparison with Mon-Khmer polities in southeast Asia before we come to a firm conclusion about the nature of exogenous impulses on the formation of Khasi Siyems.

R. K. Saha's paper 'State Formation among the Meitei of Manipur' indicates that the Meitei kingdom was perhaps primarily the product of inter-clan feuds within the Meitei ethnic group in Manipur valley. Among these clans the Ningthouja clan chief overpowered others, gained control over the fertile rice land and established the Meitei kingdom. Considering the records of periodic warfare with the Burmese Kings, and encounters with Ahom and Dimasa and Jaintia states, it is difficult to be sure whether the evolution of the Meitei state structure is not the product of interaction of the Meitei clan chiefs with the surrounding states and of stimulus diffusion of ideas of kingship.

V

SURPLUS GENERATION, EXTRACTION AND REDISTRIBUTION

From the cases presented and discussed in the volume we find significant correlation between the degree of surplus generated through appropriate technological innovations and the level of functional differentiation, stratification and centralization of a polity. This point has been elaborately dealt by Amalendu Guha in his paper 'The Ahom Political System : an enquiry into the state formation process in medieval Assam : 1228-1800' in this volume.

The Mizo chieftaincies provide a case where polities could not develop beyond the level of petty chiefdoms by depending only on shifting cultivation in the rugged and steeply inclined terrains of Mizoram. In the case of the Siyem chiefdoms in the Khasi Hills we do not find either settled plough cultivation or extensive animal herding. The small-scale chiefdoms or principalities (Siyems) were sustained by horticulture, intensive hoe cultivation, some shifting cultivation, development of metal-crafts, mineral extraction and trade with the people of the plains. It is important to observe that only when originally shifting cultivator groups like the Jaintia or the Dimasa could com-

mand control over the plough cultivating rice lands in Sylhet and in the Cachar plains that they were able to develop states of elaborate scale like the Jaintia state of Meghalaya and Sylhet and the Dimasa state of Cachar (Pakem, Bareh and Bhattacharjee).

In eastern India also, only in the cases of kingdoms like Bishnupur (Mallabhum) and Panchakot (Pachet) where the Rajas could gain control over extensive fertile low rice lands in addition to their rugged hill forest terrains, that they were able to develop large kingdoms and gain *peshkas* tributory status under the Mughals. Their kingdoms were also surrounded by semi-autonomous tributory principalities, Samanta Rajas, guarding the frontier (Sanyal).

Although concentration and expansion of political power of the heads of the kingdoms and states in the tribal regions critically depended on the power of the king to extract surplus and exploit the technological productive power of the subjects, it is also observed that the heads of the polities were expected to partially re-distribute the wealth through the organization of feasts and sacred festivals, building of temples, construction of tanks etc.

In the case of the Bishnupur Raj of Mallabhum, for example, the Rajas were important sources of social service and cultural activities. They excavated many tanks, reservoirs and canals, built many temples, made land grants for the maintenance of Brahmans and deities. These exemplary redistributory roles of the Rajas consolidated their political and social power to be at the apex of the society (Sanyal).

Such redistributive economic roles of the heads of the principalities and the states are observed in most of the cases presented in the workshop.

VI

THE KING OR CHIEF AS HEAD OF SOCIETY, RITUALS AND CULTURE

In Eastern India, North-east India, as well as in Sikkim the heads of the Principalities or States carried an aura of sacredness which they enacted through exemplary rituals and festivals.

In Garhjat Orissa, following the tradition of 'Lord Jagannath' of Puri, the Rajas were regarded as 'moving Gods' (*Chalanta Vishnu*) and the royal presiding deity '*Achalanta Vishnu*' (immovable Vishnu). The Rajas not only ruled over their kingdom on behalf of the Presiding Deities of their lineage, they imbibed in their social being the sacredness of the Deity. Similar notions were also prevalent with reference to the Rajas of Panchakot, Barahabhum and Mallabhum in Western Rarh Uplands. Among the Munda and the Bhumij tribes of Chotanagpur and Western Rarh, we find that in the past the headman and the priest usually belonged to the same lineage. Sometimes the headman himself acted as the priest.

The coronation ceremony of the Meitei kings was not simply a political act of affirming the rulers, right to get obeisance from the ruled, it was an invocation to the ancestral spirits to secure the life-power for effecting the welfare and prosperity of the kingdom.[13]

In all these principalities/states, the Rajas sponsored exemplary rituals, such as, Indra Puja, Durga Puja etc. which not only emphasized the role of the king as the blessed one of the presiding deity of the kingdom, he also acted as the mediator between the divine beings and subjects and thus he vicariously ensured rain, good crops and safety from epidemics. Often the coronation rituals, as in the cases of several Garhjat states of Orissa, enacted the special historic role played by the tribals in installing the founder Raja. Mahapatra describes how the Bhuiya tribal chief had to ceremonially present a Bhuiya maiden to be the king's wife. He also puts the royal turban and annoints royal *tika* marks on the forehead of the new king. In Kalahandi state the new Raja is seated on the lap of the Kondh tribal chief and the Raja is involved in a ritual marriage with a Kondh girl.

It has been observed that the Hinduized Rajas (often claiming Kshatriya-Rajput identity), particularly in Eastern India, and also in some states in north-eastern India, not only controlled the polities but were also at the apex of the tribal and caste societies. In Garhjat Orissa the Rajas were regarded as the preservers of the social and moral order. In each princely state all the castes with middle and lower status had their own self-regulating caste councils, whose headmen were for-

mally recognized by the Raja. When the caste councils failed to settle certain disputes these were referred to the concerned Rajas. The Rajas, in consultation with the Brahmin Royal Priests and Royal Preceptors, finally dispensed with the appeals from the caste councils and also from the village cluster based tribal councils. Similar relationship between the Rajas and the caste and tribal councils were also observed in principalities in Western Rarh Upland such as Mallabhum, Panchakot and Barahabhum.

The heads of the principalities/states described in this volume always tried to maintain a balance between playing the following roles : controlling the subjects of the state 'from above', extracting surplus, building up an army and tribal-peasant militia, expanding the territorial domain of the principality and *acting as the patrimonial head of the polity as a society*. The heads of these principalities were cautious about not disturbing the norms of self-regulation of the endogenous tribals and other ethnic groups, from whom they only accepted token tributes. Skillful peasants, artisans and traders from outside were induced by the Rajas to settle down in their territories subject to regular payment of rent and cess in cash and kind. The Rajas also encouraged artisans to develop specialized crafts and traders to develop trading centres. From these centres the royal exchequers had substantial income.

LEVELS AND TYPOLOGY OF POLITIES

The levels and types of the polities described in this volume are as follows :

I. Small chiefdoms : Mizo chieftaincies

II. Evolved chiefdoms on the hills (mainly following pre-settled agricultural technology) : Khasi Siyems

III. Principalities in the forest regions of Eastern India : Orissa Princely States, Chotanagpur Raj and Mallabhum

IV. Archaic sovereign states in North-east India : Ahom, Jaintia, Manipur and Dimasa states and the frontier Himalayan state of Sikkim.

In all the above cases the higher levels of polities were evolved :

(a)   by coagulation of lineage or clan-based units of one or more ethnic/groups ;

(b)   and/or by conquest of segmentary tribes by larger principalities or states.

In all the above levels of polities co-ordination of lineage or clan segments at the level of kingship or chieftaincy and also among the lower strata of tribesmen and peasants, are significant structural blocks. We observe that in the pre-state level structures like the Mizo chiefdoms in North-east India or the small scale polities at the level of about twelve villages among the Munda, Bhumij and Ho tribes of Eastern India are entirely dependent on stratification of clan and lineage segments. But in the more complex political formations in Eastern India like Chotanagpur Raj, Mallabhum, Panchakot, Barahabhum and feudatory states of Orissa, it is observed that the controlled terrain of the Raja is surrounded by segmentary clan-lineage based political formations. In Mallabhum and in Panchakot the chiefs of such feudatory political formations are labelled as Samanta Rajas. The Garh or fort-palace-capital of the Rajas set the cultural model, secular as well as sacred, for the subordinate loosely attached vassal principalities. They participate in the important rituals and festivals in the Garh of the Raja and emulate the pattern in their own principal villages or townships. Although in these principalities there is a saying that there is no boundary as firm as that of a 'river' separating two neighbouring Rajyas, early British observers of these regions have noticed that the frontier vassal chiefs exercised considerable autonomy. They were engaged in perennial warfare with the neighbouring chiefdoms and thus the territorial boundaries of the Rajyas were fuzzy.

Perhaps one could describe such polities as segmentary states, following the terminology of Southall.[14] The emphasis on exemplary ritual performance at the centre and their emulation in political segments at the perpheries would also fit in with what Greertz has described as 'Theatre Kingdom' for South-east Asian states like those in Indonesia.[15] The model of a central vassal kingdom with subsidiary vassals surrounding

them as typical of forest regions (Atabika Samanta Chakra Chudamani) is an appropriate conceptualization for the hierarchy of polities in Eastern Indian uplands covered in this book.[16]

In contrast to the states organised by the Samanta system, we find more centrally organised state systems in the case of Ahom and Meitei States and also the pattern of government of the Jaintia and the Dimasa States in the plains segments of those polities.

VIII

NEED FOR KINGSHIP IN THE TRIBAL REGIONS

L. K. Mahapatra, in his paper, 'Ex-princely States of Orissa' has raised a very important issue while explaining the mythology of the Bhuiya tribals of Keonjhar stealing the young prince of Mayurbhanj for making him a Raja in the forest region of Keonjhar : what was the need for sponsoring kingship in the forest-clad tribal regions ?[17]

From the reports recorded in this volume it will be observed that none of the principalities operated in a political vacuum. They were periodically engaged in warfare with the neighbouring chieftains or princes and were also involved in marital relationship with some of them. Under such a situation, small scale participatory tribal polities consisting of a small number of neighbouring villages did not feel strong enough to ensure safety needed for protecting themselves from the pressures of large scale powerful kingdoms. Just as these small-scale polities needed support of large-scale polities, the large-scale forest principalities like Panchakot and Bishnupur allowed the development and persistence of several smaller forest kingdoms as vassals (Samantas) surrounding the central regions of their relatively large-scale polities. It is important to note that even a sovereign king like Rampal of eastern India in the 10th century A.D. needed the support of Laksmi Sura, the Chief of all the forest vassal principalities in the region (Samasta Atabika Samanta Chakra Chudamani) and his subordinate vassals for strengthening his power base in the outlying forest regions. Atabika Samanta Rajas thus operated as buffers as well as mediators, between the forest dwelling tri-

bals and the larger kingdoms and state systems in the plains.[18]

In the medieval period the Mughal rulers granted tributory status as Peshkash Zamindars to some of the forest kingdoms like Kokrah (Chotanagpur Raj), Pachet (Panchakot), Bishnupur (Mallabhum) etc. in Eastern India and Koch Rajas in Northern India. The Mughals needed powerful allies in different hill forest terrains which were notionally included within their empire.

Later on, some of these tributary states were converted into revenue paying zamindaris. Under the pressure for payment of ever increasing revenues to the Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, these Rajas become increasingly concerned with extraction of surplus from the indigenous tribals and peasants. They also took the initiative to settle peasants, artisans and traders from outside to enhance their earnings. From their original role as indigenous leaders of people, as the heads of tribal and caste associations and of nearly autonomous polity, society and culture of the sacred geography of their Rajya (territory), they gradually became more and more exploitative as collectors of rents and corvee labour from the tenants. The process gained further momentum during the British rule over these regions and led to substantial erosion of the patrimonial bond between the Raja and the tribals and the indigenous peasants. The British, however, granted tributory status and certain degree of internal autonomy to a number of forest principalities in Garhjat Orissa and also to the Khasi Siyems and the Meitei state of Manipur.

IX

HISTORICAL ROLE OF STATE FORMATION IN THE TRIBAL REGIONS

In the tribal regions of eastern India and also in the foot-hills and plains of north-eastern India, formation of states played a historic role of generating multi-ethnic local or regional cultures, synthesizing and universalising the tribal and caste customs. These processes of evolution, while slowly transforming the tribal systems into caste and peasant formations, also conserved the tribal formations to a considerable extent in the relatively isolated regions. Whether these formations operated merely as brakes on the path towards progress or also played

a constructive role as mediators of transformation, need to be carefully examined. It is important to record that while the states/principalities withered away, the micro-regional patterns of socio-cultural interaction and participatory, 'genuine' regional folk cultures which had been generated within the framework of the earlier states persisted. They continue to provide vigorous cultural material for constructing contemporary regional cultural forms.

X

METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

It will be obvious to the readers that our task would have been much easier if we had chosen to describe and analyse the chiefdoms/principalities/states in the tribal regions mainly on the basis of the records of observations of the colonial administrators during their initial encounters in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. It would have been easier to follow up the scenario nearer to our times by gleaning through the archival and later ethnographic records. Such an exercise would have provided an authentic picture of transformation and breakdown of these polities since the earliest period period of British encounter.

The contributors to this volume, however, have chosen the more difficult task. They have felt that it is important and interesting to reconstruct the process of emergence and later transformation of the complex levels of polities—chiefdoms, principalities and states—by putting together mythological, legendary, archaeological, archival, and ethnographic materials, to the extent that they were available. In the case of the Ahom state the rich and properly classified Buranji materials have been utilised by Amalendu Guha. In the Meitei state of Manipur also there are traditional 'historical' material, Puiya, recorded by traditional Meitei pandits. These, however, are yet to be properly classified. It would have been very fruitful if we could present a study on the Tripura state fully utilising the different Rajmala chronicles. But this was not possible as we were not able to locate a scholar who would be interested in such an exercise.

K. S. Singh, in his paper 'The Chotanagpur Raj : Mythology,

Structure and Ramification' indicates how in a mid-nineteenth century (partly mythological) court-history *Nagvansavali,* the author Vani Ram essentially presents a Brahmanical account of the origin of the Chotanagpur Raj. The Brahmin plays the key-note in all stages of the account. The regional Munda and Oraon tribals, on the other hand, present their own versions of the origin of the kingdom in which their own ethnic groups play the decisive role in founding the Rajya. On the basis of his analysis of the three versions and re-examination of the ethnographic data, Singh challenges the earlier propositions of Dalton (1872)[19] and Roy (1912)[20] about the Munda origin of the Raj and suggests the probability that the state was founded by the Dravidian speaking Nagvansis from the west of Chotanagpur who already had a tradition of formation of kingdom. This view deserves critical examination.

L. K. Mahapatra has indicated how it is necessary 'to string history with myths, legends and current or recently extinct social institutions, if we want to reconstruct the structure of tribal polities and state systems in pre-colonial Orissa'.

It is interesting to compare the two papers on the Jaintia and the Khasi-Jaintia states by B. Pakem and H. Bareh in this volume. Pakem presents the Jaintia state as evolution from a simple to complex formation passing through four stages : migratory groups of families belonging to a clan—formation of settled village communities, *raids* and village councils—federation of *raids* into *elakas* with chiefs—a group of *elakas* forming a sovereign state.

Hamlet Bareh presents the Khasi-Jaintia small-scale Siyem chiefdoms as later products of devolution and withdrawal from an earlier tradition of forming large sovereign Khasi states which combined hills and plains. How such large-scale states were endogenously built up among the Khasi group of tribals at a pre-literate stage and the specific historical processes of their development need closer examination.

XI

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

As we review the case studies it is observed that all the polities covered in this volume have been decisively conditioned/

determined by ecological set up, technology and economy of surplus generation and surplus extraction, size of mobilized manpower, military organization, warfare and conquest and networks of socio-cultural (often marital) interaction among chiefdoms, principalities and states. Brahmin priests, Vaishnavite sectarian organization and Tibeto-Bhutanese Lamaism (in Sikkim) have played significant role in the crystallization of higher level of polities in different regions. In many cases important role was played by enterprising peasant castes, artisans, and traders who settled in the tribal regions from outside. The scale of complexity of a polity was determined not primarily by spatial size but by the size of population under control.

In none of the kingdoms or states, economic and political dominance alone was adequate for firmly establishing political control of the Head. The kings, princes or chiefs had to present themselves as heads of polity, society, religion and culture. They had to combine economic role of surplus extraction and exploitation with redistribution of wealth for public good. The royal cults had to combine exogenous Brahmanic and, in the case of Sikkim, Tibetan-Buddhist traditions, with varieties of endogenous ethnic cultures. Rebellions broke out when the Rajas in these outlying regions tried to establish either personal or public authority exclusively or primarily from above neglecting the role of economic redistribution and preserver of local and ethnic customs.

The chiefdoms and states in the tribal regions described in this volume had to mobilize largely pre-literate tribals. However, a thin layer of immigrant or inducted Brahmins and members of Vaishnava sects, and Lamaist priests (in case Sikkim) brought in Hindu and Buddhist Great Traditions around the courts of the kings, princes and chiefs. The Brahmanic-Vaishnavite and Lamaist traditions, however, were widely spread among the tribals and peasants through varieties of oral communication, icons and cultural performances.

The tribal based kingdoms played the double roles of buffers and mediators between the tribesmen and state systems and civilizations of the plains. These kingdoms transformed as well as conserved the tribal traditions.

A number of papers have indicated that the tribal regions

have gone through cycles of evolution and devolution in response to the pressures and pulsations received from the state systems of the plains. The earlier historical experience left their imprint on the minds of the people in subsequent periods in re-structuring the regional polities. We have already mentioned that the kingdoms in the relatively isolated tribal regions played the role of bringing advanced civilization in their midst while conserving, to a large extent, their participatory rigorous folk traditions which survived even after the disintegration of states and principalities.

I hope these case-studies will encourage scholars to further explore the relatively untrodden field of study of formation of various levels of complex polities in the relatively isolated tribal regions of India. The present case-studies have established the necessity of studying these enclaved and frontier polities not only in terms of 'looking up' from the segmentary small-scale formations, but also to observe and analyse them as products of pressures and requirements of the larger non-tribal state systems of the plains. The various papers raise the issues of conditions of stability and disorder of the polities of various scales. They seem to present an underlying agreement that the people were not being merely ruled from above with decisive control of economy and power. The rulers had to present themselves as creators and preservers of exemplary social and cultural forms and play significant redistributive roles.

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11. A. L. Waddel, *Buddhism and Lamaism in Tibet*, Heritage Publishers, New Delhi, 1974.

12. Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society*, Random House, New York, 1967, pp. 231-242.

13. Personal communication from Lokendra Arambam, Senior Lecturer in History, D. M. College of Arts and Commerce ; of an unpublished paper 'Manipur—a Ritual Theatre State : Coronation Model and Concept of Welfare in Meitei Ethno-State System'. This was an abridged version of a paper he had presented at North East Indian Historical Association Congress at Pasighat, Arunachal Pradesh, in November, 1986.

14. Aidan W. Southall, *Alur Society*, W. Heffer, Cambridge, 1956. The concept of 'segmentary state' was later on used by Burton Stein in *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1980.

15. Clifford Geertz in *Islam Observed : Religious Development in Moroco and Indonesia* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1968), develops the concept of 'Theatre State' and the doctrine of 'the exemplary center'. The king's court, its activities and its styles, reproduces the world of gods. 'It provides an ideal toward which life outside the court, in the kingdom as a whole, ought properly to aspire, upon which it should seek to model itself, as a child

models itself upon a father, a peasant upon a lord, a lord upon a king, and a king upon a god.' (p. 36).

16. In Ramacharita of Sandhyakaranandi it is recorded that king Rampala in order to regain his kingdom took the help of several forest chiefs. One of the important chiefs, Lakshmisura, is mentioned as the head of the group of 'feudal chiefs of the forests : *Samsta-Atavika-Samanta-Chakra Chudramani* (Amiya K. Banerjee, ed. West Bengal District Gazetteers : Bankura, 1968, pp. 71-72).

17. L. K. Mahapatra, op. cit., pp. 19-22.

18. B. K. Roy-Burman, 'Tribal Communities in North-East India are living on the fringe of three great political communities—India, China and Burma. Historically, some of them played roles of 'buffer' communities, and others as 'bridge' communities', *in* K. S. Singh (*ed.*) *Tribal Situation in India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla 1972, p. 72.

19. E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1872.

20. S. C. Roy, *The Mundas and their Country*, Ranchi, 1912.