

# Marxist Dialectic to Understand Conversion and Social Change in Arunachal Pradesh: Beyond Synthesis

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Studies on social change in India after independence have presented a complex and skewed dimension of the process not only in its totality but also at its component level. In a total perspective, the social change manifests in certain important and visible areas, such as: the rise in fundamentalism, casteism, regionalism, ethnic assertion, economic diversification, urbanization, political democracy and literacy. Within each area, the changes are unevenly patterned displaying further complexities. In the economic sphere, for example, the gap between rich and poor has widened; the share in national income being heavily tilted in favour of the forward groups namely, the neo-elites, the upper castes and the traditionally dominant groups.<sup>1</sup> In spite of reservation for backward classes in general, a section in each community invariably appropriates the benefit, due to the whole community. Political participation is skewed in favour of elites and gender equality is yet an aspiration. Cultural identity of a group and community struggles between the force of modernity and resistance from tradition. The social change, especially of tribal and other backward communities, has taken place due to the processes of Westernization and Modernization (Srinivas 1962; 1989), Sanskritization (Srinivas 1952), Soaraization,<sup>2</sup> Industrialization and Modernization (Singh and Bhandari 1980), constitutional safeguards (Vidyarthi and Rai 1985; Kumar, 2002) and development interventions (Behera 1994; Furer-Haimendorf, 1985). Conversion in these communities also speaks of another aspect of complex reality in the process of social change.

The process of social change has not been smooth; it rather presents a picture of consensus and disagreement, resilience and thus persistence and continuity. Forces of acceptance and doubt-led resistance operate simultaneously in the process. Needless to say,

there exists a conflict between ideologies and counter-ideologies, for the ideology we as a nation subscribe to is an 'organic viewpoint of nation state' (Singh 1993:18). But different groups that emerged in the process place their emphasis on 'a rigid cultural mosaic rather than on organic integrated system' (Singh 1993: 17).

The emergence of contradictions—both acceptance and resistance to change—in the process of change has its anchor, as can be argued, on the country's economic policy. After independence the planned approach to development was introduced with focus on planned investments in economic and social sectors. It is, therefore, obvious that the focus has been basically on creating economic forces as agents of social change. This is further clear from the establishment of the Planning Commission at the Centre and other institutions to develop infrastructure, including human resource with an avowed objective of economic growth at large in order to effect all round development of the people and society. Even as the emphasis has shifted to growth with social justice, more specifically to socio-economic development of people in the line of participatory, sustainable and equitable norms, the anchor then also is secured in economic plane. That the national perspective is more tilted to 'economics' than to other aspects of life is clear from the conspicuous absence of national institutions in the line of the Planning Commission towards planning for religious and social life of the people. Contrarily, the constitution of India has guaranteed freedom to different groups in this regard. Obviously, economic development envisions social change (Lal and Ahmad 2001) with freedom to people in order to plan and pursue their social and cultural life by themselves without state intervention. Social change in India after independence undoubtedly presents a model of its own (Singh 1993: 22-40) to study social change in response to development interventions.

There is another way of looking at change in economic sense. The change in advanced section of people and in advanced areas has also been more rapid than in the traditional communities (Kuppuswamy 1972-86: 8-9) like Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In the former case, the built-in mechanisms in various institutions like research and development, scientific institutes, etc. work more effectively than the latter. These institutions have a bias towards economic development at large.

The economic dynamics through planned investments have changed the mode of production, *i.e.*, both forces of production and

production relations. In rural and tribal areas, community based mode of production with reciprocative communal mode of appropriation of surplus labour has been replaced by wage labour in different degrees. In tribal states like Arunachal Pradesh, there is a great demand for outside labour force even though the unemployment level among the Arunachalee youths is very high. Communal ownership of means of production, wherever existed, is giving place to individual ownership (Behera 1994). At least a section of the tribal and rural communities produce for the market using non-traditional technologies like tractors, irrigation, HYV seeds, fertilizers, etc.

Change in the mode of production accompanies the process of change at structural and institutional levels of the society. In the process however, what is evident is the co-existence of ideologies and counter-ideologies as has been discussed in various studies on social change (Bose 1964; Kuppuswamy 1972; Mibang 1994; Singh, 1993; Rina 2001). The existence of ideological opposites concomitant to the influence of economic forces through planned investments, therefore, necessitates the analysis of social change through a dialectical interpretation in materialistic perspectives. Precisely, the paper intends to study the social change of tribal communities after independence applying Marxist dialectical frame.

The main objective of this paper is to attempt at an explanation of social change with reference to 'conversion' by applying Marxian dialectical frame of analysis. The analysis however assumes the following: (i) it studies social change in a contemporary society; (ii) it has avoided reductionism in analysis; (iii) there exists a 'pull' factor outside the society which negatively affects the society to evolve linearly in one direction; and (iv) it starts with a given particular for generalization; in other words, it assumes economic factor as the prime mover in creating antithesis and thus the entry point for the analysis.

#### *Frame of Analysis*

Dialectical reasoning has been used as an analytical tool in different research perspectives in order to comprehend a phenomenon. For example, it has been used as a form of argument (Alexy 1989; Habermas 1990; Goldman 1994), as a psychological concept (Piaget 1980; Kramer 1983; Riegel 1973), as sources of individual differences and as a tool of evolution of ideas (Hegel 1812/1967) or societies and culture (Engels 1872-82/1940). Marxist dialectical

reasoning recognizes the permanence of opposition and contradiction in the real material world and therefore in thought about reality, for 'there is an element of mental in all... reality' (Godelier 1986: 151). Put simply, Marxian dialectics interprets evolution of societies drawing on economic base of the society. It is to be noted that the dialectical logic of Marx has its root in Hegelian method of reasoning in interpreting the evolution of ideas (Hegel 1812). This thesis of the influence of Hegel on Marx is however contested (Elster 1985); nevertheless it does not delimit the efficacy of Marxian dialectics as an analytical tool to study social change. Marx has studied social evolution in a historical perspective. However, in the present paper, the tool is not applied to study the change in a historical perspective but rather with reference to a contemporary situation. Reference to historical process however is made to study the contemporary conflict of the society rather than placing the society in relation to its dynamics in an endless process of historical development of societies (Engels 1872-82).<sup>3</sup> Marx's analysis is basically diachronic in nature while the present study is necessarily a synchronic frame of analysis.

Dialectical reasoning to understand social change is however now contested by not only non-Marxists but also by many Marxists and post-Marxists (Smith 1993:1-4,139-140, Elster 1985). The contestation draws on contemporary issues like the stagnation (and later collapse) of Stalinism, the retreat of the Left in the west, and the general failure of Third World movements to institute either development or democracy (Smith 1993: 139-40), for dialectics is a method for comprehending dynamic processes. Contrary to these issues however, there are social dynamics. Many backward communities transform having been exposed to external dynamics of change such as development interventions, religious conversion and many of these sorts. Even the process of globalization introduces social dynamics (Vago 1999: 31-34) in developing countries at present. Therefore, the relevance of dialectics as a tool to comprehend social change still holds in contrast to static social phenomena.

Conversion is both an agent and process of social change. It presents a picture of social dynamics through change of faith and redefines social relations in the line of new faith. As a result, it puts social relations in two opposite camps—one of converts and the other of non-converts. Evidently, the term conversion has two implications; one is conversion as social change in itself and the other being the existence of the society of non-converts in relation to it. In its two implications, conversion is used to study social change

in tribal communities with reference to 'ideological conflicts' resulting from post independence development interventions.

There are studies on social change in tribal communities with reference to Westernization, Sanskritization, Modernization, Assimilation, and Acculturation. But there is no study available on conversion as social change. Though there are studies on conversion as a result of crisis (Behera 2003; Rina 2001; Bose 1964), these studies lack analytical rigidity in comprehending social change in that they have only established casual relationship between crisis and conversion. In view of this understanding, social change in terms of conversion within the analytical frame of Marxist dialectical reasoning assumes academic interest.

The concept of social change needs some qualification. Social change is a comprehensive and inclusive concept; in that it is holistic in nature and sees changes of all aspects in a totality. But in this paper, social change is explained in a partial sense with reference to conversion of tribals in Arunachal Pradesh to alien faiths. It is to be mentioned that unlike development interventions through planned programmes, conversion in itself is a change and at the same time an agent affecting changes in different aspects of life other than religion. For example, marriage and other social relations are affected by principles of faith to which people have been converted. In this sense the approach to study, is holistic though it starts the discussion with partial change as an entry point.

The phenomenon of conversion reflects an apparent economic dimension. Generally conversion has taken place among economically backward communities and economically backward regions like tribal areas. The economic factor associated with conversion is visible in the creation of schools and hospitals, mostly charitable in nature, in these areas. The pre-converted people were deprived of these services due to their poverty even though they had a need for such services for their material welfare and human resource development, as has been the case in advanced areas. The converted people forego wasteful means of spending on alcohol and in rituals. This arguably affects their post-convert economic life positively though there are arguments contrary to it. The seemingly waning away from apparently wasteful expenditure in traditional life does not add positively to purchasing power of the converts as they also spend regularly and significantly in donations and in terms of both money and labour hours to church services and fellowship (Showren 2004). What is important here is not the economic gain involved in terms

of purchasing power when being weaned away from traditional faiths, but it is the economic factor that goes with conversion phenomenon. Obviously it reflects an economic disparity across community and regions and implicitly to a level of conflict. Precisely, an aspect of social change, a specific phenomenon, is attempted at an explanation applying dialectical analytical frame of Marx. Analytically the study is designed to focus on 'partial' change (see Kupuswamy 1972/86: 10-11) in tribal communities.

### *Selecting Arunachal Pradesh for Analysis*

Arunachal Pradesh, *the land of the dawn lit mountains*, was put behind the curtain of Innerline Regulation of 1873, initially by the British administration to stop tea planters to encroach upon the hills and later, after independence, by the Government of India to safeguard the tribal culture and their rights on land according to the provisions in the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945. In addition to this, the policy towards development was spelt out on the basis of *tribal panchasheel* of Nehru and Elwin (1959) with directives (Elwin *et al*: 1967) and guidelines for the development of the tribals 'along the line of their own genius', by encouraging in everyway 'their own traditional arts and culture' and respecting 'tribal rights on land and forests' (Elwin 1967).

Towards the protection of the indigenous culture, the state government also has enacted Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Indigenous Faith Act, 1978, (Government of Arunachal Pradesh: 1978) with a view 'to provide for prohibition of conversion from indigenous faith of Arunachal Pradesh to any other faith or religion by use of force or inducement or by fraudulent means and for matters connected therewith'. Gegong Apang and his predecessor PK Thungan, during their tenures as Chief Minister, were cautious enough not to destroy the fabric of rich cultural heritage of the state. Christian missionaries were not permitted to work inside the territory. However, to speed up the pace of, and to ensure quality in education Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda Kendra, Sharada Mission were permitted to open up schools. Even Gegong Apang started Donyi-Polo Mission with twin objectives of spearheading Donyi-Polo movement and promoting value based scientific education.

In spite of all these protection, since early 90s, conversion to alien culture, especially in central and eastern parts of the state, has assumed a menacing proportion among the teenagers and youths.

There is mushrooming of churches and schools by the religious groups who have been converted to Christianity. Noctes, who have been practising *Neo Vaiṣṇavism*, are being converted to Christianity almost en masse. Even in the Buddhist area of Bomdila, churches have come up in recent years. Of course, there are temples of Hindu gods and goddesses mostly by the people who are working here in both private and government sectors for their own use. It is to be noted that Ramakrishna Mission or Vivekananda Kendra schools, true to their ethics, have not attempted any type of conversion. The pass outs from these schools have not changed their faiths to Hinduism. Rather, they are concerned about the protection, preservation and promotion of their own faiths and beliefs.

Naturally, it comes to one's mind to enquire into the situation that promoted conversion in the state in spite of all out efforts to preserve and promote indigenous culture.

#### *Development Interventions*

The tribal society of Arunachal Pradesh was very much tradition-bound before independence. The economy was operating at subsistence level in between the stages of food gathering and food production. An idea of the state of underdevelopment, which existed in the territory in 1947, can be ascertained from the fact that there were only two lower primary schools with less than 100 enrolments, 13 health units, mostly to cater to the needs of Assam Rifles, and 168 km jeepable road in plains at the time of independence. Women folk had to walk 3-5 kilometers to fetch water in the bamboo containers which they carried on their backs (NCAER: 1967). But after independence, the representative government at Delhi took interest in the all round development of tribal people and therefore, introduced general plan programmes (GOI:1986-87:36).

At the outset, plan measures were exclusively aimed at penetrating into Arunachal Pradesh with administrative network. The first concern of the government of independent India had been to cover the entire territory administratively. That's why circle headquarters have been set up in remotest places of the territory. During 1948-49, a total expenditure of a little less than seven lakhs was incurred for the whole area. It was about one million rupees in 1949-50 and about 12 lakhs in 1950-51. There was further rise in expenditure and it came to a total of three million rupees during 1951-52. All these years, the government spending accounted primarily and

almost exclusively for the speedy administration across the innerline (Chowdhury 1982: 246). But the first stress on development was spelt out with the inception of First Five year Plan 'when a full scale development programme for the area was put into operation from 1953 with earmarked allotments for different heads of expenditure' (Chowdhury 1982: 246).

During the First Five Year Plan, four sectoral activities namely, agriculture and allied services, industry and mineral, transport and social community services were introduced. Two additional activities were undertaken under rural development and economic services sector during the Second Plan. During Fourth Five Year Plan, three more activities were added to plan measures. The expenditure incurred during the First Five Year Plan was about three crore of rupees which was increased to five crores in the second Five Year Plan and further to seven crores in the Third Five Year Plan and to 18 crores in the Fourth Five Year plan (Behera 1994, 1997). During 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th plan periods, the expenditure has been recorded at Rs. 63 crore, Rs. 223 crore, Rs. 552 crore, Rs. 1729 crore, and Rs. 3570 crore respectively (Government of Arunachal Pradesh 2000). It was a 'top down' plan approach to development with government departments as implementing agencies (Behera 1994, 1997). During independence, it may be noted that tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh were economically non-hierarchical.

Over the years, Arunachal Pradesh has undergone changes in terms of literacy, economic transformation and politico-administrative evolution (Government of Arunachal Pradesh 2000). By March 2000, about 65 per cent of villages were electrified, length of roads constructed was 13867.8 kms and educational institutions stood at 1850. The literacy rate has been recorded above 50 per cent in 2001 census. Production (1999 data) of rice was recorded at 114116 MT; maize at 47002 MT, millet at 15601 MT and fruits at 93582 MT. As per 1999-2000 estimates (Q), primary, secondary and tertiary sectors contributed 35.28 per cent, 21.88 per cent and 42.83 per cent respectively to NSDP of Arunachal Pradesh. Percentage of ST workers in primary, secondary and tertiary sectors was recorded 87.16 per cent, 2.98 per cent and 9.86 per cent in 1991 census as against 67.44 per cent, 8.66 per cent and 23.90 per cent for all categories in the state. In fact, as per 1991 census about 67 per cent of the total workers engaged in agriculture contributed only 29 per cent of the state domestic product. In other words, 33 per cent of

total workers share 71 per cent of state domestic product and this shows the extent of inequality. Though we do not have comparative data for 2001, we can presume the extent of inequality when agriculture contributes about 35 per cent of the NSDP. During the year 1999-2000 (Q), per capita income was estimated at Rs. 9170 at 1993-94 prices. Interestingly, there are many villages that are as they were during 1947 in terms of economic diversity (cf. Behera 1999). Many villages (about 10 per cent along the international border) are still uncovered by PDS though the number in rural areas is increasing every year. During 2001-2002, number of fair price shops in rural areas was recorded at 1181, which were 920 during 1998-99. The production of cereal crops during 2001-2002 stands at 210324 MT and off take of rice and wheat at 47627.12 MT to meet foodgrain requirements of a population of 10,91,117 (2001). This excludes sale of wheat and rice in private shops. Data available with the government during 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99 mark a surplus of foodgrains by 39570 MT, 23658 MT and 1391 MT respectively, when both production and PDS off take are taken into consideration (Government of Arunachal Pradesh, nd.). These figures obviously exclude sales in private sectors. PDS off take and market purchases together with agricultural production in the state make-up for a surplus in excess of requirements. Clearly, this excess is indicative of a concentration of agricultural production and its skewed distribution.

It is to be noted that during early plan periods, plan investments were made on infrastructure development of selected sectors. Up to the fourth Five Year Plan, road and transport sector shared 41.67 per cent of total allocation of plan outlay (Behera 1994: 118). In addition to this, there were also construction activities undertaken in concerned departments. Understandably, initial development programmes did not reach the whole population in equal degree and those who were socially visible were first to participate in the process. It is to be noted that licenses for business and contract works are given to Arunachalees only. Consequently, these people who initially participated, got access to the benefits from plan programmes and many of them now share larger portion of the state resources. The inequality is also apparent when only 5.84 per cent of ST population of the state constitutes urban population. Naturally, a very small section as against a large rural population has access to development information and obviously to development programmes.

In industrial front the picture is not encouraging (Behera and

Mantaw 1998: 215-224). At the end of March 2000, only 18 medium scale and 4694 small-scale industries were recorded in private, public and co-operative sectors. The Fourth Economic Census, 1998 (Government of Arunachal Pradesh 2000) enumerates 20,694 agricultural and non-agricultural enterprises with 80,536 persons employed therein. Of total persons employed 76.58 per cent are hired workers. It is to be noted that in enterprises, non-Arunachalees are employed as hired workers. As a matter of fact, a very small section of Arunachalees have access to income from industrial activities. Moreover, there are instances as observed during field studies, of single individual having licenses for more than one enterprise.

The non-Arunachalee population constitutes 36.34 per cent of total population of the state (1991 census) and this population has increased over the years from 11.50 per cent in 1961 to 21.15 per cent in 1971 and to 30.18 per cent in 1981 (see Census reports of 1961, 1971, 1991). The increase in non-Arunachalee population is indicative of growing demand for workforce in non-government sectors as 80 per cent of jobs in government sector have been reserved for Arunachalees since late 80s. Moreover, most of earlier non-Arunachalee employees have retired. The demand for non-Arunachalee workers is due to shortage of workforce in general and in the family of those who have diversified their individual economic activities in particular. Naturally, these few Arunachalees have been able to lay hands on community resources by occupying more land and availing more development schemes for themselves.

#### *Conflict: Nature and Extent*

Development interventions through planned programmes have affected the subsistence mode of production. The level of industrialization though comparatively low is indicative of a change in mode of production. Whatever industrial activities are recorded in private sector, it is found that they are dominated by few families of modern elites. The picture of traditional economy of subsistence type in rural areas and increase in foodgrains production also indicates inequality in landholdings and commercialization of agriculture with the employment of outside labour force. In industrial sector, labour is not organized on the basis of the consideration of the kinship and mutual reciprocity. The technology does not belong to the subsistence mode of production in traditional society. Land

resource has become privatized. Individual ownership has replaced community ownership. Because of this change in the mode of production, there has emerged a conflict between infrastructure and superstructure that corresponds to the tradition.

The tribal communities had a social equilibrium before independence where superstructure was in conformity with the infrastructure. Consequent upon development exercises after independence, a gap has been created between market-linked infrastructure and tradition bound superstructure. The system of production is no more subsistence in nature, though a large chunk of the rural population is involved in subsistence production because of many interrelated factors. But wherever they get the opportunity, they try to exchange their produce for money. They need money to spend for their children's education and for treatment of disease. Traditionally, rituals with sacrifice of animals like hens, pigs, *mithuns*, etc. are being performed for the cure of diseases. These animals were either domesticated or obtained locally by barter exchange. Now money is required to purchase them. Surprisingly, these animals and birds are not available easily on account of frequent parties on occasions of VIP visits. Moreover, people now go for modern treatment in town hospitals even though they perform rituals at home. Recourse to both practices has made the treatment of diseases expensive. People are also educated enough to understand that many new diseases could not be cured in traditional way (Rina 2001: 182).

In such situations, Christian missionaries promise free education with free food that people perceive more clearly than they perceive of the free provision of education by the Government. Moreover, they arrange treatment of diseases free of cost and many a time link it to prayer session as an alternative to rituals, which people used to perform traditionally.

As has been discussed, there is concentration of wealth in the hands of those who happen to be socially visible. That has created a gap in the standard of living of people who were otherwise almost at an equal level a generation back or so. A section of population has been able to provide expensive education to their children even within Arunachal Pradesh in such schools as Donyi-Polo Vidya Bhawan, Royal International School, Kids Foundation, etc. Parallel to these schools, missionaries run schools where education is free or affordable to a large section of the population, who otherwise could not have gone for education in private schools. Still there is a section that cannot afford at all to pay for education.

The neo elites<sup>4</sup> enjoy a life of material affluence, which the rest of

the people of the state watch enviously. A village is no more isolated from at least circle and district headquarters. These people compare their lifestyle with those living in administrative headquarters. In the meantime, the literacy rate is on the increase and educated youth are uncertain about their future outside their traditional life; that they have already left in school days. Licenses for business, contract works and other opportunities are under the control of neo-elites. Lust of neo-elites for land deprives commons of their resources (Behera 1994; Behera and Mantaw 1997) even though every one enjoys customary rights over land.

Problem related to privatization and alienation of land within the customary frame has two implications in promoting Christianity. Those who occupied more land could donate it for a church or for missionary schools or alternatively, they themselves have started schools of their own. Others being deprived of land resources find it difficult to raise their economic status both at present and in future in terms of expansion of agriculture. Moreover, an uncertainty about employment in government sector hunts those who are educated. The transitional phase is so critical that it captures the imagination of adolescents, right from the beginning. At this juncture they desire to take shelter anywhere that could provide a sense of security. This vulnerable situation comes to the advantage of the missionaries.

In this connection, it is to be noted that crisis and conversion are positively related (Behera 2000). Munda's conversion began, writes Bose (1964/1996: 50), when 'the Munda cultivator's rights over the land came to be restricted on every side and the British Government, unaware of the real source of suffering, continued to help the landed stratum'. He further agrees with SC Roy's contention that 'whenever the country is passing through a severe economic crisis, there is a great wave of conversion to Christianity' (Bose 1964/1996: 64).

'Monetization of the economy and change in occupational pattern created an outlook for material wealth for which the tradition neither had the opportunity nor the logic to negate it. The changing cultural outlook due to education and outside exposure made them more materialistic for which the present system could not provide opportunities. This crisis at mental level made them vulnerable for a change. For better job opportunities but with no resource, children from interior places study in missionary schools free of cost. Their childhood and adolescent period takes shape in a tradition that gives them an outlook different from their own' (Rina 2001: 182).

The conflict is apparent, but with a difference. The two classes

have not confronted one another for a share in the state resources, but there has emerged the conflict; in that who could not have the opportunity initially to command over resources presently display a strong desire. Of course, their desire has not come up to the level to launch confrontation with those who have command over, but nonetheless it has created a crisis; in that the only objective for them is material welfare. When this objective confronts traditional ideologies, they prefer to alienate themselves from the tradition.

### *Conversion*

*Mechanism:* As has been discussed, there is a positive link between crisis and conversion. Crisis is nothing but the prevailing counter ideologies in the society. Put differently, there is a conflict in the society and there are counter forces to the norms and ideologies which the society used to uphold. Because of this conflict the natural expected outcome is a synthesis between the ideologies and counter-ideologies. But out of this conflict, one of the outcomes is conversion mainly to Christianity. Conversion history of Arunachal Pradesh, 'a post independence phenomenon' (Rina 2001: 180), has its root outside the territory when in 1836 (just 10 years after Sadiya came under the British control) missionary work was started in Sadiya under the garb of spreading education and carrying out social work. Dr. Nathan Brown, who joined the mission in the last part of the 19th century, tried to spread Christianity through Assamese literature and social works. However, the success was marginal till independence. In 1947, a base camp of Christian missionary was set up at Sadiya and later in North Lakhimpur in Assam. From there, they operated in Arunachal Pradesh and recruited Arunachalee youths to theological colleges (Phukan 2000:84). It is through them that the missionary work got an easy entry in the territory in spite of all the protective efforts to safeguard tribal culture. These youths have been working towards its spreading by 'producing Bibles in Roman scripts and in local dialects' (Rina 2001: 181). It gathered a fillip in early 90s when some of the committed local converts joined Apang's ministry. As a result, many youths, probably more than 50 per cent, have been converted to Christianity (*ibid.*). Behind missionary efforts is the 'the affluence and organized Christian contribution....,' as a result of which 'the conversion network has spread as conflagration among the Aruanchalees.'(Rina 2001: 181)

Due to political crisis<sup>5</sup> and consequent induction of ministers who

are converts, repulsive forces to conversion efforts became weak within the territory. Preachers got patronage to enter into the territory either as tourists or on some other pleas, like carrying out researches or attending seminars and conferences. There are tourist agents in the state who are authorized to facilitate tourist permit. Some agents take it as an opportunity to spread Christianity by arranging tourist permit to preachers. In a recent complaint, the Chief Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh has been urged upon to cancel the agency of Himalaya Tourists at Bomdila. But it is found that the same agency, with another proprietor, and in the name of North East Himalaya Tourist now operates from Itanagar (Haare 2003).

*Extent:* Individual tribal communities apparently look homogeneous. But every community is homogeneous heterogeneously; in that it is integrated structurally. There are communities like Nyishi, Adi, Apatani, Tagin who have Tani as common ancestor but are different tribal groups in Arunachal Pradesh. (The name Nyishi, Adi, etc., however has spatial significance). On the other hand the tribal identity of others have spatial significance only; the members of same tribe across the clans do not share a common ancestor (see Behera 1994 for the tribal identity of the Khampti). Communities like the Apatani and the Minyong group of the Adi are divided along moiety. People of each clan of a tribe have their own clan identity. Their tribal identity is a later construct in a historical process (see Riddie 1997). However, different clans have had got another identity, both ritualistic and social, which distinguished them from others of the same category. In other words, there was a structural integration of different clans at a level which attached an identity with them (for example, the present Nyishi and the Adi were called *Daphla* and *Abor* respectively during and before British period). That the tribe is a structural integration is clear from other counts. In a tribe there are members who were slaves earlier or were looked down socially due to one reason or the other.

Though these members constituted the tribe, their organic integration was very weak. There are instances of feuds between clans of the same tribe also. There are also differences in terms of marriage groups. Therefore it can be concluded that the structural integration was a differentiated reality, which gets manifested during social occasions and in terms of social relations. But among Buddhist tribes like the Khampti, the Monpa, and the Singhpo, the structural integration has strengthened because of their institutionalized religion.

It was found that Christianity has made inroads among non-Buddhist tribes. In these communities, the passive social tension

became activated consequent upon development interventions. Non-traditional ways of life due to changing occupational pattern, participation in ballot democracy, etc. weakened the structural integration of the traditional societies. The differences became visible along their command over resources. During the early stages of development, the weaker constituents of the society were mostly deprived of reaping the development benefit from development programmes of the government. There was a silent protest over their helplessness to spend on medicine, education and other material comforts, which their counterparts could afford. Before this silent protest became violent, they got exposed to an alternative in Christianity.

The Buddhist tribes did not suffer from such a conflict because development interventions have not created any perceptible difference in their socio-economic life. Their economic life after independence is not much different from their post-independence life. The passive tension could not take the form of a silent protest consequent upon development interventions. The structural integration is so compatible around Buddhism and chieftainship of the Khampti and the Singpho and the village democracy of the Monpa is that any silent protest, if there is any, has not been strong enough to allow a break away of a section from the tribe.

*Nature:* The change in faith does not affect the way of life abruptly. The converts remain nearer to the way of life they were accustomed to, prior to their conversion. Prayer organized by the converts to cure the ailment is simply the modification of curative rituals. It brings the same sense of belonging to the group like curative rituals. They read Bible in their own language and arrange marriages in accordance with the traditional exogamy practice. But they are not required to spend in prayers, nor do they incur huge expenditure in terms of bride wealth. 'Christianity promotes an alternative with no animal sacrifice or marriage exchanges. It provides an alternative that the people lack in tradition. Tradition, on the other hand, created a problem without creating any alternative mechanism to overcome the crisis. The result is towards a change. That is possibly the reason why mostly in interiors of Nyishi and Tagin areas, large number of people have been converted to Christianity' (Rina *op.cit.*, 181-182). These converts take part in festivals though they themselves may not perform. Interestingly, there is an effort to relate Tani—ancestor of Adi, Nyishi, Apatani, Hill Miri and Tagin communities—with Jesus and so newly converts need not suffer from any doubt about

their ancestry in the new faith. Visible economic gain and the sense of belonging to the culture do not apparently make the converts alienated from their traditional life. Whatever they have lost is what they were not comfortable with, that is a sense of insecurity at mental level, during the transitional phase of their life. The superstructure could not be developed to satisfy the needs that created frustration, insecurity and crisis on account of changing infrastructure and inequality in it.

What follows is the incompatibility of superstructure to take care of the changes even in hierarchical communities that accentuated the crisis and the desire for a change. The desire to change is two pronged; in that it may lead to social movement or to conversion. *Nyader Namlo* movement (Showren 2002) or *Donyi-Polo* movement (Rukbo 2000; Ering 1998) in Arunachal Pradesh in fact is the outcome of such a desire of people for a change. There are historical evidences to substantiate the point. *Tana Bhagat* movement among the Oraons, though apparently religious, was rooted in their desire to free themselves from their condition of dire poverty' (Bose 1964: 70).

### *Beyond Synthesis*

Apparently, the change reflects upon synthesis but with a difference. The synthesis is a bipolar competing reality; at one pole is the society with continuity and change while at the other it is a change and continuity. The society in fact got divided into two opposite camps on the basis of beliefs and faiths. The convert group formed the society wherein traditional social relations and norms and practices for example in marriages and rituals and ceremonies follow Christian rules. Marriage is solemnized in churches. Sacrifices in rituals are forbidden. Even the converts don't partake ritual food items and even do not take part in death ceremonies of their non-convert relatives; nor do they observe taboos relating to death and birth ceremonies. The converts have their own way of helping one another out of the money they deposit in the name of fellowship and church services. They even render physical service whenever required. They almost remain within a boundary, which very much resemble to their non-convert life but around the faith in Christianity. But for such a situation in non-convert group, they remain conspicuously absent though one or two members of a family may be present at the time of crisis in the family of very close kin. When members of non-

convert families come to the aid of their kin members who are converted, at the time of any social occasion or ritual, they are asked to follow the Christian ways like praying and participating in Christian ritual. Their presence, therefore, is conspicuously absent in terms of rendering help. Arguably, the society is not the same after conversion.

Interestingly, convert groups of different communities form into a solidarity in social functions and in social relations whereas the non-convert groups of different communities maintain their own group identity in rituals and social relations. The original society therefore does not evolve into a stage of organic integration; it is rather disintegrated, though the disintegrated groups display two types of synthesis in terms of syncretism but with a basic difference about religious belief.

Conversion is not the only synthesis out of the conflict in traditional tribal communities of Arunachal Pradesh, consequent upon development interventions. Side by side, and to an extent opposite to it, there exists another synthesis, a revival expression, preserving the tradition in the light of changing perspectives. The synthesis has taken the forms like Donyi-Polo, Nyedar Namlo, Nanyi-Inteya and Rangfra movements in Adi, Nyishi, Idu Mishmi and Tangsa communities respectively. The traditional community, instead of evolving into an integrated stage, rather displays disintegration at being divided into two social groups of converts and non-converts. These two groups in fact display ideological contradictions in many aspects of social life along with their two different belief systems. The result of the contradictions at ideological level did not happen to be of synthesized thoughts, nor did it follow a linear and one directional path (see Peng and Ames 2001:3636, for features of dialectical reasoning as a tool in explaining change). It rather emerged as disintegrated and bi-directional opposites. In fact the two groups reflect an ideological conflict rather than a synthetic evolution of the traditional society.

### *Concluding Remarks*

Dialectical materialistic interpretation assumes that the synthesis that emerges indicate a higher level of cognitive functioning (see Baltes and Staudinger 1993:75-80) usually considered to be more sophisticated, creative and advanced methods of thought (see Benack *et al.*, 1989:199-208). From our discussion, the evolutionary synthesis of revival group of the society evidently presents a 'progressive' picture of the society. The religion has become

consecrational; the followers consecrate in a specific place of worship like Nyedar Namlo or Donyi-Polo Dere on a particular day of the week for worship. The faith of Donyi-Polo, for example, has been institutionalized (Rukbo 2000; Showren 2002) and there are attempts to interpret traditional faith and beliefs logically. On the other hand, the 'progress' in the synthetic evolution of the convert group is contested. The converts no doubt interpret their practices, even the traditional ones, in a new light of thinking. But the 'society' of the converts, in terms of Christian beliefs and tribal faiths, is simply a diluted expression where Christianity has internalized traditional practices to a large extent. Naturally, the synthesis is not 'progressive' when considered from the point of view that Christianity has come down to the level of being acceptable to a people.

The inadequacy in explanation of social change in tribal communities applying dialectical principle perhaps lies in the very nature of those communities. In tribal communities, all aspects of life are embedded. Economic aspect of life, for example, is embedded in social institutions and relations and therefore cannot be treated and explained separately. In other words, the conflict which emerged consequent upon development interventions was not strong enough in economic terms, rather the conflict itself assumed embedded; in that it displayed aspects of social, economic and religious life together. When the society's outlook is not predominantly material, any attempt to explain a social phenomenon applying dialectal materialistic frame of analysis becomes inadequate and inappropriate.

In Marxian dialectic interpretation, the change has been assumed linear in which the contradictions evolve into a synthesis. The influence of 'pull' factor from outside the society was not considered in the analytical frame. When the 'pull' factor is active, the society disintegrates, for the society is not allowed to evolve by itself. This could be attributed to the non-linear growth of Indian economy due to British 'pull'. India did not experience industrial revolution in the way some European countries experienced.

The point that I want to make is that in the presence of 'pull' factor like Christianity, the contradictions in a society do not allow a linear and one directional synthesized evolution. In the same line of reasoning, it can further be generalized that in the process of globalization, structurally integrated communities/societies cannot evolve in a synthesized direction given the presence of 'pull' factor. Put simply, the thesis and synthesis, having material origin, will not

evolve into a synthesis in communities, which display embeddedness at least structurally and are affected by 'pull' factor.

It can be argued with some degree of certainty that all societies do not follow one directional synthetic evolution in the temporal plane. Many unforeseen forces emerge in a future period. Therefore all societies do not evolve through Marxian stages. That socialism did not evolve into communism could be explained with the logic that evolutionary changes in a society are multi-directional, with 'open ends' and the synthesis existing in opposites. The social change manifests in disintegration and not along economic line only as is observed in tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh. Further Marx's understanding of dynamism in his materialistic interpretation of history points to a limited dynamism because of the fact that he did not include other possibilities of social dynamics, as for example, 'pull factor', than the ones he assumed for his analysis.

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## NOTES

1. 'Prosperity and power however, do not seem to have percolated down the hierarchy of caste, as the lowest in the stratification system are unable to ensure for themselves dispersal in the inequality that tends to be cumulative.

Changes are least spectacular in the case of women whose amelioration of status still remains an aspiration' (Drèze, 2001:29-77).

2. This concept is being developed by Dr. Jagannath Dash, Department of Anthropology, Utkal University, Bhubaneswar. I acknowledge my gratitude to him for enlightening me on the concept during a personal interview in September 2002 at Edinburgh.
3. The 'endless', however, ends with 'communism', for Marx has not located any other stage of synthetic evolution of society in the historical process after communism.
4. In Arunachal Pradesh the neo-elites include Arunachalees working in Government and in private sectors, contractors and contractor-bred politicians.
5. During late 80s and early 90s, some leaders of the Congress party conspired against the leadership of Gegong Apang who was the Chief Minister of the state. Apang, to avoid the crisis, introduced some new faces into the Congress party. Many of them happened to be early converts. One of them, Neelam Taram, became the Home Minister in the Apang Ministry.