would have been impossible if not for the renowned resiliency, tenacity and industriousness of its people. Korea has endured war, poverty and a march toward democracy that few if any people living in other developed nations today can understand. But yet another hurdle awaits. Demographic transition is both a different kind of problem than those faced in the past and one that can have profound effects on the future quality of life in Korea. Longer lifespans are now the norm and that advance will not change. It is therefore the other facet of this transition that must be addressed with a committed focus. In order to ensure the continued growth and health of their economy and democracy, Koreans must produce and raise more children who in the future vote as educated, productive and responsible stakeholders with the nation's best interests in mind. **PEAR**

RETHINKING HEGEMORY: A REFLECTION PIECE

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In this paper, I critically examine the notion of hegemony, especially as it is used in Subaltern Studies scholarship. I argue that the concept of hegemony, inappropriately used, inhibits rather than illuminates understanding of contemporary socio-political processes in India. I show how the concept of hegemony as commonly used might have certain limitations by drawing on ethnographic works from South Asia, and thereby, argue that contemporary political and social processes in India reflect a more shifting character of power than the concept of hegemony allows. Hence, I argue that it is worth revisiting and rethinking a concept which has been discussed so often almost as a central aspect of all power relations in various social science studies.

Introduction

In the social sciences and especially South Asian studies, the concept of hegemony has long functioned as a heuristic tool to understand structures and discourses of dominance. In a society such as India, the concept has proven especially useful in conceptually grappling with struggles against caste structures, patriarchy, state or landlordism. While the term has been in academic use since the dissemination of ideas of Antonio Gramsci,[1] it was given a significant new role in South Asia by Ranajit Guha,[2] a founder member of the subaltern studies collective. In 1982, Ranajit Guha, a historian of India teaching in the University of Sussex, began a new series: *Subaltern Studies: Writings on Indian History and Society* along with eight younger scholars of India, who together constituted the editorial collective.[3] In the following years and decades, *Subaltern Studies* expanded from its status as series title and concept to becoming a

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1   Antonio Gramsci, *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000).
2   Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
3   Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography," *Nepantla: Views from the South* 1, no.1 (2000): 9-32.

school of thought that was closely allied to post-colonialism. Subaltern studies theory has not simply influenced the trend of South Asian scholarship, but also the orientations in several other area and disciplinary studies.

For Ranajit Guha, a conceptual understanding of hegemony was necessary in order to shed light on the elite character of both colonial rule and the nationalist struggle in India, for in his view, both historical processes, despite their conflicting agendas, excluded the "people." As subaltern studies grew in stature and influence in the social sciences, its conceptual toolkit, including the notion of hegemony, was increasingly utilized by scholars of South Asia as well as others wishing to address and critique the marginalization of particular groups (low-castes and untouchables, women, religious minorities, "tribes" and indigenous peoples).

In this paper, I critically examine the concept of "hegemony" if it is popularly used in understanding contemporary socio-political processes in India. I show, both theoretically and with the aid of selected ethnographic works by scholars of South Asia, how the concept of hegemony as commonly used might have certain limitations. I also draw on works on Northeast India, the region to which I belong and where I have done ethnographic work because of their relevance to my argument.

I begin by revisiting Antonio Gramsci's notions of hegemony in order to historically locate the term. I then look at how Ranajit Guha adapted and modified Gramsci's concept to understand conditions in South Asia during colonial rule. Through his now famous formulation "dominance without hegemony,"[4] Guha sought to explain features in South Asian, more specifically Indian, society and history which could not be explained by directly importing categories used by writers such as Eric Hobsbawm and E.P. Thompson describing non-Western cultures.[5] Hegemony is a concept that has been so influential as to become an adjectival trait of power (as the wide use of the term "hegemonic" suggests) in academic discussions.

In this paper, by drawing on contemporary scholarship on India, I suggest that political and social processes in postcolonial India reflect a more shifting character of power than the concept of hegemony allows. Guha's concept was relevant to a particular historical period, namely, colonial India and the immediate period after the decolonization. But with changing empirical realities, in India and globally, hegemony seems to have outlasted its use and time beyond its academic shelf-life. In the sections below, following a general discussion of the inception and use of the term, I will elaborate how hegemony requires a reconceptualization for the sake of better understanding of current realities.

Revisiting Hegemony

Gramsci used hegemony to refer to a political phase during which a single party or social group succeeds in bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity[6] among different subordinate groups.[7] However, during crisis, the political and moral leadership breaks down to lead to a crisis of hegemony and subsequently to the process of formation of an alternative hegemony. It should be noted here that for Gramsci, hegemony was a dialectical phase rather than a quality or condition of rule. I also venture to state that for Gramsci, hegemony referred to a phase in the dialectical unfolding of events,[8] that is, as a part of a process, it is comparable to terms such as rule, reign etc.

Raymond Williams[9] further refined the concept of hegemony by using it to mean a continuous process of struggle and contestation. He thus used counter-hegemonic and hegemonic as part of the "hegemony" vocabulary. He also preferred to use "hegemonic" and "dominant" instead of hegemony and domination. It is a process because it is not a fixed relation between unequal groups, but is continually resisted, altered and challenged hence, has to be thought together with the concept of counter-hegemony.

In Guha's conceptualization of hegemony, the concepts of both Gramsci and Williams are revised. Guha modifies the Gramscian concept by diagrammatically showing it to be more or less a static form of power rather than a phase of political struggle.[10] He begins by critically reviewing the dominant

4 Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*.

5 Eric Hobsbawm**,** *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movements in the 19th and 20th Century* (New York: Norton, 1959); E.P Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Gollancz, 1963).

6 The term "ideological unity" might also be used.

7 Gramsci, *Antonio Gramsci Reader*, 205-220.

8 Ian Copland writes that Gramsci's characterization of Mussolini's Italy as "hegemonic" suggested that the totally hegemonic state was theoretically possible. The same characterization might have led to hegemony becoming a negative term, although Gramsci's actual concept of hegemony was different. See Ian Copland, "The Limits of Hegemony: Elite Responses to Nineteenth-century Imperial and Missionary Acculturation Strategies in India, " *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 3 (2007): 637-665.

9 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).

10 David Arnold provides a lucid comparison between the aims of Gramsci and Guha. See David Arnold, "Gramsci and Peasant Subalternity in India," in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, ed. Vinayak Chaturvedi (London: Verso, 2000), 24-49.

historiographies of nationalism which were prevalent in India at the time he was writing. While the Cambridge (which he terms neo-colonialist) school conceived of nationalism as a positive outgrowth of institutional spheres that were initiated by colonialism, the Nationalist school conceived of nationalism as the outgrowth of resistance to foreign rule.[11] But both these schools, as Guha pointed out, saw colonialism as a homogenizing force that brought *together* all the elites to wage political struggle against the colonizers. Guha writes:

> Between these two interpretations the question of power was reduced to an elite contest [between native elites and rulers] with no room left in it for the South Asian people except as an inert mass deployed by the dominant elements to serve their own ends [...][12]

What is thus left out in these formulations is the politics of the people, which could not be studied as an autonomous domain in itself. According to Guha, colonialism thus witnessed two historical paradoxes; first, the failure of capitalism to realize its universalizing tendency under colonial conditions (because older forms continued) and second, the failure of the metropolitan bourgeois culture to assimilate the indigenous culture of the peoples of South Asia. Correspondingly, there was a structural split between the Indian nationalist elite and the subaltern groups as seen in the failure of the Indian bourgeoisie to speak for the nation. The subaltern groups continued to wage their autonomous struggles outside the domain of elites associations or institutional politics.

In order to explain the character of colonial rule, Guha first breaks down the notion of power into two main constituent elements. Power, according to Guha, is constituted by the interaction of two opposed variables — Dominance (D) and Subordination (S). Dominance and Subordination imply each other universally (that is, the existence of power implies the *domination by* some and the *subordination of* others) and can be applied wherever there is power. Each of these variables are, in turn, constituted by a pair of elements — Dominance is constituted by Coercion (C) and Persuasion (P), and Subordination, by Collaboration (C*) and Resistance (R).

To write it in a formulaic fashion, D= C/P and S=C*/R. While domination always presupposes subordination, (there can be no domination without a subordinated other) the other terms imply each other contingently, for "there

can be no ideal structure of power that is not subject to and modified by the contingencies of history."[13] That is, the weight of Coercion and Persuasion in Dominance is not constant but varies according to context, and likewise for the composition of Collaboration and Resistance within the character of Subordination. Therefore, in some cases of Dominance, there might be more of an element of Persuasion and less of Coercion or force. Similarly, some subordinated groups might choose to collaborate with, rather than resist the policies of the ruler/leader/state.

According to Guha, "hegemony stands for a condition of Dominance (D) such that in the organic composition of D, Persuasion (P) outweighs Coercion (C)."[14] This means that in hegemonic forms of domination, the element of Persuasion is more in amount than the element of Coercion. The dominant group exercising hegemony uses Persuasion as the major instrument of rule. But since hegemony is a particular condition of Dominance (here Guha slips into a mathematical mode of reasoning, where $1 = 1/1$), it follows that there can be no hegemonic system under which Persuasion outweighs Coercion to the point of reducing the latter to zero. That is, hegemony is not entirely about consent but has an element, however slight, of force or coercion. Guha's complicated mode of explanation (that I reproduce here) was aimed to instill in his readership an idea about the complex composition, workings and forms of power; and to show how power is not always legitimate or based on popular consent.

After laying out his formula for power, Guha argues that the colonial state characterized a power form that could be termed "dominance without hegemony." This is because in colonial rule, coercion far outweighed persuasion. However, Guha argues that what colonialism failed to achieve in history, it sought to achieve in word, for colonialist historiography "sought to endow colonialism with a spurious hegemony denied it by history."[15] Therefore, most official histories of the colonial Indian state are statist histories that recast the empirical (and illegitimate) story of colonial conquest as a narrative of legitimate, good governance. Needless to mention, the people's point of view did not find a voice in such narratives. A similar exclusionist tendency persisted with the Indian bourgeoisie historians who continued to write the history of the Indian people from their own point of view. Subaltern studies intervenes here to wrest a past written from the colonizer and elite point of view and rewrite it from the point of view of the conquered people.

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11   Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography," 11-13.
12   Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, x.

13   Ibid., 22.
14   Ibid., 23.
15   Ibid., xii.

In order to understand Guha's need for a concept such as "dominance without hegemony," we have to take a look at his concept of peasant consciousness. Guha was against theories of peasantry that attributed a pre-political consciousness to the latter. As Guha writes, the British Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm[16] uses the term pre-political again and again "to describe the state of supposedly absolute or near absence of political consciousness" or organization which he believes to have been characteristic of such people [peasant rebels.][17] In order to reclaim agency of the peasant, therefore, Guha tries to show that the peasant is a conscious actor who are aware of the consequences of his action (of rebellion). By analyzing a hundred cases of peasant rebellion in India, Guha tries to show that the symbolic acts of inversion of speech codes, dress, behavior and other insignia of power through which the peasants rebelled, constituted the latter as a political actor. It should be noted here that consciousness is not the collective imagination stressed in class analysis as *class for itself*, but a consciousness that is to be deciphered through studying practice, that is, as actions expressing peasant consciousness.[18]

What is the relevance of a discussion on peasant consciousness in understanding Guha's notion of hegemony? It must be remembered that Guha was interested in hegemony as a condition of power where the persuasive element predominates, and he defined colonialism as a condition where persuasion and consent are strikingly absent. Correspondingly, where there is lack of persuasion or popular consent, there is greater scope for people's rebellion. The study of peasant rebellions was thus tied to his thesis that colonial and indigenous elites failed to include and absorb the popular sentiments and thus laid the grounds for an autonomous domain of peasant (or any other marginalized group's) struggle. Guha's reconceptualization of hegemony also suggests that even the most persuasive structure of Dominance is always open to resistance. To go back to his mathematic formula; if Subordination is composed of Collaboration and Resistance, then it is possible to argue that there is always potential for Resistance, however negligible and long dormant, to resurface and reassert itself.

There have been several other writers who have attempted to understand the phenomenon of resistance among subordinate groups. For example,

James Scott,[19] similarly propelled by the question "why is there resistance if power is so pervasive?" was reacting to both Foucauldian frames of analysis that saw power as capillary and diffuse, as well as Marxist notions of the "false consciousness" which is the ideological tool of the dominant class to lull the subordinate classes into compliance with rule. Scott thus distinguishes between public transcripts which are the official transcripts performed by both dominant and dominated, and the hidden transcripts or the backstage discourse (rumor, gossip, disguise, subterfuge) by which the subordinate groups express their resistance. Scott argues that focusing only on the public transcripts might mislead us into thinking that there is no resistance. On the other hand, probing into hidden transcripts might reveal the fermenting discontent just beneath the surface that erupts in myriad and sporadic ways.

To get back to our discussion on hegemony; it is clear that although hegemony is a condition of power, apparatus like "hidden transcripts" allows us to conceive of dominant discourses as always being under threat of challenge or subversion. In this sense, Guha's concept retained the original flavor of Gramscian hegemony, but cut back on the latter's processual quality.

Hegemony and Resistance

Guha's concept was adopted by both subaltern and non-subaltern scholars wishing to make a case for the constitution of subjects (in the sense of subjected individuals) by a nation *vis-à-vis* its population (nation or state hegemony), men *vis-à-vis* women (male or gender hegemony), upper-castes *vis-à-vis* untouchables or "tribes" (caste hegemony). Yet, in Guha's writing and more so in the writings that followed in the wake of his work, hegemony remains a fixed quality, an aspect of power and of the ruling group, which is to be countered by resistance. To be more precise, hegemony and resistance become binary opposites, rather than relational and reversible qualities.[20]

To cite one example, in Satish Deshpande's notion of the "hegemonic spatial strategies" of the nation-state, hegemony is the ingredient necessary to make people identify with the ideological construction of India as a national

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16   Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels, 23.*

17   Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 5. See also, Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-insurgency," in *Culture/Power/History: A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. Nicholas Dirks, Geoff Eley, Sherry B. Ortner (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 336-371.

18   Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography."

19   James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

20   This is particularly valid for early writings of subaltern studies, while later subaltern studies works take care to argue for a more provisional character of subalternity without, however, addressing the concept of hegemony.

space with particular moral qualities.[21] Deshpande looks at how different discursive spatial strategies were deployed in different periods of Indian history to give shape to an Indian nation-space. In the immediate post-colonial period, the first Indian prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's faith in scientific development led him to forge a nation-space based on an economic geography, where the nation and its various regions became sites of economic production (textbook representations of particular regions through their economic potential provides ample proof of this. For example, Ankleshwar is "petroleum", Rourkela is "steel" and so on). Deshpande argues that with the failure of planned development in removing regional disparities, the Nehruvian nation-space crumbled and was replaced by a sacred geography. In this new idea of the nation-space, whose architects were the proponents of Hindutva (a right-wing Hindu nationalist ideology), the people of India were united through their common possession of a Hindu-ness and by inhabiting a nation-space where *pitrabhoo* (fatherland) coincided with *punyabhoo* (holy land). In Deshpande's work, as is clear, both the Nehruvian and the Hindutva nation-spaces are hegemonic spatial strategies, where the term hegemony is a qualifier of power.

This is not to say that the concept of hegemony, as it has been used in Indian social science writings, can be pinned down to a single meaning. There have been writers who have stuck to the more Gramscian notion and seen hegemony as potential — as the ability of different groups and not of the dominant group alone — to cultivate and articulate collective demands and aspirations.[22] *My sense of unease is with those theoretical formulations that make hegemony a characteristic of the dominant group, which can only be countered by resistance on the part of the oppressed group or strata or what-you-will.* That is, hegemony and resistance become opponents in a binary tug-of-war. There is no scope of conceiving of alternative hegemonies or of different groups engaged in continuous struggle to become hegemonic. It is, once and for all, decided that the currently dominant is the hegemonic power, which can only provoke resistance but not transformation.

Such applications of hegemony remove the processual and negotiated character of social relations, despite Guha's original intention perhaps being the contrary. Often, relations between dominated and subordinated are not as stark

as dominance or even hegemony suggests. Power relations are constantly shifting, transforming, transmuting or in the process of becoming. Let us turn to a couple of examples taken from select works to demonstrate the point.

"The Politics of Becoming"

Becoming implies that which has not attained closure. It allows us to see how the once dominated can become the newly dominant, as Pandian shows in his study of caste politics in South India.[23] Pandian's study of Brahmin and non-Brahmin identities in Tamil Nadu is based on Foucault's insight that rather than taking identities for granted, one should attempt to trace the multiple trajectories and historical conjunctures that led to their constitution. He thus shows how the Brahmin, the group that traditionally occupied the highest echelons of caste hierarchy, emerged in co-constitutive fashion in Tamil Nadu during the colonial period.[24]

The Brahmin emerged as an epistemic category through colonial representations of the Brahmins as repositories of tradition on the one hand, and as bearers of modernity (because of their literate skills) on the other. On the other hand, debates about what a Brahmin should be opened up a field of discourse in which non-Brahmins too intervened and contributed, by constructing themselves in opposition to the Brahmin. In this respect, Pandian pays attention to the anti-Brahminical discourse in Tamil Nadu of the early nineteenth century among backward castes reacting against their domination by Brahmins. But in trying to displace the authority of the Brahmins, the non-Brahmins valorized an idea of authentic Brahmin-ness which they claimed to have originally inhabited, but from which they were usurped by the current Brahmins. Pandian shows how the categories of Brahmin and non-Brahmin thus emerged in co-constitutive manner in which boundaries of who belonged kept shifting along with the terms of discourse. But these were also identities that were solidified through politics, that is, by the formation of an anti-Brahmin Justice Party, and the Self-Respect Movement of the early twentieth century.

However, Pandian does not stop at tracing the constitution and solidi-

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21   Satish Deshpande, "Hegemonic Spatial Strategies: The Nation-Space and Hindu Communalism in Twentieth-century India", in *Subaltern Studies XI, Community, Gender and Violence*, ed. Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2000), 167-211
22   For example, see Aditya Nigam, "Hegemony and Counter-hegemony: Understanding Indian Communism," *Economic and Political Weekly* 31, no.14 (1996): 901-906.

23   M.S.S Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2007).
24   Dirks has shown how colonialism and its institutional procedures constructed a definite form and meaning of caste, by dislodging it from pre-colonial political processes. By disguising both pre-colonial and colonial struggles and contestations around caste identifications, colonial institutions represented caste groups as the fixed character of Indian society. See Nicholas Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001)

fication of these identities in Tamil Nadu, but also shows how the settled character of these identities hampers Dalit (the former untouchables in the caste system) mobility today. If the Brahmins were the former hegemonic power, the anti-Brahminical backward castes constitute the new hegemonic force, which prevent the Dalits — who were not lower, but *outside* the traditional caste hierarchy — from asserting themselves. Pandian shows that the current non-Brahmin political dominance resembles the dominance that Brahmins used to enjoy before. Hence, it is only in the denaturalization of these identities that the possibility for a Dalit politics lies, which otherwise gets lost in the Brahmin/non-Brahmin identity politics.

We can read in Pandian a critique of the binary understanding of hegemony/resistance, for what was earlier subordinate (non-Brahmin) is now dominant, which is in the process of being superseded by yet another subordinate group (Dalits). Therefore, using terms such as the hegemony of Brahmins or non-Brahminical hegemony blinds us to the politics unfolding beyond a *singular* frame of hegemony versus resistance.

Another example from India's Northeast region would help to further clarify the point. The politics of Northeast India — a vast and diverse border tract surrounded by China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan — is particularly helpful in understanding the limitations of hegemony in understanding contemporary socio-political life. Home to numerous ethnic groups engaging in identity politics, assertions of indigenous self-hood and cultural politics in India's Northeastern region does not lend itself to singular frames of hegemony and resistance, as the complex relations between majority and minority and "scheduled tribe" or "*adivasi*," which literally means the original inhabitants, show.

In India, "scheduled tribe" refers to a constitutional category which is subject to affirmative action benefits and does not indicate aboriginal groups. It is an enumerated category rather than one that describes the historical characteristics of a particular group. The tribes of Northeast India are recognized as scheduled tribes but not indigenous peoples, in the sense of primordial inhabitants, because quite a few of these groups had migrated to what is present Indian territory as late as the nineteenth century. This is not to suggest that all of the tribes of Northeast India are late migrants, but that the notion of indigeneity as based on aboriginal inhabitation cannot be applied wholesale to Northeast India.[25] But it is also true that most of the groups inhabiting Northeast India,

while late migrants, definitely migrated to this region prior to other population groups from the Indian sub-continent who migrated here at even later time periods. Therefore, when only the Northeast region is taken as the unit, many of the tribes can and do claim indigeneity in the sense of prior settlement *vis-à-vis* new settlers, but if their arrival is measured in terms of people's migratory movements within India as a whole, they would be seen as later migrants. In this situation, indigeneity is relative to territorial scale.

On the other hand, *adivasi* refers to the indigenous peoples of Central India and other parts of India. But in India, since the designation of scheduled tribe is area specific, the *adivasi* groups having scheduled tribe status in one part of the country might not have this status in another part of the country by virtue of their late arrival to the latter. Thus, the Oraons, Mundas and other *adivasi*s of current Jharkhand state might have a legitimate claim to be called indigenous in their home regions, and indeed have lived in these areas for many centuries. Yet, in Northeast India, where they were transplanted as *corvee* and tea labor by the British colonizers in the nineteenth century, they are not enumerated as scheduled tribe, and hence, excluded from affirmative action benefits. As a result, the claims of Oraons and Munda *advisasis* to indigeneity are disputed by tribal communities in Northeast India such as the Bodos who have a longer history of settlement in the region, and who consider the latter to be interlopers on their land. The *advisasis* have often been subject to domination and fear tactics by Bodo sub-nationalists on an ethnic cleansing mission. The conflict between the Bodo tribals and the *adivasi*s shows how hegemony is an inadequate description for inter-ethnic politics in Northeast India. I elaborate this in the following section.

Durable Disorder

In writing about ethnic politics in Northeast India, Sanjib Baruah[26] shows how the process of different marginal groups increasingly repudiating unequal assimilation into the mainstream identity is an enduring condition of this region. Baruah terms the situation in Northeast India a condition of "durable disorder"[27] for structural and historical factors create ethnic militias, which in turn encourage new ethnic militias (not unlike an ethnic balkanization process). In the

25   Virginius Xaxa, "Tribe as Indigenous People of India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 34, no. 51 (1999): 3589-3595.

26   Sanjib Baruah, *India against Itself: Assam and the Politics of Nationality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder: Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005).
27   Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, 12.

Northeastern state of Assam, for example, groups who consider themselves ethnic Bodo as against the dominant Assamese ethnicity engaged in cultural politics in the 1980s whereby they disassociated themselves from the Assamese by adopting a distinct dress, religious practices, language and literature. The Bodo identity politics resulted in the creation of an autonomous Bodo homeland (Bodo Territorial Council) within Assam. In the present period, other non-Bodo minorities are contending for their own piece of home territory to be carved out of the Bodo land.

Thus, if Bodo cultural politics were the struggle of an ethnic minority against the hegemony of the dominant Assamese in the 1980s,[28] today Bodo sub-nationalism has become exclusive to the point of practicing violence against migrant Muslims from Bangladesh and Santhal *adivasi* laborers who occupy space within the territorial jurisdiction of Bodoland. The Bodo/*adivasi* conflict, as I have already mentioned, is a conflict between two categories with similar claims, *viz.*, scheduled tribe and *adivasi*. While the Bodos are indigenous to Assam, the Santhals call themselves *adivasis* and they are regarded as autochthons in central parts of India. However, the British colonial rulers transplanted many of these central Indian *adivasi* groups to work as manual laborers in the expanding tea plantations of nineteenth-century Assam. Many of these migrant groups were settled in areas which were traditionally Bodo habitat.

As a result, in the post-colonial context, although both Santals and Bodos are indigenous peoples of India, it is the latter between the two who claim relative indigeneity, having settled in Assam much before the former did. Their claims of priority have frequently taken the form of violence against the Santhals, who are considered outsiders. Bodo policies of ethnic cleansing have resulted in new assertions for an ethnic homeland or privileged status by disenfranchised groups living in Bodo areas. For example, in 1996, an Adivasi Cobra Force was formed by the *adivasis* living in Assam with the objective of protecting *adivasi* rights through armed struggle.[29] Again, it is clear from the example of Northeast India's "durable disorder" that understanding power relations requires more than a fixed and singular framework of hegemony and resistance, for previously oppressed groups often turn out to be the new "hegemons" in a new framework.

So far, I have attempted to show how the tendency of hegemony to slip into a kind of binary rut leads to opaque understandings of social realities, such as those unfolding in Northeast India. In the next section, I evaluate Guha's notion of hegemony from a different point of view. I raise the question, what kind of power is said to exist when the elements of persuasion (P) and coercion (C) are present in equal measure? If hegemony is to be defined as a condition where persuasion outweighs coercion, how are those situations to be accounted for where loyalty of members of a group or community is ensured by the equal distribution of force and beneficence?

The Many Faces of Rule

Thomas Blom Hansen,[30] writing with reference to Maratha identity in Maharashtra in India, attempts to capture the internal working of the Shiv Sena, the organization which spearheaded the Maratha politics of identity. A right-wing organization, the Shiv Sena's ideology has commonly rested on exclusivist definitions of Hindu communal identity. Hansen shows how the Shiv Sena has maintained its force and appeal in the public sphere through a dual strategy. He argues that the Shiv Sena's popularity rests not on stable bases of support but rather, its continuous reiteration of mission statements, and assertion of its presence through local help organizations such as the *Shakhas* (local branches) as well as the staging of violent acts from time to time. He pays particular attention to the discursive techniques, such as satirical, plebian humor, street language or *Bombaya Boli* (Bombay speech), an action-oriented ideology, and a masculinist rhetoric that glorifies martial values, manliness, aggression and violence as constituting the Shiv Sena's mass appeal. But the Shiv Sena is also a militant Hindu organization which has openly condoned killings during Hindu-Muslim riots. In fact, Hansen shows how this double strategy of social improvement and violent street politics has marked the Shiv Sena's public presence.

In a recent article on violence and the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) or Association of the National Volunteers in the south Indian state of Kerala, Ruchi Chaturvedi[31] similarly argues how party loyalty is ensured through acts of caring for each other during times of need, so that during incidents of inter-party violence, the bonds of love and loyalty restrain members from speaking out against fellow members who had committed murder and assault.

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28   Bengalis in Assam were targets of the anti-foreigner movement in Assam during the late 1970s and early 1980s. See Baruah, *India against Itself*; Baruah, *Durable Disorder*, 11.
29   For more, see Satp website and description of the various terrorist and insurgent groups of Assam at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/states/assam/terrorist_outfits/acf.htm.

30   Thomas Blom Hansen, *Wages of Violence: Naming and Identity in Postcolonial Bombay* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
31   Ruchi Chaturvedi, "Somehow it Happened: Violence, Culpability, and the Hindu Nationalist Community," *Cultural Anthropology* 26, no. 3 (2011): 340-62.

The Shiv Sena's (or the RSS's) public presence is thus a balance of what Guha would call P and C (persuasion and coercion). The state run by the Shiv Sena is similarly based on the split between the profane and the sublime. While state-sponsored violence marks its profane sphere, truth seeking and reconciliation marks its sublime sphere. The state attempts to rise above the banality of riots through legitimating organizations, such as the Srikrishna Commision in the wake of the Bombay riots,[32] a truth-seeking committee through which the (Shiv Sena) state attempted to appease the Muslims and bring a semblance of normality to the state.

What Hansen's example shows is that power relations always carry an element of ambiguity and active construction. Groups or organizations which are dominant have to continuously produce bases for their authority and this gives a negotiated character to their relations with the marginalized or subordinate group. Secondly, the constant need for performance and reiteration of authority means that we cannot think of power as being a constant quality. Rather, power, as Hansen's example demonstrates, has different phases that cannot be reduced to a single quality of either direct dominance or hegemony.

Hegemony has had a long innings and this paper is, in a way, an acknowledgement of its influence on social theory. Guha's notion of hegemony was undoubtedly a nuanced and sophisticated concept, but his concept of dominance without hegemony was relevant to a historically-specific context, which is colonialism.[33] In the post-colonial period,[34] the use of hegemony in a narrow or crude sense frequently poses limitations for understanding contemporary events in India. Hegemony is an ideal-type, and applied crudely, might distort rather than illuminate understanding. The inappropriate conceptualization and application of this concept, without attending to context, can lead to a foggy grasp of ground realities.

This paper aimed to show, through the use of empirical examples derived from select works on Indian society and history, that hegemony needs to be used, both theoretically and empirically, with circumspection and qualification. The paper is thus a call for clarity — it seeks clarity by raising certain questions: Would it be more fruitful to revert to a notion of hegemony as a relation or phase rather than a condition of rule? Is hegemony an adequate concept to understand power relations in South Asia today which are negotiated, produced through the intersection of diverse and multiple forces and constantly in flux? Does one begin by redefining (yet again) hegemony or search for other theoretical concepts? **PEAR**

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32   Later, however, the Commission refused to make the report public and only a strenuous campaign by social activists extracted a high court injunction to release the report as a public document.

33   Ian Copland however shows through examples from India's Parsi community that even in the colonial period, there were attempts to cultivate hegemony, however unsuccessful. This somewhat reduces the efficacy of Guha's "dominance without hegemony" concept in terms of understanding colonial rule in India. See, Ian Copland, "The Limits of Hegemony," 637-665.

34   Postcolonial here is used in a purely chronological sense to indicate the period after colonial rule ended in India.