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9

The Politics of Multiculturalism

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Introduction

In spite of its engagement with application, and in spite of its concern for social justice, sociolinguistics, according to some, has had negligible impact beyond academic circles. (Bargiela-Chaippini, 2004) The theoretical agnosticism of sociolinguistics and the relatively unengaged attitude of current sociolinguistics towards social theory (Coupland, 2001), no doubt, contributed to this impasse. The present paper, as a tribute to the responsible teachings of Rama Kant Agnihotri, redresses this allegation to some extent by situating language rights movements and minority rights in general within the broader spectrum of a liberal, plural democracy framework.

In the aftermath of recent events that urged political scientists to promptly designate a *pre-* and a *post-* period of these events, the spirit of liberal democracy has been under threat in the form of exclusionary gestures towards integrating multicultural policies concerning immigration and ethnicity in general. The notion of an undifferentiated citizenry in the public sphere has been compromised by western societies and governments. This is further compounded by the philosophical retreat from such policies as amounting to a denial of individual freedom and equality. This, in short, is the politics of multiculturalism; however, it is also becoming clearer that there cannot be a political car of multiculturalism without its philosophical engine. Throughout the following discussion, it becomes evident though, that the thread that runs through – or the oil that runs the car – the politics and philosophy of multiculturalism is the liberalist dilemma of coping with the opposing demands of liberty and equality.

The Philosophy of Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism attains a philosophical underpinning by virtue of the discord it brings about with the notion of individual freedom enshrined within the western liberal tradition of political philosophy. However, this was not always the case; the *individualistic* turn in philosophical thought in the 18th century gives rise to this modern discordance. Let us unravel this in some detail.

In one famous mapping of the notion of identity (Taylor, 1994) – that which engenders recognition – individualistic identity figures prominently. That is, the concerns of a community, a group or a nation, are the concerns of individuals that compose it. Identity, in this regard, provides the social form that shapes individuality. However, such a particularized identity (the *one that I find in myself*), comes along with an ideal of being true to myself and my way of being. Thus, a sense of the moral is acutely attached to identity, making *ethical individualism* one of the central heritages of liberalism.

The pre-18th century view of morality was concerned with divine punishment and reward. This gave way to the sense or feeling of what is right or wrong – the "voice" within. Taylor (1994) identifies Trilling's (1969) use of the term "authenticity" to identify the displacement of this voice as an ideal that humans strive to attain. This shift in focus can be read as the passage from the moral to the ethical, the former being only a part of the broader tradition of the latter. The distinction comes out clearly in Dworkin's (2000) formulation where ethics "includes convictions about which kinds of lives are good or bad for a person to lead, and morality includes principles about how a person should treat other people."

Over the centuries and decades the notion of an ethical life has undergone various transformations. One of the modern views of a well-lived life recognizes it as the principle of *expressive liberty* which ensures "individuals and groups leading their lives as they see fit, within a broad range of legitimate variation, in accordance with their own understanding of what gives life meaning and value. This principle implies a corresponding presumption against external interference with individual and group endeavours" (Galston 2004). The ethical turn, in the shape of how to lead a well-lived life, finds identity (among others) as an important tool to attain this ideal.

However, "authenticity" makes its appearance most directly in the form of the principle of originality – each of us with a unique way of being human.[1] Thus, for the first time, the difference between human beings attained a moral significance: in articulating my true self, I am also defining myself, my authenticity. Determination of one's identity

through social positioning now had to be discarded in favour of authenticity where you are called upon to determine your own original way of being. However, being a true communitarian, Taylor (1994) warns against an inward generation of the self, rather, it depends crucially on the dialogical relations with others.

In the public sphere, however, this gives rise to the politics of difference in our times, which seems like a negation of the main tenet of liberalism, namely, equalisation of rights, itself derivable from the notion of equal dignity. Thus the demand for equality through recognition of identity of individuals and groups unsettles the universal foundations of liberalism as it plays out in the public sphere.

Constitutional Democracy

Thus multiculturalism compromises individual freedom by privileging groups over individuals and equality by treating people differently on the basis of group traits such as race, gender or ethnicity. However, a far more alarming prospect is the attempt to associate multiculturalism with the rise of a concern for national security in some western societies. The disquieting belief is that multicultural policies of a state provide the basis for installing institutional structures within minority communities that promote sectarian ideas.

A different concern in circulation coterminous with this is the sociological worry that multiculturalism weakens the welfare state, it gradually erodes trust, solidarity and coalition essential to sustain the good health of a welfare state. (Banting and Kymlicka, 2006) It may not be difficult to assess which came first, the threat to national security or the threat to welfare state. From the early days of liberalism, many liberals including Mill (1956) had agreed that liberalism is only viable in countries that share a deep sense of common nationhood. The recent events alluded to above have only thus accentuated the nationalistic fear to national security.

Above all however, the claims for multiculturalism have been firmly set within the basic principles of justice, especially in its relation to human rights norms. Rights in this sphere increasingly have acquired a relational character which expresses the mutual recognition of the citizens articulating them, though for Kant, for example, the law in general was regulated by reason and situated in the realm of morality. The legal positivists rejected this moral legitimacy of law and instead identified political status as the source of legitimacy for the law. That is, a law is legitimate only when socially and politically recognized authorities posit it. However, in the past decades, a Neo-Kantian notion of law has prevailed which emphasises subjects constructing

intersubjective worlds through their own faculties and actions, termed as "Kantian Constructivism" by Rawls (1980). This is also the tenor of a Habermasian legal theory with its focus on human practices of world construction, on citizens' creation of legal norms through discourse. Habermas (1996) calls his core argument (for the derivation of a system of rights), "the logical genesis of rights". In this, democracy and law come together in organising peoples' lives to enable them to see one another as equal citizens - as "free and equal consociates under law."

Thus we see that the beginning of multiculturalism can be philosophically traced to the liberal notion of individuality with its political ending with the liberal notion of the system of rights. Multiculturalism is thus codified into specific enactments in the form of constitutional democracy.

Reconstruction of Rights and the Politics of Segregation in Tripura

Habermas' "reconstructions" of human practices is a process of interpretation in which a practice's full meaning, in terms of its internal structure and sets of presuppositions, must be understood. Thus rights are reconstructed through discourse by the consociates. Given his emphasis on reconstructing the implicit presupposition of a practice, by analogy to language, Habermas's work can be considered as a reconstruction of norms and rules that define the actual practice of the democratic rule of law. For example, the right to privacy in the U.S. constitution is not there in the text of the Bill of Rights but is considered to be an implicit right.

Similarly, Article 29 of the Indian Constitution, falling under cultural and educational right, although named as *Protection of interests of minorities* never actually uses the word 'minorities' in the text, yet is assumed to relate to minorities:

Article 29: *Protection of interests of minorities*

(1) Any section of the citizens residing in the territory of India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve them.
(2) No citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language or any of them.

Thus in its scope, Article 29 is not confined to minorities, since it is available to "any section of citizens resident in the territory of India." This may well include the majority, as pointed out by Chief Justice Ray in the case 'Ahmedabad St. Xavier's College Society v. State of Gujarat',

AIR 1974 SC 1389. (Bakshi, 2009)

In fact, the word 'minority' has not been defined in the Indian Constitution. The U.N. Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities has defined minorities as follows:

> (i) The term 'minority' includes only those non-document groups in a population which possess and wish to preserve stable ethnic, religious or linguistic traditions or conditions or characteristics markedly different from those of the rest of the population; (ii) such minorities should properly include a number of persons sufficient by themselves to preserve such traditions or characteristics; and (iii) such minorities must be loyal to the State of which they are nationals.

Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights does not define the expression but renders the following right to them:

> In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistics minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of the group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion or to use their own language.

If a government or state fails to administer Article 29 within the ambit of minorities, it can be deemed to have failed in "reconstructing" the implicit rules of a democratic legal practice. It thus exposes the failure of the political system to follow through its commitments (hypocrisy) or its inconsistency in embracing a new principle but not its implicit preconditions.

However, a clear grasp of the reconstruction of the rights is clearly not enough since the enactment of the laws themselves are sites for discontent and strife, precisely because they have been, to a large extent, non-discursive. Within the context of the case study that we later report, namely the tribal in-group out-group behaviour in Tripura, this gives rise to a politics of segregation and/ or self-rule in the form of a creation of an autonomous council. Note in this connection the contentious clause (iii) above of the U.N. Commission definition of 'minority'. This restrictive clause is also a reflection of Galston's (2004) liberal strand of value pluralism which calls for certain restrictions a liberal public institution may observe for several reasons, preventing and, when necessary, punishing transgressions individuals may commit against one another to guard the boundary separating legitimate from illegitimate variations among ways of life. A few among them ensure that adherence to State laws however non-discursively they are enacted – for the parties under conflict – must be observed at all times.

This conflict in the case of the tribals in Tripura becomes apparent when we consider certain assertions that the politics of multiculturalism

makes. It is asserted in Banting and Kymlicka (2006) that western democracies have never retreated from granting rights to the indigenous and substrate population, neither have there been any instances of backlash towards these groups or rolling back of rights granted to them in the past; it is only the immigrant groups that have faced such treatments recently. This is exactly the opposite of what we find in the case of a state within a nation, such as Tripura, where the rights and the demands of the majority indigenous historic population of the Tripuris have been compromised or suppressed by the minority ruling Bengali population, whereas no major backlash against recent migrants from other states have been reported.

Thus, it becomes clear that the non-recognition of Constitutional demands made by an ethnic group, within this Habermasian model, in addition to indicating a lack of discursivity at the level of enactment of the law governing the conduct of individuals that make such a group, is a direct reflection of a failure of reciprocal, mutual granting of autonomy between "consociates" under law. The misrecognition of a group is then the deliberate act of denial of presuppositions implicit within a democratic legal practice.

Plural Democracy

The situation in Tripura thus presents a critique of the constitutional democracy in such an analysis by exposing its hypocrisy and inconsistency in reference to the particular legal practice. In other words, reconstruction is able to provide a critique but not a direction. We need to now shift our gaze from the codification of a democratic practice to the politics of it in terms of how it is contested by affected groups.

For this, the reworking of the Gramscian notion of hegemony as 'articulation' in Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) seminal work *Hegemony* is found useful:

> ... (W)e will call articulation any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice. The structured totality resulting from the articulatory practice, we will call discourse. The differential positions, insofar as they appear articulated within a discourse, we will call moments. By contrast, we will call element any difference that is not discursively articulated.

As it will become clear from the exposition of the situation in Tripura (section 0), borrowing from Haobam (2003), the linguistic demand of a tribal population in general is an articulation, with its discursive background being greater political autonomy. On the other hand, extending the analysis presented in Bhattacharya and Haobam (2003) and Haobam (2007), an 'element' in this framework is shown as the

language right movement of a minority tribal group (section 0).

This reinvestigation reveals to us that if a direction, referred as above, is to be sought, it is most likely to be found in the plural, radical democracy model enunciated in *Hegemony* and specially, in Mouffe (1993, 1996, 2000). Although on surface it may seem to be another recalcitrant thread from Gramsci, especially his proposal of a formation of a 'historical bloc', it is a more complex notion arising out of the typical liberalist tension between liberty and equality. In addition, the treatment the model is subjected to in our analysis can make sense only in this extended, a more tempered notion of plural democracy found in Mouffe's later works (section 0). Before we proceed further, let us now examine the ground realities of the political and linguistic situation in Tripura.

Tripura: Where the majorities are a minority

Tripura is one of the North-Eastern states of India, sharing its national border with Assam and Mizoram in the east and the international border of 839 km constituting nearly 84% of its total land frontier in the north, south and west with the neighbouring country of Bangladesh. Comprising of four districts, namely, North Tripura, South Tripura, West Tripura and Dhalai, the total geographical area of Tripura is 10,491 sq. km, the total population being 27,57,205.[2] (Census of India, 1991)

The remarkable growth in the population of Tripura in terms of percentage variation is as shown in Tables below:

Table 1: Growth of the Population in Tripura

Year	*% Variation*
1911	+32.48
1921	+32.59
1931	+25.63
1941	+34.14
1951	+24.56
1961	+78.71
1971	+36.20
1981	+31.90
1991	+34.30

Table 2: Change in the total population of Bengali and Tripuri speakers over time

Year	*Bengali %*	*Tripuri %*
1911	42.71	40.93
1921	42.18	41.32
1931	44.65	38.78
1951	60.51	23.49
1961	65.22	24.86
1991	68.88	23.50

The major cause of the rise of population is found to be the large number of immigrants from outside the state and country particularly, the adjoining Sylhet and Bangladesh. Being bounded on its three sides

by Bangladesh, the geographical position of Tripura also makes it vulnerable to such a movement of population. As can be seen from the table, the total population of Tripura increased by 78% between 1951 and 1961 alone. This heavy influx of population into Tripura from the adjoining territories mainly comprises of the Bengali speaking immigrants. The infiltration has been an ongoing process and by 1961, the Bengalis had emerged clearly as a dominant group and the Tripuris were effectively reduced to a meagre 25% of the total population.

These factors had a significant impact on the population, economy, culture and language of the region. The Bengalis being the economically, educationally and numerically more stronger group became the dominant group. They came to be the people in power, administration, business, educational institutions etc. Based on the numerical strength of the Bengali speaking population and their economically and politically advantageous position, Bengali is today the official language of Tripura and also the medium of instruction. *Kok Borok*, the native language of the Tripuris and spoken by 84% of tribal population of Tripuris is taught in schools but only at the primary level where the children have to shift to Bengali from standard six onwards. The script used is also Bengali. However, as will be discussed shortly, this is beginning to change. One major outcome of such a scenario is a situation where of the indigenous people and their languages emerge as minority groups and the immigrants as the dominant group.

There are two prominent trends that can be witnessed among the tribal population of Tripura (Haobam, 2003; Haobam, 2002) On the one hand, a trend of assimilation, culturally and linguistically, towards the dominant group can be seen among sections of tribals in urban areas, particularly in Agartala and surrounding areas in West Tripura. For example, there already is a language shift in the direction of Bengali. This is evident from the fact that as many as 5,354 (0.7%) Tripuris returned Bengali as their mother tongue according to the 1991 Census of India. On the other hand, there is also a strong resistance building up against the dominant group.

Tribal unrest in Tripura

Tribal political mobilization against Bengali inflows was first articulated in 1947 by *Seng Krak*, an organization (mostly drawn from Tripuri and Reang group of tribals) which was banned shortly afterward. The history of the tribal insurrection in Tripura is closely linked to the history of the Communist movement in the state which started as early as 1946 when *Tripura Rajya Praja Mandal* and later in 1948 *Gana Mukti Parishad*

were formed by progressive young tribals, where the Congress party, the major national level party, was dominated by the Bengalis. However, the Communists who were largely responsible for spreading awareness among the tribals and later, articulation of their demands, fell from favour and were largely seen as not representative of the tribal struggles.

A new organization, the *Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti* (TUJS), was thus born in June 1967 and began a political campaign to create an autonomous tribal district council which had a four-point agenda, two out of which had to do with language:

(*i*) Recognition of the *Kok Borok* language

(*ii*) Adoption of Roman script instead of the Bengali one

Anti-Bengali activities surfaced with the reformation of *Seng Krak* in 1967 and the Government in 1968 declared Bengali as the official language. TUJS formed *Kok Borok Sahitya Sabha* as a cultural and literary front at the same time.[3]

However, the left front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) received a massive mandate in the 1977 elections winning 56 of the 60 seats, TUJS forming the main opposition with 4 seats and 7.9% share of the total votes cast. Due to internal division, Congress drew a blank. The government recognised *Kok Borok* as the tribal representative language and the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) Bill was adopted as the entry 5, list 2, Schedule VII of the Constitution of India on 20th July 1979; the district council realised in 1982.

Demands for language and script

Kok Borok falls within the Boro group of Tibeto-Burman branch of Tibeto Chinese family of languages and as such, recognised as a language in Grierson as early as 1904. The Tripuris can study up to standard Xth in *Kok Borok*. As a language subject, it is taught up to standard XIIth. Since the last few years, Tripura University has started a one year Diploma course in *Kok Borok*. This was a result of first Education Commission since 2005 to implement the study of the language at primary, secondary and higher secondary levels.

A look at the proposals of the government of Tripura with regards to Education in the form of a 25 Point Tribal Development Package (1999 to 2002) is instructive; it is clear that none of the points in this package mention anything about mother tongue education or a language policy. In fact, by looking at this proposal, it appears that there is no language issue involved in education in this area which is a major blunder.

The emergence of *Kok Borok* as the most important language of the

tribals of Tripura is accompanied by controversies regarding the issue of script and the renaming of the state. The script issue emerged as a major bone of contention after the Congress-TUJS coalition government came to power in 1988. While regional parties favour the Roman script, the Left parties go for the Bengali script. As a result, the primary and secondary schools of the council areas, which teach *Kok Borok*, are thrown into turmoil because the script, the textbooks and pedagogic strategies change with bewildering regularity.

Both the controversies regarding the language and script are statements of assertion of the linguistic rights of a minority. However, at the same time as this demonstration of assertion is taking place, a different, hegemonic dominance begins to play out its tune. (Haobam, 2002)

Kok Borok as the articulation

Though the tribals of Tripura have been successful in carving out a new identity for themselves through *Kok Borok*, other several tribal languages of Tripura have been inadvertently put to a greater disadvantage. The state today comprises of nineteen different types of tribal communities. They are Tripuri[4] , Reang, Jamatia, Chakma, Halam, Noatia, Mogh, Kuki, Garo, Munda, Lushai, Orang, Santhal, Uchai, Khasi, Bhil, Chaimal, Bhutia and Lepcha. Among these, the Tripuris and the Reangs are the biggest and the earliest inhabitants. (Das, 1982)

We have seen so far that *Kok Borok* has achieved the status of the representative language as a symbol of success of the struggles of the indigenous tribal population of the region. In terms of Laclau and Mouffe, thus, *Kok Borok* is the articulation of the movement for language rights of the minorities. As a result, all the other tribal languages which are significantly different from each other and from *Kok Borok* have been conveniently grouped as dialects of Tripuri and their differences are identified by Tripuris as minor differences emphasising only the language-dialect difference. However, in the model of plural democracy, the representative articulation is also to be widely acceptable as a new collective identity (section 0), but is it really the case?

The Census of India, 1961 and 1951, list Tripuri, Jamatia, *Kok Borok*, Murasing, Noatia and Reang as dialects of Tripura (and Tripuri, respectively). However, the Tripuri of 1991 census subsumes at least three other languages, namely, *Kok Borok*, Tripuri and Reang. Comparing the mother tongue tables of the relevant years, the number of *Kok Borok* speakers show an increase from 3 to 5,16,749 in 30 years. Note in this connection that the number of so-called Tripuri (as a dialect) speakers has reduced from 2,11,883 in 1961 to 73,147 in 1991. Since Tripuri is

standardly considered to be the language of the Debbarmas, it is assumed that the reduction is due to identification with *Kok Borok* as the representative language of the Debbarmas. The corresponding figures of the number of Reang speakers also reveal the fact that many of the Reang speakers identified with *Kok Borok* as their mother tongue in the 1991 census. Thus the inflated figure of *Kok Borok* speakers is not only due to identification with *Kok Borok* by the Tripuri tribe but also because of some Reangs, Jamatia and Noatias identifying with *Kok Borok* as a reaction to dominance of Bengali as the major language. However, this state of affairs also points to the hegemonic role that the major tribal language, in this case *Kok Borok*, ends up playing.

The trend of switching over to the dominant minority language was already visible in the mother tongue and bilingualism data of the 1961 census. The following table shows the figures for minor tribes (Reang, Jamatia and Noatia) identifying Tripuri as the mother tongue:

Table 1: Minor tribes identifying with Tripuri as MT

Tribe	MT in the tribe's name	MT as Tripuri
Reang	52,926 ↑	3,645 ↓
Jamatia	14,137	10,203
Noatia	4,433	11,535

The arrows indicate increase in numbers. Thus we can deduce that the Noatia are the most willing to give up their linguistic identity whereas Reangs are the most resistant to sacrificing their linguistic identity. The table is thus instructive in not only showing us how switching over to another linguistic identity is already set as a trend in 1961, but also that Reangs as a group are resistant to this switch-over.

Thus, *Kok Borok* does not really satisfy the criterion that 'demands of each group are articulated equivalently', however problematic the term equivalent may mean in this model. The articulatory stance of *Kok Borok* as the representative language of the minority tribal groups is thus flawed. This is might as well since in the model of plural democracy the end of each hegemonic practice is an impossible one, each hegemonic formation necessarily encounters 'frontier effects' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985) with other articulatory practices. We shall see that Reangs and their language constitute one such frontier effect.

Rise of the Reangs: A minority within the minorities

The Reangs as a tribal group constitute about 14% of the tribal and 4% of the total population of the state. By no means, the presence of the

Reangs is a recent phenomenon in Tripura. The 1875 census reports 2435 of them, which even then constituted 3% of the total population. By 1901, their numbers had increased to 15,115 which was then a healthy 8.72% of the total population; the increase itself was comparable to that of the Tripuris.

In 1990, the Reang Democratic Convention Party was formed with the aim to protect and promote Reang culture. This brought about opposition to the domination of Christian Mizos. The Reangs won in seven village council elections and a seat to the Lai Autonomous District Council in 1992. In 1997, another organisation — the Bru National Union — demanded an Autonomous District Council. It was also during this period that the Bru National Liberation Front — a militant body — was born. The BNLF, floated in 1997, had demanded a separate autonomous district council for the Brus carved out from the north-western parts of the state. The opposition to the Reang demands was led by the Mizo Zirlai Pawl (Mizo Students Federation). Mizos accused National Liberation Front of Tripura, a banned group dominated by Reangs, of providing arms and training to BNLF cadres. Due to infighting among these groups, an exodus to Tripura and Cachar in Assam began. Other Brus joined them later in 1998, swelling their numbers, and they were treated as refugees by Tripura and the Government of India and lodged in six different camps. Repatriation of the refugees has not yet taken place and the conditions of the camps continue to be inhuman, with lack of drinking water, health care, education. 'Education for All' (*Sarva Siksha Aviyan*) of the Government of India which has been successfully launched in many districts of Tripura, has not been started in these camps and as a result, a whole generation of Reang children (about 5,000) remains illiterate. The refugees get Rs. 87 a month compared to Rs. 800 that displaced Kashimiri pandits get.

With respect to linguistic minority rights, although Reangs constitute 14% of the population, their language has not been adopted by any institution as a medium of instruction even in the areas dominated by the Reangs. Subsuming *Kai Bru*, the language of the Reangs, under *Kok Borok* as one of its varieties deprives *Kai Bru* of its status as a different language in its own right. Though, we have taken up the case of Reang and *Kai Bru* for the purpose of our paper, this observation holds true of the case of other minority languages of Tripura which face the threat of being reduced to varieties of *Kok Borok*.

It must also be realised that since Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (1904), Reang has been recognised as a separate language. Grierson's survey was based on the 1891 census data. It is thus all the more surprising that even now the language of the Reang is considered

to be simply a variety of the language of the dominant group, that is, Triupris. Furthermore, the census of 1961 clearly identifies Reang as one of the three strongest languages of the state.

Predictably, by June 2003, the Reangs pressed for demands for a formal recognition of *Kai Bru* as separate language from *Kok Borok*. Several seminars and meetings have been held in the Reang-dominated areas of Kanchanpur in North Tripura and Shantir Bazar in South Tripura to press for the demand. A Reang-dominated group, Bru National Renaissance Organisation (BNRO), is spearheading the struggle for recognition of *Kai Bru*.[5] However, it is in subjecting a demand like this to the model of plural democracy that true chances of it succeeding are revealed.

Agonistic Pluralism as 'Civil Association'

In *Hegemony* (section 0), radical democratic pluralism is a struggle that superimposes a 'new common sense' that alters the identity of the different groups in such a way that the demands of each group are articulated equivalently with those of the other groups. In light of the case-study discussed in section 0, *Kok Borok*, at the first glance, seems to attain the hegemonic articulation or the new common sense. The suspicion that was consequently attributed to such an articulation was discussed in section 0 with respect to the language rights movement of the Reangs. It now becomes clear that such a suspicion emanates from the correct interpretation of the term 'equivalence' above, the model is unclear about how equivalence is to be construed. In fact, Wenman's (2003) employment of a broadly Saussurian semiotic theory in this regard successfully accentuates the political difference between *Hegemony* and the tempered notion of plural democracy of Mouffe. Thus the absence of a synecdochic replacement (a part standing in for the whole) in Mouffe's pluralism highlights the formation of a condensation of a new common sense that is at the same time indifferent to each particular demand.

Returning somewhat to the liberal themes, an agonistic form of pluralism, unlike other strands of liberalist political philosophy, is not relegated to the private sphere so that a rational political consensus can emerge in the public sphere but rather creates a situation where identification with different positions in the public sphere becomes possible. It is only a real struggle against different positions advocated by agonistic pluralism that creates a vibrant democratic life as opposed to a deliberative model of democracy.[6] In the localised context of our discussion, such a form of political engagement is able to construct the

possibility where Reangs can see themselves also as Reangs and not just as tribal Tripuris.

The challenge for this new notion of radical democracy is 'to envisage a form of commonality strong enough to institute a "*demos*" but nevertheless compatible with certain forms of pluralism: religious, moral and cultural pluralism, as well as a pluralism of political parties'. (Mouffe, 1999) That is, to identify a common political identity among persons engaged in different enterprises. In this view, a radical democratic community is devoid of any aspiration of any single group so that the principle of pluralism is not violated. Viewed from a semiotic lens, synecdoche fails to provide us any 'direction' we may be seeking, but rather a metaphoric condensation does.

The well-known challenge to liberalism's preference for the individual at the cost of the community is also partly met by Mouffe in her notion of the 'demos'. Her commitment to liberalism is clear in what she takes to be its most important contribution to democracy, the idea of pluralism. Her idea of a community in the form of a "demos" is a combination of the best of the liberal and communitarian world views. The tempered notion of pluralism thus ensures that in addition to what we have in common, the particularities are also taken into account.

Furthermore, her notion of the *societas* or 'civil association' emphasise the bond between radical democratic citizens that is defined not by an engagement to pursue a common purpose or to promote a common interest, but by the notion of loyalty to one another. It is in this light of political action that the language rights demands of the Reangs must be seen. Although a politics of multiculturalism when translated in terms of a constitutional binding comes with certain restrictive preconditions, it is only a tempered notion of pluralism that lends its acquiescence to a "co-articulation" of a demand. Thus, on surface, such a co-articulation may seem contradictory to the strategy outlined in *Hegemony*, capable of inviting an allegation of dissent, civil association, especially at the time of 'revolution', leaves enough space for it in the true spirit of the liberal democratic tradition.

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NOTES

1. Herder, J.G. 1877-1913. Ideen Chapter 7, Section 1. In Herders S¤mliche Werke, ed. Bernard Suphen. Berlin: Weidmann.
3. Another non-political cultural society was formed in 1993 called Kokborok tei Hukumu Mission or KOHM to promote and to preserve the Kok Borok literature, culture, tradition and its heritage.
4. Also called Tipura / Tripura or Tippera
5. Muzrati Bru, a Reang intellectual, who is a prominent figure in leading the movement for recognition of Kai Bru as a separate language, has emphasised the fundamental differences between the two languages. He believes the tribals were being forced to record their identity as Boroks and their language as Kok Borok in the census. Blaming the mainstream tribal parties and a section of militant outfits for trying to impose Kok Borok on Reangs, he has pledged to fight to elicit their demand on national and linguistic identity (*The Telegraph*, Kolkata, June 7, 2003).
6. As in the nature of the discursive in Habermas (1996) being the instrument of participatory democracy.