RECENT TRENDS IN MEXICO'S INDIGENOUS POLICIES

RECENT TRENDS IN MEXICO'S INDIGENOUS POLICIES

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Dissertation submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
School of International Studies
Latin American Studies Program

NEW DELHI
2000

CENTRE FOR AMERICAN & WEST EUROPEAN STUDIES
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3 JULY 2000

CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled **"RECENT TRENDS IN MEXICO'S INDIGENOUS POLICIES"**, submitted by Ms. Seema Ashok Raj has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University. This is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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PREFACE

The indigenous constitute a sizeable portion of the Mexican society. The dominant perception and resultant policies towards the indigenous peoples have continuously worked towards their assimilation, integration and Mexicanisation. The *indigenista* and peasantisation policies and the current trend towards a multicultural discourse have led to the acculturation of a large number of indigenous peoples and their gradual incorporation into the dominant *mestizo* culture of the country. However, the Indians continue to grow in numbers and refuse to disappear, challenging the prevailing dominant views around them.

For over five hundred years the Mexican Indians have experienced the effects of marginalisation, poverty, discrimination, exclusion and contempt for the cultural forms of their social and communal life. It has been suggested that the problems of the indigenous are the result of their lack of ability to speak Spanish and resistance to acculturation, which has prevented their benefiting from the gains of development. In the aftermath of the 1910 Revolution, there is no denying the fact that governments have made considerable efforts to improve the lot of the Indians. Approach of the state

apparatus towards the indigenous population has been welfare-oriented and somewhat paternalistic. But the state strategy of incorporating the indigenous into the national mainstream has always been one of encouraging the Indians to give up their languages and cultures and to adopt *mestizo* ways and culture; in the hope that by the turn of the century no Indians will be left.

This has, however, proved to be no more than wishful thinking on the part of the Mexican state. Today one finds the largest conglomeration of the indigenous people in Mexico among the Latin American countries. Particularly, the southern and eastern states of Mexico -- Campeche, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Puebla, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosí, Veracruz and Yucatán -- have very high levels of indigenous population living in their traditional styles and areas of occupation. These states are also characterised by the lowest levels of development due to state policies and politics, which have limited federal and state budgetary allocations and investments in areas inhabited by indigenous peoples. Rural municipalities with predominantly indigenous constituents show the highest degree of marginality as a result of exclusion of the indigenous population from the process of development, particularly over the last nine decades.

Four recent historical events have profoundly influenced the current and future projections of Mexico's state policies as of other Latin American countries. First, since the 1960s, the process of industrialisation and urbanisation has shaped governmental attitudes towards the indigenous. The other three events are linked to and enmeshed with each other: the debt crisis of the 1980s; the shift towards liberal economic policies and the slump during the mid-1980s; and the declaration of multiculturalism as the framework for dealing with the indigenous position.

The Constitution of 1917 had gradually restored the communal lands seized from the indigenous peoples by the Spanish and the state before the Revolution. Land forms the pillar around which the life of the Indian community revolves and the basis of their reproduction and existence. Subsequent land reforms continued to award *ejidos* to the Indian communities. The *ejidal* lands have sustained the Indians through earlier periods of economic deprivation. But the recent amendment to the Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution in 1992 has had far-reaching consequences for its indigenous population. The change in the land tenure system is part of the policies of economic liberalisation in a bid to increase agricultural productivity of the country. It has raised a hue and cry. It has brought all future land reforms to a stop. The rug has been pulled from under the feet of

the Mexican Indian. The pillar of his communal existence has been demolished.

The official acknowledgement of the Mexican state of its multicultural composition following the 1992 amendment of Article 4 accepts the growing presence of its indigenous population and their importance in the development of the country. This is another significant development in the policies towards the indigenous.

The January 1994 Chiapas uprising is a forerunner of the future. The militant nature of the movement far belies the placid nature of the Indians. The response of the government has been initially that of suppression. But under national and international pressures, negotiations are continuing intermittently between the rebels and the state to find an amicable solution acceptable to both parties without destabilising the country. The future of the indigenous movement is uncertain. Will it gain momentum and split the nation? Or will national interests prevail and the indigenous demands be fairly met with? Or will it be repressed and controlled as in the past by an authoritarian state under pressure from its powerful elitist lobbies made up of both politicians and capitalists.

The present study is a modest attempt to understand the policies and perceptions of the Mexican government towards its indigenous population over the years especially the recent changes and trends in state policy. The focus is more on the policies and changes since the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and their implications on the Indian peoples. The first Chapter highlights the demographic and geographic profile of the indigenous population of Mexico and its diversity. It also looks into various definitions and criteria used to describe the indigenous. A separate section describes at some length the treatment of the indigenous people in the colonial and post-Independence periods with a view to explain the subordination and exploitation of the Indians since the Conquest, and significantly which continues to be manifested even today. The colonial legacies of the *haciendas* or *latifundias* (large-landholdings), of *repartamiento* (system of forced labour) and debt peonage, as institutions of subjugation and degradation continue to exist in some form or the other even today. The fourth section of this Chapter deals with the changes in the policies towards the indigenous peoples since the 1910 Revolution. The 1910 Revolution was marked by the restitution of communal lands and cultures particularly during the term of president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40). But subsequently successive governments have paid more attention to the industrial sector and large scale agri-businesses to boost the economy of the country. What did

these changes mean to the Indians? Lack of resources and infrastructure for the *ejadatarios* and decreased productivity of their lands. These aspects are dealt with extensively in this section.

The *indigenista* policy of the state was embodied in the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI - National Indigenist Institute). The second Chapter describes the events leading to its establishment in 1948. The first section explains the organisation of the INI followed by the second section, which gives an elaborate description of its function and role in the implementation of the different projects initiated by the government from time to time for the indigenous. The last section emphasises the policy changes and innovations in the 1970s and 1980s in terms of the achievements of the INI.

The third Chapter describes and discusses the recent changes in the policies and perception of the government in the 1980s, particularly the impact of the policies of economic liberalisation and multiculturalism pursued by the Salinas administration. In the first section constitutional changes in the agricultural policies and the amendment of Article 27 of the Constitution and its immediate and long-term consequences for the indigenous are examined. The second section deals with the changes in the education and cultural policies for the indigenous people following

amendment of Article 4, which has declared Mexico as a multicultural society. The last section discusses the 'social liberal' policies of the government of president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, particularly the 'Solidarity programme'; the largest anti-poverty scheme undertaken by the Mexican government.

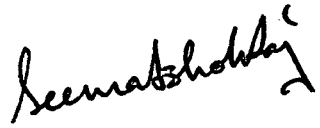
The drastic austerity measures enforced by the state to overcome the debt crisis led to withdrawal of government aid and closure of government-funded institutions particularly in the agricultural sector. This hit the small peasants in a large way. Many went into bankruptcy unable to pay the loans taken for improving agricultural production. The introduction of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the withdrawal of import licenses dealt the final blow to small producers. The poor peasants unable to sell their products at such competitive rates are today faced with their meagre income being slashed even further. The indigenous have reached the rock bottom. They have 'nothing further to lose'. They have been forced to revolt in despair.

The Chiapas uprising in 1994, which caught the government by surprise, was the end result of years of discrimination and deprivation. In Chapter five, the Indian demands and the movement of the indigenous are

delineated in the first section followed by the steps taken by the government towards reconciliation with and recognition of the demands of the indigenous peoples. The continuing negotiations are analysed in a critical manner to understand the government response and its intentions towards the indigenous. The limitations of the package of initiatives acceptable to both parties and the ultimate compromises, which will be made in the future, can only be envisaged at this stage. The last section in Chapter four makes a critique of the complexities and dilemmas involved in the negotiations between the government and the rebels.

The last Chapter summarises the various policies and perceptions of the Mexican government towards the indigenous population over the years. The impact of the policies and programmes of the different governments in the progressive marginalisation of the indigenous communities are highlighted. The role of the INI is analysed and its achievements and shortfalls will be presented. The results of the liberal economic, cultural and social policies of Salinas in the resurgence of the indigenous movement are also briefly summarised. In conclusion, in view of the uncertainty of the result of the current negotiations of indigenous demands and the attitude of the state, and the international attention the indigenous issues have gained, the dilemmas and complexities involved in the negotiations are presented.

Underlying these dilemmas are certain basic theoretical issues calling for a redefinition of assimilation, nationalism and national integration, collective rights and autonomy for the indigenous peoples, etc. Understandably, the resolution of indigenous demands is not easy. What, however, is important are the recent policies, perceptions and initiatives of the Mexican government in dealing with some of these complexities.



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3 July 2000

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel that this monograph will be incomplete without thanking the people who made it possible for me to complete it. I am greatly indebted to them for their encouragement, support and criticism.

I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Abdul Nafey for guiding me and encouraging me to pursue this subject and for inspiring me to continue to work in this field. I would also like to thank Señor J. L. Ferreirra and Prof. R Narayanan.

I would like to thank my parents, for having encouraged me all my life and always advised me to follow the path that would give me the greatest satisfaction and happiness. I am forever grateful for their love and support.

Lastly, a very special word of thanks to my husband, Sumod, for being a true friend and confidant and for his continuous support during the course of my work.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Of late, there has been a growing interest in the lot of the indigenous peoples throughout Latin America, particularly in Mexico. Maybe this is a part of the worldwide resurgence of ethnicity that is being witnessed. While scholarly analyses are concerned with the causes and shape of the ethnic resurgence; in the case of Mexico, the mobilisation of the indigenous, epitomised by the 1994 uprising in Chiapas and the follow-up action and initiatives, have thrown up a whole lot of issues of interest to scholars. These issues are wide-ranging: what is the definition of assimilation, integration, nationalism and nation building? As previous economic development strategy based on Import-Substitution-Industrialisation (ISI) has given way to policies of economic liberalisation and integration with the global market forces, questions seeking redefinition of development; the place of the indigenous economy in a liberalising economy; and preservation of their identities and cultures in the globalising process are also becoming important.

The conflict between what the indigenous in Mexico are seeking and what the government wants to proffer through welfare programmes and prescriptions does not simply convey the conflict of interests but in reality a conflict of perception. Domestic changes in the Mexican economy, politics and society juxtaposed to the changes taking place in the international economy and politics since the end of the Cold War have brought issues related to indigenous ethnicity to a crucial juncture. In short, both democracy and development need not only incorporate the indigenous -- which the present Mexican government wants - rather the indigenous are seeking to redefine both democracy and development from their own perspective.

The present compendium makes a modest attempt to describe and analyse a subject of considerable scholarly significance. The description and discussion spread over five chapters focus on particularly the dilemmas and complexities that are involved in recent initiatives and policy prescriptions of the Mexican government.

The introductory Chapter sets the background to the three succeeding chapters by constructing a kind of a demographic map of the

indigenous in Mexico. The depth and range of linguistic and cultural diversities among the indigenous itself brings into question the uniform application of the term *indios*. The second and third sections in the introductory Chapter take a long overview describing the salient processes and turning points that have shaped and decided the lot of the Indians during the colonial and post-Independence periods up until the recent decades.

The second Chapter grapples with a very dense subject. Varied perceptions, contradictory policies, shifting meaning of nationalism and integration characterised the governments of post-1910 Revolution. Understandably, governments were more occupied with issues of sovereignty and development and the affairs of the Indians was certainly not on top of the national agenda. This is amply brought out in the discussion in the second Chapter. Equally important to official and popular perceptions and policies towards the indigenous is the mechanism that was set up in the late 1940s. Creation of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI- National Indigenist Institute) was the most the government could do for the indigenous. The Chapter covers a long and wide ground preparing a balance sheet of the achievement and failures of

the INI - its mandate, functions, organisation and limitations, both political and financial. Separately, the subject of the changing functions and role of the INI has been analysed towards the end, in the same Chapter. More so, in the 1980s when a deepening economic crisis began unravelling past governmental policies towards the indigenous.

How profound has been the impact of the economic crisis of the 1980s and of policies of economic austerity and adjustments for the indigenous has been discussed at some length in the third Chapter. The Chapter highlights the implications and promises of economic liberalisation for the indigenous population of Mexico. Independent section-length treatment has been given to important issues including constitutional amendments and changes in the agrarian structure that were brought about in the 1990s in accordance with the policies of economic liberalisation and a free trade agreement with the United States. Indigenous populations and other vulnerable sections elsewhere in other developing societies undergoing similar policies of economic adjustment are faced with almost identical problems and this is what makes the Chapter of some scholarly interest. Dealt in a separate section is the declaration of multiculturalism as an official policy of

Mexico by the government of president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). The co-optative and pre-emptive intentions of the much-hyped rhetoric of multiculturalism are evident in its failure to stem the assertiveness and mobilisation of the indigenous. No gainsaying, many multicultural democracies are realising the limitations of the multiculturalist discourse, more so Mexico, since the country remains authoritarian and the democratisation process abysmally slow. The same Chapter also ventures into a discussion of the social safety programme called Solidarity. 'Liberalisation with a human face' is a contemporary cliché. Its achievements and limitations in the context of the indigenous population have also been discussed.

The fourth Chapter examines the factors that made the indigenous resort to an armed struggle in the southern state of Chiapas in 1994. it examines the demands raised by indigenous mobilisation. A separate section discusses the offers made by the Mexican government, including the offer of autonomy, collective rights, etc., to the indigenous peoples. Towards the end, there is a critique of the basic issues involved in the struggle and negotiations between the government and the indigenous

rebels. The last Chapter presents a summary and conclusions of all the preceding chapters.

In accordance with the schema outlined above, the present Chapter therefore begins with a demographic profile of the indigenous and surveys their status and position during the colonial and post-Independence periods.

Definition of the Indigenous

The indigenous constitute about 7.9 per cent of Mexico's total population.[1] The indigenous population of Mexico is concentrated in the centre and the south of the country mainly in the states of Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Puebla, Yucatán, Mexico, Hidalgo, Guerrero, San Luis Potosí and Michoacán. Northern states of Sonora and Chihuahua also have a significant number of indigenous communities. The basic economic activity of the indigenous population is uniformly subsistence agriculture and therefore it is located mostly in regions where agricultural activities can be sustained. Commercial agriculture is also to an extent prevalent

[1] James Dow, vol. ed., *Encyclopaedia of World Cultures,* vol. VIII (Boston, 1995), p. 1.

among the Indians. The development of commercial farming cultures in the tropical coastal regions of Veracruz is a good example. Although the north of the country is dry resulting in a difficulty for agriculture, the indigenous population in this region has adapted to the environment and adopted other means of irrigation, through river systems to increase their agricultural productivity. Cattle-raising is another important economic activity.

Mexico has two broad ethnic groups based on cultural rather than racial differences. These are the *mestizos,* that is the 'mixed' and the indigenous, the so-called *indios.* Both groups perceive themselves and are perceived by the government as different and culturally distinct. The *mestizos* are generally regarded as those people who have adopted a Mexican Hispanic culture. The indigenous population is identified by means of certain characteristics. Interestingly, according to anthropologist Alan Sandstorm, an Indian is someone who identifies himself as such; chooses to use an indigenous language in daily speech; remains actively involved in village communal affairs; participates in religious ceremonies

rooted in native American traditions; and attempts to achieve a harmony with rather than control over the social and natural worlds.[2]

Anthropologists rely more on physiognomy while sociologists rely on cultural criteria, while both emphasise the criteria whether people are bound to their lands and hold it collectively as also the communal living style and binding to the villages when defining the indigenous. Also, notions of citizenship and nation are other parameters of definition.

ILO definition referred to the indigenous as persons in contrast to the present UN definition which, in keeping with the current concerns for the indigenous, refers to them not as persons but as 'indigenous communities, peoples, and nations which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them.[3] They form at present

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[2] Ibid., p. 2.

[3] ILO Definition: 'Persons who are descendants of the aboriginal living in a given country at a time of settlement or conquest (or successive waves of conquest) by some of the ancestors of the non-indigenous groups in whose hands political and economic power at present lies. In general these descendants tend to live more in conformity with the social, economic and cultural institutions which existed before colonisation or conquest than with the culture of the nation to which they belong'

non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as basis, of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal system'.[4]

The indigenous peoples can be identified and possess, in differing degrees, the following characteristics; an attachment to ancestral territories and to their natural resources; self-identification, and identification by others, as members of a distinct cultural group; an indigenous language, often different from the national language; presence of customary social and political institutions, and systems of production primarily oriented towards self-subsistence[5]

From another perspective, the indigenous groups of Mexico can be considered as the rural base of Mexico. Although most of the population is located in rural areas, there is a prevalence of rural to urban migration.

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4 Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in The Ethnic Question Conflicts, Development, and Human Rights* (Tokyo, 1990), p. 97.

5 World Bank, Operational Directive OD 4.20: Indigenous Peoples, September 1991.

These cultures have many common characteristics, which include subsistence agriculture based on maize, beans, squashes; the worship of community religious images; open air weekly markets; and similarities in the style of clothing. But many differences such as linguistic variations, differences in customs and technology are also present among them.

Indians are generally members of small, local, agricultural landholding units, many of which have a corporate community. That is membership is defined by kinship and ancestry, as well as a more or less elaborate set of rules of conduct, and of rights and obligations, covering most aspects of social and economic life, which maintains solidarity *vis-a-vis* the outside world. It has been argued that more than anything else, it is the individual's subjective feeling of belonging to, and identification of belonging to and identification with, such a community structure which actually 'defines' an Indian.[6]

There is no legal definition in Mexico of what constitutes the Indigenous population. Mexico is today a multicultural and multi-

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6 Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Between Underdevelopment and Revolution: A Latin American Perspective* (New Delhi, 1981), p. 61.

linguistic country, the result of the interaction of two types of civilisations over a period of 500 years. The cultural diversity of its indigenous peoples has its origin in the heterogeneity of the Mesoamerican pre-Hispanic societies.

For all practical purposes, language has been used as the main criterion in defining the indigenous. Language is an important criterion for census gathering in Mexico, particularly in the rural areas. This can pose a problem sometimes as many people abandon their native language when they migrate to urban areas or get assimilated into the *mestizo* culture, and thus lose their status as indigenous.

Significantly, language variation is probably the most distinct characteristic among these groups. As a result of years of cultural evolution in the same location over the centuries the languages have remained a distinct feature. There can be many dialects of the same language. At least, twelve linguistic families have been identified in Mexico with more than forty subgroups.

Another problem arises when the Indian is also a peasant. By definition an Indian does not share notions of citizenship and nation, is isolated from the national market and has little stake in the national political life. In contrast, the peasant - a socio-economic category - has a notion of Mexico being a nation; they also participate in the market economy and have a political identity.

Geographic and Demographic Profile

The indigenous population of Mexico is spread over twenty-three states and is mainly found in the central and southern parts of the country. It is worthwhile to elaborate and enumerate the major indigenous groups found in Mexico.

The Amuzgos are located in the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca. Their main settlements in Guerrero are located in the *municipios* of Ometepec, Tlacoachistlahuaca and Xochistlahuaca and in the state of Oaxaca in the *municipios* of San Pedro Amuzgos and Santa María Ipalapa. In 1990, their total population was 32,637 - the state of Guerrero accounted for 27,629 and Oaxaca accounted for 5,008.

The Chatinos, numbering about 30,000, live in 50 communities along the Pacific coast of Oaxaca. The majority of these communities are in the district of Juquila in the *municipios* of San Juan Lachao, San Juan Quiahije, San Miguel Panixtlahuaca, Santa Reyes Nopala, Tataltepec de Valdéz, and Santiago Yaitepec. The rest of the communities are in the *municipio* of Santa Cruz Zenzontepec in the district of Sola de Vaga.

Located in northern Oaxaca in the districts of Tuxtepec, Choapan, Ixtlán and Cuicatlán, the Chinantecos are supposedly the descendants of the Zapotecs. Presently there are fourteen Chinantec townships along with many lesser dependent communities. Their population according to the 1980 census was around 67,000.

The Chocos live in the northern region of Oaxaca known as "Mixteca Alta", bordering Puebla. Their population is between 11,000 and 12,000. They are closely related to the nearby Popoloca of southern Puebla and both are often considered as one ethnic group.

The Choles live in the *municipios* of Tila, Tumbalá, Sabanilla, Palenque and Salto de Agua, Yajalon in the state of Chiapas, The

population has expanded to the jungles of Ocosingo. Their population numbers approximately 100,000.

The Chontales of Tabasco, also known as the Chontal-Maya are located in the central part of the state of Tabasco. During the pre-Colombian period, they had occupied almost most of Tabasco and western Campeche. The population of the Chontal-Maya has varied through the centuries with a sharp decline during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and then a slow recovery from the eighteenth century onwards. According to the 1990 census, their population was about 30,143.

The Coras inhabit the mountain range of Sierra Madre at the northern end of the state of Nayarit. The natural limits of their habitat are to the north, the state of Durango; to the east, the *mestizo* communities of San Juan Peyotán, Santa Rosa, Ejido de Higuera Gorda, and Huaynamota and the Huichol community of San Andrés Cohamiata; to the south, the right bank of the river formed by the merging of the rivers Jesús María and Chapalanga before flowing into the Río Santiago and to the west, the coastal plain of Nayarit. They live in mainly 10 communities in the

Nayarit municipalities of El Nayar, Acaponeta, and Rosa Morada. There are 11,434 Coras living in Nayarit and 489 living in other states.

The territory of the Cuicatecos is located in the north-eastern part of Oaxaca The Cuicatecos live mainly in the district of Cuicatlán. They occupy the municipalities of Quiotepec, Coyula, Cuyamecalco, Santa Ana Chuiquihuitlán, Teutila, Santa Cruz Teutila, San Andrés Teolilalpan, Chapulapa, Tlalixtac, San Lorenzo, Santa María Pápalo and Concepción Pápalo in the state of Oaxaca. There has been an increase in the population of the Cuicatecos over the past sixty years, and today their population numbers about 11,846.

The Guarijios are a semi-dispersed group based in the southeastern part of Sonora, near the border with Chihuahua. Diverse rivers and streams thrust this mountainous land. They are located in the municipalities of Alamos Sonora and Quiriego respectively and inhabit mountainous regions, ravines and the Valley of the Alto Río Mayo. Population growth has been slow due to the geographic location of this group. According to the 1990 census, their population was 1,199.

The Huaves live on the Pacific coast of the Isthmus of of Tehuantepec. They live in about five villages and dozens of hamlets. According to the 1990 census, their population numbered 11,955.

Most of the Huicholes live in the Sierra Madre Occidental. They are located in the states of Jalisco, Nayarit, Zacatecas and Durango. They occupy some of the most rugged terrain in the mountainous chain. The river Chapalagana flows through the Huichol territory dividing it into two parts. Acculturation has been more among the inhabitants of the land west of the river, who live in small groups among the Cora Indian or *mestizo* settlements, whereas the Huicholes occupying the eastern side have still retained most of their traditions. The population according to the 1990 census was 20,000.

Chiapas is home to about 300 Lacandon Mayas. They are divided into two main sub-groups, the Northern Lacandons, who live in the tropical rain forests and actively resist acculturation and the Southern Lacandons, who live in the jungles and have been more inclined towards assimilation.

The Mayas are predominantly found in the central region of the Yucatán peninsula, consisting of the states of Campeche, Yucatán and Quintana Roo. They are also found in Chiapas and Tabasco. The Mayas live in two main regions: the first region is comprised by the mountain range that runs through Tabasco, Chiapas and Guatemala, and the second one is made up by the plains of Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo and the northern part of Guatemala. Their population is about 713,520.

The Mayos are located in the southern part of Sonora, in the municipalities of Etchojoa, Huatabampo and Navajoa, and in the northern part of Sinaloa, in the municipalities of Ahome, Choix, El Fuerte, Guasave and Sinaloa de Leyva. They occupy the region between the river Mayo and El Fuerte, bounded by the Gulf of California to the west and the foothills of the Sierra Madre Occidental to the east. Their population is about 40,000.

Mazahuas live to the north of the state of México, with the municipality of Acambay to the north, the Valle de Bravo towards the south and the state of Michoacán to the west. They are located in about eleven municipalities, which equal about seventeen per cent of the state of

Mexico. They also live in some villages in the state of Michoacán. Migration has caused the dispersion of these people to many parts of the country. The 1990 census records their population as 127,826.

The Mazatecos are located in the Sierra Madre Occidental in central Mexico in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz. A few of them also live in Puebla and Mexico City. They inhabit the highlands as well as the lowlands. Their population is 168,374, out of which about seventy per cent live in the highlands and thirty per cent in the lowlands.

The Mixes live in the Sierra Madre of northeastern Oaxaca consisting of tropical mountain forests and open grasslands. They occupy 50 villages and many small hamlets. Some live in the towns in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and Mexico City. Their population according to the 1990 census was about 76,000.

The homeland of the Mixtecos is known as the Mixteca and has been traditionally divided according to their geographical locations. The mountainous region is known as the Mixteca Alta; northwest of the Mixteca Alta is a high, dry area known as the Mixteca Baja and bordering

the Pacific is the low-lying tropical area called the Mixteca de la Costa. The Mixtecos are located in the states of Oaxaca, Guerrero and Puebla but there has been a lot of migration to other areas also. In 1980, their population was 323,137.

The most populous indigenous group in Mexico, the Nahuas, are located in the Huasteca region, a cultural-geographical region on the Gulf Coast of Mexico, which comprises of parts of six states namely, Veracruz, San Luis Potosí, Tamaulipas, Hidalgo, Querétaro, and Puebla. In 1990, their population was recorded to be 385,032. The Nahuas who live in the Sierra de Puebla are known as the "Sierra Nahuat". The Nahua of the northern Sierra de Puebla live in the northern part of the state of Puebla. A smaller group lives in the Jalapa area of Veracruz. The Nahuas of the southern Sierra de Puebla live in the mountains of the west-central Veracruz, in a few adjoining municipalities in Puebla, in the mountains of the south-eastern tip of Puebla and in a few municipalities of Oaxaca. The densest Nahua population in the southern Sierra de Puebla is in the border region between Veracruz and Puebla around the Río Tonto and the Sierra de Zongolico. The Nahuas of Morelos and Guerreros are a more dispersed group. They are located in the municipalities extending east to

west across southern Puebla into Morelos and from there south into the state of Guerreros. Nahuas are also living in the state of México. These Nahuas live in high mountain valleys and on slopes.

The Otomíes are located in the region northeast of the state of México, a large part of the state of Hidalgo and some portions of the states of Guanajuato, Querétaro, Michoacán, Puebla, Veracruz, Morelos and Tlaxacala. Their population is about 324,000.

The Pames are the descendants of the nomadic Chichimec, who lived in central Mexico. They are divided into the Northern Pames and the Southern Pames. They are located in the states of San Luis Potosí, Querétaro, and Hidalgo. Sierra Gorda in San Luis Potosí is considered to be the hub of the Pame region. According to the 1990 census the population of the Pames is 5,732.

Located in east-central Sonora and adjacent areas in western Chihuahua, the Pima Bajo were split into two groups: the Névomes, the lowland, desert branch of central Sonora and the Ures located near the confluence of the Sonora and San Miguel rivers and the highland branch, the Yécora, living in and around the towns of Yécora and the Tutuaca,

near the Sonora-Chihuahua border. According to the 1990 census, the best estimate of the population of the lowland Pima Bajo was 200 and that of the highland Pima Bajo was between 1,500 and 2,000.

The Popoloca live in twenty towns and hamlets in southern Puebla and Mexico. Their population has been recorded as 26,000.

Presently, the Seris reside in two villages in the state of Sonora, El Desemboque de Los Seris and Punta Chueca. Their population, although had dropped severely, has recovered from 516 in the year 1990 to around 700 in the year 1994.

The Tarahumaras are located in the mountains and canyons of western Chihuahua. Some also live in the nearby states of Sinaloa, Sonora and Durango. According to the 1980 census, their population was about 62,419. Sixty percent of the Tarahumaras in Chihuahua live in the mountains and canyons of the Sierra Madre Occidental and the rest are located around urban centres outside the sierra.

The Tarascos, also known as the Phuhépecha, are located in the region known as the Tarascan Subprovince in the neo-volcanic axis of west-central Mexico. The main regions of this group are in three sub areas of the zone - the island and shoreline communities of Lake Pátzcuaro, the highland forests to the west of Lake Pátzcuaro (the the Sierra Phurhépecha or Meseta Tarasca) and a small valley of the Río Duero to the north of Meseta Tarasca. Their population according to the 1990 census was 87,088.

The Tepehuanos occupy the mountainous regions of eastern Hidalgo and northern Veracruz, There are two regions of the Tepehuano settlement. The first forms a band stretching from Huehuetla, Hidalgo, northwestward through Tlachichilco, Veracruz and the second forms a U-shaped area at lower elevations to the northeast of Pantepec, Veracruz. Their population is 8,702. The Tepehuanos are divided into two groups- the Northern Tepehuanos who are scattered over sparsely settled high woodlands and canyons in the southwestern corner of Chihuahua and the Southern Tepehuanos, who are located in southern Durango and are known as Tepecanes in the region. Their population in Chihuahua is recorded to be 10,000. Their population in the state of Durango is 16,000.

The Triquis live in the southwestern part of Oaxaca in an enclave of the Mixteca Alta and Mixteca Baja. The Triquis live in 5 villages of Oaxaca: San Andrés Chicahuáxtla, Santo Domingo Chicahuáxtla, San José Chicahuáxtla, San Martín Itunyoso y San Juán Copala. The 1990 census recorded their population as 14,981.

The Tzeltales live in the central highlands of Chiapas. Their population is about fifty thousand and they are distributed among 12 municipalities. The Tzeltal region is ecologically divided into three zones - north, central and south, which have some demographic and cultural variations.

Some Tzotziles are located in the Maya township of San Juan Chamula in the highlands of central Chiapas. Most live close to the lands they cultivate but due to erosion, water holes, the main sources of water, tend to dry up before the rainy season and this forces the people to abandon their hamlets and look for other places to live. Their population in this region is about one hundred thousand, out of which half live in the township and the other half have emigrated to establish new communities, within or outside the highlands. Others live in the

municipality of San Andrés Larraínzar, in the highlands of Chiapas. Their population in San Andrés is 15,303 according to the 1990 census. Tzotziles are also located in San Bartolomé de los Llanos, the capital of the municipality of Venustiano Carranza, near the centre of Chiapas. The 1990 census shows that there are between 8,000 to 10,000 Tzotziles in the region. Tzotziles are also found in the Chiapan municipality of Zinacantan. In 1994, the population recorded was 22,000.

The Yaquis inhabit the region below the Río Yaqui in the state of Sonora. They occupy the municipalities of Guaymas, Bácum, Cajeme y Empalme. Their population is 10,984.

The Zapotecos are located in the Sierra Norte, a wide strip of land that goes across the state of Oaxaca, where they live in the district of Villa Alta, as well as in the districts of Ixtán and Choapan. There are currently 36,115 Zapotecos of the Sierra Norte. The Zapotecos of the Isthmus live in south-eastern Mexico, in the state of Oaxaca, particularly in the districts of Juchitán and Tehuantepec. They are surrounded by the Isthmus of Veracruz in the north, the Pacific Ocean in the south, the Sierra Juárez and

the Sierra Madre del Sur in the west and the state of Chiapas in the South. The population of the Zapotecos numbers around 132,059.

The Zoques are located in the rainforests of Chiapas, Oaxaca and Tabasco. Their population numbers about 43,160.

The aforesaid description of the demographic profile of the indigenous makes few things very clear: the indigenous population of Mexico comprises of very diverse communities, differences in language and other cultural attributes, economic conditions and geographic-locating factors shaping economic and demographic profiles, patterns of settlement and migration, proximity of *mestizo* population and urban centres mark the very diverse indigenous population of Mexico.

These diversities had admittedly existed over the centuries. A brief overview of the treatment of the indigenous under the Spanish colonial rule and the economic structures that characterised Mexico, both before and after it's independence in the early nineteenth century, bears some significance and relevance for understanding some of the recent innovations and initiations towards the indigenous.

TABLE 1

Mexican Indigenous Population: Total Population, Indigenous Total, and Major Ethnic Groups (1990)

State	No. of Towns	Population Total	Indigenous Population	Major Ethnic Groups
Aguascalientes	9	719,659	771	Tarascos
B. California Norte	4	1,660,855	22,427	Tarascos
B. California Sur	4	317,764	3,372	Mixtecos
Campeche	9	535,185	105,994	Mayas
Chiapas	111	3,210,496	885,605	Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Mames, Zapotecos, Zoques, Mayas, Tojolabales, Choles
Chihuahua	67	2,441,873	74,716	Tarahumaras, Pimas
Coahuila	38	1,972,340	4,513	Nahuas, Zapotecos, Mayas
Colima	18	428,10	1,826	Tarascos, Nahuas, Huicholes, Zapotecos,
Districto Federal	16	8,235,774	134,120	Nahuas
Durango	39	1,349,378	21,901	Tepehuanos

TABLE 1 (Cont.)

Mexican Indigenous Population: Total Population, Indigenous Total, and Major Ethnic Groups (1990)

State	No. of Towns	Population Total	Indigenous Population	Major Ethnic Groups
Guanajuato	46	3,982,593	10,839	Otomíes, Pames
Guerrero	75	2,620,637	360,374	Nahuas, Mixtecos, Tlapanecos, Amuzgos
Hidalgo	84	1,888,366	303,665	Nahuas, Otomíes
Jalisco	124	5,302,689	30,010	Huicholes
México	121	9,815,795	397,336	Mazahuas, Otomíes, Nahuas, Mixtecos
Michoacán	113	3,548,197	126,756	Tarascos, Mazahuas, Nahuas, Otoníes, Mayas
Morelos	33	1,195,059	24,900	Nahuas
Nayarit	20	824,643	29,386	Coras, Huicholes, Tepehuanes, Mayas
Nuevo León	51	3,098,736	5,783	Nahuas, Otomíes, Tarascos

TABLE 1 (Cont.)

Mexican Indigenous Population: Total Population, Indigenous Total, and Major Ethnic Groups (1990)

State	No. of Towns	Population Total	Indigenous Population	Major Ethnic Groups
Oaxaca	570	3,019,560	1,208,821	Zapotecos, Mazatecos, Mixes, Chinantecos, Cuicatecos, Nahuas, Huaves, Chochos, Chatinos, Triquis, Zoques, Chantales
Puebla	217	4,126,101	611,388	Nahuas, Totonacos, Chochos, Mixtecos, Otomíes
Querétero	18	1,051,235	24,884	Otomíes, Pames
Quintana Roo	7	493,277	164,919	Mayas
San Luis Potosí	56	2,003,187	248,993	Nahuas, Pames, Huastecos
Sinaloa	18	2,204,054	37,290	Mayos, Tarahumaras
Sonora	70	1,823,606	57,547	Mayos, Papagos, Pimas, Yaquis, Coras, Seris, Otomíes, Tarahumaras
Tabasco	17	1,501,744	59,993	Choles, Chontales

TABLE 1 (Cont.)

Mexican Indigenous Population: Total Population, Indigenous Total, and Major Ethnic Groups (1990)

State	No. of Towns	Population Total	Indigenous Population	Major Ethnic Groups
Tamaulipas	43	2,249,581	10,489	Nahuas
Tlaxcala	44	761,277	28,437	Nahuas, Otomíes
Veracruz	207	6,228,239	704,891	Nahuas, Huastecos, Popolucas, Totonacos, Zapotecas, Mazatecos, Tepehuanos, Otomíes Chinantecos
Yucatán	106	1,362,940	628,945	Mayas
Zacatecas	56	1,276,323	1,081	Mayas, Huicholes, Nahuas
National Total	**2,483**	**81,249,645**	**6,411,972**	

Source: Donna Lee Van Cott, ed., *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), pp. 188-89.

Treatment of the Indigenous: Historical Background

The preceding two sections presented an overview of the indigenous population in Mexico and the problems involved in defining the indigenous. The various indigenous groups and their geographic location have been described. The present section takes an overview of the status and treatment of the indigenous over the centuries up to the beginning of the twentieth century. This will help in some way in the understanding the responses of the indigenous people to the recent trends and changes in the policies of the Mexican government. In this long overview, admittedly there are various stages covering both the colonial era and the post-Independence period.

One of the early institutions introduced in New Spain to use the labour and land of the indigenous and at the same time keep some Crown control over the *conquistadores* was the system of *encomienda*. It was an institution brought from Spain; and as historians have argued, was meant to be a temporary one, *encomienda*, however, lasted for a very long period defining the status of the indigenous and their relationship with the *conquistadores*. To understand it clearly, *encomienda* was a kind of

trusteeship. In lieu of the protection of the indigenous, *conquistadores* were allowed to use Indian labour on the land granted to them by the Crown. Theoretically, it was not slavery since the indigenous were free vassals of the King and thereby were entitled to retain their properties and social and economic system. The arrangement was deemed transitory, so as to eventually prepare the Indian to become the full subject of the Crown and also as one who could be initiated into the Christian faith.

It is another story that the system became permanent, laid the foundation of large landholdings, including usurpation of the best Indian lands, including waters and transformation of the indigenous into permanent hereditary serfs, bound to the large estates. Much later, around the seventeenth century, changes in the commercial policies of Spain and incessant exports of primary products from New Spain would further increase the process of land concentration and emergence of what is called as *latifundia minifundia* complex; that is, large estates producing for markets at home or abroad but more than that, at the same time, converting land into an instrument of economic and political domination, coexisting side by side with *minifundias,* that is, subsistence or below subsistence peasant economic activity.

Before the conquest, the Mexican Indians had been mainly a self-sufficient agriculture-based community, living in small villages surrounded by their communal lands and governed by a structured hierarchy. The economy was entirely agrarian and a kind of primitive communism prevailed.[7] Before the advent of the Spanish conquistadors the Indians spoke their own indigenous languages and observed the cultural practices and beliefs of their community. Education was imparted by schools run by the community.[8]

The economy, to use some modern categories, was something of a mixture of feudalism, private ownership, and primitive communism. Contemporary documented evidence conveys that the system provided the population with as much nutrition, clothing and housing as the average European of that time.

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[7] This was characterised by communal ownership of land, communal right to fruits of the hunt, periodic redistribution of wealth among different families, including periodic allocation of land and division of labour within the family.

[8] According to the social standing of the students, they were instructed in social etiquette and manners in addition to various skills like reading, writing, farming, knowledge and practice of religion, traditional medicine, astronomy, architecture, warfare, governance and communal laws peculiar to each tribe or ethnic region.

There seems to have been no sense of permanent land ownership among the Indians and fields were awarded to families within the clans by elders to be tended as long as they could or would do so. The land itself belonged to the state or nation its produce went to the family who worked it. Apparently the system worked well enough to feed and satisfy the population at least the favoured tribes and clans, and it provided an element of security. In addition to the strips and fields thus divided out, common lands, or *ejidos,* reinforced the economy and provided opportunity for those who did not enjoy occupancy of distinct plots. The introduction of *encomienda* immediately undermined the system of land use as well as gravely strained the social system that revolved around it.

Conquest was usually followed by conversion to Christianity. The Spaniards, appalled by the pagan practices of the natives, were spurred on to convert and civilise as soon, and as many as possible, determined that these Indians should be incorporated into the colonial society as Christian vassals of the monarchy. The cultural policy dictated Christianisation followed by Latinisation, the two aspects of a common objective for the cultural assimilation of the Indians. The evangelisers functioned at the same time as teachers of languages, both Spanish and

Latin, of music and singing (liturgical) and of technical education in both agriculture and manufacture. The missionaries were conversant with the native languages, which they learnt to be able to preach the word of Christ in the vernacular. Bilingual dictionaries (Spanish-Nahuatal) and Mexican hieroglyphics were widely used. [9]

Rudimentary secular education was usually an extension of the religious training. Selected members of the Indian upper class, especially sons of caciques, did learn to read and write Spanish. Adoption of Spanish ways ensured continuity of their status in the new society and power over their community. Acculturation was not so much the result of education, it was more a result of the native adaptations in speech, dress, social activities, and economic productivities, depending on the Indian class and status, and proximity to centres of Spanish population. Majority of the Indians adopted the Spanish traits and products more slowly or not at all. Most Indians did not learn the Spanish language, but instead used a few Spanish words while speaking their native languages. In the later period of colonial rule, legalisation of *repartimiento de efectos* -- a system of forced

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[9] Jacques Lafaye, "Literature and intellectual life, Spanish America" in Bethell Leslie, in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. II (Cambridge, 1984), p. 667.

labour -- led to an enforced acculturation, as the Indians were forced to buy, at exorbitant prices household goods, clothing and items like silk stockings and jewellery, which were totally superfluous in Indian life. The illiterate Indians who worked on the farms and ranches as servants and labourers imitating the manners and ways of the Spanish masters were forced to give up their language and culture and adopt those of their conquerors.

In short, the colonial economy in New Spain was centred around (i) the large landed estates, that is, *latifundias* or *haciendas*; (ii) the mining industry, which given Mexico's richness in mining resources, attracted investments and more importantly concentration of an ever increasing Indian labour; (iii) at the margin, the survival of the indigenous agricultural activities and artisanship.

It is significant to note that the Crown authorities had initially sought to preserve the communal land system of the indigenous, which included lands under cultivation, woodlands and the pasturelands. Keeping with the Indian tradition, these communal lands were considered as inalienable by the Crown authorities. In sum, large landholdings and

Indian communal lands, somehow, continued to exist well into the nineteenth century. This is not withstanding continuous expansion of *haciendas,* including tying up the Indian labour to these *haciendas;* shipment of Indian labour to the emerging mining towns and the decline of the Indian population in the first century after the Conquest. Given the large size of Mexico, it is interesting to find regional variations in this generalised pattern. For instance, the Spanish were able to establish at least on the central plateau, a relatively stable system of domination that offered some benefits to the peasants and the Indian communities of the centre-south of the viceroyalty of New Spain. Towards the north, in the Bajío region, the mining labour force remained mainly 'free'.[10] The Indians in the frontier and peripheral regions and the northern missions, the Mayas of Chiapas and Yucatan, and the ethnic mosaics of the Huasteca or Oaxaca continued to resist the Spanish conquerors for some time.

European livestock introduced into New Spain spread rapidly across the Valley of Mexico and across the valleys of Toluca, Puebla,

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10 Florencia E. Mallon, "Indian Communities, Political Cultures, and the State in Latin America, 1780-1990", in *Journal of Latin American Studies* (Cambridge) vol.24, Quincentenary Supplement, 1992, p. 42.

Tlaxcala, Oaxaca and Michoacan.[11] In these areas, which were densely populated by Indians who used traditional farming methods, the European animals invaded and destroyed the open-field cultivation system, transformed arable land into pasture, dislocated the pattern of settlement, and destroyed the crops produced by the Indian communities. The Indians soon began rearing domestic animals like the pigs, sheep, goats, and chicken for consumption.

The impact of these systemic changes was admittedly very profound for the indigenous. For Indians who were forcibly taken to distant mining towns, it was no less than a trauma. To say the least, the shift from rural to urban living, as they moved from agricultural communities to Spanish-dominated mining towns for higher wages, meant a loss of their indigenous culture and a gradual adoption of Spanish habits. Likewise the introduction of new crops and livestock was no less damaging to the Indian social life. Not only did they, sometimes, lose the best pieces of land and water resources, they were also made to grow crops which were unfamiliar to them and which were not fully adopted to their careful system of irrigation.

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[11] Leslie Bethell, n 9, p. 155.

No less damaging to the Indian cultures, the Indian belief system and ways of living were the activities of Christian missionaries. This is not to deny the simultaneous existence of a very powerful and persistent trend seen in the Church from the very inception of the Conquest. In the fifteenth century, Bartolomé de Las Casas, was the first one to protest against the inhuman treatment of the indigenous. During the entire colonial period, certain elements of the Church were always in the forefront of defending the rights of the Indians, preserving their language and cultural heritage and imparting education and training to them.

Be that as it may, nearly three centuries of colonial rule had the net effect of reducing the Indians to the lowest level of the social hierarchy, depriving them of their lands and languages, damaging and dementing their social structures and ethos and worst of all labelling them uniformly as *indios*.

Around the time when the Mexican Wars of Independence broke out in the 1820s,once again, new developments would shape the future of the Indians. Mexican Wars of Independence initially began in rural areas. The participation of the Indians and other peasant communities - known

as *grito de Dolores* – added a uniquely social and indigenous dimension to the struggle for independence. It also represented the close involvement of church elements with the Indian causes, rather the cause of Mexico's poor symbolised by the leadership of Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla and Father José María Morelos Pavón as harbingers of Mexico's struggle for independence. As had happened elsewhere in Latin America, in Mexico too, independence was in the end achieved under the leadership of the conservative land-owning Creole aristocracy.

The decade preceding independence was characterised by massive revolts by Indians and *mestizos* in conjunction with the Creoles seeking autonomy from Spanish. The achievement of Independence in 1821 brought no improvement in the conditions of the indigenous population. For the next forty years, political power was divided among local regional centres controlled by local landowners and caciques while a conservative coalition of landowners and the Church struggled with the liberal anti-clerical professionals and intellectuals of the urban middle class to gain national political supremacy.

At the foundation of Mexico as a republic in 1825, indigenous peoples were given the same rights as other citizens under the law, eliminating in principle the social differences of the Colonial period. From the indigenous peoples' perspective, however, this legal equality and citizenship signified that their own cultures could still not have their own processes of economic and cultural development.

The Indians, constituting half the population on the eve of Independence, played no conscious part in the public life of the new nation.[12] They continued to labour as peons or live in the missions. Many of them almost completely withdrew contact with the white man. Chattel slavery was abolished in 1829, and debt servitude was outlawed by Article V of the 1857 Constitution, which laid down that "nobody shall be obliged to render personal service without proper compensation and full consent". But with the Mexican, with its servile system, political power and economic incentive overrode legal provisions.[13]

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12 In 1821,the Indians constituted about fifty-five per cent of Mexico's six million inhabitants.

13 Alan Knight, "Mexican Peonage: What was it and Why was it?" in *Journal of Latin American Studies* vol. 18 Part I, (Cambridge) May 1986, p. 51.

The 1825 constitution gave equal rights to all citizens under the law. To the 'mixed', it meant just that, to the whites it meant parity between the *peninsulares* and the creoles, for the Indian it meant continued subordination to the landowning creoles. Spanish language continued to be the medium of communication. The indigenous languages were considered as inferior 'dialects' and every effort was made by the successive governments to eradicate them.

Rural Mexico, at the dawn of Independence, was dominated by the *haciendas*. These large areas of land seldom less than a thousand hectares in size, under the ownership of a single landlord, were self sufficient for agricultural operations. In the absence of the owner, a permanent underemployed and cheap labour force, which resided in the *hacienda,* cultivated the land using most primitive farming methods. Barring *haciendas* growing cash crops, large sections of the land were allowed to lie fallow, often refused to be rented out to idle and hungry *campesinos* who at the same time were bonded to these *haciendas*. To the *hacendado* the *hacienda* was a matter of prestige and not a matter of business.[14] Mexico

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[14] Roger D. Hansen, *The Politics of Mexican Development* (Baltimore, 1982), p. 25.

was still a rural country and for the average Mexican little had changed. Indians continued to live like they had for hundreds of years and what little modernisation that had occurred so far in Mexico had by and large passed them by. Many of the Indian lands were gradually encroached upon by the church and civil institutions.

The balance which had developed between the *hacienda* and the surviving Indian villages was soon to be shattered by the Reform Laws introduced by the Liberals who came to power in 1855, hoping to establish political stability and economic growth along the principles of free market economy.

Post-independence Mexico now had a small, urban, articulate middle class made up of professional, bureaucrats and intellectuals which strongly opposed all colonial legacies and represented the core of vocal Liberals. The Liberal middle class tended to view the Indian communities as overly protected enclaves whose members were incapable of or unwilling to utilise their large blocs of land of agricultural and ranching purposes efficiently hindering economic development. The Liberal

administration swept the Conservatives from control of the national government in 1845-55.[15]

The Liberal government of Benito Juárez established an order based on explicit capitalist economic principles in the Constitution of 1857. The Indian was considered as an obstacle in that context. Legislation was passed such as the *Ley Juárez* of 1855 and the *Ley Lerdo* of 1857 that expedited the expropriation of indigenous communal lands. Under the prevailing legal order, these lands became the property of those who promulgated the law.

The *Ley Juárez* abolished military and church *fueros* (legal exemptions). *Ley Lerdo* prohibited civil corporations and the Catholic Church form holding real estate or speculating in real estate. The goal was to weaken the financial hold the church had on Mexico. Lerdo's intention was that the landed properties would be auctioned off to individuals so that a class of small farmers would inherit the estates of the Church. All

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[15] Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, *The Colonial Heritage of Latin America: Essays on Economic Dependence in Perspective* (New York, 1970), p. 141.

Indian communal property was also to be granted in severalty to village members to create a class of yeoman farmers.

In practice the enforcement of the *Ley Lerdo* worked to the detriment of the rural masses. Not the land-hungry peons but speculators and political favourites stripped the Church of its lands. Also, the phraseology of the *Ley Lerdo* was to permit the communal land holdings of Indian tribes to be seized and parcelled out so that once-free natives would become mere peons on large estates or *haciendas.* An Indian tribe was juridically as much a corporation as the Catholic Church. One of the civil corporations that would be forced to sell of its property was the Indian *ejido* or the communal land holding of the Indians. All these attempts were, so to say, to modernise Mexico and institute modern capitalism in Mexico.[16]

The Porfirian period (1877-1911), the last 35 years of the 100-year period between the revolt of 1810 and the Revolution of 1910 were marked by political stability, and massive foreign investments particularly

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16 Fredrich Katz, "Mexico: Restored Republic and Porfiriato, 1867-1910" in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America,* vol. V (London, 1986), pp. 3-62.

to develop the transport system within the country, which opened the domestic market. The *hacendados* and foreign investors prospered and an increasing numbers of Mexicans joined the ranks of capitalists as industrialists.

The Indian was considered as an even greater obstacle to the modernisation process. Employment opportunities decreased as machinery replaced man in extractive and manufacturing sectors accompanied by a sharp decline in wages particularly in the agricultural sector. The ever-increasing concentration of landholdings was not matched by growth in the agricultural production, pushing the *campesino* toward starvation.

Under the liberal and modernising impulse that became dominant in the second half of the nineteenth century specially during the period of Porfirio Díaz, the lot of Indians worsened as policies to break up communal land and transform the Indians as individual farmers continued. Liberal policies were pursued even more vigorously, so much so that it has been estimated that over 2 million acres of communal land were allotted in severalty during the Porfiriato and literally all of it,

sooner or later, ended up in the hands of large land companies and *hacendados*.[17]

The rural peasantry, including the indigenous, bore most of the cost of modernisation. Government seizure of private and communal land increased the landless rural population and led to further concentration of land ownership. Taking advantage of an 1883 land law, land companies had by 1888 obtained possession of more than 27.5 million hectares of rural land. By 1894, new laws dropped all limitations. The Indian village lands, which had survived the Reform period, ended up in the hands of the land companies and estate owners. These companies controlled one-fifth of Mexico's total territory.[18]

Latifundia worse than that of Spanish colonial times had emerged. By 1911, Mexico had 900 large landholders, some with ranches of several million acres, and a rural poor of 9 million who owned no land at all. Díaz totally ignored the welfare of thirty-five per cent of Mexico's population,

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17 Roger D. Hansen, n. 14, p.26.

18 Donna Lee Van Cott, ed., *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America* (New York, 1994), p. 24.

the Indian segment. By 1910, about ninety per cent of Mexico's rural families owned no land, and eighty-five per cent of the country's Indian communities had lost all their holdings. The remaining fifteen per cent eked out a living on fractions of their former lands.[19]

On the eve of the Revolution, a few hundred families held some 54.3 million hectares of the country's most productive land and more than half of all rural Mexicans worked on these families' huge *hacienda.* In the middle were the *rancheros,* under 50,000 in number, who subsisted on their land, well under a 300 hectares in size, worked by the owner his family and a few sharecroppers or hired labourers. The small farmers (*pequeños agricultores*) had little or no purchasing power.

By the census of 1910, nearly fifty per cent of the total rural population, or 5.5 million debt peons, lived on 8200 *haciendas* and 45,000 ranchos while about fifty per cent of the rural population was landless. In this fashion, economic modernisation had completed the conquest of the land and the mobilisation of the indigenous labour force for private profit

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[19] Roger D. Hansen, n. 14, p. 147.

with the assistance of the complex mechanisms of the modernising Mexican state.[20]

Changes in Perception and Policies towards the Indigenous since the Revolution

The leaders of the Mexican Revolution were greatly influenced by the writings of three individuals: Ricardo Flores Magón on social reforms, Andrés Molina Enriques on agrarian reforms, and Francisco I. Madero on Presidential succession - which contributed to the development of a revolutionary ideology.

Francisco I. Madero, on the 20th of November 1910, raised the banner of revolution with his *Plan de San Luis Potosí,* which expressed his preference for political reform over social and economic reform. The *Plan Politico-Social* accepted Madero as provisional president of Mexico and dealt only perfunctorily with the agrarian issues and labour problems.[21]

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20 Stanley J. Stein and Barbara H. Stein, n. 15, p. 141.

21 James Louis Hamon, *The Ideology of the Mexican Revolution: Pragmatism and Socialism* (Indiana, 1971), p. 50.

The movement for land and liberty was led by the peasant leader, Emiliano Salazar Zapata. In November 1911, the Zapatista revolutionaries issued the Plan of Ayala, which asked for restoration of privately owned lands to rural villages. The armed revolt spread through the states of Morelos, Guerrero, Tlaxcala, Pueblo, Mexico and even into Mexico City.

The pressure exerted by the followers of Emiliano Zapata and Francisco 'Pancho' Villa, led the dominant faction led by Venustiano Carranza to offer, in December 1914, to amend Article 109 of the 1857 Constitution aimed at guaranteeing the autonomy of municipalities throughout the country and next formulate the first national agrarian law. It promised a system for the restitution and donation of lands, granted legal personality to the peasant communities so that they could petition for the lands, and established the basis for new agrarian politics.

A great many plans, *pronunciamentos*, programmes and decrees went into the formulation of the ideology of the Mexican Revolution. The general principles of agrarian reform were expressed in the *Plan de Texcoco, Plan de Ayala* and the Agrarian Law of the 6th of January 1915. Agrarian reform was to be based upon the division of large estates and the

creation of smallholdings. The social reform principles expressed in these plans and *pronunciamientos* would receive official recognition and were incorporated in the 1917 Mexican Constitution.[22]

In January 1917, Mexicans drew up a new Constitution under the presidency of Venustiano Carranza (1917-1919). Article 27 dealt with property rights and it proclaimed that the nation was the owner of all lands, waters and subsoil rights and the state could expropriate foreign ownership of these rights with compensation. These resources could never be sold to foreigners but individuals and corporations could obtain concession for their exploitations.

Article 27, which vested the nation with the inalienable ownership of natural resources, provided for the expropriation of private property in public interest and, specifically, the division of landed properties and their distribution to population centres having no land or insufficient holdings, prohibited religious institutions from acquiring land, and provided that foreigners must bind themselves not to invoke the protection of their governments before being given concessions for the exploitation of

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[22] Ibid., p. 86.

resources and waters. All land changes made since the law of the 25th of June 1856, which had alienated property from communal holds were declared null and void, and such lands was to be restored to the communities.

The four years of Álvaro Obregon's presidency (1920-24) were dedicated to beginning to realise the objectives of the Constitution of 1917. The military phase of the Revolution was over and the new administration began to build the bases for the next stage of the revolutionary process of reconstruction. Obregon's agrarian policies proved more traditional. He believed that the Mexican economy could not afford to forego productivity for the sake of radical agrarian reform. Consequently, redistribution of land proceeded slowly. During his administration, he redistributed 1.2m hectares to landless peasants, a fraction of the eligible land. Even after a village received its land, its prospects for success were poor for the government failed to provide adequate credit and technical training.

Significantly, through a formal act, the Obregon government delegitimisted the existence of indigenous organisations and indigenous

groups were asked to re-channel their discourse through peasant demands. This "peasantisation" policy was bolstered by a policy of assimilation through education.

Plutarco Elías Calles, during his presidency (1924-28), began seriously to implement agrarian reform by distributing some 3.2m hectares of land during his term in addition to developing agricultural credit and irrigation. The National Agrarian Commission also issued Circular Number 51 outlining a programme for the creation and development of *ejidos*.[23]

During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) a nationalistic policy was adopted in which workers, peasants and Indians were assigned a prominent role. Cárdenas also backed a policy of "Mexicanisation" of the indigenous peoples. However, his administration recognised the Indians as peasants thereby denying them their ethnic identity.[24]

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[23] Ibid., p. 137.

[24] Donna Lee Van Cott, n. 18, p. 194.

In January 1934 a decree was passed which transformed the National Agrarian Commission into an autonomous Agrarian Department, directly responsible to the President-thus removing the implementation of agrarian reform from the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Agriculture. In March an Agrarian Code was formulated which brought together existing legislation on the agrarian question, simplified the machinery for land distribution, including the right of *peones acasillados* (resident peons on the *haciendas*), to now be legally entitled to receive land under agrarian reform. Thus the institutional machinery for much of the agrarian reform was put in place when Cárdenas became president.[25]

Land reform was one of Cárdenas' major accomplishments. In the course of six years, he distributed almost 18 million hectares - more than twice as much land as all of his predecessors, combined to two-thirds of the Mexican peasantry through a system of communal farms or *ejidos*. Even though agriculture suffered an initial setback because of the loss of economies of scale and lack of resources and credit. The redistribution

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[25] Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton, 1982), p. 122.

proved tremendously popular with the majority of the Mexican people and earned Cárdenas a special place in Mexican history.

During the Cárdenas administration, there was a reduction in the value of agricultural production due to the land distribution. One of the problems was that the *ejidatarios* had less financing than the private owner. The individual *ejidos* had few inputs such as capital, fertilisers and irrigation The other was the *ejidatario* grew crops for domestic consumption, while the old agri-business that had its land turn into *ejidos*, grew cash crops for the international market. The Ejidal Bank was created in 1937 to provide credit through local credit societies. Government disbursed over 140 million pesos during its six-year term in preference to given to the *ejido* over the smallholding.[26]

By the end of his term in 1940, Cárdenas had also dramatically transformed the Mexican political system. The official Mexican Revolutionary Party (PRM) membership expanded to include representatives of four corporately defined "sectors" of Mexican society: labour, agrarian, military, and popular. The agrarian sector consisted of

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[26] Ibid., p. 172.

peasants and rural labourers, and the popular sector included the small but growing middle class, civil servants and small-scale merchants, and including significantly the indigenous.[27]

By 1940, an area of 29 million hectares had been transferred to the village communities and their members. In that year, out of the total cultivated area of 15 million hectares, 7 million hectares belonged to the *ejidos*. The reform had thus redistributed nearly fifty per cent of the cultivable land.[28]

Debate regarding the agrarian reform under Cárdenas concerning the extent it promoted or impeded conditions for capitalist accumulation and resulted in re-peasantisation or proletarianisation of rural sector continues.[29] On the one hand did Cárdenas gave a peasant solution to proletarian demands or did he reverse the process of land and capital concentration and proletarianisation in the countryside? Cárdenas and

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[27] Merrill, Tim L. and Miró, Ramón, eds., *Mexico, a Country Study*, (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/mxtoc.html, June 1996).

[28] Sheldon B. Liss, and Peggy K. Liss, eds., *Man, State, and Society in Latin American History* (New York, 1972), p. 414.

[29] Nora Hamilton, n. 25, pp. 178-180.

other agrarians believed the collective *ejidos* were a collectivist alternative to capitalistic agricultural production rather than a form of re-peasantisation. It was in keeping with the Mexican tradition of communal farming in pre-conquest Aztec villages as also the socialistic influences during the period of the 1930s.

The revolution did not stand still though land distribution declined after 1940. Between 1946 and 1952, a further 4 million hectares were transferred to native ownership. The new owners were for the most part simple Indian peasants without equipment or technical education and for that reason the creation of agricultural credit organisations such as the *Banco Nacional de Crédito Ejidal* for the *ejidos* and *Banco Nacional de Crédito Agricola y Ganadero* for private owners has been of some importance.

Although, most incoming presidents claimed there was no more land to be distributed, the state periodically broke up a few estates, distributed new lands or settled old land claims in order to quell incipient unrest. For example during the peasant revolt in Morelos, led by Rúben Jaramillo, the regime of Adolfo López Mateos (1958-1964) decreed that 12

million hectares be distributed, more than the combined total of the previous three presidents. Only twenty-five per cent was actually delivered, however, President Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) decreed the distribution of 11.5 million hectares, and delivered half. President José López Portillo (1976-1982), on the other hand, had, by the end of 1981, distributed less than 1 million hectares. Overall, between 1940 and 1976, only 25.6 million of 52.7 million hectares decreed for distribution was actually handed over. The balance was under dispute, and was often forcefully seized by the deceived peasants. On the other hand, a tiny minority of state-favoured *ejidos* achieved agribusiness size, contributing to six-fold increase in *ejidos'* hiring of wage labour (often from other *ejidatarios*) in the 1960s.

'Indianism' or *indigenismo*, which the Revolution had set out to promote, seemed a forgotten cause as Mexico experienced a period of substantial economic growth and industrial expansion. The thirty years following the Cárdenas administration was characterised by one of the highest sustained growth rates in the world, coexisting with increasingly high levels of economic inequalities, unemployment and the impoverishment of the majority of the population.

The state's policy during the 1970s was marked by a dual context -- palliative economic policies and political repression by president Echeverría. Ministry of Agrarian Reform was created to replace the Department of Agrarian Affairs and Colonisation. Federal legislation on credit and natural resources was amended, financial resources were channelled to rural areas through trusts and more than 12 million hectares were distributed to approximately 200,000 supposed beneficiaries to which end 2274 presidential resolutions were signed.[30]

The focus of Echeverría's social welfare policies was the Mexican countryside. Despite massive evidence that the *ejidos* were less efficient than private farming, Echeverría resumed the redistribution of land to *ejidos* and extended the credit subsidies to cooperative agriculture. The government also pursued an extensive programme of rural development that increased the number of schools and health clinics in the rural communities. By refusing to defend rural property owners from squatters, the Echeverría government encouraged a wave of land invasions that reduced land pressure in the countryside but seriously undermined investor confidence. Although the government avoided large-scale

[30] Donna Lee Van Cott, n. 18, p.197.

expropriations, it increased the state's role in the economy by assuming control of hundreds of domestic enterprises. Despite signs of a looming financial crisis, deficit spending continued unabated throughout Echeverría's sexenio.

In 1976, the López Portillo administration inherited a crisis that worsened during the 1980s. The *indigenismo* of the López Portillo government was evident in 3 main areas:

1. The officially aligned organisations such as the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (CNC - National Peasant Confederation), *Consejo Agrarista Mexicano* (CAM) and *Unión General de Obreros y Campesinos de México* (UGOCM - General Union of Workers and Peasants of Mexico) no longer called for land reform. They also supported the Mexican food system and the law for agricultural development, important initiatives in agrarian policy,
2. The government also promoted 'participatory *indigenismo*' obtaining administrative posts for some anthropologists critical of the government,

3. It incorporated the young Indian intelligentsia into the *indigenista* structure particularly in INI and in the government's indigenous education programme. This initiative led to the creation in 1977 of the *Alianza Nacional de Professionales Bilingues, A.C.* (ANPIBAC - National Alliance of Bilingual Professionals)[31]

The economic crisis inherited from the previous administration was mitigated by the discovery of oil. This gave the successor President López Portillo a much-needed relief. The oil industry grew rapidly but could not employ the ever-increasing ranks of the unskilled. Oil made Mexico a rich nation in which a majority of the people continued to live in poverty. López Portillo vowed to invest substantial amounts of the new oil revenue in areas and projects that would establish sustainable economic growth. Food subsidies, long a political necessity in Mexico, accounted for the largest single portion of the spending.

Like Echeverría, López Portillo sought to channel government resources to *ejidos*. Following the discovery of vast petroleum reserves

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[31] Clark W. Reynolds, "Mexico and Brazil: Models for Leadership in Latin America?" in James W. Wilkie and others, eds., *Contemporary Mexico* (California, 1976), p. 463-64.

along Mexico's southeastern coast, López Portillo used oil profits to establish the *Sistema Alimentario Mexicana* (SAM - Mexican Food System), which sought to ensure self-sufficiency in basic staples, such as corn and beans. López Portillo encouraged *ejidos* to play a major role in this effort and channelled petrodollars to agencies offering credit to *ejidatarios.* For many *ejidatarios,* however, credit merely generated increased debt and dependence on government bureaucracies without significantly improving their conditions.

Portillo left office in a dismal scene of high external debt, stagnant exports and a devalued currency In 1980 before leaving office President Portillo passed a legislation limiting land ownership to 100 hectares (250 acres) ordering expropriation of large tracts of land.

The 1980s marked the beginning of the dismantling of the institutions that grew out of the Mexican Revolution and redefinition of the state's social bases. These changes represent a shift in the Mexican state from its interventionist, populist and nationalist position to a contemporary position in support of economic liberalisation.

In the wake of the debt crisis that began in 1982, the administration of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988) abolished SAM and cut agricultural funding by two-thirds. Government had to renegotiate foreign debt and adopt severe economic austerity measures, freezing wage and price, resulting in a fall in living standards as the economy shrunk. Condition such as inflation, devaluation and the withdrawal of subsidies hit the poor hardest.

In sum, the Chapter covers a very wide ground and variety of issues. As has been seen, the definitional problem continues to persist to the great disadvantage of the indigenous. From fifty per cent on the eve of Independence, today they constitute roughly seven per cent of the population. Assimilation and absorption apart, the dominant trend since Independence has been perhaps to deny the existence of the indigenous altogether. In comparison, treatment during the colonial period, though paternalistic and exploitative, was still based on the recognition of certain collective rights, including the system of land use by the indigenous. The 1910 Revolution produced a new concern for the indigenous but without offering a well laid-out perception or policies. Concerned with issues of national sovereignty, nation building, industrialisation and economic

development, post-Revolutionary governments often approached the issue through policies of restructuring the landholding system, including involving land distribution and setting up communal farms.

As the next chapter argues, concern for the cultures and education of the indigenous was only sporadic and resulted in intermittent ad hoc policies. It was only during the presidency of Cárdenas that the question of land for the indigenous communities was dealt with systematically albeit with several negative consequences. As far as the education and cultural aspects were concerned, it was not until 1948 that a clear policy was formulated. Establishment of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI-National Indigenist Institute) marked the initiation of governmental policies for the education of the indigenous, promotion of their languages and preservation of their cultures, all promised, however, on *incorporación* and assimilation.

CHAPTER II

INI: ORGANISATION, FUNCTIONS AND ROLE

In the previous chapter, an attempt has been made to describe and highlight the ethnic, linguistic, demographic and economic diversities that characterise Mexico's indigenous population. The Chapter also presents a large overview of the treatment meted out to the indigenous during the colonial and post-Independence periods. Driven by economic processes, policies towards the indigenous generally revolved around the question of Indian lands and labour. As has been discussed, it was only in the wake of the 1910 Revolution that issues of Indian identity, their integration with the Mexican 'nation', and subjects of their education and preservation of their cultures began gaining some attention.

Related to the aforementioned issues, the present chapter deals with significant policy initiatives and institutions that came to be established for the preservation and protection of Indian cultures over successive decades since the Revolution. The Chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes and analyses the varied perceptions

that dominant political and cultural elites had held about the indigenous. It also details some of the very early institutions and agencies that were established after the Revolution to deal with the cultural and educational needs of the Indians and pave the way for their integration with the emerging 'nation-state'. It highlights the conflicts in the official perception about the appropriate role and status for the indigenous; for instance, the question of monolingual or bilingual education for the indigenous.

The second section examines the circumstances and context in which the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI - National Indigenous Institute), an autonomous, apex organisation for the cultural and economic development of the indigenous and their integration with the Mexican nation, was established. Since the INI has been the leading federal agency over the past about five decades, the second and third sections of the present chapter deal separately with aspects of organisational set-up, and the functions and role of the INI.

The fourth and the last section then gives a detailed account of the changing role of the INI particularly since the 1970s and 1980s. The changing mandate and consequent budgetary allocations to the INI were

reflective of the changing governmental perceptions and policies towards the indigenous. Towards the end, the chapter makes an attempt to assess the dynamics of policy changes and accomplishments of the INI under the circumstances.

Post-Revolutionary Perceptions and Initiatives for the Indigenous

The Mexican Revolution brought about a change in the attitude towards the indigenous peoples. It was realised that the nation could achieve economic development only if the native Indian population also contributed to the nation's development. Attempts were now made to encourage their education and health and to allow a more active participation of the indigenous peoples in the national economy with the purpose of eventually incorporating and integrating them into the national culture.

The Revolution, dedicated to reforming the Mexican society and rejecting Porfirian ideas, readily adopted the phrase "*La incorporación del Indio*" as one of its major slogans. It appeared on even the most trivial

government documents and continued to do so for many years.[1] Although these views were acceptable, the definition of the term *incorporación* was open to much debate as also the process by which this was to be achieved.

There is no gainsaying that the Mexican intellectuals particularly the anthropologists as well as many of the revolutionary leaders, were beginning to look at the question of the Indians from a new perspective. There was a new pride in the Indian heritage and a new understanding of the Spanish legacy. Mexico was not just the combination of Indian and Spanish heritage but something more in the form of its *mestizo* composition and culture. In the debates that continued after the Revolution at least three distinct views about the Indians can be delineated:

At one end of the spectrum were the Hispanicists who perpetuated the Porfirian views that the Indian was irredeemable, had contributed nothing to Mexican culture, and in any case were so few in numbers that they could be ignored. To them, the future of Mexico lay in its

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[1] Ralph L. Beals, "Anthropology in Contemporary Mexico", in James W. Wilkie and others, eds., *Contemporary Mexico* (California, 1976), p. 761.

'Hispanicisation' or 'Europeanisation'. A view upheld both in Mexico and Spain, since the early colonial times.

A larger group accepted the reality of the Indian in Mexico. To them *incorporación* meant assimilation, that is, converting the Indians to *mestizos,* both racially and culturally. Both groups opposed special agencies and schools for Indians and opposed the study of Indian cultures and languages. Strongly nationalist, they envisaged a uniquely Mexican culture, building in part on the Mexican past but homogenous in character with no place for distinctive Indian groups and their collective identity and rights.

A small number of scholars mainly anthropologists, labelled as the 'realistic Indianists' underlined the necessity of special treatment for contemporary Indian groups and of utilising their unique characteristics to achieve assimilation while, at the same time, retaining some respect for them and according some recognition to their collective rights.

Amidst these contrasting views, the overwhelming support was for some kind of a middle ground. For most, *incorporación* meant a plural

society in which the Indian while retaining his individuality and his local societies, could be led to function more effectively within the larger national society and to share in the more beneficial aspects of its culture. To achieve these objectives, many organisations were established.

Education has always had a significant place in the schema and programmes for the indigenous. Even the positivism of the Porfirian period emphasized on education as the medium and mechanism for the integration of the Indians. As has been examined in the next section, education and organisations dealing with cultural and social aspects of the Indians came to be accorded even greater importance in the post-Revolutionary schema of things for the Indians.

The efforts of leading anthropologists during the Porfirian times had resulted first in the founding of the *Escuela Internacional de Arqueología y Etnología del las Americas* (International School of Archaeology and Ethnology) on the eve of the Revolution. After the Revolution, the first organisation set up to look after the affairs of the indigenous was the *Dirección de Antropología* (Directorate of Anthropology), which was established in the *Secretaría de Agricultura y Fomento* (Department of

Agriculture and Development) in 1917 under the directorship of the anthropologist Manuel Gamio, (1883-1960).

With the passage of the 1917 Constitution, government policies focused on the processes of schooling and Hispanicising the indigenous groups. These policies were guided by the prevailing view for the need to respect racial and cultural differences among the world's peoples and those of the American continent, and with their special historical and regional characteristics in particular. In order to carry this out, various institutions were created at different periods of time to attend to the needs of indigenous peoples. Some of these are the Autonomous Department of Indigenous Affairs, the National Institute of Anthropology and History, the Inter-American Institute, and finally, in the decade of the 1940s, the National Indigenist Institute.

Article 3 of the 1917 Constitution had provided for education for all the citizens. Educational policy in Mexico became the responsibility of the federal government and its main instrument, the Ministry of Education. The language and education policies were formulated with the objective of making the indigenous people literate and Spanish speakers. Next step

was the creation of rural schools, which were set up by the Revolutionaries and in particular by the well-known educationist José Vasconcelos (1882-1959). Voluntary missions established these schools in the most remote districts with the aim of giving native children the rudiments of education both theoretical and practical. Vasconcelos believed that the Indian culture had nothing to offer civilisation.[2] Moisés Sáenz (1888-1941) and Manuel Gamio, both anthropologists, agreed that the Indian should learn Spanish as a necessary tool, not because it satisfied the sentiments of the intellectuals. Also, learning Spanish does not necessarily involve suppression of Indian languages. Basically, the dominant view was that the Indian needed to be helped to build his self-confidence and self-respect and to find his place in Mexican society.

José Vasconcelos who was Secretary of Education during the presidency of Álvaro Obregon (1920-24) pioneered new ideas and formulated curricula for rural schools deemed in consonance with the Mexican reality, by teaching students basic skills in reading, writing, mathematics, history and geography. Seeking to integrate the indigenous peoples into the Mexican society through education, Vasconcelos

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[2] Ibid., p. 764.

despatched hundreds of teachers to remote villages. Between 1920-24 more than two thousand public libraries were also established, many in the rural areas catering to the needs of the local indigenous population.[3]

The policy of assimilation through education was the goal. Initially, it was implemented through the *Departamento de Educación y Cultura para la Raza Indígena* (Department of Education and Culture for the Indigenous Race), created in 1921, followed in 1925 by the *Departamento de Escuelas Rurales de Incorporación Cultural Indígena* (Department of Rural Schools for Incorporation of the Indigenous Culture). These two agencies, in short, as reflected in their names, represented the three concepts that outlined the direction of State policy: education, culture and incorporation. Socially, the indigenous communities were to be incorporated into the non-indigenous society through education while still retaining their cultures and languages, which the modern Mexico respected and drew admiration from. The all-embracing *mestizo* culture, in the ideas of Vasconcelos, was to be the dominant nationalising and integrating culture.

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[3] Tim L. Merrill and Miró, Ramón, eds., *Mexico, a Country Study*, (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/mxtoc.html, June 1996).

In 1924, the first boarding school for the indigenous peoples was created, called the *Casa del Estudiante Indígena* (House of the Indigenous Student), which was later converted into the *Internado Nacional de Indios* (National Boarding School for the Indians). Public education facilities continued to expand and the administration of president Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) built another 2,000 schools.

Focus on education as the force nationalising and integrating all Mexicans was by itself an extraordinary development in the post-Revolutionary Mexico. However, as educational programmes were formulated and institutes began to be established, it was increasingly felt that incorporation of the indigenous through education was not such a simple process. On the one hand, there was a new consciousness about the Indian cultures, and awareness about the diversities of languages and dialects among the indigenous; on the other hand, strong assimilationist ideas still prevailed at the policy-making and popular levels. The anti-Indianist political pressure soon led to the termination of the earlier *Dirección de Antropología* in 1925. For the next eleven years anti-Indianist thoughts continued to prevail and dominate government action. However, increasing flow of publication dealing with the Indians, at the

same time however, continued to highlight the problems of the Mexican Indians to which the literate urban population became increasingly aware.

In 1932, eleven more indigenous boarding schools were created. It was hoped that away from the influence of their community members, who continued to use local dialects, these students would be able to learn the Spanish language more easily. Also, the creoles and *mestizos* would be role models for these students as living examples of the educated *indios* who now enjoyed the benefits of "civilisation' and progress. The National Boarding School for the Indians that was established in the 1920s was however closed down in 1933.

In 1935, president Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) created the *Departmento Autónoma de Asuntos Indígenas* (Autonomous Department for Indigenous Affairs), which would act as an institution representing the indigenous people. Government resumed its interest in the welfare of these Indians with the establishment of the *Dirección General de Asuntos Indígenas* (Directorate General for Indigenous Affairs) later, within the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Department of Public Education). This

agency developed many programmes with the view to resolve Indian problems, particularly in the field of education.

The Autonomous Department for Indigenous Affairs continued to pursue its monolingual policy and encouraged Mexican Indians to reject their indigenous languages, customs and beliefs. The number of boarding schools also continued to increase and the existing 33 schools could now accommodate up to 3,000 students. With the ability to speak Spanish and being able to imitate the European mannerisms, it was hoped that these natives would now be in a better position to become part of the nation. In 1937, the Ministry of Education created the Department of Indigenous Education.[4]

Besides government initiatives, many anthropologists were working independently in a different direction. They continued their efforts to establish special schools for the Indians, which would respect

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[4] Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán and others, *¿Ha Fracasado Indigenismo? Reportaje de Una Controversia. [13 de septiembre, 1971]* (Mexico, 1971), pp. 195-225.

Indian traditions while providing them with special tools for coping with their environment and the social milieu in which they found themselves.

In 1939 the government established the *Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia* (National Institute of Anthropology and History). Under the noted anthropologist, Dr. Alfonso Caso Andrade (1896–1970), it worked to improve the public understanding of Indian problems and the Indian and Colonial past of Mexico.

A discerning change in the government perception and policies had begun with the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). These changes were more evident in the government's approach to the question of education and those of Indian languages as the medium of instruction in response to the demand for bilingual education and respect for local cultures and values, which continued to be voiced in the 1930s. The government invited a United States-based Protestant missionary organisation, the *Instituto Lingüístico de Verano* (Summer Institute of Linguistics - SIL), to come and help with this effort. The agency helped to develop Mexico's Indian languages, but its missionary activities produced

resistance not only among the Indian communities but also the Mexican teachers and social scientists.[5]

The government also sponsored various conferences such as the first *Assemblea de Lingüístas y Filológos* (Assembly of Linguists and Philologists) that developed the programmes for use of Indian languages in elementary levels. In 1939, the same year, an innovation was introduced to supplement the education policy following the Assembly of Linguists and Philologists where the participants recommended not only the use of indigenous languages in the primary schools and in the adult literacy programme, but also the use of indigenous teachers. It was thought that teaching the indigenous in their mother tongue would make the process of learning the second language, Spanish, easier. This was a major change in the making. It contained a new definition of assimilation and incorporation and a new approach to education through Indian languages.

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[5] Rodolfo Stavenhagen, *Educational and Cultural Issues in The Ethnic Question - Conflicts, Development, and Human Rights* (Tokyo, 1990), p. 147

In 1939 bilingual teaching became part of the new national education policy. It marked a major change in the policy of *mestizaje*, that is, upholding the *mestizo* as the national culture and Spanish language as the medium of assimilation of the Indians. These efforts on the part of the government were consolidated by the founding of the Literacy Institute for Monolingual Indigenous Peoples. This change in policy, which had otherwise started as an effort to make learning of Spanish easier in an attempt to accelerate the assimilation process, was a landmark development. For the first time indigenous languages and cultures were being valued and recognised as an essential part of education.

In accordance with the policy of bilingual education, the government also created the Regional Congress of the Indigenous Races, while also promoting the *indigenista* bureaucracy with the creation of the Autonomous Department of Indigenous Affairs earlier and by organising the *Primer Congreso Indígena Interamericano* (First Inter-American Indigenist Congress) in 1940.

The First Inter-American Indigenist Congress held in April 1940 reinforced the importance of local cultures and languages and role of

indigenous peoples themselves in the indigenous education programmes. The Congress, held at Pátzcuaro, was the result of the recommendations made during the VII and VIII Pan-American Conferences held at Montevideo in 1933 and at Lima in 1938, and the Seventh American Scientific Congress which was organised in Mexico City in 1935, and the First Pan-American Conference on Education also held in Mexico City in 1937. The main outcome of these conferences was the establishment of the Inter-American Indigenist Institute by means of signing a convention by all the participating countries.[6] It was ratified, on the 29th of November 1940, by representatives of Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, United States, Honduras, Mexico and Peru. The Mexican president, Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) ratified the agreement with prior authorisation from

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[6] In signing the Pátzcuaro Convention, the contracting Governments agreed "... to identify the problems affecting indigenous population groups within their jurisdiction and to cooperate on the basis of mutual respect (...) in solving the problems of the Indian peoples of the Americas through periodic meetings, an Inter-American Indian Institute and national Indian institutes...". Manuel Gamio, (1883-1960), was the first director of the *Instituto Indigenista Interamericano*, a post he held until his death.

During its sixty years of continuous activity, IAII has been a decisive factor in indigenism in the Americas. It has formed a bridge of understanding and harmony between the Governments of the region and indigenous populations; it has encouraged scientific study of the situation of indigenous communities and races; it has denounced the injustices to which they are subjected, as well as their low and impoverished state: it has promoted numerous plans, programmes, projects and actions of all kinds with a view to overcoming those conditions and achieving the well-being and development of the American Indians: it has been a constant driving force behind the indigenist policies of the Governments of the region.

the Senate. Article X of the Convention provided for the creation of a National Indigenist Institute in each of the contracting countries. During the inter-war years, the question of the rights of the indigenous had become a Hemipheric-wide issue. United States had taken the lead in creating a region-wide consensus on giving a better deal to the indigenous in accordance with its claims for upholding democracy and the principle of rights to self-determination.

It was in this context that the final governmental effort came in the form of the establishment in 1948 of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI - National Indigenist Institute), founded and directed by Dr. Alfonso Caso. The creation of the INI was a concrete move by the government to further enforce the policy of assimilating the indigenous peoples into the Mexican society. The Institute was to be the major agency for future governments to implement action programmes for the Indian communities. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it was organised, planned and directed by professionally trained anthropologists.

***Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI): Organisational Set-Up**

On the 4th of December, 1948, the Mexican Government under the leadership of president Miguel Alemán Valdés (1946-1952) created the *Instituto Nacional Indegenista* (INI) as a decentralised public body of the federal government with a legal status and an independent budget. It has since remained affiliated to the Inter-American Indigenist Institute. The Institute was formed with the objective of promoting actions and programmes that help indigenous communities in the economic, legal, political, cultural and social areas. The idea was not to define and isolate the Indian but to help integrate him into national life. In the perception of the federal government, the indigenous problem required an integral solution, with the participation of all government offices, which, in some way or the other, dealt with indigenous issues. Thus, the law established that ministries and state departments must extend their co-operation to the INI wherever necessary for the fulfilment of its objectives.

Creation of the INI was a major move to further enforce the policy of assimilating the indigenous peoples into the Mexican society. The INI became the main force behind ethno-development promoting indigenous participation in the national life. The INI defined its mandate as promoting self-reliance and self-management of the indigenous

communities. These ends were pursued by developing four main work areas: production, social welfare, training and advisory services, and fostering cultural heritage. Thus the INI is an organisation that helps prepare the indigenous peoples to be easily incorporated in the national mainstream.[7]

In 1963, the INI became a branch of the *Secretaría de Educación Pública* (Department of Public Education). This helped it to improve its resources. From 1970-1982, the INI, under its director Dr. Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán (1908-1996), expanded its activities. Fifty-eight new centres were formed between 1970 and 1976 at the ratio of ten per year. Between 1976 and 1982, realising that the situation of the indigenous peoples was that of marginalisation, the *Coordinación General del Plan Nacional de Zonas Deprimidas y Grupos Marginados* (COPLAMAR - General Co-ordination of the National Plan of Deprived Zones and Marginalised Groups) was created. This period saw the construction of bridges, roads, clinics, and rural shops in areas inhabited by the indigenous. In 1992, the INI became a part of the *Secretaría de Desarrollo Social* (SEDESOL - Department of

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7 Donna Lee Van Cott, ed., *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America* (New York., 1994), pp.195-196.

Social Development) as policies of economic liberalisation made the government formulate new programmes of social safety for those adversely affected by new economic programmes.

The INI headquarter is located in the Federal District but the Institute has twenty-three delegations in different states having a significant indigenous population. Besides it has 110 Co-ordinating Centres; a network of 16 radio stations; 1080 schools for indigenous children; 3 video-centres and one rural hospital. The INI headquarter consists of an elaborate administration and other specialised agencies.[8]

The apex board of the Institute is represented by the federal ministries and state departments, which are in some way or the other

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[8] Organisational Set-up:

- Board of the Institute
- Director
- Sub-Director
- Secretary-Treasurer
- Technical Directors separately for Economic Promotion, Social Medicine, Roads, Agriculture, Planning and Architecture, Education, Publication, Legal Affairs and for Land, Forests and Water.
- Administrative Office
- Directors of the Co-ordinating Centres numbering about 110
- Department of Roads, Education, Agriculture, Health, Justice and Anthropology

associated with the problems and needs of the indigenous communities.[9] Other members also include institutions, such as the universities and the polytechnics, which are in charge of training the personnel responsible for the *indigenista* action.

The different departments in the Institute reflect the diverse functions of the Institute. The INI does not solely focus on the cultural aspects of the indigenous peoples but also deals with problems of economic development, roads, agriculture, planning, land, forests and water.[10]

The most important components of the INI are its co-ordinating centres. Created through presidential decrees, these centres are located in different regions and co-ordinate the various activities of the different administrative agencies that work in these regions. The co-ordinating centres consists of offices, clinics, equipment, camps, etc., which carry out agricultural, agrarian, sanitary, economic activities and activities of legal

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[9] Ministries of Education, Health, Social Development, Agrarian Reform, and Communication and Transport, Office of the Agrarian Comptroller, Ecology Institute, National Commission for Human Rights, National Institute of Anthropology and History.

[10] Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán and others, n.4, pp. 195-225.

assistance and defence. The action of these centres is integral. All the activities carried out are done so with the support from each other. Considering the nature of the population whom they are catering, it is incumbent that integral action is executed taking into consideration the lifestyles, beliefs, values that are followed in a particular region and by specific communities.

As the official government agency for indigenous affairs, INI co-ordinates or at least has a significant impact on the co-ordination of more than three thousand first-tier indigenous organisations. Its *indigenista* actions are implemented through other official entities whose jurisdiction includes issues related to the indigenous communities. Among the most important ones are: the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agrarian Reform, the Office of the Agrarian Comptroller, the Institute of Ecology, Ministry of Social Development, the National Commission for Human Rights and the National Institute of Anthropology and History. Where there are specialised units for addressing indigenous issues, the INI co-ordinates its work through co-operation agreements.

The projects that the INI carries out promote direct participation of indigenous peoples, involves non-governmental organisations, and civil society in actions, act with a view to improve the living conditions of Mexican ethnic groups.

INI: Functions and Role

The INI was created not to define the Indian and isolate him but to help integrate him or, at least, include him into the national life. It functions therefore with the following objectives:

- researching the problems related to the indigenous peoples;
- finding out means of improving their situation and seeking approval of these means from the federal executive, that is, the office of the federal president;
- helping in the promotion of these means and co-ordinating the actions of the concerned government organisations; and
- acting as a consulting organisation for governmental and non-governmental organisations. The INI also undertakes any work assigned by the president of the country.[11]

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11 Alfonso Caso, *La Comunidad Indígena* (Mexico, 1971), pp. 197-98.

The most important function of the INI is the integration of the indigenous groups, who conserve their own identity, into the core of the Mexican society. The INI aims to achieve this change by elevating their living conditions and reaching a level of inequality in order to make these groups a part of the national community.

From its inception in 1948 through the 1970s, the INI, as a major state institution charged with overseeing projects intended to implement social change in indigenous villages, promoted Spanish language education, vaccination programmes, "modern" farming techniques, and closer commercial ties of Indian communities with *mestizo* towns. The underlying rationale for such a policy came directly from the then dominant, but at the same time highly criticised, modernisation theory of development. Exponents of modernisation theory argued that the indigenous are poor because they are backward and tradition-bound, and what they need therefore is to become more like 'modern' people. Ironically, the question of the Indians also suffered at the hands of many of the critics who advanced the view that the problem of Indians is mainly

part of the agrarian problem, including the prevalence of large landholdings in Mexico.

Policy Changes and Innovations in the 1970s and the 1980s

In time with the changing perception that now advocated multiculturalism, INI since the mid-1970s began responding to criticisms, among others, to its earlier programmes that they were not only paternalistic but promoted internal colonialism in the interest of advancing capitalism in Mexico. An offshoot of *dependencia* writings, many Mexican sociologists, including Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, were looking at the economic context of the indigenous from the perspective wherein urban and industrial centres such as Mexico City and Monterrey kept the rural hinterland with its subsistence economy tied in a dependent manner. The INI has importantly since then begun to emphasise bilingual education and bilingual media; to promote projects to bring drinking water and irrigation facilities to villages in order to help indigenous communities to become self-sufficient; and to subsidise grain, fertilisers and pesticides. Nonetheless, indigenous persons and other critics continued to allege that these changes are cosmetic; besides corruption

and paternalism continue to characterise the INI.[12] But that is another matter not of immediate interest in the present context.

Critics have argued that most of all, INI has not solved the problem of the vulnerability of the Indian to the modernising and industrialising capitalist economy of Mexico. INI has also been criticised for using the plea of integration as a means of providing cheap labour to commercial agricultural sector. Encouraged by the INI, the Indian comes out of the traditional community only to be exploited by the large firms or farms as he is drawn towards the semi-proletarian or informal sector forms of production which are subordinate parts of the overall industrialising capitalist mode.

Besides, in response to some of the perceived failures of INI, Indian communities, independent of government organisation, had also begun forming a network linking their voluntary protest actions across the country. From the 1970s there has been a growing display of indigenous

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12 Carole Nagengast and Michael Kearney, "Mixtec Ethnicity: Social Identity, Political Consciousness, and Political Activism", in *Latin American Research Review* (Albuquerque, N.M.), vol. 25, no. 2 (1990), p. 68.

consciousness, which in the 1980s and 1990s formed the basis of other socio-political action.[13] Chiapas uprising in 1994, for instance, was in the making for more than a decade in response to exploitative conditions prevailing among the Indians and failure of the INI and other government programmes to reach them.

During the regime of José López Portillo (1976-1982), in response to increasing criticism but equally responding to growing militancy among the indigenous, the Mexican government's indigenous affairs department, the INI, proclaimed a new policy of indigenous "participation" called as *indigenismo de participación*. It is besides the point that nothing much changed in the way the government bureaucracy handled its relations with indigenous peoples. However what is noteworthy is that it was a feeble response of the government to growing consciousness and mobilisation among the Indians.

During the ensuing years of the seventies and eighties, a feverish process of organisation and mobilisation had resulted in the emergence of numerous local level indigenous associations as well as their efforts at

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[13] Tessa Cubitt, *Latin American Society* (Essex, 1988), pp. 72-73.

regional and national articulation. Some of these were short-lived, others went through numerous phases and transformations; still, some survived into the nineties. The *Consejo Nacional de Pueblos Indigena* (CNPI - National Council of Indigenous Peoples) was created by the government in 1975. But when the members began to question the policies that directly affected the indigenous communities it was soon declared a militant indigenous organisation and suppressed by the state apparatus. As the CNPI was weakened by the state, the first national assembly representing the independent peasant organisations led to the formation of *Coordinadora Nacional Plan de Ayala* (CNPA - "Plan de Ayala" National Coordinating Body) as the new organisational base of *indianismo* in 1979.

In the 1980s following a pronounced change in official policy in Mexico, declaring that Indians should be integrated into national development process, but not at the expense of their cultural identity, attempts by some well meaning INI official to foster cultural preservation were made. The problem with most of these programmes however remains that of implementation. Policies for the Indians often directly affect landowners, ranchers, and local bosses of the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI - Revolutionary Institutional Party). As a

result, several of the important federal decisions and initiatives have often remained blocked at the state level by governors belonging to the PRI.[14]

The INI, however, has continued with its modest and limited efforts to improve upon its activities concentrating on the following programmes: cultural promotion and research, production support, school shelters, and justice.[15]

The INI, through its programme of *Difusión del Patrimonio Cultural de los Pueblos Indígenas* (Indigenous Peoples' Patrimony), is also engaged in publicising the diverse cultural practices typical of the many indigenous communities living in Mexico in order to enhance their value and to promote respect for their lifestyles. This is being done by means of editing and publishing books and brochures, placing billboards, organising meetings, exhibitions, conferences and seminars, etc.; as well as through activities related to the preservation of the cultures of the indigenous

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[14] Douglas W. Payne, "Between Hope and History: Mexico's Indians Refuse to Disappear", *Dissent* (New York), Summer 1996, p. 64.

[15] *Instituto Nacional Indigenista,*
URL: http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/html2/ini/iini.htm

peoples such as filming videos programmes and documentary movies. Since 1996, the Institute has also taken upon itself the task of organising a specialised system of information and documentation, which gives precise and detailed information about the living conditions, and the cultural characteristics of the different ethnic groups in the country. The system has seven different types of library services: books, maps, photographs, movies, videos, and the indigenous and popular art library.

The *Archivo Etnográfico Audiovisual* (Audio-Visual Ethnic Files), created by INI in 1977, contain basic material on the history of the indigenous peoples for producing documentaries, as well as reproducing, editing, safeguarding, classifying and spreading the related material. The production of documentaries is done with the support and supervision of traditional authorities of the indigenous communities themselves. During the last twenty years, the Institute's *Centro de Producciones Audiovisuales* (Centre for the Production of Audio-visual Material) has become the most important archival source of material on the indigenous peoples in Mexico.

The *Centro de Producción Musical Indígena* (CPMI - Indigenous Musical Production Centre) is in charge of registering and recording musical testimonies and oral knowledge of the indigenous peoples. The CPMI creates soundtracks and written documents oriented towards the continuance of the music and dances of the different indigenous communities in different regions of Mexico for posterity. The Centre is attended by qualified personnel who are experts in the areas of anthropology, music, audio and ethno-musicology. They are supported by several offices of the Institute such as state delegations, co-ordinating centres, indigenous broadcasters, and, most of all, music and dance organisations of the indigenous communities and the artisans who build musical instruments. The CPMI helps to register the music of indigenous peoples.

For the last eighteen years, the *Sistema de Radiodifusoras Culturales Indigenistas* (SRCI - Indigenous Broadcasting System) has been working and providing varied services like communications, information, and promotion of indigenous cultures and traditions. The broadcasting services promote health, productive activities, education and justice,

among others social issues, paying special attention to the musical activities of each region. The broadcasting stations are run by radio announcers, producers and local researchers who are mostly indigenous themselves. With the cooperation of several indigenous organisations and communities in 1996, sixteen radio stations in fourteen states with a duration of 53,736 broadcasting hours and in as many as thirty indigenous languages were able to reach about 4,000,00 indigenous persons and 3,000,000 *mestizos* in rural areas and small towns.

In 1995 the Institute started a research programme for creating databases on the existing economic and social conditions of indigenous communities living in the country. INI analyses the compiled data obtained from specific projects, and highlights the typical features of the cultures and economy of the indigenous communities. The main activities and themes covered through the database programme include analyses pertaining to the indigenous demography, patterns of migration and immigration, ecology, health, education, the situation of indigenous women and children, technology, crafts production, music and dance. Also there is an ongoing analysis of the structural violence perpetrated

against them as well as studies about issues of indigenous rights, self-determination, employment and productivity.

The statistical data regarding the socio-economic condition of the indigenous population ostensibly helps the government to focus its welfare programmes at the national, state, regional and sectarian levels as per their needs.

The *Fondo de Cultura Indígena* (Cultural Indigenous Fund) - yet another INI-related activity - gives financial aid and consultancy services in a great number of fields, such as compilation of indigenous history, their written and oral languages, preservation of their sacred places and historic sites, development of dance and music, radio transmissions, video and photographic production, craftsmanship, traditional medicines and techniques on the use of the natural resources. The objectives are to contribute to a wider knowledge of the communities and their cultures; strengthen and develop various forms of indigenous cultural expressions; and promote cultural innovations within their own cultural framework.

Each year, indigenous communities are invited to show the cultural projects sponsored by the INI and other governmental agencies. In these programmes, resources are delivered to the communities, which are used by the community to develop and fulfil the specific cultural objectives. In 1996, as many as 916 projects were promoted to the benefit of 44,117 persons.

The INI also provides production aid to the indigenous peoples in the form of two programmes, namely *Programa de Agroecología Productiva* (Agro-ecology Programme) and the *Fondos Regionales para Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indigenas* (Regional Funds for the Development of the Indigenous Towns). The Agro-ecology programme helps to generate the sustainable management of their natural resources; strengthen the indigenous social organisation by considering the local environment through sustainable development criteria; promote, qualify and give technical assistance in the use of organic materials and alternative technology in order to make the productive processes more efficient and profitable; and importantly rescue endangered genetic material, which are of interest to the indigenous communities, and eventually to promote the increasing existence of genetic banks.

Since 1989, the strategy of transferring responsibility to the indigenous communities under the Solidarity programme was formulated with a view to promote the community's participation in managing their own affairs. Several projects have been created and are taken care of by the indigenous organisations and communities themselves. In these various programmes, the federal and state government offices and the higher education institutions are supposed to act in co-operation with the INI. The tasks that have been done up to the present, it is claimed, have allowed some improvement of the living conditions of the indigenous communities and the strengthening of the community structures. In 1996 the projects had reportedly covered ten federal states with a total of twenty-seven projects.

Another important programme, INI has taken to is the creation of *Albergues Escolares Indígenas* (Indigenous School Shelters), whose purposes are to facilitate the access and completion of elementary education for indigenous children who have otherwise no access to regular school services. Furthermore, the school programme also aims at improving their nutritional levels. It also offers the opportunity to bilingual indigenous

youngsters of going to junior high or high school. The programme is coordinated through a community assembly, which is in charge of supervising, and participating in the use of the resources destined for the indigenous school shelters. Each indigenous coordinating centre has a Technical Committee composed of traditional indigenous authorities, representatives of the *Dirección General de Educación Indígena* (Indigenous Education General Bureau) and personnel from the INI. The Technical Committee grants scholarships and supervises the money that is being paid. Today the INI has 1,080 shelters in which 57,856 students with scholarships are taken care of. The INI renovates and maintains the shelters as well as furnishes, making them worth living in. The working arrangements are co-ordinated by a support committee as well as the parents. They all supervise the management and utilisation of the resources. 203 such shelters were repaired and 323 were equipped in 1996.

The *Programa de Defensoría de Presos Indígenas* (Programme for Defending Human Rights of Indigenous Inmates) provides for executing direct judicial defence in cases of the so-called cultural conflicts. The programme is attended by political parties and non-governmental organisations along with 23 states that have formal representation in the

Institute. In 1996, with the legal aid provided by INI, 14,400 indigenous convicts were freed from the 442 prisons of the country.

Another programme of the INI is the *Programa Nacional de Apoyo al Registro Civil para la Población Indígena* (National Civil Registry Programme for the Indigenous Populations). The guiding principle of the INI is the absolute respect for the fundamental rights of the indigenous population, as established by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and guaranteed by the Mexican Constitution.

The programme operates permanently in indigenous communities of twenty-two states and in the metropolitan area of Mexico City. The programme works with the help of brigades and special attention modules located in the offices of the Institute, as well as through the indigenous coordination centres. The special teams explain the importance of the civil registry and their requirements and co-ordinate with the civil registry offices and other institutions and organisations operating in different regions. 16,968 registers were obtained in twenty-two states and the metropolitan area of Mexico City in the year 1996.

Therefore it can be seen that the INI's mission associated with the integrationist ideology called *indigenismo* has resulted mainly in the compilation of ethnographic data, the 'preservation' of Indian languages and 'culture' in the form of arts, crafts, music, dance, etc., extension of health services and grade school education, and the promotion of 'economic development' (within the Mexican economy) in the 'indigenous zones'.

While the INI's budget has never been sufficient for implementing these wide-ranging given tasks, surprisingly its mandate has never included even the discussion of Indian control of land, natural resources, local economic institutions, local political organisations, or local systems of justice. This has brought a severe criticism of the INI to the effect that its function and role are more cosmetic; many of its modest objectives remain unimplemented for want of resources or on account of political interference, and, above all, that INI remained an instrument to promote the official integrationist agenda.

The Indigenous peoples have been commonly regarded as nothing more than 'ethno-linguistic groups'. The INI is an institution with limited powers answerable to other state departments. It stands always in a position of abject subordination in relation to other agencies especially the Secretariat of Agrarian Reform that have the greater ability to determine the course of Indian destiny.

Many Mexicans do not view the official policy of the Institute favourably. To the extent that exploitation of Indian groups has been curtailed and their property, and social and political rights protected, many Mexicans are bitterly opposed to the Institute's operation. These opponents include among others *mestizo* peasants who have squatted on Indian lands, commercial farmers and others who have exploited the Indians as cheap sources of labour, the hoards of entrepreneurs and middlemen who have lived off the Indian labour, and commercial lumbering interests seeking unrestricted access to Indian controlled forest resources, and no less politicians and bureaucrats who view them as recalcitrant and troublesome clienteles. [16]

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[16] Ralph L. Beals, n. 1, p. 766.

The INI has in all its endeavours served to tie Indians more closely to the national economy. But at the same time it has not only not been able to stop but also has been accused of masking and legitimising the exploitation and subordination of Indians carried out by *caciques, neolatifundistas,* merchants, moneylenders, migrant-labour recruiters, agribusiness henchmen, and private or state factory and workshop owners.[17]

At a more ideological level, the state and Institute's policies have been attacked because they have not been completely effective, despite limitations of funds and political pressures. They have been condemned for their failure to terminate 'internal colonialism.' Also their efforts to conserve Indian communities and local cultures have only led to the perpetuation of Indian marginality. In fact, at present levels of education and political consciousness assimilation will only lead to the

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[17] Marcela Lagarde points out that INI programmes are "directed and planned by anthropologists who claim to be for the Indian, but whose aim is that he ceases to be one", while anthropologists Ricardo Pozas and Isabel H. Pozas assess the "true content" of *indigenismo* as being that of "expediting the exploitation of those human conglomerates most easily exploitable". James D. Cockcroft, *Mexico: Class Formation, Capital Accumulation and the State* (New York, 1983), p.148.

disappearance of the Indian into the lowest economic and social levels of the Mexican *mestizo* society.[18]

The INI's principal stated objectives of "self development" and "self management" for the indigenous communities have been drowned in the flood of official *indigenista* rhetoric over the years transforming them into unattainable dreams. These objectives reiterated during the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), which encouraged grassroot participation during the implementation of the policies of social safety called Solidarity project. However, president Salinas' proclaimed ideology of "social liberalism" was only part and parcel of a larger vision of economic liberalisation as we shall see in the next chapter, with even more devastating consequences for the indigenous.

Carrying the discussion and analyses of the varied issues forward, the next chapter deals with the policy changes of the 1980s and 1990s. It is divided into three sections. The first section describes the constitutional changes that allowed the government of president Salinas to formulate

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[18] "Commentary: Maya Self-Determination in Chiapas", in *Fourth World Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 2, April 1994
(URL: http://www.cudenver.edu/public/fwc/Issue7/commentary-1.html).

new policies for the agricultural sector in tune with his policies of economic liberalisation and pursuit of a free trade agreement with US. The second section describes the enunciation of the policy of multiculturalism, and the changes that were made in the cultural and educational policies for the indigenous. How the INI came to adjust itself to the change from a state-led nationalistic development to a free-market economic growth strategy is described and discussed in the last section.

CHAPTER III

ECONOMIC LIBERALISATION AND MULTICULTURALISM: POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

The preceding two chapters have covered a good and long ground describing the treatment and status of the indigenous population of Mexico well into the 1980s. The policies and perception of the post-Revolutionary governments have also been highlighted in details. Particularly, the role of the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI) in ameliorating the social and cultural conditions of the indigenous and their integration with the *mestizo*-dominated national mainstream has been presented in details in the second chapter.

The present Chapter presents the policy changes witnessed in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly policies of economic liberalisation that made the government of president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) effect changes in the agrarian and landholding system of Mexico. The section dealing with these policy changes highlights particularly their implications for the indigenous *campesinos*. The second section of

the Chapter deals with the meaning and implications for the indigenous of Salinas's policy to declare and pursue policies of multiculturalism.

Amidst these transformative changes in the economic and socio-cultural policies of the government, the role of the INI also assumed a new significance. To offset the negative consequences of liberal economic policies, Salinas had instituted the social safety programme called Solidarity. The INI became the mechanism to provide Solidarity-related funds and services to the indigenous communities at a time when its own traditional mandate and role had declined. A separate section looks into the activities of the INI in the milieu of economic liberalisation and official policy of multiculturalism.

The relationship between the indigenous peasant communities and the State began changing radically in the 1980s. Because of the economic crisis following Mexico's 1982 declaration that it could not pay its foreign debt, the government began a period of fiscal austerity that resulted in the curtailment of public works projects, health and education services, and programmes to subsidise increasingly

unprofitable agriculture. The rural poor suffered the most; although in the most remote and heavily indigenised areas these benefits had never reached indigenous communities. At the same time, since the 1970s, the discovery of oil and the emergence of alternative industries had anyway reduced the importance of agriculture to the Mexican economy leading many to leave the agriculture sector. This had begun causing a surplus of off-farm day labour (exacerbated in Chiapas by the arrival of tens of thousands of Guatemalan refugees) while a decline in international agricultural prices made less efficient rain-fed plots unviable. Indians were not able to find occasional labour to supplement declining *ejido* (communally owned) incomes. Thus, the indigenous peasant was converted from an important partner in the national economy to a burden on it. Taking office in 1988, president Carlos Salinas de Gortari continued as a matter of policy the removal of the agrarian safety net that had begun initially as a requirement of austerity. It set out to dismantle peasant agricultural supports and rewrite the constitutional relationship between the peasants and the state. This was part of the new development strategy on free play of the market forces. Salinas paced the process of structural adjustments as Mexico moved rapidly towards a free trade agreement with US. The

impact of the combination of integration with the international economy and the Mexican agricultural reform on *campesinos* was devastating, particularly for coffee growers in Chiapas.[1]

The beginning of Salinas' tenure (1988-1994) saw the introduction of new policies introducing changes in the industrial, agricultural, and social spheres, which culminated in constitutional changes - amendments to Articles 4 and 27 in the Mexican Constitution - by the Salinas administration. These changes it was hoped would help to accelerate the process of adapting the country's economic and financial structures to the demands of the international forces, in accordance with the neo-liberal policies of the state.

The first initiative is meritorious in so far as it amounts to constitutional recognition of the country's multiethnic character, including the indigenous peoples in this pluralism. The second initiative is part of a broader process of privatisation of finance and industry and

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1 Donna Lee Van Cott, "Defiant Again: Indigenous Peoples and Latin American Security", *Mcnair Paper no. 53*, Oct. 1996, (URL: http://www.ndu.edu/ndu/inss/macnair/macnair53/m53cont.html).

modernisation of agriculture. The economic justification is based on two key facts. First, Mexico is a net importer of agricultural goods reaching the extreme of having to import bean and corn to meet the growing demand. Second, communities and *ejidos* control fifty per cent of lands suitable for agriculture. The latter based on the system of collective property, control forty per cent of the agricultural lands and on an average are thirty per cent to fifty per cent less productive than their equivalents under the system of private property.

The profound changes in the economy and society were to have a deleterious effect on the working class, small peasantry and other sections of the dominated and deprived populations importantly the indigenous. To compensate for the effect of further marginalisation of the poorest during this period of change the Salinas administration had introduced many antipoverty programmes with massive state funding to support the poor peasants, indigenous peoples and the urban poor.

Constitutional Amendments and Changes in the Agrarian Structure

The government of Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976) had, in accordance with its goal of 'shared development', established the *Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares* (CONASUPO - National Company of Subsidised Staple Products) to fulfil three major objectives: to regulate the market prices for basic commodities; to increase income for poor farmers; and to ensure the availability of basic goods to low-income consumers particularly in the urban areas. This was followed by the establishment of the *Sistema Alimentario Mexicano* (SAM – Mexican Food System), which intended to reduce the country's dependence on food imports from the United States and restore self-sufficiency in basic staples.

The multi-million dollar state food agency, CONASUPO bought crops from the peasants at decent prices and sold these agricultural products from the nation's granary directly to transnational corporations. CONASUPO's retail outlets also distributed the basic foods to some 19 million undernourished Mexicans at low purchase prices. The consumer subsidies for basic foods in order to improve the nutrition of the poor

were financed by the petrodollars that had begun flowing in around the mid-1970s.

SAM was more ambitious and expensive a plan, costing nearly $4 billion in 1980 alone. The strategy formulated by president José López Portillo (1976-1982) was to channel income from the ever-rising oil exports of the late 1970s into the countryside through agencies, which offered credit to the *ejidatarios* for the production of basic grains. 'Sowing the petroleum' was the stated slogan.[2] Exceptionally good weather yielded a bumper crop in 1981, and grain production was thirty per cent higher than in the drought year of 1979. Officials claimed instant success for SAM. Others greeted the dry spells in 1982 and 1983 with a sense of deep foreboding.

The incoming administration of president Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988) was faced with huge fiscal imbalances, unsympathetic creditor banks, an alienated private sector and heavy

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2 Peter H. Smith, "Mexico Since 1946", in Leslie Bethell, ed., *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, vol. VII (Cambridge, 1984), p. 139.

international debts that forced the government to introduce harsh austerity measures with the goal of drastically reducing domestic spending. As a result of the debt crisis and failing austerity measures, the de la Madrid administration had to abolish SAM in 1982 and replace it with a modest food production programme. In mid-1985 the government followed it up with the so-called national programme of integral rural development, which made provisions for little more than inflationary adjustments in the guaranteed price for basic commodities importantly corn, beans, wheat and some infrastructural investments in rain-fed areas. The emphasis was on increasing production and not distribution. The continuing economic difficulties had by mid-1985 forced the de la Madrid government to cut back the role of CONASUPO.

In short by late 1980s, Mexico's agricultural sector represented a dismal scenario. While the production of staple food continued to decline, under the austerity measures subsidies to small producers and consumers were also withdrawn; besides fiscal deficits of the government forced it to wind up programmes and agencies that intended to restore self-sufficiency in the production of staple foods.

President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), determined to set Mexico on the path of free market economy, accelerated the process of economic liberalisation and privatisation. State-owned firms were auctioned, trade and investments were liberalised and all subsidies and social security measures were removed. Withdrawal of support to the agricultural sector, including those producing staple crops, was deemed necessary as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), that his regime had been negotiating with the United States since 1989. Admittedly, these changes had even more profound an impact on an already depressed agricultural sector.

There has been a series of changes in agricultural policies since 1989. Important of these include the elimination of guaranteed prices for basic products with the exception of maize and beans; elimination of CONASUPO and other state enterprises that formerly regulated and commercialised agricultural products such as the *Insituto Mexicano del Café* (INMECAFE - Mexican Institute of Coffee Production), and *Tabaco Mexicano* (TABAMEX - Mexican Tobacco).

INMECAFE, a state agency established in 1958 to carry out research and provide technical support, was expanded in 1973 during Echeverría's regime to play a more central role in organising and financing coffee production as well as guaranteeing the purchase and export of the harvest. With the economic crisis of the 1980s the position of INMECAFE declined and it withdrew from purchasing and marketing and reduced its provision of technical assistance as the Salinas government began the process of privatisation. In the absence of INMECAFE, marketing costs had to be absorbed by the producers themselves or through the middlemen who resurfaced during the period. With no immediate support programmes and increasing financial constraints of credit and debts thousands of small growers abandoned production between 1989 and 1993. The principal coffee producing state, Chiapas, was the most affected, and large number of small coffee producers who were largely Indians lost their lifetime gains.

As stated, most negatively affected were the indigenous *ejidatarios* that had in the past enjoyed some support from government institutions and had shown their enterprise in switching over to cash crops. These producers saw their incomes decrease rapidly; since they did not fit the

new requirements for formal loans and credit, yet continued to cultivate crops that were formerly subsidised. The results were loss of income, increased indebtedness to private lenders and intermediaries who began charging exorbitant interest rates far above that charged by former credit mechanisms and government.

By late 1980s, the writing was on the wall. Indebted small indigenous peasants and *ejidatarios* had begun abandoning their lands in search of employment on ranches, or migrating to the towns and cities. Large numbers of them began moving into forest areas to supplement their incomes. Amidst all this adjacent farms and cattle ranches began eyeing and encroaching upon the fallow lands with the connivance of local administration and ruling party bosses. In brief, the economic crisis of the 1980s and changes introduced in the agricultural sector had the effect of re-concentration of lands nullifying in many cases the gains of land distributions of the past seventy years.

The transition to free market economy in rural Mexico has been governed by macro economic decisions, which are far removed from the realities of the *campesinos* who are reeling under the impact of the fall in

grain prices with the removal of import licences and flooding of the market with the cheap imported grains. In July 1985, the government had substantially reduced import-licensing requirements and raised the share of total imports exempt from any licensing requirements. An elaborate system of import licensing with direct control over the imports had provided a major protection to the Mexican economy. Under the licensing system, the fact that a product could be produced domestically was reason enough to suspend the importation of the competing item. However, domestic producers had to face import competition if they could not manage to market their products at a reasonable price within a reasonable period of time. Under Salinas all this was gone. Besides, the new credit policies of the government had made peasants and *ejidos* ineligible for loans.

As part of its overall agricultural programme, the Salinas administration also restructured *Banrural* (*Banco Nacional de Crédito Rural* or National Rural Credit Bank). To make it more efficient and profit-oriented its scope was limited to serving only those *ejidatarios* who had production capabilities.

In accordance with its social liberal policies and to offset the criticism that liberal economic policies are bypassing the poor and vulnerable sections of the society, the Salinas government instituted a number of programmes. The government responded with a much talked about support programme for the Mexican farm sector in the form of *Programa Nacional de Apoyos directos al Campo* (PROCAMPO - Programme of Direct Rural Support). The *Secretaria de Agricultura y Recursos Hidraúlicos* (SARH - Department of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources) announced that PROCAMPO intended to assist the more marginal producers in dealing with and adjusting to the agricultural transformation. PROCAMPO was established in 1993 as part of the larger PRONASOL initiative.[3]

PRONASOL (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad* or the National Solidarity Programme) had reported that fifty-one per cent of the population in 1987 had fallen below the poverty line.[4] Salinas designed

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[3] Merrill, Tim L. and Miró, Ramón, eds., *Mexico, a Country Study,* (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/mxtoc.html, June 1996)

[4] Mexican author Julieta Campos asserted that approximately sixty per cent of all Mexicans were poor, including twenty-five per cent indigent. Tim L. Merrill and Ramón Miró, eds., *Mexico, a Country Study,* (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/mxtoc.html,, 1996).

PRONASOL to achieve the dual objective of making social spending more cost-effective and fostering greater community involvement and initiative in local development projects. PRONASOL was supposed to give a humane face to the market-oriented policies. It intended to provide directly to the communities by bypassing the government machinery.

PROCAMPO replaced the current price supports for basic grains with direct cash payments of about 12 billion pesos. It marked the abandonment of the Mexico's traditional policy of agricultural self-sufficiency in favour of a more market oriented system in which individual producers rather than government bureaucrats could make basic production decisions. Initial beneficiaries of PROCAMPO included some 3.3 million growers of corn, beans, sorghum, wheat, soybeans, and cotton, who together occupied and accounted for seventy per cent of Mexico's arable land. Barley and safflower producers were added to the programme in the autumn of 1994.

The most important compensatory mechanism after this major policy change has been, through PROCAMPO, the substitution of subsidies with direct payment to the producers calculated on the basis of

area under basic grain production. In order to gradually ease CONASUPO's demise, SARH also founded in 1991 another institution called the *Apoyos y Servicios a la Comercialización Agropecuaria* (ASERCA - Support and Services for Agricultural Marketing). The ASERCA has been vested with the responsibility of providing support and services for agricultural marketing but without direct intervention in the buying and selling as CONASUPO had done earlier. Today PROCAMPO advances small loans ranging from 500 to 2000 pesos and works directly with the communities. Experience has shown that in the indigenous regions a modest but continuous level of credit availability and financing can result in sustainable and self-financing development processes because the majority of the indigenous municipalities already have the resources, knowledge and the will to continue their development.

However the problem lay in the limitation of most programmes to a six-year period tied to political administration and characteristically lacking in continuity. This has a negative impact on the efforts of the producers to sustain modest but continuous levels of production. Starting in 1995, the PROCAMPO support is to gradually decline over a fifteen-year period till 2008 giving farmers adequate time to adopt to new

technologies, develop producer associations with other farmers or private agri-business firms, and rationalise land use and encourage change from programme crops to alternative crops or livestock, forestry, ecological, and aquaculture activities throughout the fifteen-year phase-out period. Worse, PROCAMPO has also suffered from corruption, political favouritism and diversion of its meagre resources towards financing cattle ranchers and big farmers.

During 1995, a new agricultural support programme called *Alianza para el Campo* (Alliance for the Countryside) was introduced to reinforce the agricultural support activities by empowering the state governments. The new programme also serves to improve credit to farmers from *Banrural* and other state-level agencies.

The most disputed of all Salinas' rural reforms was the decision to modify Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution. Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution has formed the basis of all agrarian reforms over the past 70 years. By 1991 there were a total of 29,951 *ejidos* and *communidad agrarias* in Mexico, representing half of the country's land surface and 3.5 million

families or 20 million people, equivalent to a quarter of the country's population.[5]

Despite the collectivist efforts of Echeverría and to a much lesser extent, López Portillo, a national survey released at the beginning of the Salinas' presidency revealed that approximately eighty-eight per cent of *ejidatarios* and *communeros* farmed individual *parcelas*. (Government statistics did not differentiate between *ejidos* and agrarian communities.) Mexico's post-1940 population explosion produced a continual subdivision of most *parcelas*, parcels of land, resulting in a very large number of holdings that were below the subsistence level. According to the 1981 agricultural census, nearly thirty per cent of all *ejidatarios* till *parcelas* of two hectares or less, far below the amount of land required to support a family. Another twenty-seven per cent maintained holdings ranging from two to five hectares with another thirty-eight per cent farming *parcelas*, of between five and twenty hectares. Only less than three

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[5] Neil Harvey, "Rebellion in the Chiapas: Rural Reforms and Popular Struggle", *Third World Quarterly* (Oxfordshire), vol. 16, no.1, 1995, p.49.

per cent of *ejidatarios* held individual plots of between twenty and fifty hectares.[6]

Data from the 1981 agricultural census on private landholding patterns revealed an even more stratified picture. Nearly forty per cent of all private (non-*ejido*) farmers held plots of two hectares or less, with an additional seventeen per cent working plots of between two and five hectares. Together these two groups have only two per cent of the privately owned land. Two per cent of all landholders continue to control sixty-three per cent of the privately owned land. Holdings exceeding 2,500 hectares were particularly in evidence in the north especially in Chihuahua and Sonora and in Chiapas in the south. Such heavy concentration of land on the one hand and the rise of subsistence peasant activity on the other hand has exposed the hollowness of the much-touted land reforms of the past several decades.

With plots too small to support even a modest standard of living, with changes in the agricultural sector farming became a secondary source

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[6] Tim L. Merrill and Miró, Ramón, n.3.

of income for most *campesinos*. Many had been forced to work as day labourers for large landholders. The 1981 agricultural census recorded approximately 3 million farm labourers, sixty per cent of them temporary. *Ejidatarios* in effect have formed a cheap and easily available labour pool for commercial agriculture who, in addition, have been, before 1992, illegally renting out *ejido* land to supplement their income. Also, regular migration to the United States has enabled many *campesinos* to send remittances on which their families, remaining in the countryside, exist. Many of the young *campesinos* spend the bulk of the year working in the United States returning to their plots only during the planting and harvesting seasons.

Ejidatarios have remained highly dependent on the bureaucratic channels of both the state and the ruling PRI. All *ejidatarios* are automatically members of the peasant sector of the PRI but lack political experience to advance their independent demands. They continue to look to the state as a modern patron who has the power to control prices, credit opportunities, and access to farm machinery and water rights and who must be continuously courted and reminded of their pressing needs.[7]

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[7] Ibid.

Amendment of Article 27 was added to the Mexican constitution. Its purpose was ostensibly to modernise the Mexican economy through a process of privatising the traditional *ejido* communal land system, which is primarily controlled by Indians. Changes in Article 27 not only permitted Mexican and foreign enterprises to buy *ejidal* lands, it more importantly began a process of excluding indigenous communities and small producers from the market economy; much contrary to its avowed goal. Once alienation of *ejidal* lands was permitted it allowed the formation of large private estates including the entry of foreign corporations in the agricultural sector.

The Salinas government had determined that the *ejidal* communal land system is inefficient and is hindering Mexico's modernisation process. The individualised production on small *ejido* plots, which formerly allowed the indigenous people to carry on their distinctive cultures, was no more viable in an integrated world market. Neo-liberal policies, having removed the subsidies that promoted the entry for indigenous producers in commercial enterprises in the past, now worked to exclude the indigenous from the mainstream economy; and depress them to a more marginalized status. Indian economies are not and were

not economically closed. The majority of Indians enter into economic and social relationships with *ladinos* at the level of commercial activity and not at the level of wage labour. True, they have formed the weakest link of the national economy but have worked hard for independent status. The Indian as a small producer, small seller, small buyer, and finally small consumer, can influence neither prices nor market tendencies.[8] But this is not to deny his capabilities and his achievements to stand up to an alien and hostile economic environment.

Confronted with what has been described as the dysfunctional nature of Mexican agriculture, the government in 1992 by amending Article 27 radically changed the *ejido* land tenure system, codifying some existing actions that were illegal but widely practised and introducing several new features. Under the new law, an *ejido* can award its members individual titles to the land, not merely usufruct rights to their *parcelas*. *Ejidatarios* can, in turn, choose to rent, sell, or mortgage their properties. *Ejidatarios* do not any longer need to work their lands to maintain ownership over them. They also may enter into partnerships with private

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[8] Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Classes, Colonialism, and Acculturation", in Irving Louis Horowitz, *Masses in Latin America* (New York, 1970), pp.254-55.

entrepreneurs. The law also announced the end to the redistribution of land through government decrees. Finally, the processing and resolution of land disputes have been decentralised.[9]

Article 27, Section VII, paragraph two after the amendment still reads that the law will protect the integrity of the lands of the indigenous groups. Although Article 27 specifies the protection of indigenous peoples' lands, the new agrarian law does not establish the implementing regulations and the forms to be adopted by indigenous peoples in the administration of their communal and *ejidal* lands. In other words, it offers no recognition to a community as a legal entity that would permit it to act as a group to defend its interests against pressures of land markets, or to organise themselves for productive activities and to derive benefits from financial and credit institutions.

The reforms to Article 27 of the Constitution were proposed in November 1991 and adopted just two months later. They were followed in late February 1992 by the passage of the new Agrarian Law to establish the new regulatory framework for the social sector. For the government,

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[9] Tim L. Merrill and Miró, Ramón, n.3.

the modifications were seen as necessary steps to attract private investment in agriculture and increase productivity and welfare of those in the agricultural sector.

Indigenous *ejidos* operating under the norm of the Agrarian Reform Law are, notably, a minority and individually divided. According to the modification of Article 27 of the Constitution, the owners can opt for private titling or for the maintenance of communal *ejido* property. As stated earlier, it also permits the privatisation of the *ejidos* after sixty years whereas sale and land alienation were earlier prohibited.

The reforms in Article 27 were in accordance with the government's economic reform policies and the free trade agreement negotiations, which were on with the US. The government hoped to attract investments in the agricultural sector leading to increased productivity. The significant changes embodied in the new agrarian law were the following:

(i) *ejidatarios* were given the legal right to purchase, sell, rent or use as collateral the individual plots and communal lands, which make up the *ejido*.

(ii) Private companies were allowed to purchase land in accordance with legal limits prescribed for different crops. At a maximum, a company with at least 25 individual share-holders could purchase holdings of up to 25 times the size of individually permitted limit.

(iii) The reforms also allowed for new associations between capitalists and *ejidatarios*, the latter providing land as 'T' (transferable) shares in joint ventures.

(iv) In line with the reforms' intention of guaranteeing security for private property, the sections of Article 27, which allowed for land redistribution, were deleted from the new law.[10]

The government hoped and proponents of economic reforms argued that these changes would help the *ejidatarios* to decide what is the best option for them in future. Many peasants who have been marginal and ineffective producers may and did find it more profitable to sell their properties to more productive farmers than working on their own lands. The more entrepreneurial *ejidatarios*, with property to mortgage, now have collateral to obtain private-sector credit and increase their productivity.

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[10] Neil Harvey, n.5, pp.53-54.

Private owners are more likely to invest resources to increase agricultural production, as they need not fear future acquisition of their lands by the government for land redistribution under the pretext of land reform.

However, those critical of the effectiveness of these changes, fear somewhat rightly that the revisions may and are in reality only leading to greater landlessness and poverty among the *ejidatarios* and are reinforcing the inequitable land distribution that exists in states such as the Chiapas.

The debate surrounding the *ejido* reforms raises several concerns. First, it was feared that the sale of *ejido* plots could lead to the re-concentration of land. Although the new law expressly forbids *latifundias* in Mexico, it also allows private companies of at least 25 individuals to own farms of up to 2,500 hectares of irrigated land, 5,000 in the case of rain-fed areas, 10,000 hectares of good quality pasture land or 25,000 hectares of forested land. A company made up of 25 ranchers could also feasibly own an area equal to 12500 hectares. In order for *ejido* land to be made available for private ownership, however the assembly of *ejido* members must approve the measure by a two-thirds majority. Some commentators noted that the traditional control and manipulation of the

assemblies by *ejido* members could lead to forced votes in favour of privatisation. These apprehensions have not been a simple exercise in academics. Trends towards land concentration; replacement of staple with cash crops; growing landlessness among the indigenous and other transformations into temporary and seasonal wage labour; rising exodus of the indigenous from the rural areas are the features of the Mexican agricultural scene in the 1990s.

In the early 1990s the indigenous activists protested against the official end of agrarian reform and the modernisation of agriculture by the Salinas administration. Indian communities protested against the changes in the Mexican Constitution's Article 27 that weakened the inalienable communal landholdings of Indian communities, which went into effect on January 1992. The Indian communities, who were not consulted beforehand, also fear losing their ancestral lands to non-Indians if the traditional communal holdings are allowed to be sold.

Most independent indigenous organisations view the threat posed to communal property as having profound negative implications for the

economic, social, and political organisation of indigenous communities. As one Indian leader explained:

> In the end it is the weapon that will destroy our people, because it is a way of dividing us into pieces, families or individual, because the lands will be privatised. In the *ejidos* everyone will have their parcel with title to their property and the collective life of the community will be destroyed.[11]

Privatisation of communal lands means that it has an economic value and that it has been transformed into a commodity. This is giving rise to new social inequalities depending on the ways the land is now cultivated by the individuals - sharecropping, tenant farming, wage labour, sale, and mortgage.[12]

Ejidal land was collectively owned and could be inherited and divided, but not sold. It did not produce rent but it could be mortgaged under special circumstances. The concept of private property is now slowly developing. Many Indians who were unable to seize the meaning

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[11] Donna Lee Van Cott, n. 1.

[12] Michael W. Foley, "Privatising the Countryside: The Mexican Peasant Movement and Neoliberal Reform", in *Latin American Perspectives* (California), vol. 22, no. 1, issue 84, Winter 1995, p. 60.

of the new private documents failed to register their lands; and in many instances these were sold to the big plantations as non-validated lands.

The indigenous people of Mexico continue to experience extreme impoverishment and subsist on either low-wage labour, agriculture or seasonal employment. While president Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-) promised improved infrastructure and health facilities to these communities after the 1994 Chiapas uprising, indigenous people however are even more severely marginalised now - economically, politically, and socially. As part of its modernisation drive, the Mexican government promised to build infrastructure and establish industry in indigenous regions. But the fiscal crisis of 1995 prompted the president Zedillo to further reduce social spending - a policy, which prompted further protests both by indigenous and non-indigenous peasants. Zedillo government has shifted PROCAMPO's operation to the newly created Alliance for the Countryside (*Alianza para el Campo*) and extended it for a fifteen-year period. Hardships however are continuing to increase, and are likely to do so in the foreseeable future, the indigenous people of Mexico are also likely to mobilise either on their own or in coordination with other indigenous peoples of the country who already have strong organisations.

Towards Multiculturalism: New Cultural and Educational Policies

Hector Díaz-Polanco calls the assimilationist policy of the Mexican state, especially since the 1980s, an "ethnophagus" strategy. The Mexican case helps to understand the cost of such an incorporation. At a very general level, it is argued, the pay-off for suffering the authoritarianism of the so-called 'political *mestizaje*' would be social and economic redistribution plus some kind of an *indigenista* model of development. During the 1980s and after however, the privatisation of the state sector and the complete opening of Mexico to markets and capital in the United States has jettisoned the principles of redistribution and economic nationalism, development and *indigenismo* that had defined the original pact, albeit imperfectly. According to Díaz-Polanco what has remained is only racism and authoritarianism.[13]

In the 1980s, Mexico altered its official policy declaring that Indians should be integrated into national development but not at the expense of cultural identity. In the long struggle for survival, this is a new game for

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[13] Igor Boussel, "The Indian and the Land", in Sheldon B. Liss and Peggy K. Liss, eds., *Man, State, and Society in Latin American History* (New York, 1972), p. 52.

the indigenous: they have to face the forces of economic liberalisation and globalisation while preserving their identity if they can afford to do so. No wonder, little changed however, as attempts by some well meaning INI officials to foster cultural preservation are blocked at the state level by PRI governors. Anyway, it is too little, too late. Mexico's Indians are already mobilising, not just to preserve their culture, but to demand autonomy on their traditional lands. State governments and private armies hired by large landowners have responded by force. The repression was most severe in Chiapas and the 1994 uprising too was the strongest that has shaken the foundation of the liberal economic edifice and exposed the clumsiness of national commitment to multiculturalism.[14]

In 1980s and 1990s what has been called "participatory *indigenismo*" has predominated. In response to the increasing criticism, the Mexican government's indigenous affairs department, the INI, proclaimed a new policy of indigenous "participation" (*indegenismo de participación*) but in fact nothing much has changed in the way the government bureaucracy handled its relationship with the indigenous peoples.

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[14] Douglas W. Payne, "Between Hope and History: Mexico's Indians Refuse to Disappear", *Dissent* (New York), Summer 1996, pp. 61-66.

Indigenismo, is a nice sounding word that represents the state's policy on indigenous peoples that has been implicit since Independence and explicit since the 1940s when elements of the national development strategy, under the aegis of an authoritarian state were put in place. The ultimate objective of this policy is to assimilate the indigenous peoples into the modern Mexican nation-state; and the variations expressed in terms of "destruction", "integration", "participation" and "ethnophagia" are just different strategies used at different points in time by the state. An effort is made to assimilate the Indians not because they are considered culturally inferior, but because their labour power and their control over natural resources such as land, forests, and subsoil minerals need to be harnessed to serve the economic development project of the modernising state. Cultural considerations fit within the state strategy to justify its policy.[15]

The Mexican Constitution never recognised the ethnic groups as legal persons. The legal relations between the state and the indigenous peoples were never codified. In other words, while the policies and

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[15] Donna Lee Van Cott, ed., *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America* (New York., 1994), pp. 200-201.

institutions to service the special needs of the indigenous people were founded on recognition of cultural differentiation, the official relations were oriented to deny these differences and create one homogeneous nation. The assimilation of many indigenous peoples however had the unintended result: they themselves began to assert their claims for an official recognition of their ethnic uniqueness. Moreover, it was also in consonance with trends and government's own pursuit of liberal economic policies. Therefore in 1992, Article 4 of the Constitution was modified to reflect the nation's multiculturalism.

A Commission for Justice for the indigenous Peoples was established. It brought together anthropologists, indigenous Peoples 'representatives', and government officials to draft a new amendment to the Constitution. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari forwarded the proposal to the nation.

Article 4 of the Mexican Constitution now states that the Mexican nation has a multicultural composition based on its original inhabitants. The law promises to protect the development of indigenous languages, cultures, customs, resources, and specific forms of social organisation, and

will guarantee indigenous citizens the effective access to the state jurisdiction. Significantly, in legal decisions and agrarian related processes that the indigenous are a part of, their special practices and legal norms will be taken into account in terms established by the law.

The Mexican Government also ratified ILO's Convention 169 in 1989, which since makes the Convention and all its provisions as law of the country.

On 7th December 1990, Article 4 was added to the Mexican Constitution. It recognised the "multicultural composition: of the indigenous peoples and called to protect their language and cultures through state institutions. The amendment was, it is said, drafted in response to international pressure from NGOs for human rights causes and is credited for its recognition of indigenous traditions. It is still criticised for the paternalistic state attitude towards the Indians. More truly, the recognition was part of the liberal economic agenda; Article 4 is closely related to the amended Article 27 in giving a new official perception of the indigenous question

The amendment of Article 4 emphasises the cultural rights while economic, social and political rights are excluded, as it speaks of protecting indigenous peoples without recognising their ability to take care of themselves.

In 1993, after the changes in article 4 of the Constitution referring to indigenous rights were made, the general Education Law formalised the teaching of Spanish as the national language without precluding the promotion and development of indigenous languages.

In Article 4 of the Constitution "the Mexican nation has a multicultural composition based on its original peoples. The law will protect and encourage the development of their languages, culture, customs, resources, and specific forms of social organisation. It will guarantee its inhabitants effective access to the state juridical system".

In practice these are two different and contradictory systems. Even if not explicit, the official standing of Spanish fosters mono-lingualism and language loss in indigenous bilingual communities as well as monolingual indigenous communities. The alternative of bilingual and bicultural

education has not expanded to cover all the indigenous regions of the country despite a cultural desire to maintain multiple languages. The use of multiple languages is restricted when these are used as a tool to facilitate Hispanicisation and are not taught nor intrinsically valued. Indigenous languages are rarely taught after the third grade of primary school and there is little effort to use them in wider communication media, literature, movies, theatre, etc.

In 1996, federal and state education authorities initiated the 1997-2000 Adult Literacy and Primary Education Programme. In less than one year of work almost 13,500 literacy workers assisted more than 86,000 adults, using both the students' native language and Spanish.

In Mexico, lately there has developed a renewed interest in the customary law of indigenous peoples. Article 4 of the Constitution now states that the Indians' customary law will be taken into consideration in all matters concerning agrarian disputes and administrative procedures. There is no mention of civil or penal law. Local judges and government attorneys have been asked by the INI and the *Comisión Nacional de Derechos Humanos* (CNDH - National Commission of Human Rights),

among other agencies, to be sensitive to indigenous traditions and customs. Indigenous organisations themselves have begun placing this issue high on their agenda. Further, new federal legislations have been passed to deal with this complex issue. However, it is by no means certain that the indigenous question can be resolved satisfactorily at the level of and through the national congress. Both conservative and liberal legal scholars, trained in the tradition of "positivist" legal doctrine, have come out staunchly against any kind of recognition of "legal pluralism", arguing that the modern Mexican sovereign state needs to integrate all of its citizens in only one legal system. The issue will certainly continue to be debated for a long time to come.[16]

The Solidarity Programme and the Role of the INI

The 'social liberalism' ushered in by president Salinas, it was claimed, envisages free play of market forces in the service of the society. It was part of the government's strategy of abandoning its past populist paternalism and switching over to one of co-responsibility between

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[16] Rodolfo Stavenhagen, "Indigenous Organisations: Rising Actors in Latin America" in *CEPAL Review* (Santiago), vol. 62, August 1997, p.11.

policymakers and low-income communities. The anti-poverty policy commonly known the Solidarity Programme was to be more targeted and accountable by designing the programmes as per the needs of the poorest and by promoting pluralistic grass-root mobilisation. More broadly, through Solidarity, the state promised a profound change in the state-society relations, renovating the social foundations of Mexico's long-standing political stability.[17]

The Solidarity programme was founded with the purpose of funding infrastructure and industry programmes primarily in indigenous states of southeastern Mexico. Most of Solidarity funding was to be distributed through federal block grants through state and municipal governments as in the traditional social policy. It was hoped that these institutions would change their attitude, their way of thinking and acting in keeping with the liberal trends while implementing the programme.

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[17] Jonathan Fox, "Targeting the poorest: The role of the National Indigenous Institute in Mexico's Solidarity Program" in Wayne A. Cornelius, Ann L. Craig and Jonathan Fox, eds. *Transforming the State-Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy* (San Diego, 1994), pp. 179-216.

Solidarity's political and ideological roots can be traced back to the 1968 student movement. Mexican reformist and populist policymakers had ever since been negotiating with political power brokers comprising of local PRI bosses and other regional strongmen to gain access to social programmes. By mid-1980s, *concertación social* (social dialogue), a new direct bargaining relationship emerged between the federal reformists and social movements. State managers showed an unheard of willingness to give official recognition to autonomous citizen's groups to carry out social programmes in the 1990s as in the case of the post-earthquake housing movements by establishing both formal and informal *concertación social* agreements. The traditional corporatist way of functioning continued but it was now combined to a minor but more open pluralistic variant, which had gained entry in agricultural production policy, urban social services and public sector labour relations. In concrete terms, it implied that the all-powerful office of the president was beginning to establish a direct rapport with the citizen groups and movements bypassing the corporatist structure of the ruling PRI.

The government of president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) gave a new impetus to the INI with the initiation of the social safety

programme, that is the Solidarity. The INI was chosen to implement the programme, as it was the only agency that specialised in dealing with the indigenous groups, one of Solidarity's target-population. The INI had not faced competition in this field from any other agency, the INI-staff usually has no political affiliations, and the Institute is able to conduct its activities through its own funds without having to depend on the local government machinery. Since 1989, the strategy of transferring responsibilities to the indigenous persons themselves had increasingly promoted the community's participation.[18] Briefly, INI came to acquire a significant place in the economic modernisation programme of the Salinas government.

Solidarity had come under severe criticism almost from its inception. It was alleged that Solidarity has fallen prey to electoral considerations and the personal aggrandisement of the PRI leaders. However, the creation of separate INI Regional Solidarity Funds programme by the Ministry for Social Development demonstrated that

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[18] Ibid., pp. 179-216.

communities and *ejidos* could be effective managers if such funds are honestly made available to them.

The Regional Solidarity Funds supported the communities' income generating activities. They had the responsibility of generating enough returns so that they were able to pay back the money and in addition finance the local ancillary units necessary for the success of these projects. In this manner, they were able to strengthen indigenous organisations, using methods to develop planning, budgeting, execution and utilisation of the infrastructure and resources they had and achieve legal recognition for their organisations so that they might, among other things, have access to other financial resources. In brief, the INI-administered funds were to be cost-effective, enhance efficiency and competitiveness among the indigenous, and in the end were to become profitable.

Today, the community's participation is based in each and every one of the organisation that forms part of the Regional Fund through it's General Assembly. In this assembly, the projects are appraised and the most important ones are given priority. The Regional Funds programmes have a geographical coverage of twenty-three states in the Mexican

Republic, with 147 regional funds that have benefited 2,050,369 producers with 14,559 projects.

Another feature, which characterised Solidarity and made it different from past antipoverty reforms, was its effort to strengthen the local municipalities so that these could be directly responsible for service delivery. This was part of Salinas' effort to provide funds directly to the local bodies bypassing the federal state bureaucracy and political leadership.

By 1993, the local Solidarity committees that had been formed numbered 120,000. These committees had to choose the public works projects as per the requirement of the community: sixty per cent of them were formed only to distribute funding, the rest showed further interest in the implementation of the projects. Organising grassroots participation proved more difficult in areas where the poor people had already created their own organisations. However, during the first half of his term, Salinas promoted these organisations creating conflicts within the ruling party. INI's budget increased eighteen-fold during the first three years of the Salinas government. With Solidarity funding, INI transformed itself from

a service provider into an economic development agency. Success was greatest when the geographic distribution of reformist INI officials and consolidation of community-based organisations overlapped.

With INI assuming larger and bigger roles as a development agency, indigenous communities, one of the target groups of the programme, witnessed a break from the government's traditional style of clientelism, corporatism and corruption to one of equity, transparency, pluralism and power sharing during this period. By mid-1993 the government's support for the programme as a whole however began to weaken. Two major obstacles appeared at the higher levels in the political system. The first was the resistance from the more authoritarian political elites entrenched in federal and state governments. Bureaucrats and PRI leaders found their roles reduced; with financial resources taken away from them their indulgence in political favouritism and clientelism also began to decline. Secondly INI could not overcome its own semi-clientelist tendencies.

Also, the commitment of the INI to the Solidarity programme had not been uniform. Less than half of INI's directors "understood" the goals

of the programme; lower-level INI staff was a major obstacle; some governors thwarted the reforms in the name of federal division of power; and the Institute itself soon fell out of favour with Salinas when it unwittingly voiced its dissent of the changes in the land tenure system. Solidarity programme almost came to a halt with the petering out of its Regional Fund allocations towards the end of the Salinas presidency.

Still it should be stated that the INI has to its credit of having carried out one of the most pluralistic programmes in the country. The National Solidarity Programme served to erode the PRI's clientelist politics in urban and rural areas. In its brief tenure it witnessed unique instances of power sharing among the indigenous organisations themselves as well as within and across ethnic groups. It may not have been able to overcome the continued paternalism entrenched within the INI apparatus itself but it continues to be a service provider with diminishing funds, curtailed by the anti pluralistic forces within the Ministry of Social Development itself.

In 1994 president Salinas appointed a commission to study and promote co-ordinated action to improve the life of Indians in Mexico. The

commission was composed of officials from 11 cabinet ministries. The Commerce Secretariat announced a $1.5 billion programme to create infrastructure and industrial development projects in Chiapas. The money to be specifically allotted to projects for agriculture, fishing and *maquiladora* industries.

Despite the vastly increased social spending by the government and the initiation of anti-poverty programmes like Solidarity, the disparities in Mexico have increased enormously. Ten per cent of the population controls 41.4 per cent of the national wealth.[19] All this showed that Solidarity though may have been a well-meaning project, still its social safety net was small. It could not have and did not decisively influence the process of economic liberalisation.

Be that as it may, the Indigenous people have already tasted the power of co-responsibility with the state in decision-making and definition of policy. Recognition of leadership councils as interlocutors while bargaining in the interest of their communities has been a morale

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[19] Vinay Lal, "Rebellion in Chiapas: Colonial History of a New World Disorder", *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), vol. 29, no. 25, 18 June 1994, p. 1514

boosting experience for many of the Indigenous. Under Solidarity efforts to transfer resource allocation decision-making under Regional Fund of the INI were left to representative organisations of civil society. This ambitious policy opening was undertaken on behalf of Mexico's indigenous peoples - precisely the social group that has been most systematically victimised by state-sanctioned authoritarian abuses.[20]

The changing role of the INI and the entire Solidarity scheme has proved a kind of catalyst for indigenous organisation mobilisation. The potential of Mexico's organised indigenous society has surfaced. Some regions had experienced two decades of ebb and flow of protest and mobilisation, often beginning with land rights and then focussing on ethnic identity and human rights issues.[21] Most of the movements, that managed to offset entrenched regional political and economic elites, had previously received some kind of support, or at least tolerance, from past rural development reform programmes like PIDER or CONASUPO_COPLAMAR. Each brief and partial opening of political

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[20] Jonathan Fox, n.17, p. 181.

[21] Indigenous mobilisations have been strongest in Chiapas, Oaxaca, Hidalgo, Veracruz, and Guerrero.

space for new levels of region-wide collective action have left the movements better able to take advantage of future cracks in the system. This "accumulation of forces' is no doubt very uneven; however many regions still lack autonomous groups with the bargaining power and organisational capacity needed to handle development projects.

The next chapter will go into the complexities of the Chiapas Uprising, as a case study of the contemporary Mexican Indian profile. Ironically, the Mexican government has always flaunted its success in promoting indigenous rights through the creation of *ejidos* and the INI, in the international forum. The Chiapas rebellion caught the Mexican government unaware of the simmering discontent among its indigenous population and demonstrated the limitations of its indigenous policies. The government response to this event along with measures to tackle this new situation will also be discussed. Since Chiapas has forced many new issues to the centre stage of Mexican politics, and highlighted the limitations of official and scholarly perception and prescriptions of integration, assimilation and multiculturalism, the uprising and the governmental responses have been dealt with in two separate sections.

CHAPTER IV

INDIGENOUS RESPONSE AND NEW POLICY TRENDS

The description and discussion in the preceding three chapters has traversed a long distance covering a whole range of issues - perceptions, policies, and mechanisms and institutions - dealing with the indigenous peoples of Mexico. While the introductory Chapter has described the socio-cultural and geographic profile of Mexico's very diverse indigenous peoples, it has also given a long overview of the treatment of the indigenous including the ideological-cultural and economic-political dynamics that shaped the attitudes and policies towards the indigenous.

Admittedly, the 1910 Revolution had led the state to look afresh at the question of the indigenous population of Mexico. The second Chapter develops the political-cultural association that accorded some recognition to the rights and the needs of the indigenous. How the perspectives of a strong Mexican rationalism and developmentalism under the aegis of a strong state shaped official policies of land distribution, education and promotion of cultures have been described. The Chapter focuses

particularly on the formation, organisation, functions and role of *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI) ever since its inception in the 1940s.

The first two Chapters have provided in the third Chapter the content for a discussion of the policies of economic liberalisation and multiculturalism pursued relentlessly in the 1980s especially by president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). Constitutional amendments particularly of Article 27 that paved the way for structural changes in the agricultural sector including the landholding pattern along the principles of economic liberalism, and of Article 4 that embraced the policy of multiculturalism have been dealt with at length. The indigenous peoples have had no role to play in the formulation of the policy changes, nevertheless these policies have had far-reaching implications for them.

The present Chapter is the penultimate one. It seeks to put in perspective the broad aims and goals of the recent militant mobilisation of the indigenous; their specific demands and political strategies and the present national and international junctures which have enabled them to seize power while rising perhaps for the first time in their long history of resistance to domination, giving an opportunity to redefine both the goals

of democracy and development. The Chapter is appropriately divided into three sections. The first section looks into the demands raised by the 1994 indigenous uprising in Chiapas and its implications, The second section reviews the government response and policy trends since the negotiations between the government and the rebels began in 1995. The parley of the last five years highlights the complexities of the issues involved. The last section makes a critique of changing perceptions and policies of the government, and the challenges and dilemmas faced by both the government and the rebels.

Evidently ethnicity in Latin American countries is emerging as a consciousness of the identities of the indigenous peoples as the vast majority find themselves in the era of post-developmentalism and nationalism at the bottom of the social and class hierarchies of their respective nation states. Much has come out in terms of limitations of the dominant ideologies of assimilation and multiculturalism. The conditions under which ethnicity is now being perceived and constructed are different from those of a century or even half a century ago. Just as the liberal policies of the last century, that were intended to assimilate and incorporate the indigenous peoples into the national mainstream in reality

created structural conditions that perpetuated their marginalisation and oppression, so the neoliberal policies of today seem to be re-creating comparable conditions. One difference is that the contemporary "developmental" policies, based on privatisation and economic integration are being played out in a more globalised economy and society. Thus, although it appears that deep structural conditions of contemporary capitalist society and economy continue to perpetuate indigenous society and culture, they are also stimulating novel transnational cultural and political expression of indigenous identity.[1] This also differs from the era of developmentalism and nationalism in its essence when nation building and nation-state were deemed sacrosanct, inviolable and dominant in relation to ethnic diversities and their specificities.

The recent changes in the policies of the government towards the indigenous people through Article 4 is an expression of the acceptance of the state of the cultural identity of the indigenous population as different from the dominant non-indigenous segment of Mexican society.

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1 Michael Kearny "Indigenous Ethnicity and Mobilisation in Latin America", *Latin American Perspectives,* Issue 89, vol. 23, no 2 Spring 1996, p. 5.

Multiculturalism in its essence remains the dominant version of country's ethnic and racial diversities, albeit one that confines ethnic diversities within the Mexican national fabric. Still what is significant is the way a globalising economy and a democratising polity in Mexico is forced to genuinely address itself to the demands of a multicultural society and take into account specially the problems and perceptions of its indigenous populations. How has this come about spearheaded and forced by the uprising of Chiapan Indians?

Through changes in Article 27, the indigenous people have at last been given the title deeds to their lands but at the cost of giving up their traditional way of life which has sustained them all through the periods of not only conquest and colonialism but also through the effects of marginalisation that accentuated following the decades of the process of modernisation and industrialisation and political authoritarianism. These changes also signalled the end of future land reforms, which had always served the purpose of buying social space for implementing the chosen economic development strategies of the state.

The instances of recent political instability and mobilisation caused by the prolonged exclusion of marginalised groups from decision making are being acknowledged for the first time in Latin America. In Mexico, which contains the Hemisphere's largest indigenous population, the government is finding that the only way to put down the 1994 New Year's rebellion in the state of Chiapas and to resolve the political crisis for the ruling party caused by the embarrassment and shock of the guerrilla insurgency, composed largely of Mayan peasants, is to finally bring the disenfranchised Indians of Chiapas into the political system, besides making them an equal partner in the economic development. All over Mexico, the cries of a small group of rebels and their Indian peasant supporters have turned into a debate on the limits of Mexico's one party democracy and the great risk to social peace and developmental strategy of continuing to ignore the demands of marginalised groups.[2]

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2 Donna Lee Van Cott, ed., *Indigenous Peoples and Democracy in Latin America* (New York., 1994), p. 23.

Chiapas Uprising: Demands and Movements of the Indigenous

The armed uprising by between 3000 to 4000 Indians in Chiapas on 1st January 1994 took everyone by surprise. Its continuance represents a watershed in Mexican history. The rebellion cannot be compared to an expression of the guerrilla struggles of the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America. It did not have on it's agenda the objective to seize state power or aspire to lead the masses towards a social revolution. The rebellion was directed against the liberal economic model implemented by Salinas; to make the government accountable to the people; and to achieve effective representation of all Mexicans, particularly the indigenous population by demanding a genuine democratisation of the country's political process.[3]

The remoteness of Chiapas, which lies at the southern end of Mexico, to the east of the state of Oaxaca and north of Guatemala, of which it was once a part, has for so long engendered an attitude of indifference to its indigenous population among the bureaucrats in Mexico City. The state had the largest proportion of indigenous people, some forty per cent, by 1990 and for decades, if not for centuries they have

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[3] Ibid., p. 39.

been at the mercy of an authoritarian and conniving local political elite, which has remained hand-in-glove with the local class of landowners, ranchers, and national and international investors.

In keeping with its economic interests the state has catered to the needs of the rich *latifundistas* and ranchers to meet the demands of the international market, as the state of Chiapas is one of the wealthiest in terms of resources. The state produces over half of Mexico's hydroelectric power; is the second largest petroleum producing state; and the largest coffee exporter. Chiapas is also a large producer of corn, cattle, tobacco, banana and cacao. Economy of the Chiapan state boomed during the 1970s. This has been attributed to the growth in cattle ranching and export-crops production and the discovery of petroleum.

The wealth of the state today is in striking contrast to the poverty of its people. It has the worst indices of poverty and marginalisation of Mexico's thirty-two states. The Mexican state has treated Chiapas as an internal colony draining out its wealth and leaving behind an impoverished rural population, which is largely made up of indigenous people. This contrast between extreme wealth and poverty in the Chiapas

is, in large part, the result of the capitalist revolution and its consequences in these past twenty-five years.[4]

The state contains rich river valleys, tropical rain forests, Sierra mountain ranges, and fertile coastal plains next to the Pacific Ocean. The river basin *latifundias* grow abundant subsistence crops, coffee plantations flourish on the Sierra ranges, and the coastal plantations grow bananas, cotton and sugarcane and other crops. The jungle areas in the north and east and the Lacandon rain forests provide rich supply of indigo, hardwoods, rubber, cacao and coffee. Extensive lumbering has destroyed much of the forest. The large-scale farming estates and plantations have provided the seasonal, migrant highland Indian labourers employment and subsistence in addition to the meagre produce of their communal lands.

Communal property exists but is cultivated as a private property. The breaking up of the *latifundias* had restored the communal lands to the Indians in the Chiapas after the Revolution. Periodic redistribution of

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4 Roger Burbach, "Roots of Postmodern Rebellion in Chiapas", *New Left Review* (London), no. 205 May - June 1994, p. 115.

lands from government to government raised the number of Indian families on *ejidos* from 71,000 in 1950 and 148,000 in 1970 to 3.5 million families on 29,951 *ejidos* in 1991. However, the land so distributed often had the poorest soils while ninety-six per cent of it was rain-fed. The best lands remained under the control of the wealthy farmers, plantation owners, and the rich ranchers.

Peasant rebellions are often pivotal in social and agrarian change in pre-industrial societies. The desire for land and the recent changes in land tenure laws, which have ended their hopes of acquiring land made these peasants to revolt in the Chiapas. The changes were in the offing at least since the late 1970s, and with the economic crisis of the 1980s the plight of the poor peasants had begun worsening. Austerity plans of the 1980s and shift towards the market-oriented economic policies had a deleterious effect on the living conditions of the indigenous. The problems of late 1980s took a shift for the worse as growth in population escalated the pressure on the land.[5]

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[5] Joseph M Whitmeyer and Rosemary L. Hopcroft, "Community, Capitalism and Rebellion in Chiapas", *Sociological Perspectives* (London), vol. 39, no.4, Winter 1996, p. 517.

Chiapas is the largest maize producing state. Maize is the principal crop cultivated in the *ejidos* and *communidades agrarias,* followed by coffee. Following the debt crisis in 1982, under the administration of president Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado (1982-1988), government subsidies to the agricultural sector decreased. The higher input costs and decrease in credits was partly compensated by the guaranteed prices by CONASUPO (National Company of Subsidised Staple Products). The stopping of credit to all defaulters by *Banrural* had also decreased the productivity levels even further. New credit was next provided through PRONASOL. After 1989 only maize and beans continued to receive guaranteed prices. Other grain prices fell drastically with the removal of import licences, as the market was flooded with cheap imports. Many farmers switched back to maize production only to be again hit below the belt by the imposition of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Two million maize producers in the country had lost their source of income from the sale of maize in the domestic and international markets by the early 1990s. Social funds released through PROCAMPO (Program of Direct Rural Support) initially made direct payment to the peasants for the produce of maize and other selected grains. The financial support is planned to continue for

a fifteen-year period in a decreasing and phased manner to allow the small peasants time to recover his losses and to increase production.

Chiapas is the principal coffee producing state in Mexico. The establishment of INMECAFE (Mexican Institute of Coffee Production) as part of president Luis Echeverría's efforts in the 1970s to modernise small-scale production had benefited the *ejidatarios*. In the Altos and Selva regions over ninety per cent of the land under coffee cultivation was worked by the small farmers. The financing, marketing and export of the cash crop was done through INMECAFE assuring good returns. In 1989 the fall of coffee prices in the international market and the devaluation of the peso as part of Salinas's macroeconomic reforms washed away all profits and the coffee growers were soon in the red. The private financiers appeared again on the scene as the small producers could not pay back their loans and hence could not qualify for any further financial assistance. INMECAFE had accumulated massive debts and was abolished as part of government's austerity programmes in the 1980s. As a result thousands of small growers had abandoned production between 1989-1993.

Thus, the near destruction of maize and coffee production, and withdrawal of state support mechanisms had by the 1990s created large scale conditions of indebtedness, bonded labour conditions among large portions of the Chiapan indigenous population. The inroads that petroleum and lumbering had made since the 1970s were proving equally devastating by the 1990s.

The petroleum industry in the northeast has further altered the Chiapan social and economic scene. Large tracts of agricultural lands have been destroyed and the peasant populations uprooted. Since the 1970s petroleum towns have attracted Indian labour, which was drawn into the lowest economic stratum. The community lost a field hand and the industry gained cheap labour. In 1982, the drop in petroleum prices led the nation into a debt crisis. Petroleum production dropped in the Chiapas and peasant who had accumulated some earnings in the petroleum fields and those who had managed to save some money during the boom period began to use their small capital in green revolution technologies. This soon led to stratification within even the traditional Indian villages. The adoption of severe austerity measures in the 1980s to pay off the nation's debts, severally affected the poor farmers. The withdrawal of subsidies

and decreased social spending for the poor led to a further decline in their social and nutritional status.

Salinas had increased social funding as part of the anti-poverty Solidarity programme. Chiapas received more funds from Solidarity than any other state. The resources however failed to reach the target population or were not sufficient to ameliorate the increasing poverty; also it did not provide for production and marketing needs. The state government exerted its federal powers and created a state-level fund that instead of providing relief further reinforced political patronage and control of local PRI bosses. The state governor also interfered in the functioning of the INI and coerced the INI officials to follow the corrupt authoritarian practices of the local elites.

While Chiapas shares its poverty and discrimination against its indigenous populations in states such as Oaxaca and Guerrero, it is distinguished from the rest of Mexico by a brutal style of governing that was intolerant of opposition or even efforts at improving the minimal

living conditions of the indigenous population. People turned to armed struggle when they found all political channels blocked.[6]

In brief, the policies of economic liberalisation pursued relentlessly by president Salinas precipitated the rebellion: these included withdrawal of subsidies in the form of credit, cutbacks or discontinuation of government programmes providing technical aid and marketing assistance; privatisation of nationalised companies that had often sustained regional economies; and the elimination of price subsidies. In Chiapas these policies have had negative effects on output as well as the environment because *campesinos* tried to increase the cultivated area to make up for their losses, thus contributing to deforestation and soil depletion. Nor did the increased expenditures of PRONASOL (the National Solidarity Program) money in the jungle on social welfare programmes, which grew by 130 per cent during 1989-1990, make up for the losses in production caused by the neo-liberal policies.[7]

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6 Stephen D. Morris, "Reforming the Nation: Mexican Nationalism in Context", *Journal of Latin American Studies* (Cambridge), 1999, pp. 363-397.

7 Neil Harvey, "Rebellion in the Chiapas: Rural Reforms and Popular Struggle", *Third World Quarterly* (Oxfordshire), vol. 16, no.1, 1995, p. 54.

There were other equal structural factors. In Chiapas the potential of the politically powerful rancher's association, representing over 12,000 *ganaderos* organised in some 60 local associations has been raising great apprehension in the minds of the local indigenous. Ranchers applauded the reforms to Article 27, arguing the greater security in land tenure would attract the domestic and foreign investors wishing to create new meat processing plants in the region. The competition for land with indigenous *campesinos* and expansion of large estates throughout the 1980s should be understood in this context.

Ranchers occupy about fifty per cent of the land and keep encroaching on communal lands. Cattle ranchers especially have continued to concentrate and monopolise the land, encroaching on agricultural land, illegal occupation of *ejido* lands and destruction of the rain forest as increasing heads of cattle require more grazing lands. Cattle ranches are exempt from being parcelled out. *Ejidos* and peasants were encouraged to participate in cattle ranching. The untrained and unskilled Indians found it a very risky venture and found it more profitable instead to rent out their land for cattle grazing which led to further land concentration. As a result by 1983, thirty per cent of the Chiapan lands

was once again in the hands of the *latifundistas* while at least 100,000 peasants were landless.

In Chiapas, paucity of new lands and destruction of indigenous lands has further increased with the construction of dams on the Grijalva River for production of hydro-electricity. Some 100,000 hectares of the best lands were submerged and as much due to microclimatic changes in the immediate areas. About 90,000 people were forced to move and settle on the remaining lands in Chiapas mainly in the surviving forests.

Violence over land has always been the order of the day and has only increased as land concentration accentuated since the 1970s. Local landowners, government troops and hired thugs inflict physical methods to end land occupation and public demonstrations for land. In 1983, president Miguel de la Madrid launched an extensive land reform programme. This did not improve matters. Indian communities and independent Indian organisations, which had fought for the lands, were bypassed and the Indian groups and organisations aligned with the PRI were favoured.

Land crunch has been compounded with the population growth in the Chiapas. War between the Guatemalan government and the guerillas going on in the region adjacent to the Lacandon rain forest since the early 1970s has led to large scale illegal immigration into Chiapas of refugees of Mayan descent. Guatemalan refugees have sought refuge in these forests and have also spilled into the labour segment competing with their Chiapan co-brothers for jobs on the plantations and ranches.

Thus the Lacandon has been the scene of land invasions since the 1970s. Highland Indian people in the Chiapas already occupy most of the arable land and use it quite intensively. The *Lacandon* rain forests house not only poor landless peasants from the highlands and elsewhere, they are also occupied by wealthy ranchers and plantation owners. The land invasions by the poor peasants have been dealt with by violence by the rich for their eviction. Carlos Salinas as president in January 1989 granted 25 *ejidos* pending since 1975. Cultivation on these *ejido* lands is not collective or communal. Truly communal holdings are rare in the areas of Chiapas where the conflict took place. Even those property rights, which are *communal de jure* are private in practice. Solidarity in the revolt was

based on the material concerns of peasants and indigenous, especially those landless Indians who had migrated to the Lacandón rain forest.[8]

The declaration of the forests as an eco-reserve by Salinas government stopped the government from giving any more titles to the occupied land. Further with the amendment of Article 27, any hope of getting land has been completely lost. This has hit the high percentage of squatters in the Lacandon area the hardest. The Lacandon has no more space to accommodate the people without endangering the ecosystem; nor is the government encouraging occupation and squatting.

The change in Article 27 regarding claims to land is affecting the Indian colonisers in the Lacandon jungle more than those in the corporate Indian communities. For those who lacked title, it dashed the hope of ever obtaining legal titles to land some had occupied for decades. Also those who had titles to their lands are more likely now to sell them because they became indebted in the process of establishing their homestead. This will

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[8] Ibid., P.518.

gave another impetus to the establishment of the *latifundismo* thus breaking the social contract established by the Mexican Revolution.[9]

Article 27 now allows the use of land as collateral or in association with private investors, which involves the risk of farm foreclosures and loss of land rights.[10]

Finally, the fear that most of the unresolved land petitions (known as *rezago agrario*) would be simply rejected has proved right. The government's claim that there is no more land to be distributed has been contested by several organisations. Some have called for an investigation into the private holdings, which allegedly far exceed the legal limits, before decreeing the end to land distribution. It is significant that this demand was taken up by the *campesino* movement in Chiapas and reasserted in the wake of the Zapatista rebellion. In fact, instead of immediate expropriation of the land and re-distribution of excess holdings, the new law gives one year's time to sell off the excess property.

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[9] June Nash, "The Reassertion of Indigenous Identity: Mayan Response to State Intervention in Chiapas", *Latin American Research Review*, vol.30, no.3, 1995, p. 26.

[10] Neil Harvey, n. 7, p. 54.

The end of land reform in Chiapas and other states cancelled out forever the hope of land for thousands of *campesinos*. The end of land reform constituted a symbolic break of promise made in the 1910 Revolution and has spelled an end to all hopes and expectations with no guarantees for the future -- which seems bleak and full of fears. The spirit of the original law has broken as public interest has been subordinated to individual interest in the spirit of liberalisation and globalisation.[11]

As protests mounted, the government next promised to purchase land in order to deal with the *rezago*. *Campesino* leaders blamed the delay on the bureaucratic inefficiency and the reluctance of private owners to sell and collusion between functionaries and landowners. Following repeal of Section X of the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which guaranteed peasants "communal land' even if it entailed expropriation of land at the expense of the federal government, there were still 25,000 unresolved land claims in 1992. By 1995, there were fewer than 3000 of these cases, the vast majority of them having been resolved by turning down the claims.[12]

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[11] Ibid., p.54.

[12] Vinay Lal, "Rebellion in Chiapas: Colonial History of a New World Disorder", *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay), vol. 29, no. 25, 18 June 1994, p. 1514.

The land bears more than economic value for the Indian. The Indian needs the land because without it he loses his social and ethnic identity. It does not matter whether this land is communal, *ejido*, or private. In any case, for him it is property not merchandise. It is a means of production and not capital. It is a source of income but not rent. Traditionally, the land is not a commodity with an exchange value for the Indian. The soil must be tilled, and only by so doing does the Indian come to realise himself, even when it be on someone else's property, as day labourer, sharecropper or tenant. The family performs the tilling of the land yet if the need arises, a few day labourers may be temporarily employed to help in the farming tasks. The Indians do not like to sell their lands. He who sells land loses his prestige while he who buys it increases it. The Indian is a person who is integrated in his traditional community, which is bound to the land. Customs, beliefs, religious practices and festivals, traditional authorities and their role, relationship with the environment, indigenous perception and estimation of *ladino* authorities are all defined by their use and relationship with the land. The Indian tills the soil; culturally and psychologically he ceases to be an Indian when he becomes separated from the land. The tilling of the soil is related to the

group's social organisation -- lineage or tribe -- and to its religious organisation and beliefs.

If the stated goals of the *ejido* reform are not in evidence, the negative impact of declaring an end to land reforms is still being felt. The Zapaista uprising made the people aware of the unequal distribution of land in Chiapas and the size of the backlog of unresolved petitions. The formation of CEOIC in late January 1994 marked the starting point of *campesino* mobilisation involving at least 8000 land claimants belonging to 11 organisations. Private lands were seized which led to violent confrontations.

The *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) was able to gain support from thousands of Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Zoque, Chol and Tojolobal Indians in the Altos and Selva regions. It was an expression of popular organising and resistance to elite manipulation, government indifference, and police brutality. It drew support from the *campesinos* who had participated over several years in legal organisations, which sought to defend land rights and obtain more favourable terms for marketing their

coffee. It was the denial of political space to these organisations, which allowed for the armed option to gain acceptance.[13]

The rebellion in Chiapas is a popular response to a series of rural reforms decided without the participation of the representatives of the *campesino* organisations. Historically, it is part of a cycle of rural rebellions, which have periodically revealed the illegitimation of the Mexican state. Furthermore the Zapatistas set in motion several important processes of political struggle. In the first place, the solidarity expressed by the many pro-democracy movements provided the key to their convergence in the National Democratic Convention, held in the Lacondan jungles discussing the need and the shape of democracy in Mexico. Secondly, within Chiapas thousands of *campesinos* began to recuperate land through direct action, and force the issue of agrarian reform back on to the political agenda. [14] Thirdly, the rebellion has brought into question the age-old official policies of integration and multiculturalism. The rebellion represents more than a challenge to these paternalistic ideas and polities. What the Chiapan rebellion has brought about in sharp relief is the indigenous

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[13] Neil Harvey, n. 23, p. 56.

[14] Ibid, p. 62.

demand and need to define Mexican multi-ethnic mosaic from the Indian perspective. Let it be a multi-ethnic society defined, fully participated and shaped by the indigenous mosaic. What the Indians have challenged is the centuries old dominant-subordinate relationship. Lastly, and above all, the question of Mexico's indigenous population cannot be resolved through economic palliative such as land reforms and educational-cultural programmes such as bilingual education. The Zapatista rebellion has put in bold, the truth that the Indian problem is a political problem requiring a political solution. Any attempted solution, therefore, needs to incorporate issues of self-determination, political and administrative autonomy and an equitable relationship between the Indian and *ladino* worlds.

The Indian uprising in Chiapas that burst upon the world scene in January 1994 is in a sense a post-modern political movement. The rebellion is an attempt to move beyond the politics of modernity may they be of the Salinas government or of past national liberation movements. And it is more fundamental, as it seeks to end the victimisation of Indians by centuries of western modernisation. Its objective is to spark the broad-based movement of civil society in Chiapas and the rest of Mexico that

will transform the country from the bottom up and redefine modernisation, for the first time in the past 500 years, from the Indian perspective.[15]

From a short-range, the rebellion in Chiapas may be seen as the product of a quarter-century of capitalist modernisation and resistance by the peasant and Indian organisations. It is a rebellion against the government that has nominally proclaimed its commitment to revolutionary reforms and democracy while actually using repression and the free market to consolidate the position of a new ruling class.[16] Given the recent developments in other Latin American countries and the way the Indian issue has forged to the national political agenda, the Zapatista movement represents a pan-Mayan cultural uprising that encompasses the rest of Meso-America as well; their demand is for Indian political and cultural autonomy.[17]

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15 Roger Burbach, n. 4, p. 113.

16 Ibid, p.123.

17 Carol Upadhyay, "Rebellion repression and reform", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. XXX, no. 7, March 1995, pp. 430-31.

Chiapas uprising, has set forth prolonged negotiations between the government and the rebels, wherein the later has forced its viewpoint on the national agenda and the government is reluctantly acknowledging some of the rebel demands. The stalemated negotiations for the past years only confirm the complexities of the issues involved.

The broad- based character of the Zapatista demands became clear when it demanded "jobs, land, housing, food, health, education, Independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace". These formed part of the 32-point agreement reached between the rebels and the government including "recognition of EZLN as a belligerent force", "cease fire by both parties throughout the territory involved in the conflict" and "withdrawal of all federal troops from all the communities", and "respect for human rights "and led to the establishment of a Commission for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas. As negotiations failed peace talks were interrupted for 13 months only to be resumed in April 1995 at San Andrés Larrainzar in Chiapas.

New Constitutional and Political Package : Towards Reconciliation and Recognition

Reflective of the new relationship that was sought to be established between the state and its indigenous peoples, the Peace Accords of San Andrés Larrainzar arrived at, between the government and the rebels, in the state of Chiapas in 1996 contained many ideas and initiatives.[18]

Simultaneously, the rebellion and the national debate in its wake have at the individual state level, brought important changes and modifications to the constitutions and specific laws. These include particularly, in the states of Oaxaca, Veracuz, Jalisco, and San Luis Potosí, which have sizeable indigenous population. Oaxaca, for instance, has incorporated several new articles into its state Constitution in 1989, and in 1997 passed the law on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples and Communities of the State of Oaxaca.

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[18] It proposes recognition of the indigenous peoples in the Constitution, widen political participation and representation, guarantee full access to justice, encourage and promote the cultural manifestations of the indigenous peoples, ensure access to education and training and guarantee the satisfaction of basic needs, develop and promote the creation of jobs and production, protect the indigenous peoples.

There is little doubt that the change made in Article 4 of the Constitution constitutes a positive step, however, it still represents the dominant political *mestizaje*. Besides, the implementing regulations still remain to be written to transform the recognition of these rights into reality for each one of the indigenous peoples in their regions. Given Mexico's authoritarian political system and vested anti-Indian interests at the state and local levels, the implementation of these laws may still remain a distant goal.

A whole gamut of basic Constitutional reforms, based on the proposal made by the Commission for Concord and Pacification of the Legislative Branch (COCOPA) on 29th of November, 1996, form the 1998 Initiative for Constitutional Reform Regarding Indigenous Rights and Culture. The Initiative proposes reforms to Articles 4, 18, 26, 53, 73, 115 and 116 of the Constitution of the United Mexican States and embodies, for the first time, the social, economic, cultural and political rights of Mexican indigenous peoples with full respect for their dignity.[19]

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[19] Press Release 769, Los Pinos, 14th March, 1998,
Today, president Ernesto Zedillo, in the company of several members of his cabinet, signed the Initiative for Constitutional Reform Regarding Indigenous Rights and Culture. This initiative proposes reforms to Articles 4th, 18th, 26th, 53rd, 73rd, 115th and 116th of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States in order to embody the social, economic, cultural and political rights of Mexican indigenous peoples,

The Initiative proposes to modify Articles 4th, first paragraph, and 115, section V; and make additions to paragraphs second through eighth of Article 4th, changing the original order of the second through sixth paragraphs to become the ninth through thirteenth; a final paragraph to Article 18; a fourth paragraph to Article 26, changing the order of the original fourth paragraph to become the fifth; a second paragraph to Article 53 and changing the order of the original second paragraph to become the third; a section XXVIII to Article 73; sections IX and X to Article 115; and, a final paragraph to section II of Article 116 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States. The amended articles now read as follows:

Article 4: The Mexican Nation has a multicultural composition originally based on its indigenous peoples, being those descended from the peoples who inhabited the country when the colonization began and prior to the establishment of the current borders of the United Mexican States and

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with full respect for their dignity. The initiative is based on the proposal made by the Commission for Concord and Pacification of the Legislative Branch (COCOPA) Thus, the Constitutional Reforms to be determined by the Legislative Branch, will contribute to the political solution of the conflict in Chiapas.
http://world.presidencia.gob.mx/chiapas/bulletins/b769.htm

who, whatever their juridical situation, preserve their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, wholly or partially.

With respect to the other provisions of this Constitution and to the unity of the Mexican Nation, the indigenous peoples possess the right to free determination; the concrete expression of which is the autonomy of the indigenous communities to:

(i) Decide upon their internal forms of coexistence and their social, economic, political, and cultural organisation;

(ii) Enforce their own normative systems for regulating and resolving internal disputes, respecting individual guarantees, human rights, and in particular, the dignity and integrity of women; their procedures, rulings and verdicts may be revalidated by the authorities with jurisdiction in the State under the terms provided for by law and;

(iii) Choose their own authorities and exercise their own forms of internal government in accordance with their norms, guaranteeing the participation of women in conditions of equity;

(iv)Strengthen their political participation and representation in accordance with their traditions;

(v) Based on the forms and modalities of property provided for under Article 27 of this Constitution, have collective access to the use and enjoyment of the natural resources, except those falling under direct dominion by the Nation;

(vi) Preserve and enrich their tongues, knowledge, and all of the elements which make up their culture and identity; and,

(vii) Acquire, operate, and manage their own communications media, in the terms to be provided under the applicable laws.

Within the sphere of their respective jurisdictions and with the participation of the indigenous peoples, the Federation, States, and Municipalities must promote their equitable and sustainable development, as well as bilingual and intercultural education. They must likewise promote respect for and knowledge of the different cultures existing in the Nation and fight all forms of discrimination.

The Federal Government, in consultation with the indigenous peoples, shall define and develop educational programmes with a regional content, which shall acknowledge the cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples.

The State shall promote specific programmes for protecting the rights of migrant indigenous peoples both within national territory and abroad; in the latter case, this shall be done in accordance with the principles of international law.

In order to guarantee full access for the indigenous peoples to the jurisdiction of the State in all trials and proceedings involving them, their practices and cultural specifics shall be taken into account, respecting the precepts of this Constitution. The indigenous peoples shall at all times have the right to be assisted by interpreters and defenders with knowledge of their tongues and culture.

The State shall establish the necessary institutions and policies to guarantee the enforcement of the rights of the indigenous communities and their integral development, which must be designed and operated jointly with said communities.

In accordance with their particular characteristics, the constitutions and laws of the States of the Republic shall establish the pertinent dispositions and modalities for the application of the above-mentioned

principles, guaranteeing the rights, which this Constitution grants to the indigenous communities.

The amended Article 18 now reads:

The indigenous peoples shall serve out their sentences preferentially in the establishments closest to their homes, thus propitiating their reintegration into the community as an essential mechanism of social re-adaptation.

Article 26:

The corresponding legislation shall establish the mechanisms necessary for taking into consideration the needs and cultural specifics of the indigenous communities and peoples in developing plans and programmes. It shall likewise promote equal opportunities so that, based on their own efforts, the indigenous peoples may have equitable access to the distribution of the nation's wealth.

Article 53:

When establishing the territorial demarcation of the uninominal electoral districts, consideration must be given to the location of the indigenous

communities in order to ensure their political participation and representation at a national level.

Article 73: XXVIII:

For enacting the applicable laws on the responsibilities of the Federal Government regarding the indigenous communities, and the manner in which they will coordinate with the state and municipal governments for the purpose of meeting the goals set forth in this regard in articles 4th and 115 of this Constitution;

Article 115: V:

Pursuant to the corresponding federal and state laws, the Municipalities shall be empowered to formulate, approve, and administer the zoning and plans and programmes for municipal and urban development; to participate in the creation and administration of their territorial reserves; to control and supervise the use of the land within their territorial jurisdictions; to intervene in the regularization of urban land ownership; to grant licenses and permits for construction; and, to participate in the creation and administration of ecological reserve zones. For this purpose and in accordance with the objectives stipulated in the third paragraph of

article 27 of this Constitution, they shall enact the administrative rules and regulations they deem necessary.

In plans for municipal development and in the programmes deriving from them, the municipalities shall allow the participation of the population groups located within the municipal district, under the terms established by local legislation. Each municipality shall establish mechanisms for civilian participation in assisting the municipal governments in the programming, exercise, and control of the resources, including federal funds earmarked for social development;

IX. In each Municipality, the indigenous communities shall have the right of free association so as to coordinate actions for furthering their economic and social development.

Pursuant to the terms of the last paragraph of section III of this article, the Municipalities where the majority of the population is indigenous may coordinate and associate among each other so as to promote their development. The appropriate authorities shall carry out the orderly

transfer of the funds apportioned to those Municipalities for their own direct administration, and,

X. In the Municipalities where the majority of the population is indigenous, local legislation shall establish the bases and modalities to ensure the participation of the indigenous communities in the incorporation of the municipal governments, auxiliary bodies, and related agencies.

When approving the creation of new Municipalities, State legislatures shall take into account the geographical distribution of the indigenous communities, prior consultation of the populations involved.

Article 116: II:

In order to guarantee the representation of the indigenous communities in State legislatures, in the demarcation of the electoral districts, consideration shall be given to the geographical distribution of said communities.[20]

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[20] Initiative for Constitutional Reform Regarding Indigenous Rights and Culture presented to Congress by the president of Mexico, Mexico City, March 15, 1998.

The Federal Government observed on comparing the texts of the COCOPA initiative and the agreements of San Andrés Larrainzar on indigenous rights and culture, that the COCOPA initiative departs from the text of the San Andrés Larráinzar Agreements on the four following fundamental points:

I. On the terms establishing the free determination of indigenous peoples.[21]

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[21] Even though the COCOPA text refers to autonomy "as part of the Mexican State" it does not clearly express the autonomy corresponding to indigenous peoples. In its text, autonomy only refers to the rights that would be held by the indigenous peoples under the seven fractions of Article 4, but does not specify its relation to the rest of the principles, institutions and, in general, the organization of the Mexican State, clearly established at San Andrés.

On the other hand, the San Andrés Agreements are emphatic in their reference to the principles of national unity, national sovereignty, national and public interest and respect for the various levels of government and institutions of the Mexican State. All of this is not contained nor specified in the COCOPA text with the clarity with which it is in San Andrés.

In the San Andrés Agreements it is expressly stated that no special exemptions are to be created and that the revalidation by the authorities with jurisdiction of their proceedings, trials and verdicts will be by "simple procedures". The drafting of this fraction of the COCOPA text would create special exemptions since, imperatively ("they will be revalidated") and without there being a legislative disposition specified, it determines the revalidation by the authorities of the State. This imperative and omission of the revalidation procedures departs from the Agreement reached in San Andrés (D2 1.3 and D1 3.3).

In the COCOPA text the "spheres of autonomy" are those specified in the seven fractions of Article 4, therefore including III. This is expressly stated in the COCOPA initiative in the second paragraph of that article. Consequently, the expression "in the

II. With respect to the levels of government (Federal, State and Municipal) and in particular, in relation to the structure of the municipal government set forth in Art. 115 of the Federal Constitution.[22]

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spheres of autonomy" located in this fraction, in addition to being unnecessarily repetitive, gives the idea of an autonomy which is different from that referred to several times in Article 4.

San Andrés was very clear in establishing that the exercise of free determination of indigenous peoples is within the new constitutional framework of autonomy referred to in the aforementioned Article 4th. The COCOPA text consigns it as an absolute right, that is to say, outside of the Constitutional framework of Article 4th, which improperly establishes a fourth level of government apart from the three set forth in the Constitution.

22 San Andrés does not contain any of the items referred to in this Fraction V, which are already set forth in Article 115th of the current Constitution.

The COCOPA text introduces the concept "municipalities that recognize themselves as belonging to indigenous peoples". San Andrés used a different expression: "municipality with a majority indigenous population". A municipality cannot recognize its belonging to an entity other than the federal entity of which it is part, according to the provisos of Article 115th of the Constitution.

San Andrés clearly refers to indigenous participation within the municipal structure existing under the provisos of Article 115th of the Constitution, and goes on to expressly clarify that it does not seek a different type of municipality.

Meanwhile, the COCOPA text grants the inhabitants of one municipality the right to define the procedures for electing their authorities and the exercise of their forms of internal government, without referring to the existing municipal framework, as does San Andrés. Hence, it establishes forms of municipal government not recognized by the Constitution.

In addition, the COCOPA text reiterates in this fraction the concept "municipalities that recognize themselves as belonging to indigenous peoples", which has already been commented upon previously.

In addition, the following observation is made:

One cannot speak of "municipal and urban" development. One may, in any case, speak of "rural and urban" development in a municipality.

III. It creates a system of exceptions that do not codify the San Andrés Larráinzar Agreements in the following issues:

- Modes of land ownership set forth in Article 27th of the Constitution[23];

- The federal regime of communications media set forth in Article 73rd of the Constitution, [24] and

- Educational plans and programmes contrary to the provisos of Article 3rd of the Constitution. [25]

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[23] The Agreements of San Andrés give a framework for the use, enjoyment and exploitation of the natural resources to which indigenous people are entitled, respecting the national and public interest and the various levels of government and institutions of the Mexican State. Among these latter, are included the various modalities of land ownership set forth in Article 27th of the Constitution. Inasmuch as the COCOPA initiative omits the explicit reference to the rest of the constitutional framework, which is contained in the Agreements, it establishes the collective one as the only modality, in detriment of the others. This would provoke a serious social problem.

[24] The Agreements of San Andrés contemplate the issuance of a new communications law which will enable the indigenous peoples to acquire, operate and administer their own media, and not a system exempting them from the powers vested in the Congress to regulate these media.

[25] The San Andrés text attempts to guarantee bilingual and intercultural education and the participation of the indigenous peoples to achieve this. It does not, thereby, seek to violate the principle of national education and, therefore, it does not question the faculty of the Federal Executive Branch established in Fraction III of Article 3rd of the Constitution, to determine the study plans and programmes throughout the Republic, in order to ensure national identity.

IV. It establishes a concurrent administration of indigenous affairs by the Federation, States, and Municipalities, different from that of the San Andrés Larráinzar Agreements.[26]

However, the COCOPA text interprets the above as a need for the Congress to issue a law to specify the "concurrence".[27]

In including the States and Municipalities in the definition of educational programmes, In including the States and Municipalities in the definition of educational programmes, the COCOPA text takes exception to Article 3rd, Fraction III of the Constitution, which was never intended by the San Andrés Agreements.

[26] The Agreements were very clear in establishing the right, and its scope, of participation in the integration of the municipality with a majority indigenous population, in the integration of the municipal governments and the election of their representatives, all within the framework of the municipal institution established by Article 115th of the Constitution.

The commitment made in the context of San Andrés was to set up a system by means of which the three levels of government could concur in dealing with the problems of the indigenous peoples, within their spheres of jurisdiction.

[27] This causes serious difficulties because:

a. A law of this type is a strongly centralizing measure, which runs contrary to the federalism intended in San Andrés.

b. The various levels of government would have to wait for Congress to issue said law to know what their responsibility and jurisdiction was in indigenous affairs. Until this takes place, the states could not issue the necessary laws to embody the constitutional principles relating to indigenous peoples.

c. There are already provisos in the state constitutions that foresee some of the principles in the San Andrés Agreements, which would make it difficult to determine to what degree it would be valid for the general law to include provisos other than those already included in the states of the Federation.

A Critique of the Package

The proposed package of Constitutional and political reforms recognises the important role that indigenous populations can play by remaining in their traditional territories and conserving their productive systems and knowledge of natural resources.[28]

Despite the historical roots of a strong Mexican nationalism and integration under the aegis of a powerful state, terms like national identity, national interests and national policies have all undergone change both in their meaning and content over the years. This is perhaps

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d. The general law would have to assign jurisdictions in a manner which is not clear, since on this issue, in the context of San Andrés, there should be no exclusive attributes on the part of the Federation, the states or the municipalities, but rather each one should act within the sphere of its respective jurisdiction.

As can be seen, the COCOPA text omits the reference to this law, by means of which it establishes a direct constitutional right in violation of the system regulating the communications media, its concessions and permits. Hence it follows that, while the rest of Mexicans must submit to this regulation, the indigenous people shall not, giving rise to a special exemption which is explicitly rejected by San Andrés.

[28] Press release no.853 - President Zedillo affirmed during the Mishol-há Ecotourism Programme meeting, which he chaired at Salto del Agua, Chiapas, April 28, 1998, the importance of continuing to invest in the development of ecotourism centres, since they not only contribute to preserving the ecological environment, but strengthen the economy and welfare of the people because they are administered and operated by the same inhabitants who go from being peasants to tourism entrepreneurs. http://world.presidencia.gob.mx/chiapas/bulletins/b853.htm

most clearly visible with regards to policy of integration. Just as many attribute the strengthening of a nationalist identity to past government policy, many see recent policy changes as setting the stage for altering popular sentiments and attitudes regarding the nation.[29] If that is so, Mexican nationalism is in the process of redefining itself, just as it had during and after the Revolution, or during the liberal revolution of the 19th century. This raises the question whether state policies dictate national sentiments or whether state policies only reflect nationalistic feelings of the populace. An answer clearly eludes, both in theory and specific reality. What is important in Mexico is that three national interest discourses have become intense in recent years. These centre about the Indian (internal), the USA (external), and the role of the state.

The government policy till now has sought to mexicanise the Indian, not indianise Mexico. It was the dramatic rise of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas in 1994, and not process of economic and political modernisation that provoked a re-evaluation of the role of the Indian in society and that may pave the way -- depending on the outcome of

[29] Stephen D. Morris, n. 6, pp. 363-397.

current negotiation -- for much greater degrees of pluralism and multiculturalism; albeit one defined and shaped by the Indians too.

The indigenous-based uprising in the Chiapas and the prolonged negotiations have reinvigorated historic questions about the role of the indigenous in the nation's identity and the importance of 'national unity' in pursuing national interests. Mexicans are strongly nationalistic and proud of their nation. Foundation of that pride may lie in a civic--political nationalism rather than its racial-ethnic dimension. Two points bear significance: a multicultural policy can still be strongly nationalist; secondly, indigenous nationalism, autonomously or as a component of the redefined multicultural Mexican nationalism can be universal, secular and civic in its spirit and content.

There is much talk of self-determination and autonomy. The language used to describe autonomy by both Indian organisations and the government is exceedingly vague and unspecified; sometimes it is more than administrative autonomy at the municipal level. There is much talk of Indian uses and customs, yet little concrete work has been done to codify the significant differences, which exist among Indian peoples in the

exercise of their "*usos y costumbres*" as well as the instances in which positive law and Indian law come into direct conflict. Another notable problem is the lack of infrastructure within Indian communities and regions, which would permit the exercise of new functions and responsibilities that are to be transferred from state and national governments.[30] Moreover, the promise of indigenous representation in state and national legislatures is only vague.

Worst, the package seeks to de-link indigenous questions from the demands of Mexico's democratisation. The political future of the Indians is closely linked to the democratisation and the political and cultural contents of such a democracy.

In 1999, together with the federal congress, a National Consultation on Indigenous Rights and Culture was organised. On the basis of the National Consultation, a constitutional reform initiative was sent to the Congress of the Union. President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994--) is

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[30] Shannan Mattiace, "Indian Autonomy in Mexico: Separate Nations or Renegotiated Nationalism?", *LASA Papers Online 1997*, Latin American Studies Association, 1997 (URL:http://www.pitt.edu/~lasa/homepage.htm)

convinced that the initiative sent to Congress is a good one, which should be debated in an open and constructive spirit. President Zedillo explained that through these measures, the autonomy, which legitimises and genuinely vindicates the indigenous communities will be set down in the Constitution as a means of overcoming inequality. This autonomy recognises and respects differences, identities and cultural backgrounds, as well as forms of social organisations and the authorities that govern and represent the indigenous communities.[31]

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[31] Press Release 1373, Las Margaritas, Chiapas, March 17, 1999 - As never before, this initiative proposes a new relationship between our indigenous peoples; to eliminate backwardness and eradicate deficiencies with full respect for indigenous identity, culture and organisation; to reconcile the social, economic, political and cultural rights of indigenous Mexicans, in line with the guiding principles that define us as a free and sovereign Nation, a democratic Republic, and as a national State united by a Federal pact; to correct the inadequate representation of our indigenous peoples before the Congress of the Union, state legislatures and town councils; to establish the autonomy that legitimises and genuinely vindicates the indigenous communities, in the Constitution.

We must work towards a new relationship between the State and the indigenous communities, so as to form a solid base to overcome the poverty and backwardness generated over so many years; to develop bilingual and multi-cultural education; and to guarantee justice and respect for indigenous laws, traditions and customs.

This proposed autonomy recognises and respects differences, identities and cultural backgrounds, while rejecting isolation or anachronistic privileges and attempts to separate our indigenous peoples, even with the justification of protecting them; this autonomy must be congruent with the norms and institutions of the Mexican State. http://world.presidencia.gob.mx/chiapas/bulletin/b1373.htm

It is not a question of the indigenous people ceasing to be indigenous; yet, at the same time, it is a question of them being Mexicans with full rights. One particularly relevant aspect is Constitutional recognition of the autonomy of indigenous communities, in order to overcome inequality. The proposed concept of autonomy rejects any intention of separating indigenous peoples, even under the justification of protecting them. This may not be the goal of the indigenous themselves; but reducing autonomy to local administrative jurisdiction is certainly not the goal of the Indians.

In short, the complexities regarding the Mexican's views towards self and the indigenous community have yet to be understood. These complexities are enormous and are of a universal nature confronting many polyethnic societies. The demands of the indigenous and the response of the government have brought out the conflict in the discourse on nationalism, multiculturalism, modernisation, and economic development. Conflicts are in flux as new meanings are added to them. The juncture at which it is all happening is quite important. Struggle of the deprived indigenous peoples has assumed new forms while remaining within the ambit of constitutional democracy and equality. It has also

assumed a new global profile and earned support of other indigenous communities in distant countries and places, thanks to the revolution in communication technology. Above all, at the dawn of the twenty first century, when many sacrosanct ideologies and framework of the past have stood discredited, goals of democracy and pluralism, equity and justice, liberalism and developmentalism are all in search of new meanings and different methods of achieving them. The uprising of the indigenous in Mexico, at a time when the country is in the throes of rapid liberalisation and globalisation, attempting at the same time, limited political liberalisation, has brought the complexities and dilemmas involved in sharper relief.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The regimes of successive presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994-2000) have been marked by a series of major policy changes in an attempt to liberalise and globalise the economy of Mexico. This has resulted in a series of significant events that have punctuated the past decade: signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); massive social spending to offset the ill-effects of liberalisation policies, especially for the more vulnerable sections of the society; major constitutional reforms -- amendment of Article 4 in 1992; amendment of Article of 27 in 1994; implementation of NAFTA on 1st January 1994. Among the consequences of these policy changes has been the New year uprising of Indian militants in Chiapas in 1994; growing militarisation of indigenous regions; increasing rural violence over land issues; increasingly militant Indian population; indigenous demands for participation in government decision-making in matters related to the welfare and development of the Indigenous people; creation of municipalities with indigenous

representation; other reforms at state and national levels with reference to political, legal and educational matters of indigenous peoples. The nation has taken a browbeating at the hands of its indigenous people in spite of its consistent attempt to indigenise, assimilate, incorporate and integrate them into the national mainstream over the past fifty years, if not more. Ironically, today Mexico finds itself at crossroads. It is caught between the dominant elitist version of economic liberalisation and globalisation, democratisation and a multicultural social fabric on the one hand; and a new meaning and shape to these very processes that the indigenous are attempting to give on the other. The hitherto dominant *mestizo* view of Mexican nation and nationalism, integration and development occupies the centre position in the debate. The rebellion in the Chiapas has brought a whole lot of indigenous issues - the survival of communal land holdings, i.e., the *ejidos*, in the age of economic liberalisation; inalienability or otherwise of *ejidos*; state support mechanisms and policies towards Indian agricultural practices; autonomy and self determination for the indigenous within and outside the Mexican state; assimilation of the indigenous into the national mainstream; the discourse of multiculturalism and the promises or otherwise it holds for the indigenous, etc. - to the centre stage of Mexican national politics. For that

matter, the issues are of interest even outside, given the worldwide resurgence of ethnic identities especially of the indigenous populations.

The present study is a modest attempt to explain these changes, their evolution and meaning. Treatment of the Indians during the colonial and post-Independence periods, changes in the indigenous policies of the successive pre- and post-revolutionary governments and their implications for the Indian communities culminating in the recent modifications in the policies of the state are aspects covered in the monograph.

The Indian lost his lands, his culture, and his language with the establishment of New Spain, a colony of the Spanish empire. The Spanish conquistadors needing the Indian labour and lands reduced them to servants and peons labouring in the large estates of the colonisers. As vassals of the Crown, theoretically they had enjoyed some protection and rights; and were granted communal lands where their cultures were somewhat protected and continued to survive. The native languages were considered to be inferior and the Spanish language was used to "civilise

and evangelise" them. It was also an instrument of conquest and empire as well as conversion and "civilisation".

Independence did not change the status of the Indians although the 1825 Constitution gave equality to all its citizens. The indigenous languages were classified as inferior dialects and Spanish continued to be the official language. The illiterate Indians remained at the bottom of the social ladder. The liberal revolution of the mid-19th century and the long rule of Porfirio Díaz (1877-1911) proved even more devastating for the Indians. Indians lost most of their communal lands as they were expropriated under the Reform Laws and continued to do so subsequent to Díaz legislation pursuing goals of implanting a free market capitalist economy. At no time in history had more Mexicans been landless, as a result. Close to ninety per cent of the rural Mexican families had no land and many were tied to haciendas through the debt bondage system. It was boom time for the *hacendados* and land companies and the Indian was considered to be an "obstacle" to the Porfirian pattern of economic development. The exploitation of the indigenous labour and the take over of their lands continued to generate conflict. The Indians rose to fight

against their impoverished state and the demand for land drove them to rebel against Porfirian administration.

The Revolution of 1910, among others restored the communal lands to the Indians in the form of *ejidos* - the pre-conquest and colonial forms of land tenure, which had been destroyed during the Diaz period. The *ejido* – an extension of the *communidad* principle- was based on the collectivised agricultural communities of the Aztecs. The 1917 Constitution also provided education for all. Spanish remained the official language for all purposes. Education for the indigenous began in 1923 and continued through the 1950s. Hispanicisation was the slogan of the day. The Indian had no legal standing. He continued to be a ward of the state under whose guardianship he would be integrated to the national mainstream. The economic and cultural policies focussed on improving the economic condition of the *ejidos* while educational programmes and policies sought their integration into the dominant *mestizo* nation.

By 1940 one-half of Mexico's rural population lived in *ejidos,* while the population living in haciendas were reduced to less than a million. President Lázaro Cárdenas (1940 –1946) is even today remembered for

restoring or granting more land than all his predecessors or successors. These were largely from expropriated haciendas as well as new lands brought under irrigation. During the Cardenista peasant agriculture was to form the basis of agricultural modernization. And the preferred form of the *ejido* was the large-scale collective type.

As the first Chapter describes in details, the core of indigenous identity is language. Mexico has a rich heritage of the vernacular native languages. For the purpose of development, Spanish language and bilingual education has been imposed for decades as a medium of education of the indigenous. The belief, that the poverty and underdevelopment of the indigenous population is due to their inability to learn Spanish, dictated government's programmes and policies

As has been noted education for the indigenous began in 1923 and continued through the 1950s. This was followed by the bilingual educational policy respecting both local language and culture. These policies were essentially one of assimilation and incorporation of the indigenous population into the national life. With the establishment of the National Indigenous Institute (INI) in 1948, the government pursued its

policy of integration of the Indigenous peoples more vigorously through education and social development programmes with mixed results.

The INI is the prime government agency, which has been implementing the social welfare programmes for the uplift of the indigenous peoples of Mexico while collecting data on the indigenous for preserving the Indian heritage of the nation in its vast archives. Conceived in 1948 as a small autonomous body with 11 Indigenous Coordinating Centres with the main objective to integrate the indigenous people into the national mainstream primarily through Spanish language education via bilingual instruction and bilingual media. It has expanded to a well-established organization today with 110 Coordinating Centres, a network of 16 radio stations, 1,080 schools for indigenous children, 3 video-centres and one rural hospital.

INI has been promoting actions and programmes under the various departments of the government for the improvement of the living conditions of Mexico's Indians. In 1963 INI began functioning as a branch of the Department of Public Education under the Directorate of Indigenous Affairs with bilingual education of the indigenous and

preservation of the indigenous culture as its main mandate. The activities of INI have since been diversified to cover other sectors like agriculture, livestock, fishing, forestry, crafts, food supply, small industry, transport, credit and finance concentrating on their production, infrastructure, marketing and operational areas through its Agro-ecology programmes and Regional Funds for the Development of the Indigenous Towns improving the living conditions of the indigenous communities and the strengthening of the community structures. In keeping with its wider agenda the INI is today a part of the Social Development Department

As has been described in Chapter Three, liberal policies have badly affected the agricultural sector most. Cutting of subsidies and credit has caused further deterioration. The shift from commercial to subsistence farming due to lack of resources was dealt a severe blow when under NAFTA the *campesino's* income from staple crops like maize and beans touched the bottom with the flooding of the market with cheaper imported counterparts. As the small landholder look towards other sectors for employment to supplement their incomes the productivity of these lands has fallen further. Lack of easy credit for agricultural inputs

earlier available through government agencies has been withdrawn as part of the austerity measures.

The advent of economic liberalization of the 1970s and the 1980s had an impoverishing effect on the rural and urban poor of Mexico. Massive social funds, intended to promote economic and social development but which did not stimulate production, could simply be regarded as part of a policy of assistance. The amounts concerned were nevertheless considerable. Although a precise calculation has not been made, millions of dollars were distributed with an inconsistent prodigality, first by the Programme of Economic and Social Development of Chiapas (Pro-Desch) from 1971 to 1976, then through the National Plan of Depressed Zones and Marginalized Groups (COPLAMAR) between 1977 and 1988, and subsequently within the framework of the National Programme of Solidarity (PRONASOL) and of the Program of Direct Rural Support (PROCAMPO) from 1989. In 1992 and 1993 alone, PRONASOL and PROCAMPO handed out 280 million dollars to improve the standard of living, create minor infrastructures and support peasant production in the state. Far from having been abandoned to its fate, Chiapas was the object

of the most gigantic public charity operation ever mounted. Today it is obvious that this operation, pursued with amazing doggedness for a quarter of a century, failed lamentably.

Under Solidarity INI ran the most pluralistic programme for the impoverished rural and urban, mainly indigenous. It transformed from a service provider to an economic development agency. Under its aegis mobilisation of indigenous organisations at the grass root level reached new heights. Participation of the indigenous communities changed their relation with the corporatist state from that of clientelist to semi-clientelist

The past decade has witnessed two major shifts in the policies of the Salinas and Zedillo governments towards its indigenous peoples embodied in the Constitution as amendments of Articles 27 and 4. The former has far-reaching implications for the indigenous. The rug has been pulled from under their feet. The very basis of their communities and collective way of life has been extinguished without even a chance to voice their view.

The amendment of the Article 27 is the most radical development since it makes future claims for private lands to be distributed almost impossible. Also it is feared that privatisation of *ejido* lands will slowly lead to the transfer of these lands to the rich few. Under the new liberal legislation Indian communities were forced to transform their communal lands into individual property, which has contributed to the fact that many indigenous communities are already in the process of losing their lands. The still existing collective property however is generally composed of land with poor soil, hardly useful for farming, and of minimal productive and commercial value and may be generally useful only for pasture, gathering wood and wild fruit.

Amendment of Article 4 has officially acknowledged the presence of the multiple cultures that exist in Mexico today. It remains to be seen how multiculturalism will be promoted in the future. Bilingual and bicultural education has gained acceptance since the past five decades, however the pace of its growth in this duration has been stunted at the primary levels of education. Whether the state has the will and initiative to enforce its implementation only the future will tell.

After the changes in Article 4 of the Constitution referring to indigenous rights, the teaching of Spanish as an official language without precluding the promotion and development of indigenous languages has been formalised. However, the implementing regulations remain to be written to transform the recognition of these rights into reality for each one of the indigenous peoples in their regions.

There will be a tendency in the coming decades in Mexico to recognise the Indigenous peoples and their cultural differences and distinctiveness. This recognition may lead to the construction of new democratic forms and eventually, to reform the Mexican state. The right to equality before the law could be complemented by an equal legitimacy of cultural differences and their value as a cultural patrimony. There is a growing public policy whose aim is to devolve and decentralise power to the state and municipal levels, particularly in actions concerning decisions about the management of resources at the municipal and community level to include the Indigenous peoples. But how far decentralisation remains a goal and when it seems a reality remains to be seen.

Among the Indians private ownership of land is still in a period of transition. For the majority, the land is too much linked to the Indian's socio-religious and family complexes to have become a commodity, an object of a distinctly commercial value. Finally, as a juridical instrument the private ownership of this Indian land has not only failed to provide the Indians the equality and security which it was meant to provide, according to the liberal ideology, but quite the contrary, it has exposed relative independence of these populations to the acquisitive spirit of those representing the new economic structure, the ladinos.

Mexico is today wrestling with its reversal of the land reforms dating from the revolution. In its need to relieve food shortages, Mexico may no longer support the cultivation of marginal lands. Rather, with NAFTA, products from the grain belt of the US will be traded for fruits and vegetables from Mexico's northwest. One can only imagine the effect of these changes on poor farmers: increased migration to the city for some, and for others soil depletion and deforestation, as inefficient farming and grazing continues. Attempts to launch massive antipoverty programme to tide over this transitional period provided some relief. But the continuing fall in economy has forced the governments to curtail these

relief measures much to the despair of the rural poor, most of whom are the indigenous people.

It is not impossible to give a complete account of all the interpretations the Zapatista uprising has evoked from analysts more or less informed, who have ill-concealed their emotions or their prejudice. Briefly, one can distinguish between two broad categories of analysts. According to the first, who give the benefit of the doubt to the abundant literature produced by Sub. Commandante Marcos and diffused by fax, cell phone, e-mail and the Web, the Zapatista uprising was a popular democratic movement and differed from all the Marxist guerrilla movements that Latin America had experienced in the preceding decades. It represented the first 'post-Communist uprising of the twentieth century', supposedly a century of social autonomy and political and cultural pluralism. The fact that Indians should emerge from the depths of Lacandon -- literally from nowhere -- to participate, by means of armed combat, in the national debate on NAFTA and neo-liberalism, and express their opinion, by means of sophisticated communication technologies, on

the choice of society for Mexico and its long-term future surely deserves to be described as 'postmodern'.

For the second category of analysts, who prefer to see the Zapatista uprising in relation to the past rather than as an indication of the future, it belongs to a long tradition of indigenous uprisings that have taken place periodically in Chiapas since the colonial era. They see it as an expression of the resistance that Indians have ceaselessly conducted for 500 years against the oppression exercised by the West. They cite as explanation archaic conditions that still prevail today in a poor state, left to its own devices by the central power, a state never touched by the 1910 Revolution, where big landowners live side by side with destitute peasants and where Indians, deprived of their land, continue to be victims of segregation and exploitation, as in the time of the Porfiriato. In short, the uprising is portrayed as a modern version of the 'caste wars' of the past, serving as a timely reminder to the national elite, proud of having brought their country into the exclusive club of industrial powers, that Mexico still belongs to the Third World.

The two categories of analysts are in agreement on one point that merits closer examination. Both concede that the Zapatista uprising had an indigenous base and was inspired by a libertarian or 'liberationist' type of ideology. But was it as 'modern' (or 'postmodern') as the former claim, or as 'traditional' as the latter suggest? By calling into question the point on which both agree, a study of the social context in which the uprising erupted could point to its true originality, while research into its origins could reveal the past it harbours.

The militant responses to these neoliberal attempts to restructure the Mexican rural society- from the EZLN indigenous to the non-indigenous private sector farmers have come to stay. In recent years the presence of the armed forces in areas that are predominantly indigenous has been growing in response to the emergence of armed dissident groups in various parts of the country. The demands of the Indians include the right to share the economic benefits of the nation, preservation of their traditions, beliefs and their identity, along with their traditional lands and resources.

Recently, with the foundation of the Peace Accords of San Andrés Larrainzar with the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), the Peace Commission proposed a wider national-level reform of the Constitution. This proposal was accepted by the Zapatistas and rejected by the Federal Government whose counter proposal is under discussion in the senate. The *Partido Accion Nacional* (PAN - National Action Party) made a similar proposal in 1998. Under the initiative of the Commission for Concord and Pacification of the Legislative Branch (COCOPA) the government is still open to consideration of the demands of the indigenous peoples. As of this date, these negotiations will surely result in the reformulation of the policies and politics and will have an impact in the social programmes and policies for the indigenous peoples.

The indigenous peoples of Mexico have consistently suffered from state policies that have attempted to integrate and assimilate them into the nation's social, economic and political processes. These relations, however, were always asymmetrical and marked by ideologies that denigrated indigenous culture and systematic exclusion from the mainstream benefits of the nation.

Concerted efforts by the government to integrate these indigenous communities with the national mainstream, has only resulted in the strong persistence and adaptation of pre-colonial communal structures and identities. Communities and *ejidos* continue to be administered through a communal system of decision-making. This socio-political system has adapted to the pressures and opportunities from outside, but retained its original essence of a prestige economy drawing upon the sophisticated allocations of community time and labour to meet community and family needs. In areas of heavy out-migration these systems have adapted to absorb the remittances and redefine the communal rules without breaking them down. In the destination areas of permanent migration they are recreating themselves in their indigenous enclaves.

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