

Development Initiatives and the Concomitant Issues of Displacement and Impoverishment in the North-East States.

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In the modern world, development is conceived as an overall enhancement of the quality of human life within a politically structured and administrative community through governmental action. Activists, academicians, policy makers and planners have been continually raising queries to explain the nature and pattern of development on one hand, and the consequences related to it on the other. Their queries have, in turn, been generating added interpretation of the fundamental issues of development as a process of economic and social planning for the improvement in the quality of life of the people. It is a long history of interaction between man and his physical environment.¹ Thus, development is not just an economic, but simultaneously a social, political, psychological and cultural process.

The event of development is not an abstract phenomenon devoid of consequences. We know that a mode of production develops its own social formation.² The structure of production relations develops, in course of time, a corresponding structure of consciousness which is manifest in the structure of social, political, and judicial institutions which legitimise, support and strengthen the production relations.³ Development, therefore, changes the status quo in society and such changes usually entail social disruption and undesirable consequences for some population segments.⁴ Impoverishment of some social groups, the forced displacement and resettlement of population(s) and the deterioration of common property resources are some of its adverse consequences.⁵

Discourses on development necessarily point to the fact that, singly or cumulatively, planned displacement of people, habitats and ecosystems lies at the very core of notions of development.⁶ Because of the impoverishment risks involved in development induced displacement or involuntary resettlement of population, it is by far the most serious adverse consequence of development.

In this paper an attempt has been made to study the paradigm of development in India with reference to the various development initiatives taken up in the North-Eastern 'seven sisters' States and the concomitant issues of displacement and impoverishment of the predominantly tribal population of the region.

India's Development Paradigm: A Critical Appraisal

Since Independence, poverty alleviation has been the main concern of our policy makers and development planners. To cope with this problem they initiated a process of planned development, adopting a model which stressed 'maximization of growth',⁷ using increased productivity and industrialization as tools. The focus on aggregate rates of growth was prompted by the belief that rapid industrialization and structural transformation would eventually spread the benefits of growth throughout the various strata of society through a 'trickle down process'. It was assumed that reduction in poverty could be tackled only after a certain level of GNP had been reached. Thus equitable income distribution, while generally acknowledged as a desirable objective, was traded for the immediate goal of maximising the GNP.⁸ In the idiom of the period, there was no point in becoming concerned about distribution when there was practically nothing to distribute. This is manifest in the Approach Papers of the first five Five-Year Plans. For example, the Third Five Year Plan stated that, 'India's other highly promising road out of poverty lies in sharply stepping up production from industries, large and small. Because of its natural resources, India has very important advantages and considerable potential for industrialisation'.⁹ Later, in the objectives of the Sixth Five Year Plan 'modernization' and 'self-reliance' were accepted as processes to help accelerate growth. The Sixth Plan document says, 'the term modernisation connotes a variety of structural and institutional changes in the framework of economic activity. The shift in the sectoral composition of production, diversification of activities, an advancement of technology and institutional innovations have all been part of the drive to change a feudal and colonial economy into a modern and independent entity'.¹⁰

The subsequent construction of heavy industries, multi-purpose dams projects, mining and allied works, along with other infrastructural facilities were the outcome of these decisions. The detrimental impact of adopting such a paradigm of development

was that the number of industries became the main criterion of progress, and industrial expansion became synonymous with development. The social and environmental costs involved in the process went unheeded. The subject matter of development was economic growth. Hence, the complementarity between economic growth and distribution with social justice though accepted in theory was not achieved in practice.

Studies indicate that inequalities have increased during the past decades of planned development. Iyengar and Jain,¹¹ found that the decilewise price movements were such that the poorer sections were affected by inflation more severely than the rich during the period 1963-64 to 1973-74. Another study states that, the incidence of poverty for the rural population declined from over 50 per cent in the mid-1950s to about 40 per cent in 1961-62 but rose to 47 per cent towards the end of the growth phase around 1964-65. The mid-sixties, during the deceleration phase, was marked by further increase reaching the peak of 56.5 per cent in 1967-69. Thereafter, there was a decline in the incidence of poverty, which has been recorded at 54.1 per cent in 1972-73, 51.2 per cent in 1977-78, 40.1 per cent in 1983-84 and 33.4 per cent in 1987-88.¹² However, recent non-official studies like those conducted by Suresh Tendulkar and L.R. Jain (1995), S.P. Gupta (1994), Abhijit Sen and C.P. Chandrashekar (1996) show that, even today the poverty ratio is in the range of 40 per cent, much above the official estimates of 18.96 per cent, as depicted in the Economic Survey 1995-96.¹³ The most disturbing aspect of the growing inequalities was that certain groups, particularly the urban upper class high castes, men among them in particular, accumulated in themselves all the advantages while some others like the *Dalits*, the tribals, particularly women, were victims of all disadvantages.

By 'development' the Constitution of India means, that process of governance which, while respecting human rights of all persons, secures for all Indians freedom from material impoverishment.¹⁴ The failure of the development process to protect the people, specifically the weak and the marginalised from impoverishment, betrays the spirit of the Constitution. The reason is attributed to the planning process itself. Even those who accept planning for development, both in its intent and impact, as vital for democracy, criticise the adopted paradigm on grounds that the citizens are treated merely as objects of development decisions, and are given no role whatsoever in key develop-

mental decisions and programmes. For some, advocacy of growth through proliferation of industry and capitalism is 'pseudo-development', contrasted with 'neo-development', defined as control over means of subsistence and of production by those who need them most.¹⁵

The adopted paradigm of inward-looking development centered on industrialization with its attendant implications for resource allocation, thus failed to achieve its goal of poverty alleviation. Eradication of poverty requires raising the earning potential of poor households in a sustained fashion. By emphasising the role of investment on the production of capital goods and the promotion of 'heavy industries' in the development process, the strategy failed to address the requirements of the poor households. Coupled with this was the paradigm's failure to reorganize the redistributive processes in the society. Today, though there have been significant modifications in specific policies since, the basic strategy has remained intact.

Tribals: Their Displacement and Impoverishment

The worst sufferers of the developmental process have been the marginalised sections of the society, more specifically, the tribals. In India, the mid-Indian hilly belt comprising the Aravallis, Sahyadris and Central Vindhyan complex and the Chhotanagpur Plateau, along with the North-Eastern periphery of the Himalayas and the group of islands in the territorial waters of India are regions of tribal concentration. The Scheduled Tribes constitute 8.08 percent of the total population,¹⁶ while their habitat constitute about 20 per cent of the total geographical landmass of the country.¹⁷ The Ministry of Welfare¹⁸ mentions an area of 28,24,380 sq. kms. as pockets of tribal concentration. However, the Eighth Plan document mentions that about 52 per cent of the total tribal population lived below the poverty line towards the end of the Seventh Plan as against about 30 per cent among the country's population as a whole.¹⁹ Unofficial estimates put the number of tribals below the poverty line at 85 per cent.²⁰

The tribal habitat is rich in natural resources. Many development initiatives were, therefore, planned in these regions. Gradually, investment in these areas increased, both through funding from PSUs and the private sector. The result was proliferation of industrial, mining and irrigation projects in these

regions.²¹ These developmental projects required land and tribal land was usurped.²² However, statistical data prove that the tribals were not the beneficiaries of these macro-economic changes.²³ On the contrary, development initiatives have contributed to their impoverishment. Exact figures on displacement are not easily available. It is estimated that at least 213 lakh persons have been displaced by development projects in the last four decades, with dams alone accounting for 163 lakhs. Most of those displaced during the last four decades are from the weaker sections: more than 40 per cent of them tribals and at least 20 per cent *Dalits*.²⁴ Later studies indicate that the situation has not changed substantially in the 1980s. Table 1 gives the estimates of the tribals displaced by developmental projects between 1951-1990.

Table I: A Conservative Estimate of the DPs of Projects, 1951-1990.

No. Project	Total Displaced			Tribals Displaced		
	Total DPs	Resettled	Backlog	Total DPs	Resettled	Backlog
01. Mines	2,550,000	630,000	1,920,000	13,30,000	330,000	1,000,000
02. Dams	16,400,000	4,100,000	12,300,000	63,21,000	15,81,00	47,40,000
03. Industries	1,250,000	375,000	875,000	313,000	100,080	233,000
04. Wildlife	600,000	125,000	475,000	450,000	100,000	350,000
05. Others	500,000	150,000	350,000	125,000	25,000	100,000
Total	21,300,000	5,380,000	15,920,000	8,539,000	2,116,000	6,423,000

Source: W. Fernandes, 'Development induced displacement in the tribal areas of Eastern India', (Mimeo, 1994) pp. 24-34.

The North-Eastern States

The North-Eastern zone of India comprising of the States of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh occupy an area of 2,54,961 sq. km., which is about 7.6 per cent of the total geographical area of the country.²⁵ According to the 1991 census, the total population of this region is about 31.5 million, 90 per cent of whom live in the villages and hilly areas. Collectively, these States contain 12.07 per cent of the tribals in India.²⁶ They comprise more than 50 distinct ethnic groups. However, there are great variations in the popula-

tion figures of the different tribes. There are small tribes with only a few hundred individuals and very large tribes comprising lakhs of persons.²⁷

The tribal population of the North-East can be broadly divided into two categories. Those inhabiting the hilly tracts or the majority of the inhabitants of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland as well as the inhabitants of the hill districts of Assam, Manipur and Tripura and those living in the plains of Assam primarily the Brahmaputra Valley. This implies that the demographic distribution in the North-East is characterised by sparsely populated hilly areas and densely populated plains. These categories also indicate differences in cultural characteristics. The tribals of the hills have remained isolated from the rest of the population until recently, while the tribes in the valley lived together with the other non-tribal groups.

Table II: Area and the Tribals in the North-East States 1991

States	Geographic Area (in Sq. km.)	Population (in thousands) Total	Tribals as % of		
			Total population Tribal	of State/UT	Tribals in India
India	3287263	838584	67758	8.08	100.00
Arunachal P.	83621	865	550	63.66	0.81
Assam	78438	22414	2874	12.82	4.24
Manipur	22327	1837	632	34.41	0.95
Meghalaya	22429	1775	1518	85.53	2.24
Mizoram	21081	690	654	94.75	0.96
Nagaland	16579	1210	1061	87.70	1.58
Tripura	10486	2757	853	30.95	1.29
Total	254961	31548	8142	25.81	12.07

Source: FSI 1995: 22; Census of India 1991: 16-19.

Geo-political significance of the North-Eastern States

To understand the geographical significance of the region it is necessary to understand its situation in relation to the world map. The North-East has boundaries which are visibly vulnerable to outside powers. The length of the international boundary is about 2,900 kilometres, and the area is surrounded by four foreign countries, viz. Bhutan, China, Bangladesh and Burma. Students of international affairs contend that this area is sensi-

tive and that this sensitivity is further compounded by the historical fact that the population of this area is polyglot and a large percentage of it consists of tribes whose links with India during the British rule were minimal if not non-existent.²⁸

Most of the tribes of the North-East have a history of isolation from the mainstream of events in the sub-continent. Hostile terrains coupled with the British policy of isolation, to further their colonial designs, made contact with outside centres of trade and culture difficult to maintain.²⁹ 'Inner line' restrictions imposed on people from other parts of India, forbidding their entrance into these tribal areas without permission, prevented the development of socio-political linkages between the two societies.³⁰

Independence brought about several changes in the social structure of the region. The extension of the civil administration into the region, the widening of the economic frontiers by amalgamating the local economy with the national economy, the drawing of international boundaries with greater rigidity, the increasing contact between ethnically distinct tribal groups, had cumulative adverse effect on the process of nation building in this region.³¹ Contrary to these changes was the government's decision to carry on with the colonial practice of 'inner-line permits'. In these circumstances, some observers feel that, it was natural for these tribal groups to attempt to define their socio-cultural identity vis a vis the others.

The basic economic principles of most of the tribal groups of the region were, production for consumption, no capital investment, investment of excess wealth for enhancement of prestige and kin-oriented economic co-operation.³² Their economy was, therefore, completely detached from the countrywide economic infrastructure. After independence, they suddenly became a part of the countrywide economic infrastructure. However, the operative forces of the formal economy based on competition were difficult for them to comprehend, because their traditional economy was structured on the processes of co-operation. The result was the failure of the tribals to participate effectively in the economic realm. Historically, it has been the non-tribals who have controlled the resources of the tribal areas in other parts of India³³ and this was the case even in the North-East. The result was that non-tribal entrepreneurs took advantage of the situation.

The separatist tendencies of some tribal groups of the North-East thus, rests on three factors, the attempts of the tribal groups to define their socio-cultural identity in the new political en-

vironment, their ethnic affinities with the population on the other side of the border and the region's militarization for the maintenance and policing of a long border. The presence of the army in the region and the ensuing hostilities, therefore, prevented the process of creating a morally unified political community out of a multitude of ethnically and culturally discrete communities.³⁴

Economic Resources in the North-Eastern States

The North-East States are rich in minerals and other natural resources like forests and water bodies. Nearly 64.46 per cent of their geographic area is covered by forests.³⁵ They share between themselves about 23.6 per cent of the total forest cover of the country. Recent satellite imagery data shows that the actual forest cover in the region is about 1,64,359 sq.km. The importance of the forests in the economy of the region can be judged by the fact that in 1980-81 the forest departments of these States earned about Rs. 279.55 crores, which was 5.91 per cent of the total revenue earned by the governments from forests in India.

Table III: Geographic Area, Recorded Forest cover and Actual Forest cover in, 1994-95 (in sq.km.) and Revenue earned by Forest Departments, 1980-81 (in Rs. Crores) of the North-Eastern States.

State	Geographic Area	Recorded Forest Area	Actual Forest Area	% age of Act. to Geog.	Revenue Earned
Arunachal P.	83621	51540	68621	81.9	38.181
Assam	78438	30708	24061	30.7	112.455
Manipur	22327	15154	17558	78.6	2.393
Meghalaya	22429	9496	15714	70.1	8.756
Mizoram	21081	15935	18576	88.1	0.284
Nagaland	16579	8629	14291	86.2	5.012
Tripura	10486	6292	5538	52.8	112.469
Total	254961	137754	164359	64.46	279.550
All India	3287263	765210	639600	19.46	4725.560

Source: FSI 1995: 22; CSE 1982: 109.

Alongwith the forest resources the North-East also has huge reserves of minerals. Mineral prospecting has proved that these States have about 1,700 million tonnes of coal, 169.82 million

tonnes of petroleum along with 160.45 million tonnes of natural gas, 6,000 million tonnes of limestone, 50 million tonnes of chromite and other minerals like fireclay, quartz, dolomite, silver etc. in mineable quantities.³⁶ The mining potential of this

Table IV : No. of Mines in the North-East

State	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Arunachal	1	1	1
Assam	7	7	7
Manipur	1	1	1
Meghalaya	6	5	5
Mizoram	-	-	-
Nagaland	-	-	-
Tripura	-	-	-
Total	15	14	14

Source: Indian Bureau of Mines 1994: 11.

Table V: Break-up of Income from Minerals (value in Rs. '000)

State	Total		Fuels	Metallic	Non-Metallic	Minor
	1990-91	1991-92	1991-92	1991-92	1991-92	Min. 1991-92
Arunachal	111614	102046	100884	nil	741	1091
Assam	13463398	13503209	13326686	nil	21012	157504
Manipur	1038	1722	nil	42	nil	1680
Meghalaya	38920	33658	nil	nil	26138	7520
Mizoram	1737	1737	nil	nil	nil	1737
Nagaland	1809	1886	nil	nil	nil	1886
Tripura	39248	58212	57750	nil	nil	462
Total	136378601	14539760	13451896	42	47124	165443

Source: IBM 1994: 118-119.

region is presently not being fully exploited. This is evident from Table IV, which confirms only 14 working mines, even though there are huge reserves in the region. The contrast with the rest of India is evident when this failure is compared with that of the 4,132 working mines in India for all minerals in 1992-93.³⁷ From Table V, it is seen that the maximum revenue is

earned from 'fuel minerals' production followed by 'minor minerals' like stones, sand, construction material. Thus, it can be said that only those minerals which are in scarce supply in the other parts of India, like fuel or those which have local usages are presently being mined. Since supply of the rest of the minerals like limestone, dolomite, chromite, fireclay is reasonably good in the Indian mineral market, the reserves located in hilly and unapproachable areas of the North-East have not generated much interest in the mineral processing units. The total income of the States from mining and allied works and the industry's growth in terms of money earned, is depicted in Table VI. It shows that the mining sector is growing albeit slowly.

Table VI: Statewise Income from the Mining Sector. (In Rs. Crores)

State	1989-90	1990-91	1991-92	% rise	% Share
Arunachal	5.08	8.00	7.11	- 11.12	0.05
Assam	781.74	933.62	936.08	+ 0.26	6.97
Manipur	0.17	0.09	0.15	+ 66.66	++
Meghalaya	2.75	2.94	2.57	- 12.59	0.02
Mizoram	0.11	0.16	0.16		++
Nagaland	++	0.16	0.17	+ 6.25	++
Tripura	1.00	2.73	4.04	+ 47.99	0.03

Source: Indian Bureau of Mines 1994: 93.

Issues in Exploitation and Redistribution of Natural Resources

(i) Sequential Exhaustion of Natural Resources.

While studying the supply of bamboo to a paper mill in South India, Gadgil³⁸ observed that, contractors supplying bamboo to the mill started by clearfelling the bamboo clumps located nearest to the mill. When this supply was exhausted they moved to the next nearest resource area. This was again abandoned when exhausted and the process continued. He calls this a process of sequential exhaustion of resources. According to him, this process of sequential exhaustion has several dimensions. Firstly, there is a sequence of accessibility in space, wherein resources available in easily accessible terrain are the first to be exploited. Gradually, the less accessible terrains are exploited by developing roads and

other facilities. Secondly, there is the sequence of distance, which shows that resources nearest to the market are the first to be exploited. Once resources in a region are exhausted it is the turn of the next resource-rich region. Thirdly, the sequence is repeated on species. When a suitable species is exhausted then the next best alternative is considered as a substitute. Fourthly, the sequence is structured on the resource's morphology. Once the supply of the resource dwindles, then the parts which were earlier rejected as wastes are taken up as substitutes. Finally, the fifth dimension to this process is the notion of ownership of land from which the raw materials are derived. Resources on State lands are the first to be exploited because of the lure of subsidies given by the State. The next in the sequence are the resources on the common lands. When even these were exhausted private lands are explored.

The sequential exhaustion principle was also observed in the collection of raw material for the plywood industry in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka. Thus, in the absence of rigorous policy guidelines and effective legislation on the process of resource extraction, the sequential exhaustion pattern becomes the determining principle of resource exploitation of forests, minerals, water and other natural resources. The concept of sequential exhaustion therefore helps to understand the process of resource extraction. The gradual distancing and the substitution of raw material sources gives an idea as to the future sequences in resource exploitation.

(ii) *The riparian doctrine*

In usual parlance, natural resources are regenerative but potentially exhaustible, meaning thereby that the sustained flow of services provided by them can never exceed some finite limit.³⁹ The exhaustible nature of these resources necessitates proper resource management and judicious redistribution mechanism. The inability of the State administrative machinery to overcome the logistics involved in enforcing these processes, makes them take a non-interventionist stand. For example, in India we have accepted a policy of growth through rapid industrialization. Industries require natural resources as raw materials. In this context, the idea of resource management loses significance because of its inherent anti-thesis to the paradigm of development. The government is forced to accept the *laissez faire* policy.

The intensity of resource exploitation, in the absence of interventions, thus proceeds on a pattern analogous to the 'riparian doctrine'.

The 'riparian doctrine', allows the owner of a plot of land to extract as much ground water as he desires regardless of its consequences on adjacent plots and on the basin. It therefore, provides no protection to a well owner from the lowering of the water table under his plot of land. On the other hand, in the absence of any intervention the doctrine will encourage an excessive rate of overall water extraction, leading possibly to an eventual ruin of the basin. The 'riparian doctrine' thus, enables an owner of a stretch of land to command control over the underground water resources beneath his land. Drawing an analogy between the extraction of underground water and of resources like minerals, forest produce etc., one finds several similarities. In both these cases excessive extraction will eventually lead to the depletion of reserves. The quantity to be extracted depends on demand for the resources. The exact quantity of the reserves is not known to the exploiter. No legal mechanism to check the quantity to be exploited because it is the demand for these that structure supplies. In developing or underdeveloped economies, because of the ineffectiveness of the administrative system, the need for growth in the economy and the dominance of the capitalist classes over the policy making bodies, a situation emerges wherein the principle governing the intensity of resource exploitation is similar to the 'riparian doctrine'. The system has no in-built mechanism to quantify limits and therefore industries and other users of raw materials try to extract the most out of the resources. The absence of a rational redistributive mechanism makes their task easier. General societal good and the norms of social justice are staked for economic development. These may result in irreversible changes in the society and the environment.

Resource Exploitation in the North-East

As already mentioned, the North-East States are rich in natural resources and therefore the problems arising out of resource exploitation and development are also visible here. The process has been slow-in most areas because of the hostile topography. The Forest Survey of India data on the forest cover loss in the North-East, given in Table III shows, that between 1993-95 the

total loss of forest cover in the region has been about 783 sq.km. The break-up of this figure on States shows, that the maximum loss of 447 sq.km. is observed in Assam which is the nearest to the rest of the Indian States. The least loss of 40 sq.km. is observed in Arunachal Pradesh which is the farthest.

Table VII: Change in Forest cover of the North-East Region (in sq.km.)

State	1993 Assessment			1995 Assessment			Total Change
	Dense Forest	Open Forest	Total Forest	Dense Forest	Open Forest	Total Forest	
Arunachal	54510	14151	68661	54176	14445	68621	-40
Assam	15998	8510	24508	15694	8367	2461	-447
Manipur	5307	12314	17621	5318	12240	17558	-63
Meghalaya	3305	12464	15769	4045	11669	15714	-55
Mizoram	4238	14459	18697	4281	14295	18576	-121
Nagaland	3487	10861	14348	3487	10804	14291	-57
Tripura	1819	3719	5538	1819	7195	538	nil
Total	88664	76478	165142	88820	75539	164359	-783

Source: FSI 1995: 7

This observation is in consonance with the idea of sequential exhaustion. The forests in Assam are located in less hostile terrain. Because the topography is less hilly and the area is closer to the industrial regions of India, the forests here were the first to be exploited. The FSI data for the whole of India shows an increase in forest cover by 278 sq.km. between 1993-95. This may mean a shift in resources exploitation from other parts of India into the North-East. With the depletion of reserves in the more accessible valley areas the process of exploitation may move further inside the difficult hilly terrains. Assam has taken up industrialization in a big way, as is evident from the fact that in the past few years it has set up several large industries producing petroleum and petroleum products, fertilizers, cement, mineral processing units, tea-based units, two major thermal power plants, as well as, two major, five medium and 1278 minor irrigation projects.⁴⁰ It can be concluded that the loss of forest cover is probably linked to the process of development. The fact, that Assam has the most easily accessible terrain and is

nearest to mainland India relative to the other North-Eastern States and has taken up industrialization in a big way, gives an indication that the pattern of sequential exhaustion is progressing into the North-East in consonance with the sequence of accessibility in space.

That industrialization in the North-East has been slow is evident from Table VIII, which shows that there are only 14 large industrial units in the region. Assam again leads the list with 8 large and 12 medium industrial units. Manipur with 2 large and 12 medium industrial units comes next. Manipur has relatively better developed communication and transportation facilities and this may have contributed to its speedy industrialization. If this observation holds true then it can be said that with the development of accessibility to its huge natural resources the whole of the North-East could develop into an industrial region. The occurrence of huge deposits of fuel minerals and limestone, the principal raw materials in cement production and abundant water and hydel power potential confirms that the North-East has the ingredients necessary for industrial development.

Table VIII: No. of Industries, Power Plants and Irrigation Projects in the North-East 1995-96

State	Industries		Hydel Plants		Thermal Plants	Irrigation projects
	Large	Medium	Large	Small		
Arunachal	N.A.	7	N.A.	22	-	1
Assam	8	12	-	-	2	3
Manipur	2	12	2	2	-	5
Meghalaya	1	3	-	4	-	7
Mizoram	-	-	1	1	-	0
Nagaland	3	2	1	-	-	0
Tripura	N.A.	N.A.	2	-	**	1
Total	14	36	6	29	2	17

** Tripura has a large number of gas powered thermal units.

Source: *India 1996*, 7; CWC 1995

However, industrialization in the region is fraught with dangers. Compared to the other regions of India the situation in the North-East is unique, especially with regard to the availa-

bility of agricultural land. Hilly terrains coupled with forests leave little land for agriculture in this region. Almost all the people of the region are mostly cultivators, and so their economy is dependent on agricultural development.⁴¹ Industrialization may take up the little land available creating imbalances in the socio-economic life of the region.

*The Development-Displacement Complex and
Impoverishment Risks*

Development in the North-East is correlated to the process of sequential exhaustion of resources. Exploitation of natural resources, rather than the desire to improve the quality of life of the people of the region, therefore, becomes the driving force behind development. In the absence of a legal-rational framework the 'riparian doctrine' provides the legitimacy to intensive resource exploitation. The 'riparian doctrine' conditioned policy interventions give primacy to economic issues like the quantity produced and the economic importance of the produce in the market rather than social considerations. The economic undercurrents of demand and supply become the propelling force. The tribal social structure, with its stress on communal living is alien to the notions of free market and intra-group competition.⁴² Therefore the tribals find it difficult to adapt to the new situation.

The North-East is rich in fuel minerals like petroleum, natural gas and coal. The energy crisis being faced by our country makes exploitation of these minerals essential. Studies have shown that coal mining operations especially, open-cast coal mining has been a major population displacer in the other parts of the country. The low-grade coal that is available in the North-East, needs to be extracted only through open-cast mining so as to keep the production cost down. The inferior quality of coal available here makes them an ideal fuel for thermal power plants. Since coal is the only raw material required for thermal power generation and the power plants requirement of coal is in very large quantities, it is economically strategic to have thermal plants near coal sources to cut down on transportation costs. Therefore, prospects of massive coal mining operations and the subsequent installation of thermal units are contemplated in the North-East. The threat of displacement due to coal mining and power generation is, therefore, more in this region than in other parts of the country.

Likewise, the discovery of huge reserves of petroleum and natural gas in this region, has great potential for industrialization. In Assam, oil production has been going on for a long time, and this has resulted in the establishment of four huge oil refineries along with ancillary units for fertilisers and petrochemical production. Recent discoveries of oil reserves in Arunachal Pradesh⁴³ could, therefore, be analogous to the development in Assam. Besides, once the Assam oil reserves are depleted the sequence of exploitation will move on to Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, the presence of natural gas reserves has created a potential for industrialization of the region. The technological breakthrough in achieving economic viability in gas-based thermal power plants implies that in future large gas-based plants may be set up. To cut through the cost of laying and maintaining gas pipelines it would be economically prudent to establish thermal units near the gas source. The availability of large reserves of natural gas will therefore lead to the installation of gas-based power projects in the region in future. Presently, several micro gas-based thermal plants are in operation in Tripura.⁴⁴

The occurrence of these mineral resources can thus be seen as the driving force behind future large-scale industrialization of this region. In a situation where only limited land is available even for agricultural purposes the prospect of setting up huge industries requiring large tracts of land seems contradictory. Industrialization would ultimately result in the large-scale alienation of agricultural land. The local tribal population's unique social structure conditioned by forests and cultivation for sustenance and their near isolation from the mainstream society, is a serious impediment to their adapting to the changed situation. So the probable benefits of industrialization will fail to reach them. In the absence of alternatives, the loss of their lands will lead to their impoverishment.

The North-Eastern region has several fast flowing rivers and therefore excellent hydel potential. In the past several micro and mini hydel projects have been constructed in the region to tap the water potential. To install these projects small tracts of land was required. However, in recent years larger projects started being planned and some have been executed. Most of these large hydel projects are located on the major rivers of the region. Because of the predominantly hilly and forested terrain, the areas on the banks of the rivers form the areas of intensive agricultural activities and consequently areas of high population

density. The installation of irrigation and hydel projects in the region thus takes up rich agricultural lands, displaces a relatively bigger population and has consequences on the areas downstream by blocking the natural flow of the river.

The most important development project in Manipur is the Loktak multi-purpose project. This project started some 15 years back, is designed to irrigate 31,000 hectares of land and produce electricity for industrial and domestic use. A component of this project is the Ithai barrage on the Manipur river. The population residing on the banks of the river had to evacuate the area. Thousands of hectares of high yielding paddy fields on the periphery of the Loktak lake, Pumlel lake and Lamjaokhang lake were inundated. In addition thousands of hectares of vegetable fields (Ingkhol) were also submerged.⁴⁵ Ibomcha Singh,⁴⁶ estimates that about 83,450 hectares (including both patta land and permitted lands) of agricultural land are affected by the Ithai barrage and loss of about 400 crores of Rupees because of the natural resources submergence. Out of these some 20,000 hectares were used for double-cropping purposes and about 35 lakh quintals of paddy was produced from them.⁴⁷ The inundation of peripheral areas has affected agriculture, cattle rearing and phoom fishing. This has caused loss of livelihood and employment opportunities for more than one lakh persons. The Ithai barrage has also affected the ecology of the region. Damage to natural fishery and aquatic plants, inundation of grazing lands, siltation of the Loktak lake, accumulation of phumdies in the lake and flooding parts of an adjacent national park, are some of the discernable environmental impacts of this project.

Another important consideration in the assessment of the displacement problem in the North-East is the growing militarization of this region. The assumption that activities of hostile neighbours are fanning inter-ethnic violence and 'separatist demands' from ethnic groups, increased the security apprehensions of the state. Large-scale army deployment by the state to counter violence and suppress separatist demands followed. This military build-up in the region has two distinct dimensions. Firstly, there was the militarization of the tribal populations by forces sympathetic to the separatist cause. Secondly, there was the state's military build-up. Militancy and militarization which started in the 1960s seems to have now become virtually institutionalised. The political structure's measures to suppress the separatist demands of some ethnic groups and the state's power

are personified in the process of militarization in the region. Though these developments may have political significance at the national and regional level polity, their sociological significance in the context of displacement and impoverishment are worth mentioning here.

The state's military establishment requires land to settle on and resources for consumption. The little non-forest land that this region has and the meagre consumables these lands produce have, therefore, to be shared by the local population with the military establishment. A study on the state of development in Manipur mentions that even football fields have been transformed into military cantonments.⁴⁸ So the increased military presence has resulted in the alienation of land which could have been used for other productive purposes. In the event of increased industrial activity in the region the pressure on the state to provide security would be increased. The state will have to increase its military presence in the region to counter possible subversive activities. The increased military presence will require more land. The ongoing industrialization process of the time will itself put strains on the availability of land and if more land needs to be alienated for the non-productive purpose of stationing a huge army, the displacement issue will become a severe problem. Since most of these activities are alien to the tribals, they cannot participate in them. The outcome will be large-scale impoverishment of the tribal population.

Coupled to the problem of militarization of the region is the problem of militancy, which in itself is an impoverishment risk. As already mentioned, the demography of this region comprises of a multitude of ethnic entities, some large others small. The development of communication facilities have resulted in violent inter-ethnic strifes in recent times. One of the features of this violence has been the ethnic cleansing of the minority groups, resorted to by the dominant ethnic group. The minority groups are thus forcibly displaced from its territory. This refugee population impoverished because of displacement migrates to other safer territories. In recent times there has been massive refugee movements in the North-East because of ethnic cleansing. Multiple displacement of such population segments by developmental projects can lead to their further impoverishment and disastrous social consequences.

Militarization in the North-East has implications for impoverishment of the population in other ways too. As observed, mili-

tarization is only one of the issues in the context of displacement and impoverishment of the people of the region. Because of the inherent political connotations of the military build-up the people of the region are aware of the problem. However they seem to have taken it up as the only issue. This can have serious implications for the future. As already explained the North-East may experience a conspicuous intensification of developmental activities in the near future. Development induced displacement is, therefore, a major impoverishment risk for the people. The low priority accorded to development induced displacement would, probably, make displacement easier. The greater significance attached to the question of militarization would result in the impoverishing effect of development on the social system being overlooked. The inability of the people to perceive the root cause for their problems will make it difficult for them to unite and develop resistance to their displacement.

Conclusion

Development initiatives in the North-East States have to be seen in the context of the macro-economic demands of the region, the process of resource exploitation in the region and the State's security concerns in the emerging socio-political scenario structured on ethnicity. Macro-economic indicators for the region as a whole are not satisfactory and therefore there is no denying the fact that the region needs developmental inputs. For achieving sustained development standards, the existing development paradigm is thoroughly inadequate. Industrialization has the potential to bring about a qualitative change in the standard of living of the people, but then it has been shown to have some adverse social consequences. This becomes the point of departure in the construction of a new development paradigm for the region.

The North-East with its predominantly tribal population, a population which has been marginalised throughout history, needs special consideration. The existence of a plethora of mutually distinct ethnic groups, with some having virtually divergent cultural practices, the tribal notion of CPRs, their informal economy, their relationship with the forests and its resources etc., makes this region unique. The depletion of natural resources used as raw materials in industries in the other parts of the country has now led the national formal economic infrastructure into this region. The process of sequential exhaustion is

gradually attracting more non-tribals into the region and the absence of resource extraction control norms and legislation is further encouraging the exhaustion process. In such a market-oriented situation it is natural that the tribal population which is used to community living would be particularly disadvantaged.

The ethnic problem and the government's policy of deterrence that reflected in the stationing of a huge army in the region, are developments which have created problem of space for the local population. Land is usurped by the more powerful ethnic groups in a process of ethnic cleansing of the numerically smaller groups. The smaller groups which are pushed out of a territory, are thus alienated and face severe impoverishment risks. On the other hand, the huge military presence requires large tracts of non-forest land for cantonments, firing ranges, air-bases and several other reasons. Several social groups are displaced or affected by land alienation for these purposes. The tribals in the region are primarily cultivators and therefore the loss of their land poses severe impoverishment risks. However, the most disturbing aspect of the displacement issue in the North-East is the shift in the concern of the people to the problem of militarization rather than development induced displacement of population. Development induced displacement in the region entails severe impoverishment risks for the predominantly tribal population and therefore it has to be the focus of our concern on the issue of impoverishment. Failure to recognize the adverse effects of development can thus lead to disastrous social consequences.

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