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Political Theory of Development and Contemporary North East India

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Abstract

This paper in its first part offers a brief historical account of North East India, including how the region which was part of single unified Assam got divided into seven respective states. Subsequent part of this papers studies political theory behind the idea of development. It starts with common understanding of development and then looks at the problem presented by this understanding of development. In the later section this paper explores the contemporary problems in the North East Region of India and the ways in which these problems are being dealt by Indian state. The ways in which these problems can be addressed more appropriately and some alternative ways of thinking about the development will be in the very last section.

Key Words : North East India, State, Political Theory, Development, Problems

Introduction

After Independence India went for a nation-building exercise. This exercise of nation building in not a one time process that can be accomplished once and for all times to come. It is very obvious and expected that in course of time new challenges come up. Apart from new arriving challenges there are also problems of past which never got resolved. The democratic experiment that Indian state undertook unfolded in coming decades after independence saw a wave of aspiration for autonomy from different regions of the country.

India is a nation with multiple nations within it. India is a experiment of its own kind which finds no precedent in the civilization history of the Earth. Many regions now part of India were coercively stitched with union and were made part of it unwillingly. Such regions were antagonistic to the annexation but the antagonism was reconciled by the Indian state marking a balanced approach.

North East India : A Region space

The North East India consists of seven states, also referred to as the 'seven sister'. The region has only 4 percent of the country's population but about twice as much share of its area. A small corridor of about 22 kilo meters connects the region to the rest of the country. The region shares boundary with China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and serves as India's gateway to South East Asia. The above information is enough to understand it's strategically important geographical location.

The northeastern zone of India is also a complex zone in terms of its ethnic and cultural diversity. Most of the states have a dominant ethnic community but also substantial minority. Assam remains particularly diverse and is divided by language, religion and tribe. Assamese Hindus are the largest religious groups, but Muslims numbers are substantial and ever-growing due to migration from Bangladesh. Arunachal Pradesh has 50 linguistic group and 53 major tribes.In Manipur the Meiteis dominate. Meghalya is peopled mainly by Khasis, Garos and Jaintias. In Mizoram the Mizos forms the largest community. Nagaland is dominated by Naga tribe, but its also has Jangkhuls, Kukis, Anals, Maos, Hamars and Haokips. Finally Tripura has been dramatic changes in Ethnic composition.

After Independence the entire region of north east has undergone considerable political reorganisation. Nagaland as a state was created in 1963; Manipur, Tripua and Meghalaya in 1972 while Mizoram and Aunachal Pradesh beccame separate states only in 1987. The partition of India in 1947 had reduced the north east region of India into a land locked region and affected its economy. Cut off from the rest of India, the region suffered neglect in developmental terms. Its politics too remained insulated the development of the region, vast international border and weak communication link between NER and rest of India have further added to the delicate nature of politics there. Three issues which dominates politics in NER are Demands for Autonomy, Movements for secession and opposition to Outsiders.

Challenges to Development in NER

This section of the essay discusses the above mentioned issues separately where major initiative on the first issue in 1970s set the state for some dramatic development on the second and third in the 1980s.

At Independence the entire region except Manipur and Tripura comprised the state of Assam. The demands for political Autonomy arose when Assamese language was imposed upon non Assamese settlers. There were opposition, protest, riots throughout the region. a Tribal Union was formed which wanted complete seperation from Assam. They demanded a tribal state to be carved out of Assam. Finally instead of one tribal state several states got carved out. But this was not the end to the demand of autonomy demand rather just a kick start. It was not feasible for Indian state to carve out yet smaller state therefore Indian state very cognitively used other federal provisions of our constitution in the form of Autonomous district council to satisfy the demands and keep the Indian Union robust at the same time.

Demands for Autonomy were lot more easier for the state to deal with but things got severely worse and difficult when demands of separate nationhood came up. Mizos believed that they were never a part of British India and therefore did not belong to Indian union. the Mizo anger after the famine led to the formation of Mizo National Front (MNF) under the leadership of Laldenga. In 1966 MNF started Armed campaign which was strongly retaliated by Indian army and Airforce which led to their repression and accentuated their anger. At the end of two decades of insurgency everyone was a looser. In 1986 after two decades of bloody insurgency, maturity prevailed at the both sides of leadership and a Peace Accord was signed between Rajiv Gandhi and Laldenga.Today Mizoram is the peaceful place in the region and has taken big strides in literacy and development.

The story of Nagaland is similar apart from the fact that it started earlier and yet not been resolved. Insurgency and seperatists movement led by Angami Zaphu Phizo. After a period a violent insurgency a section of Nagas signed an agreement with the government of India but this was not acceptable to other rebels therefore the problem still awaits a final resolution.

The large scale migration into the NER gave rise to yet another complex problem of 'outsiders'. In 1979 the All Assam Students Union (AASU), a students group not affiliated to any party led an anti-foreigner movement which was against the Bengali's migrants from Bangladesh. As the migrants were

becoming dominant politically due to their higher numbers the movement demanded their deportation and tagging them as faulty voters. The same happened in the negotiation of AASU with Rajiv Gandhi. The NRC exercise currently in news under the watch of supreme court is the follow up of this negotiation.

The idea of Development : Criticism and Alternatives.

In the broadest sense of the term, development conveys the ideas of improvement, progress, well being and a aspiration for a better life. The concept of development has undergone many changes over the years. In the initial years the focus was on catching up with the economic growth and modernization of societies. Therefore developing countries soon after their independence (Third World Countries) adopted goals like industrialization. It was a common belief among the masses that state was the only agency capable of initiating this kind of social and economic change. Many countries embarked upon ambitious projects of development often with the help of loans and aid from the developed countries. It was also hoped that the emerging prosperity would gradually 'trickle down' to the poorest section of society and help reduce inequality. A great deal of faith was placed in adopting the latest discoveries of science and state of the art technologies . However the model development adopted by India and other countries has come under a great deal of criticism over the years and this has led to some rethinking about the goals and processes of development today.

This model of development also had high social cost. A large number of people have been displaced from their homes and localities due to construction of mega projects. Displacement results in loss of livelihood and increases in impoverishment. Those who get displaced end up at the margins of society. There is also a loss of culture. The most concerning byproduct is the devastation of ecology and environment. Destruction of mangroves at the shore line which act as natural barriers to Tsunami in lieu of developing Coastal Economic Zones(CEZ). Rise in the rate of global warming. Flash floods, pollution are other end results which are strongly contended by Environmentalists.

Alternative conception of development is what is now called a Bottoms- up approach i.e., initiation and proliferation of development starting from the grass root levels of the society. The Benefits of developments have been largely cornered by the powerful and the costs of the development model have been borne by the poorest and vulnerable

sections of the population weather due to ecological degradation or displacement. The ideal model of development will be where the competing demands of different sections of population as well as achieving a balance between the claims of present and future is the task of democracies. A democratic participation is necessary where every stake holder has an equal say in formulating the plans of development and also the ways in which it will be implemented. In addition to this a decentralized approach of development is much more effective because it enables to use various technologies and know hows of both traditional and modern in a creative manner. Therefore Big is not always abundance and small is not always scarcity.Hence small and localized projects directed towards improving the quality of life for everyone are most commendable.

Contemporary North East India and Ways Ahead

North East has posed a challenge not only to its development but also to the constitutional governance as a whole. In case of Manipur having a history of ethnic conflict and imposition of AFSPA, the best is suggested by leading elites i.e., respecting the ethnic plurality and to fulfill the aspirations of peoples at the grassroots, Human rights have to be respected at all costs, creating more and more employment opportunity, and establishing a new regiment in Indian army – Manipuri Regiment. In Nagaland no PM after Nehru has tried to acertain and full-fill aspiration of people at the grass roots, best step forward seems to be the 2015 agreement between NSCN-IM and India. Thus arms will be given up, maps will not be redrawn and NSCN is ready to live with India under shared sovereignity .The most recent bone of contention between NER and Indian govt. is the citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2016, which seeks to amend the citizenship act of 1955 to provide citizenship to illegal migrants from neighbouring countries who are not Muslims. The other challenge is the proper implementation of NRC without any mal-implementation and following the Assam Accord. Other issue is the proper and dignified separation of Bru tribe from Tripura to Mizoram. One of the issue which also led to many fierce protest and agitation in Arunachal Pradesh which disrupted the normal life is the issue relating to the decision of state government giving Permanent residence status and SC status to some communities which were originally outsiders to the state. Similar exercise in Assam for OBC's is also dissented and opposed. The Supreme Court has asked the governments of 17 states to evict an estimated one million tribal and other house-holds living

in forests after their claims of the right to live in forest under Forest Right's Act has been legally unproved and therefore rejected .

Concluding Remarks

NER is a very sensitive pocket of India and also a very peculiar region. Therefore the challenges posed has to be dealt with care and a equitable approach i.e., with strong institutional structural and accommodative leadership style. It is the duty of other citizenry of the country to treat them well and their mixing with mainstream has to be done gradually and according to their wish. There must be more study, advertisement discussions in media about the NER and a model of focused economic development of NER to be rolled out and implemented on a war footing. The region is very promising to India, the only thing required is for us to be more promising to them.

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