

THE 'HILL-VALLEY DIVIDE' SYNDROME IN MANIPUR: SEARCH FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

While the goal of inclusive growth has become the strategic pillar in the Eleventh and Twelfth Plans, it has also raised number of issues which require clarity, particularly the definition of inclusive growth, its measurements and indicators. The debate on equality and non-discrimination is certainly not a new one, but the way it is incorporated in that on social exclusion leads to explore several issues and challenges within the discourse on social justice in Manipur where there are many communities existing with a small population. This kind of situation creates a fertile ground for marginalization of all sorts, forms and degrees. It is in this context that this paper aims at addressing issues and challenges concerning the inclusive growth approach from economic perspective. First, it discusses the concept of inclusive growth, including the indicators and its measurements. Second, it studies disparity in Hill and valley using some selected indicators of inclusive development and finally, it indicates the implications of the findings for the strategy of inclusive growth.

Keywords: Hill and Valley divide, social justice, inclusive development.

INTRODUCTION

Manipur is a multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic and multi-religious state. Imphal is the capital of Manipur. The total population of Manipur is 25.70 lakhs and out of which, tribals comprise 35.12 percent and remaining are Meiteis scheduled caste, and some outsider like, Nepali, Bengali, Behari, etc There are 33 tribes in Manipur. Manipur comprises of three major communities, Meiteis, Nagas and Kuki-Chin-Mizo. Geographically, tribal people are settled in hilly areas and are surrounded the Meitei dominated region in the valleys.

Whether one is a hill people or a plain dweller, Manipur is a home to all of us and our destiny is interconnected though we may owe allegiance to our respective generic terms like Kuki, Naga, and Meitei or be classified based on topography. For a peaceful harmonious co-existence and co-development the inhabitants should strive and aspire for a composite Manipur. There is no doubt

that there is a lot of discontentment at various levels among the various sections of the society inhabiting the state. This must be looked into and addressed without any inhibitions or else, ‘a spark neglected burn the house’ might prevail. We need to practice what we preach with utmost honesty and sincerity.

Manipur is a place where there are many communities existing with a small population. This kind of situation creates a fertile ground for marginalisation of all sorts, forms and degrees especially when the dominant community is self centred and indifferent to the needs of the smaller groups. This is true in the case of Manipur where there are as many as 33 recognised tribes and several others still seeking recognition. A tribal community with a few thousand is very small indeed when compared to the 16-17 lakhs strong majority residing in the valley and hence easy dismissal and easy marginalisation. Thus, isolation, smallness of the number and voiceless-ness are the main reasons leading to easy marginalisation.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Inclusive growth is necessary for sustainable development and equitable distribution of wealth and prosperity. Since independence, no significant improvement in Manipur’s economic and social development made the nation to grow strongly in the 21st century. It is in this context that this paper aims at addressing issues and challenges concerning the inclusive growth approach from historical as well as from economic perspective. First, it discusses the concept of inclusive growth, including the indicators and its measurements. Second, it studies disparity in Hill and valley using some selected indicators of inclusive development and finally, it indicates the implications of the findings for the strategy of inclusive growth.

REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE SUBJECT

There is no much literature on the areas of social exclusion and issues or marginalization in Manipur. However, some earliest historical and anthropological works of the westerners gives substantial information about the tribals vis-a-vis their relationship with the Hindu Meiteis of the valley, the erstwhile princely state. Lal Dena’s British Policy towards Manipur, 1891-1919 gave a valuable insight about the British administration and the activities of Christian Missionaries among the tribal people of Manipur. Besides, writing on the economic history of Manipur by various scholars including K. Gailangam, S. Kipgen, etc. also gave valuable insights. There are however a number of works done on the history of Manipur irrespective of Meiteis, tribals, and other communities settling in Manipur. Of late the Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusive Policy (CSSEIP), Manipur University has published some books. This is a very welcome development in this field.

At the outset we need to understand the relationship of the hill and the valley people in the historical perspective and whether the relationship was reciprocal or not. Relationship has been defined as the state of being related – by birth or marriage, by friendship, contacts, communication, etc. Between people, countries and also imply intimate bond between two persons. By studying the definitions of the two words- ‘reciprocal’ and ‘relationship’, one will discover that these two words are used not to describe individuality or a single thing but used to signify and indicate joint, shared, equal, mutual, common, association, connection, rapport- only of two or more things together’. Unfortunately these two crucial and critical words for a human relationship of any kind or nature is almost non-existence in the vocabulary of the people of Manipur which has resulted in a huge ‘trust deficiency’ thus further widening the chasm or gulf that has existed between the hill men and the plain dwellers. Constitution of India has provided certain provisions for the protection of the weaker sections of the society with a view to ensure equality and justice to all its citizens. In spite of that the tribals suffered marginalisation leading to socio-political and economic unrest. The corrupt administration and indifferent treatment of the state at various institutional or non-institutional levels are considered to be the cause of misery and suffering to the tribals. However, it should also be kept in mind that on the alleged discrimination and marginalisation of the hill people the state Government is not always responsible. Some of the problems of the tribal are not only their own creation but also inherent in nature.

Exclusion is multi-facet and took place in the form of gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability or poverty. The effects of such exclusion are staggering, deepening inequality across the world. The richest ten percent of people in the world own 85 percent of all assets, while the poorest 50 percent own only one percent. Under this backdrop India also adopted inclusive approach to the development strategy in the centre stage since India’s Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-08 to 2011-12), and inclusive approach has been extended with greater commitment in the Twelfth Five-Year Plan (2012-17). This approach recognizes that while faster growth remains the main goal, it is not an end in itself but the means to an end. And the end would demand outcomes which yield benefits for all, but particularly require that the benefits of growth reach the poor, scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), minorities and women .

The Twelfth Plan, thus, defines the inclusive growth approach as:

Inclusive growth should result in lower incidence of poverty, improvement in health outcomes, universal access to school education, increased access to higher education, including skill and education, better opportunities for both wage employment and livelihoods and improvement in provision of basic amenities like water, electricity, roads, sanitation and housing. Particular

attention needs to be paid to the needs of the SC, ST and OBC population, women and children as also minorities and other excluded group

While the goal of inclusive growth has become the strategic pillar in the Eleventh and Twelfth Plans, it has also raised a number of issues which require clarity, particularly the definition of inclusive growth, its measurements and indicators. The inclusive growth strategy for the Twelfth Plan also needs to be based on the experience of inclusive outcomes during the Eleventh Plan. Not all growth scenarios are considered inclusive. Therefore, there is a need to differentiate the growth processes that are inclusive from those that are not. Some researchers argue that inclusive growth is broad-based and benefits everyone in society – the poor, middle income groups and even the rich. In this sense pro-poor growth, in which the focus of outcome is on the poor, constitute a subset of the broad concept of inclusive growth.

DIFFERENT FORMS OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION AT DIFFERENT LEVELS:

Discrimination in terms of employment safeguards: Various safeguards have been provided in the constitution for promoting and safeguarding the interests of persons belonging to scheduled Tribes, Schedule castes, Others backward classes and Anglo-Indians. Such safeguards are– i) Protective safeguards which includes safeguard for education, employment, social and economic safeguards, protection from social injustice and all forms of exploitation and administration of schedule areas; ii) political safeguards, and iii) Developmental safeguards.

In Manipur proper implementation of the above safeguard for SC and ST community depends largely on the effective functioning of the state administrative machinery. Among the various safeguards, employment safeguard with proper implementation would be one of the main factor for the development of the tribals. In Manipur we have an Act called Reservation of vacancies in Posts and Services (for Scheduled Castes & Schedule Tribes) Act 1976. The Act provides many important sections including application of the reservation to all posts and services under the state government with a few exceptions of work-charged staff, appointment on contract basis, etc. this different sections includes items like -

- i) Restriction of reserved vacancies by general candidates(not properly restricted)
- ii) Determination of percentage to be revised (re-determination overdue)
- iii) Prescription of roster for vacancies (not properly maintained)
- iv) Exchange of reservation between SC & ST (no comments)
- v) De reservation of vacancies (no comments made)
- vi) Process of selection and relaxation(no comments made)
- vii) Annual report of appointment (no report ever made)
- viii) Formation of standing committee to look after the functioning of the Act(not done)

- ix) Annual report to be laid before Legislative Assembly (no annual report ever made)
- x) Powers to make rules to carry out all or any purpose of the Act (no rules made) etc.⁸

With regard to the question of work-charged establishment the High Power Committee under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister of India had decided that reservation for appointment of SC & ST should be made for the posts, in its review meeting held on 12th Nov. 1976, but the Manipur Act of Reservation do not bother to include under the purview of reservation. Again despite the instruction from the National Commission for SC & ST to determine the backlog vacancies and fill them up until it is clear, it is not known whether it had been made or not. Proper implementation of reservation of posts in services under the State Government is going to be the main basis of tribal development. Besides, there are many cases of grievances among the SC & ST employees of the state government as they are discriminated in terms of allocation of posts and promotion. Unfortunately, Manipur is a state where people are judged not on the basis of their conduct or character but by their creed and ethnicity.

Centralisation of developmental infrastructure: With regard to educational institution in Manipur there are two Universities namely Manipur University (MU) and Central Agriculture University (CAU) in addition to many colleges and medical institutes like Regional Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS), Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Medical Sciences (JNIMS), Polytechnic, etc. All these professional institutes and institutes of higher education and learning are confined in the capital city of Imphal and its periphery where there is no adequate space to meet for the same. Contrary to that even the buildings in most of the primary health centres in various sub-divisional headquarters in the hills are not properly functioning and dilapidated condition. It became so difficult for the poor hill people to avail the benefits despite the widespread impact of globalisation. Many people are left to their own fate.

With regard to the market infrastructure, all the buildings are located in Imphal valley where tribal women vendors are not given any space and place except the recently completed Tribal Market in the city. Besides, in terms of sports infrastructure all the stadium and houses for the National Games are confined in the congested Imphal area totally neglecting the hill districts where there is enough space and land for the same. These express unspoken words of discrimination and exclusion in terms of sports infrastructure. Consequently, a sense of alienation and marginalisation prevails. Furthermore, over the last 60 years of Indian Independence and even after 40 years since Manipur attained statehood there is no power supply in the interior part of the hill district. This is because of the active neglect of the concerned department for the hill areas.

Thus, it is to say that the more the tribals are discriminated, the more they are alienated. The marginalised tribals are left out of the process of development. Valley centric-ism makes the

tribal think that they are oppressed. A lot of inconveniences is being faced by the tribal people due to re-location of some engineering department in the capital city of Imphal. SDO/BDO offices are almost defunct and non-functioning due to the absence of staffs. They have been reduced to a mere structural existence as most of the employees prefer to work in their respective homes taking advantage of the law and order situation. The hill people wish to see the lopsided valley centric development be done away in favour of an all round-development of the state.

Neglect of transport and communication: Among the infrastructures, transport and is one of the most fundamental an essential of all kinds in as far as developmental work is concerned. Manipur as a whole is backward in term of transport and communication as the minimum facilities are not yet attended in the state. The hill districts and more specifically the remote areas are the worst affected. The pathetic road condition and the resultant isolation and under-education, make us to see poverty looming large as one enters this remote tribal area. These hapless ignorant tribals have no alternative but depend on a few local elites, unscrupulous politicians and exploiters. Since they have no access to participate in the developmental works they continued to remain excluded from all its benefits. Dr R.K Ranjan¹⁰ writes, "*This (exclusion) should be realised and provoke a new alternative development concept for maximum extension of transport and communication system in the hilly areas of the state*". Due to the lack of transport and communication facilities many governmental and non-governmental benefits and material of any scheme specifically meant for the poor tribal in the remote area were not able to reach to them. Government employees posted in theses areas are also unable to perform their duties fully because of this communication and transport bottlenecks.

Transport bottlenecks make the tribal economy costlier and also served as a constraint to sustainable development of the hill people. Thus, road networking should be properly planned to connect all the focal growth point, sub divisional headquarters, district headquarters to the capital city - Imphal. This may encouraged the tribal of raising different commercial products, increasing accessibility to governance, socio-physical interaction, etc. It will also help to create a congenial atmosphere for integrity of the state.

The tribals have the Hill Areas Committee (HAC) in the State Assembly to manage the hill areas. It was designed to be the Hill Assembly of the tribals under Art. 371 (C) for special constitutional safeguards of the tribals. But in practice it is only a toothless institution as their plans for uplifting of the tribals are often voted down in the state assembly. The present district council also do not serve the purpose. It simple existed under the mercy of the state government. The tribal welfare department meant to look after the welfare of the hill people also failed to achieve the expected result, despite heavy allocation of funds. It may be noted here that the bureaucratic approached often devoid of community participation could not successfully

addressed the real problems of the tribals. Several hill based students organization alleged that even funds earmarked for the hill areas are often diverted or irregularly (spent for the people living in the valley district) for the purposes other than that for which they were sanctioned.

Roads in the hill districts of Manipur including the two National Highways show signs of utter neglect by the government whereas roads in the valley are comparatively much better and properly maintained. For instances, the condition of national highway 39 which connect Manipur from the rest of the country is found good and properly maintained in the valley areas only. But the condition of the road from Kangpokpi up to Mao Gate (Border Gate between Manipur and Nagaland) is not properly maintained and is always in bad condition. On the other side of the same road i.e. from Imphal leading to international border town Moreh, the condition of the road upto Pallel is found properly maintained and good. Pallel is a boundary town of Thoubal district and Chandel district. But the road condition from Pallel up to Moreh is found not satisfactory.

Besides, the Guite Road which connects Aizawl- the capital of Mizoram, through Churachandpur is lying in shambles for the last many years. It came into the limelight during the three month long economic blockade imposed by ANSAM in 2010, when attempt was made by the State Government to transport essential commodities through this road. The state government was embarrassed to see the condition of the road and finally abandoned as vehicular movement was simply impossible because of mud, mudslides, narrowness in shape, etc.

CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

There have been many glaring instances of the state becoming insensitive to the needs and feelings of the people in the hills. Providing a corruption-free and responsive administration in the region is a major challenge that has to be faced for the resurgence of the Northeast. Media non-governmental organization can play an important role of diligence and vigilance in ensuring this.

There is tremendous potential for growing horticultural crops in the hills, but success depends on the development of hill economy infrastructure including market links, cold storage and processing facilities. Extension services need improvement. In order to catch up the wind of change and to get benefit of the impact of globalisation the tribal people in Manipur we need elected representatives to go down to ground reality and facilitate capacity building further so that there is no governance deficit and inclusive development that result in lower incidence of poverty, broad based and significant improvement in health outcomes, universal access for children to school, increased access to higher education and improved standards of education, including skill development both in hill and valley equally.

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