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## **Politics of Development in India's Northeast – Contradictions and Beyond**

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**Abstract:** *The basic problems that the contemporary democracies face is concentration of its resources, which lead to contestation and then to conflict. Indian democracy is also subject to this undeclared rule, particularly in its northeastern region, which comprises eight states and accommodates more than two hundred tribes having distinct ethnic and cultural orientation. Over the past six decades or more the north east region of India faces the problem of development deficiency owing to policy paralysis of respective central and state governments as well as contradictory orientation to development of the region and the discourse being followed by the Indian state. It is high time that such contradictions are addressed and worked upon to foster inclusive development in the region and beyond. This has to be done by avoiding any probable clash between development discourse of the state and ethnic orientation of life in India's north east. Alternative approach to development needs to be curved out to save its generations from lasting underdevelopment.*

*So, the present study focuses on finding these contradictions and thereby builds an alternative approach to development which is capable of bringing in cohesion between regional and national aspirations.*

**Key Words:** *Neoliberal development orientation, Indian state, Development Contradictions, Northeast Region of India, Indignity, Alternative Approach*

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## **1. Introduction**

Development has been a priority and also one issue of contention in contemporary world. However, 'development' is a subjective term and is open to interpretation. Its meaning is brought differently on different occasions. So much is the variation that, it's difficult and near impossible to build consensus on a particular model of 'development'. It is a relative term and demands issue orientated description so as to contextualize it with a particular phenomenon.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'development' as, 'the state of being developed' it is equated with 'a new product or idea'. It is 'a new stage in the changing situation'. So, development demands change. It is a change to a new direction; often positive and not nice-versa. So, development can be studied as a multidimensional idea. Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics therefore argues that, 'Development is a normative concept referring to a multi-dimensional process...' It defines development as, 'the fulfillment of the necessary conditions for the realization of the potential human personality. At the simplest, development is the increasing satisfaction of the basic needs such as for food...' but, concept of 'basic needs' is also a subjective term and depends on the performance of an economy of a state, its capacity to furnish or supply the growing demands of the masses. So, the concept of basic needs actually adds elasticity to the notion of development and expands its horizon beyond material wellbeing. O P Gouba, in his 'Introduction to Political Theory' defines development as "a process in which a system or institution is transformed into stronger, more organized, more efficient and more effective form and proves to be more satisfying in terms of human wants and aspiration', i.e. 'a conscious effort for the attainment of a specific goal'. (Gouba,2011:536) So, development is to be viewed as a systematic and a directional process of movement of civilization towards a well defined objective. However, all these definitions have material content and links development with material wellbeing and development needs to understand beyond materialism.

Akhil Ranjan Dutta, in his 'Political Theory- Issues, concepts and Debates', interprets development as, "qualitative changes in the standard of a person's life style" (Dutta:2011;227). In his "Development as Freedom" Amartya Sen points out that, "Development requires removal of major sources of unfreedom; Poverty as well as tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states" (Sen:2000). So development is a dynamic concept and subject to timed evaluation. It gets reflected in the policies of the concerned government and is objectified the actual implementation of the policies. So, "development is about ideology and the production and transformation of policies and discourses. It is not simply financial and material flow of ideas" (McEwan: 2009; 166).

## **2. Perspective on Development and the contemporary Indian attitude**

"Over the last century or two India has been more often associated with endemic hunger or poverty. The stories of the extravagant wealth and splendor of the Maharajas have not succeeded in dispelling that association" (Bardhan:2008). Such a perception needed India to follow a specific path for development so as to produce rapid economic growth and a change in perception. To respond to the situation in the post Independent era, India however, chosen for a socialistic pattern of society with capitalistic mode of development, implying that, development discourse of India is and would be free from the impact of bloc politics of the post second world war period. But in actual practice India's development discourse till late 1980s remained more pro soviet than being pro USA. However, there has been continuity and change in India's development discourse.

Development can be viewed from different perspectives and contemporary Indian orientation in the post Soviet era has developed closer affinity with the liberal model. As observed by M. Laxmikanth, "to improve the overall performance of the Indian economy, the central government

announced the New Industrial Policy. It came to be known as ‘New Economic Policy’ as it made radical departure from the Nehruvian economic philosophy contained in the 1956 policy” (Laxmikanth:2011). This new orientation of Indian approach to development owes its origin fundamentals to the realities of the post soviet era of unipolarism. This can be more precisely termed as ‘neoliberal orientation to development’. The neoliberals believe that, “Globalization can achieve true internationalism and a peaceful world order... According to the neoliberals state protectionism in the economic matters not only affects human enterprise, they bring corruption, nepotism and inefficiency in socio-political life...” (Chatterjee:2011). It further believes that “economic liberalism of the minimal state helps national and the world trade...represented by free market economy in the domestic sphere linked to international trade” (Chatterjee:2011).

So, the neoliberal model of development demands national boundaries should not be tightened to limit free movement of goods and services, i.e. it urges for free trade and unrestrained movement of capital (in the form of Foreign Direct Investment, which mostly takes place from the developed to developing countries and the developing countries are hardly capable of exporting capital to the developed countries) from developed to developing countries and vice-versa. It opposes economic restrictions in the form of protectionism and encourages a competitive market structure. In fact, it makes changes in the liberal model of positive restrictions and state welfarism by linking market to a ‘spontaneous order’ not subject to anthropogenic regulation. It reverts back to Laissez-faire economic operation and tends to limit the state to a ‘night watchman’ or a perfectly negative, i.e. limited one. It works with a design for an ‘interconnected world’, which neoliberals call ‘borderless world’ or a ‘free world’. Such orientation of development has modernist core and promote integration of global economy favoring the developed west and is often synonymously used for ‘Westernization’ and are attempted to be done as per the guidelines of the

‘Washington Consensus’<sup>2</sup>. This conception of development has inception in the changed global setting which is celebrated for being ‘deterritorialized’ in nature, as pointed out by Baylis and Smith, in their book ‘Globalization of World Politics’.

Stated in Indian Context, Economic crisis of late 1980s compelled the Narsimha Rao Government “to break through the traditional mindset and attempt an unprecedented comprehensive change...” (Bipan Chandra;2000). Bipan Chandra further observes, “the process of reforms started in 1991, involved inter-alia, an immediate fiscal correction, making the exchange rate more realistically linked to the market (rupee underwent about a 20 percent devaluation), liberalization of trade... reforms in public sector including gradual privatization...removing large number of restrictions on multinational corporation and foreign investment...and so on” (Bipan Chandra;2000). Regarding India’s economic reforms band consequent economic orientations, Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India observes, “The economic reforms initiated in 1991 introduced far-reaching measures, which changed the working and machinery of the economy. These changes were pertinent to the following:

- Dominance of the public sector in the industrial activity
- Discretionary controls on industrial investment and capacity expansion
- Trade and exchange controls
- Limited access to foreign investment

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<sup>2</sup>The set of economic policies advocated for developing countries in general by official Washington, meaning the international financial institutions (the IFIs, primarily the IMF and World Bank) and the US Treasury. The author mentions 10 point program me of economic reforms for the developing countries. (John Williamson Senior Fellow, Institute for International Economics A lecture in the series "Practitioners of Development" delivered at the World Bank on January 13, 2004. “The Washington Consensus as Policy Prescription for Development” Accessed on 29/05/2015, URL: <https://www.piie.com/publications/papers/williamson0204.pdf>)

- Public ownership and regulation of the financial sector

An important feature of India's reform programme is that it has emphasized gradualism and evolutionary transition rather than rapid restructuring or 'shock therapy'<sup>3</sup>

However, there are doubts regarding the neoliberal attitude of the Indian State as to how far such a model of development is capable of promoting inclusive development? The doubt enhances to a much higher intensity when such a model is applied to the politics of development in India's Northeast. Given the contradictions regarding the development orientation of the Indian state in general and the Northeast region of India in particular makes it a discussion point.

### **3. Development Orientation of Northeast and Contradiction with the Indian Attitude**

“The North Eastern Region together with Sikkim covers an area of about 262,000 square km and the eight States together share over 5400 km of border with neighboring countries. The region is known for its ethnic, linguistic, cultural, religious and physiographical diversities. The region can be broadly divided into two sub regions, the North East Hills (NEH) sub-region comprising of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland (except for the area adjoining Assam), Manipur (except for the Manipur valley area), Mizoram, Tripura (except for the plains), Meghalaya, two hilly districts of Assam and entire Sikkim and the North East Valley sub-region comprising of the rest of

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<sup>3</sup> .It underlines India's scheme of economic reforms and its neoliberal attitude to development. (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, Investment and Technology Promotion (ITP) Division(2014), /URL- [www.Indianbusiness.nic.in/EconomicReforms.hmt](http://www.Indianbusiness.nic.in/EconomicReforms.hmt), accessed on 10/07/2014)

the region.”(NEC:2014).“The Great Indian corridor in the east is a land mass bordered by the countries like Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected with the Indian subcontinent by a narrow strip of land not more than 26 km wide. Politically the corridor consists of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya and Tripura. These states are popularly called as seven sisters, northeast region. Therefore, the terms Corridor, northeast India, and northeast region are considered to be as synonymous” (Deka,2011:7).

With its strategic location, abundance of natural resources and the cultural fabric attracted the Indian policy makers towards the Northeastern part of India. But, In spite of the efforts from different sections, the problems of Northeast still persist.

The historic Assam was ruled by the Ahoms or the Tai-Ahoms rulers, they were Shans who came to Assam in thirteenth century and established a state that survived for six hundred years. Other states like Nagaland, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura, etc had their own tribal state formations in the pre-colonial period. The Ahom rule however ended with the Burmese invasion and subsequent coming of the British and the conclusion of the Treaty of Yandabo on 24 February 1826. “At the Treaty of Yandabo 24 February 1826, His Majesty, the king of Ava, formally renounced, amongst others, his claim upon ‘the principality of Assam and its independence. With this treaty Assam was passed to the British colonial hands till India got dependencies’ and the neighboring States of Cachar, Jayantiya and Manipur”(Barpujari,1980:16). Keeping in view the demographic and ethnic situations in Northeast India, the British colonizers introduced a number of laws which include- The Schedule District Acts of 1874 and the Frontier Tract Regulation Act of 1880. The Act of 1873, i.e. the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation act of 1873 introduced the ‘Inner Line’<sup>4</sup>; a device to

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<sup>4</sup>Inner Line’ is a policy of regulating the interaction between the plain people with the hill tribes. For detail refer Gait, Edward Sir (2008), *A History of Assam* Guwahati: EBH Publishers (India), pp 386-387.

protect the indigenous hill tribes from getting outnumbered by a probable infiltration by the plain tribe or any other group of settlers. Entry to business, land transactions and settlements were restricted to the outsiders. It was a bid to protect distinct identity of the ethnic tribes of Northeast. It was in 1935 that the hills of the northeast region was categorized as ‘excluded’ and ‘partially excluded’ areas, with the British having complete control over the former and latter was placed under limited representative system, though having British suzerainty over it as well.

So, northeast has been an entirely different field from an administrative point of view. Its geo- political and demographic composition obliged the British to introduce an entirely different mechanism. Administration was adjusted to the regional requirements so that sense of resentment may be tamed and kept within control. In 1947, when the country got independence and unified under a single national identity, entire northeast formed a part of it. But, tendency towards centralization and lack of a sense of recognition to the distinct ethnic culture left resentments resumed and secessionist movements started in the region and the nation building process went wrong in the Northeast region.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, being a distinct land, the states in north east India need special arrangements to ensure lasting development. More importantly it needs honest efforts and right intentions as well as deeper understanding of the region’s problems and their probable solutions.

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<sup>5</sup> “Excesses have been committed at times by the security forces. Small detachments have occasionally gone berserk when their colleagues have been brutally ambushed. Harsh interrogation for information has sometimes held to custodial death. There have been instances of rape and molestation. The human issues are not to be extenuated.....Investigations have been made and those found guilty punished. But civil procedures are often slow and unsatisfactory. In the prevailing conditions, delays occupy and transparency is sometimes lacking.” (Vergese 1996:304). These lines clearly state the underlined reasons of politico-ethnic unrest in the NER of India.



However, tribal or the indigenous population has a big share of each of the states in north east, except in the state of Tripura in terms of percentage. To be noted here that, though Assam has lowest percentage of tribal population among all the northeastern states, yet, it accommodates highest number of tribals. It is therefore essential to condition development as per the needs and demands of the tribal life style. Under no circumstances development discourse should be allowed to be viewed as a threat to the tribal ethos as it is in the case of the Look East Policy.

### **State wise estimate of tribal population in north east India**

Table 1: Tribal Population in North East India

State	Total Population		Tribal Population		(% of ST	
	2001	2011	2001	2011	2001	2011
Arunachal Pradesh	1,097,968	1,382,611	705,158	951,821	62.02	68.08
Assam	26,655,528	31,169,272	3,308,570	3,884,371	12.04	12.04
Manipur	2,166,788	2,721,756	741,141	902,740	340.2	35.01
Meghalaya	2,318,822	2,964,007	1,992,862	2,555,861	85.09	86.01
Mizoram	888,573	1,091,014	839,310	1,036,115	94.05	94.04
Nagaland	1,990,036	1,980,602	1,774,026	1,710,973	89.01	86.05
Tripura	3,199,203	3,671,032	993,426	1,166,813	31.01	31.08
Sikkim	540,851	607,688	27,165	206,360	20.06	33.08
All India	1,028,737,436	1,210,587,982	84,326,240	12,915,054	8.2	10.8

Source: Census of India, 2001 & 2011, Registrar of India, New Delhi.

So the people of Northeast India have a unique composition and compared to the rest of India the number of the scheduled tribe population is very high in the region. The state of Arunachal Pradesh (68.08), Meghalaya (86.01), Mizoram (94.04), and Nagaland (86.05) are predominantly tribal inhabited states and as such the life and orientation to life is very much different. “The indigenous inhabitants of this region who are mostly tribes, are bewildering in their variety, ethnicity, culture, and folklore” (Sengupta:2003; 02). To be noted here that, such a huge tribal population in India’s northeast though adds distinctiveness to its identity, but the number of indigenous tribal population showed here are only the listed or scheduled tribes. There are many other tribal groups in northeast with considerable number of population but are not yet scheduled. In Assam, for example, there are six tribes (including, tea tribes, Koch rajbangshis, Santhals, shonowal, and so on) which are constantly demanding tribal status, are likely to get it and if awarded the status the population of tribals in Assam is likely to increase. With such a high strength of tribal population in northeast development orientation must be conditioned by tribal life style.

#### **4. Development orientation of Northeast**

While giving his concept of ‘Durable Disorder’ Sanjib Baruah maintained that, prolonged counter-insurgency operations have eroded the democratic fabric of the region and institutionalized authoritarian practices. The result is a growing dissidence between the idea of ethnic homelands and the actually existing political economy of the region that makes ethnic violence and internal displacements quite predictable” (Baruah,2007:167). Development has deceived Northeast continuously resulting in politico economic problems for the region. It is therefore essential for the region to be immediately inducted into some model of inclusive development. To this end it is essential to first understand the problems that the region confronts. “In the post colonial phase, the geo-political containment of the region from mainland India combined with militarization of the region has caused immense structural damages to the pre-colonial practices of trade, barter, reciprocal exchanges and social intercourse that were done in non-

territorialized contagious space...the partition not only made the region economically backward but also effectively introduced a dependent economy on the centre. It helped to build on dependency syndrome and created a militarized ethno-spaces with overlapping identities” (Gogoi,2007:4).“The entire north-eastern region of India is today caught in a vicious circle. Assertion of identity often leading to insurgent movements has invariably had their roots in economic deprivation and, these in turn, have acted as major impediments to development” (Mishra,2006:1)

But, development in India’s Northeast is a issue of contention. Lot of contradictions are there in the development orientations of the Indian state in general and the Northeast region in particular. Regional discourse of Northeast has been protectionist in nature and the Sixth Schedule protection is a glaring example of this. ‘The Sixth Schedule to the constitution is unique in many respects. It has avowed objective of ensuring the development of the Hill Tribes without least interference with their customs, traditions and usages. It also provides for grass root level planning and encouraging the traditional institutions. It also gives the scope for a form of local self government in areas where the provisions of this schedule are made applicable”(Deka,2009:1). ‘The Sixth Schedule to the constitution is unique in many respects. It has avowed objective of ensuring the development of the Hill Tribes without least interference with their customs, traditions and usages. It also provides for grass root level planning and encouraging the traditional institutions. It also gives the scope for a form of local self government in areas where the provisions of this schedule are made applicable”(Deka,2009:1).

The rationality of the Sixth Schedule is found in the following lines, “The tribes in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram have not assimilated much the life and ways of other people in these states. These areas have been anthropological specimens. The tribal people in other parts of India have more or less adopted the culture of the majority of the people in whose midst they live. The tribes in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram, on the other hand, still have their roots in their own culture, custom and civilization.

These areas are therefore treated differently by the constitution and sizable amount of autonomy has been given to these people for self government” (Jain,1987:236). “The aim of the Sixth Schedule was to protect the hill and other tribal communities from the control and power of the groups and the plains. The process of protection began with the formation of district council in Assam...” (Laxmikanth,2009:02).

The tribes...should be left to manage their own affairs with only such interference politically on the part of our officers as may be calculated to establish personal influence for good among the chiefs and tribes. Any attempt to bring the country between our settled districts and Burmah under our direct administration even in the least...should be steadily and sternly resisted.(barpujari:2000;05). In fact, ‘Inner Line’, system prior to the Sixth schedule was another example of protectionist orientation of Northeast. “the ‘Inner Line’ provides the tribal people a protection regarding the land which is very dear to the tribal people” said Nagaland Chief Minister, S C Jamir in the year 1994 and added that, “until and unless another safeguard is provided in lieu of Inner Line Permit we cannot support the move (of repealing it)” so protectionist discourse has been a feature of politics in Northeast India. Protection of land, indigenous culture, customs, traditions, folkways, and the overall tribal identity forms the core concern of the people of northeast. In fact through the process of state reorganization predominantly tribal dominated states were created mainly to protect their unique culture from the migration and consequent settlement of the plain people.

So, development in this region of India’s Northeast is in no way separated from concern for identity rather it is intertwined. No development targeting the people of Northeast can have a long term impact provided it fails to address the dominant protectionist discourse of the region. If Amartya Sen defines ‘Development as freedom’ and rest of the world acknowledges it, it is to be practiced in cultivating development in northeast. Development discourse that the Indian state follows in its northeast must also ensure ‘freedom from fear’ along with ‘freedom from want’. It should ensure

freedom from fear of losing the hold over ancestral land, cultural identity and indigenous life style.

## **5. Basic contradictions with the Indian attitude to development**

Economic orientation of the centre concerning northeast is viewed as exploitative by the native people. There are obvious reasons for that too. Till after nearly sixty seven years of independence northeast remains India's most unconnected region. In terms of development of infrastructure, majority of the provinces in northeast are categorized as lowly developed<sup>6</sup>. There is very little focus on skill development and capacity building programmes. It took the Indian state about fifty five years to introduce an independent ministry targeting the development of this troubled borderland and what it then introduced remained a fund transmitting body, i.e. the DoNER ministry. Lack of representation to the union parliament, coupled with absence of clear and visionary programme for faster development of the region, has kept the alienation process sentient and vigorous.

In the name of region specific vision what the centre has for northeast is an under-implemented and therefore, an under-performed Look East Policy (LEP). In spite of having 98% international border, formal border trade in the region is very limited. In fact borders are troubled zones for northeast owing to uncontrolled informal trade and anti-state insurgent operations. So, within the nation, a politically overwrought space is created which hardly identify itself with the majoritarian politics and gets apprehended even at the upright intentions of the centre as there exist near permanent 'no confidence motion' between the two entities.

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<sup>6</sup> For detailed reference please see 12<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission report,(cited in Wasbir Hussain's article "Assam and North East: Breaking the Logjam" in J K Das edited Volume Agenda for Assam and the North East" the article is also available in [www.cdpsindia.org](http://www.cdpsindia.org) ).

On the other hand, LEP is all-inclusive in nature. Its neo-liberal orientation hardly provides any space for protectionism of any kind. The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Charter in its article 1 clearly mentions LEP stands on the principle of mutual aid for development. ASEAN aims “to create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment in which there is free flow of goods and services and investment” (ASEAN Charter, 2008:4). So, here is a clear contradiction between LEP and its philosophical foundation viz a viz the protectionism of northeast India. The agenda of India’s LEP can be found the following statement of Rajiv Sikri, where he explained, the then PM Manmohan Singh’s position on LEP and the South East, “A long term vision of an integrated Asia from Himalaya to the Specific in which it would be to trade, travel and invest freely through the region...it is evident that the Look East Policy must therefore be a significant element of India’s Foreign Policy.” (Sikri, 2011:09). While northeast region is concerned about the protection of identity, LEP on the other hand, is in favors of integration of identities. It supports connectivity for extended trade and tourism. This contradiction actually resulted in under performance of the LEP. In spite of having huge potential it achieved only limited success as it was not conditioned to the regional aspiration; rather it was designed only to address the economic concerns of the so called mainland India. The following data will show the under performance of the policy on the ground level.

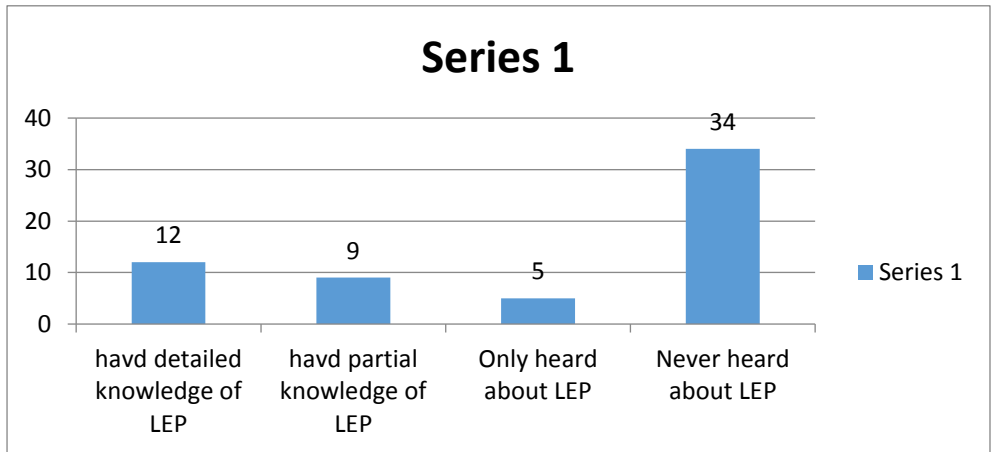
“ASEAN-India bilateral trade has been growing steadily from 1993 and stood at US\$ 43.9 billion as of 2009-10 with ASEAN’s export to India at US\$ 25.79 billion and imports from India at US\$ 18.1 billion as of the same year” (FICCI, 2013:43). “India-ASEAN trade stood at US \$ 43.90 billion in 2009-10, compared to US\$ 13.25 billion in 2003-04. In 2009-10, the value of Indian exports was US\$18.11 billion and that of import was US\$ 25.79 billion” (Shankar,2013:244). This can be seen as positive for northeast region of India and one would think that northeast will be extremely benefited by this initiative. But the reality is different. LEP has been more a

rhetoric than reality. The policy is to be criticized for being unsustainable and non representative of the concerns of India’s northeast, besides being grossly under implemented.

This becomes clear with a reality check conducted in the Moreh Land Custom Station (LCS) in the India-Myanmar border in Manipur. Field study was initiated at the Moreh; a small border town in the Chandel District, situated at a distance of 110 km from the Imphal valley of Manipur. It is the extreme borderland of India linking it to the Tamu LCS in Myanmar. It was conducted on 60 respondents from 20<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> May 2014. Some crucial facts and apprehensions have come out to suggest the deficiency of the implementation mechanisms concerning LEP via northeast borderland of India.

### **Categorization of sample population on the basis of their knowledge of LEP**

**Table. 2**



**Source:** Fieldwork, 20<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> May, 2014

Only a small portion of the respondents found to have knowledge of the LEP; more precisely 12 out of 60 respondents were aware that there is

something called LEP and most of these respondents were either highly dissatisfied or pessimistic regarding the positivity of such a venture.

**Categorization of sample population on the basis of their perception of changes brought about in their life by the state induced development measures.**

**Table.3**

Perception of positive (if any) changes in the life of the respondent	Yes		No		Cannot Say		Total	
	NR	%	NR	%	NR	%	NR	%
<b>Socio-Cultural</b>	18	30.00	26	43.33	16	26.66	60	99.99
<b>Economic</b>	13	21.66	26	43.33	21	35.00	60	99.93
<b>Political</b>	11	18.33	40	66.66	09	15.00	60	99.99
<b>Other</b>	12	20.00	39	65.00	09	15.00	60	100.0

Fieldwork, 20<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 (Also cited in (Nath, Debashis. (2014). All the Way from Moreh- Rhetoric Countering Reality, in Kalidas Bramha (Ed.) Self Determination Movement in India's North East (pp.16-36). Lambert Academic Publishing: Germany.)

A very big number of respondents did not believe that policies like LEP or else have brought about any change in their socio-politico-economic aspect of life. 39 out 60 respondents do not feel any change in their lives due to LEP and another 9 respondents were not having anything to say.



**Respondent's views on the operation of check posts**

**Table. 4**

Occupation Of the Respondents	Total	Support existing system of CP (%)	Demands Reduction of the no. of CPs (%)
Traders	15	00	25.00
Small scale businessmen	16	00	26.66
Transporters/residents	08	00	13.33
Laborers/Marginal workers	06	01	10.10
Teachers/professors	08	00	13.33
Students	02	01	02.33
Security personnel (local police)	05	04	08.33
<b>Total</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>06</b>	<b>90.00</b>

Source: Fieldwork, 20<sup>th</sup> -30<sup>th</sup> May, 2014 (Nath, Debashis. (2014).

All the Way from Moreh- Rhetoric Countering Reality, in Kalidas Bramha (Ed.) *Self Determination Movement in India's North East* (pp.16-36). Lambert Academic Publishing: Germany) \*CP, here stands for Check Posts.

Though centre upholds the concept of open trade with ASEAN via northeast and beyond, yet that openness is absent within the borders of India. There are so many Check Posts (CP) created on the highway 39. This CPs hardly allows free movement of goods once it enters the Indian Territory. Ruthless loading and unloading cause damage to the products, especially in the monsoon season. It is like a protectionist regime within a framework of open trade. 54 out of 60 respondents were found disillusioned with the CPs and their mode of operation. Such mechanisms within a development discourse which speaks for the development of northeast do not fit in; rather

they alienate people as after every half an hour they have to prove that they are not members of armed militant groups by showing legal document. With this approach both India and northeast can only look east but can't act east. A respondent named, Surinder Singh Patheja, who is also the Secretary, Border Trade & Chamber of Commerce, in Moreh, says that, "There are two different forms of forces operating in the region, one is the so called legal forces and the other is the forces run by the illegal Under Grounds (UGs). Both of them extort money from the locals and the traders. In fact, the UGs extort money once or twice in a year whereas some of the members of the security forces demand money on a regular basis. Not only that, you must have read in the news paper recently, that an Army personnel was arrested with illegal drugs. Unnecessary check posts set up by the Indian Armed forces have proved fatal as it has destroyed entire free trade scenario in the state." He also adds that, "This is not only the case with Manipur; it is true to the rest of the North eastern states, and be it Assam, Nagaland or Arunachal Pradesh. On the one hand the Government of India talks about connecting North East Indian States with the rest of the South East Asian Countries, on the other hand, the centre has created an iron curtain of internal security. So, do you think free trade and Protectionism run together? I have raised these issues on many platforms to our finance ministers P.Chidambaran and before him to Pranab Mukharjee. But no action was taken whatsoever"

It suggests that, if development is induced without taking the regional concerns it is bound either misfire or else be counterproductive. Such top down approach to development in the form of LEP has in fact raised concern regarding the intention of the centre to overpower the distinctiveness of Northeast in terms of its culture, land and ethnic orientation to life. Such apprehension among the people of northeast has never contributed to development with peace; rather political unrest in the region has led the centre to continue with coercive force to earn forced compliance to its development regimes with the help of draconian laws, such as the Armed

Force Special Power Act (AFSPA)-1958, adding further questions to its claim of legitimacy.

## **6. Development framework for India's northeast; concluding observation**

Development calls for Inclusive growth and latter calls for inclusive Governance. Inclusive governance needs to pay attention to the demand factor of the people and should try to address the demand with the supply of desired objective. In the context of India's Northeast supply factor needs to be taken into consideration with a clear vision and definite purpose "to this end, the immediate priority is to build the required infrastructure right up to the border areas, establishing connectivity and communication links to the cross-border points through which trade and economic exchanges with the countries neighboring the North Eastern Region" (NE Vision 2020). The vision Document further observes, "The North Eastern Region has long established traditions of community-based economic and social organization" these must be kept intact. "Moving away from the dependency syndrome, people in the region would like to acquire the capability and self-confidence to shape their own destinies... People-centric programmes based on harnessing the natural resources of the region" is the order of the day.

There is, however, tremendous contradiction in the development discourse of India's northeast and the discourse followed by the Indian state, particularly after the era of new economic reforms of 1991. Contradiction is about the framework of economy followed by the Indian state and the life in northeast. Life in northeast is more or less communitarian in nature and group life is preferred. Indigenous life and cultural practices bears the core of the politics of northeast. Its tribal orientation to life provides the fundamentals to its politics and therefore, such fundamental feature of the life in northeast can never be avoided while framing a development discourse for the region. However, neoliberal framework of Indian economy hardly

allows Indian state to design a region specific development programme and also limits the chances of success of any such programmes when tried for its northeastern region. Whether it is LEP or the Act East, superimposition from the centre with a 'top down' approach often creates suspicion and apprehension regarding the underlies intention of such development vision and restricts the voluntary contributions of the native towards such imposed vision.

This sort of apprehension is visible on the issue of the construction of Mega Dam in Arunachal Pradesh (Assam-Arunachal Pradesh). While the centre is obstinate on construction of the Lower Subansiri Hydro Power project capable of producing 2000 MW of electricity, public opinion in the lower stream areas of Assam is highly opposed to it owing to its dreaded environmental impact. The Dam is likely to submerge 45 km length of Subansiri River and is likely to destroy 30kms of land, natural and world life. The Government of India is nourishing a plan of constructing 150 dams, which if completed is likely to created devastating impact on the life of northeast and it's rich natural habitat. The project remains stagnant for the last three years till date due to people's resistance to the project owing to its dreading impact of the flood situation of Assam along with other natural disasters. Organizations like All Asom Students Union (ASSU), Krishak Mukti Sangram Samiti (KMSS), Asom Jatiyatabadi Yubo Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) and so on are staging protest rallies on every alternate days and are also getting popular support to their cause. Such politico-economic contradiction of the elected government with its own people is not a healthy trend for a democracy. Development if for the people and it urges the concerned authorities, who are initiating such development project, should take the people into confidence whose development it is claiming to achieve. People and their own elected government should never come to face off, as if they are two different entities. But, this happens when governance is imposed from above. Over the past six decades or more Indian state has never been able to build legitimacy in its northeastern horizon and its development vision has remained more a rhetoric than realty. Unsound

imposition of integrationist design has urged people to take arms and that in turn led the state to respond with draconian measures, such as AFSPA, of course popular resistance has occurred to such draconic design. So the 'top down approach' needs to be replaced by a 'bottom up' approach; 'top' being the Indian State and 'bottom' being the northeast region with its geo-political peculiarities.

So, it is essential that development is well planned and visionary and is conditioned to regional aspirations along with furnishing national interest. In the case of northeast with its geo-strategic features, it is essential that development follows a 'bottom-up' approach having a 'northeast face'. By 'northeast face' it implies development free from politico-economic contradictions. It demands measures for regional capacity building through infrastructure and skill development initiatives. It urges to produce sustainable development by converting the geography of northeast into its opportunity. It cannot be done by a neoliberal orientation where market forces regulate all other forces of development. There is no question of opposing development as people of the region are in desperate need of it. It must, however, be made sure that such development programmes are 'people centric' which never cause a threat to the tribal land and concern to their cultural identity. Only then it doesn't require the government to produce legitimacy rather legitimacy becomes a spontaneous process.

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