

Federalism, Developmental Governance and Northeast India

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Abstract

The Indian experience of an extending federalism has been implemented in many stages. India has adopted a number of models for meeting the nascent federal aspiration. This fascinating chronicle runs parallel with the equally the expansion of democracy. Democracy, however, at the national or widest level of the political system does not mean that all the states has attained it. The liberal state which was created after independence and the dominant party Congress has not been able to create space for the increasingly diverse ethnic elements in the population. As a result, the institutions of the liberal state have remained fragile under the pressure of ethno-political diversities. Furthermore, economic modernisation, planned development policies, liberalisation and globalisation left certain section of people unattended. Some states have achieved substantial economic growth, but not Northeast India. In this context this paper analyses how India has shifted from domestic to foreign policy model of development. The author also argues that for the efficient governance of North East Regions and its development, democratic participation of Southeast Asian countries is essential.

Key Words: *Governance, Northeast India, Federalism, Development, Look East Policy*

Introduction:

Globalisation comprises considerable development not only in foreign direct investment but also liberalisation policies as well as declines in transportation costs and technology transfer (Tandon, 2014). When the process of softer version of economy emerged, the 'international economy' amounts to meticulously integrated. The domestic representatives concerned with more and more towards the global market instead of specific national markets of their own. But, both domestically and internationally, the nation-state endures to play major role in economic management and welfare. It is a particular claim of this study that favourable geopolitical factors have been highly influential in determining, successful outcomes in the cases of the adoption of outward-oriented strategies in East and Southeast Asia. Interestingly, economic development is dependent not just on the economic strategy of openness to the world economy.

Rather it depends too on several other factors, such as the nature of society (for example, the degree of economic and social equality), and the nature of the state (the degree of its economy and strength relative to society) (Nayar B. R., 2005).

India's endeavour to address the evils of income disparities has been going since independence under the unified planning system. However, it futile to deliver the basic growth incentive to the poorer states to decrease regional differences in any significant manner in spite of several years of fiscal planning. In the post globalisation era, seeing the size and diversity of the country, declining role of government would eventually be a disaster to accomplish the set objective. With the starting of economy, states with superior infrastructure enables, greater skill labour and work culture, stakeholder friendly atmosphere and notably those states which can reform themselves in accordance to the requirement of the market-oriented economy have involved much of the private investment-both national as well as foreign. These states have developed much faster than states which are not, prominent to widening inequalities. This has posed countless challenge to academicians and policy makers who must defend the prospects of globalisation be disseminated throughout even though globalisation is a lopsided practice with uneven sharing of profits and losses. With the growing distress of widening of inter-state inequalities and lack of development, it is highly imperative to examine India's model of development in the context of North East India.

It is widely known that foreign policy of any country is an extension of its domestic politics as well as of its economic policies. Our internal policies have been measured by uncertainty and inadequate planning. The reason of the launching Look East policy was to improve India's closer cooperation with Southeast Asia as well as to engage Northeast for its development.

Understanding India's diversified Culture

In a democratic culture, the institutional protections fundamental of 'state nation' policies no doubt hold federal form, it precisely endorses asymmetrical federalism, and consociational practices. Practically stable and contemporary democratic countries in the world which is relatively peaceful is not only federal, but asymmetrically federal. An Asymmetrical federal politically organised whose polity has diverse, linguistic-cultural assemblage that is a popular in some significant part of the territory. This means that in order to 'hold together' these states had to constitutionally insert exceptional cultural and historical privileges for some communities, rights that answer to their hopes and demands slightly different linguistic, cultural, historical identities.

Historically, asymmetrical federalism appeared in Belgium, Canada, Spain, and India as a policy reaction designed at accommodation. Some author, therefore thinks that, 'asymmetrical federalism' as a standardizing model, an influential structure, and a set of historical experiences, should be strongly measured. It is a feasible tactic to democracy in polities such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar that have at least one territorially constructed, already politically motivated, linguistic-cultural division with the current state. At the same time, it is essential to be clarified that federalism is neither sufficient nor indispensable for the formation of a state nation. The formation and survival of a state nation needs diversifying factors with sufficient measures which are not shattered via federal mechanisms. By the same token, for a unitary state it is conceivable, where these diversities are not territorially restricted, to introduce all-inclusive practices towards founding a state nation (Linz, Stepan, & Yadav, 2007).

Diversity and pluralism are extraordinary for Indian. Interestingly, our diversity is known as plural and pluralism itself diverse. Apparently, our country is of the majority of minorities of different kinds. The social diversities of India have mainly occupied by caste, religion, language and tribe. Of these, last two forms are geographically concentrated. There exist in India two types of the religious 'others' or outsiders. First, there are those who fled from their ancestral homeland to escape persecution and are seen as the ethnic outsiders. Second, there are the natives of India who embraced religions which originated outside India. They are ethnicized and treated as outsiders largely because of their historical associations-Islam with the conquest of India during medieval times and Christianity with the colonisation of India. India is in this sense viewed as a plural society because certain segments of its population are treated as aliens. With independence legitimised and institutionalised, inequality inherent in the caste system was removed, at least constitutionally, but the problem of ethno-cultural pluralism, that is, the acceptance of dignified co-existence of religious, regional, linguistic and tribal communities remained. Three types of communities-religious, linguistic and tribal-have made claims for recognition over the years. As nations are territorially anchored by linguistic, religious and cultural communities (nowhere in the world, even in the west Europe, has the concept of one nation, one state ever been realised), the negotiation of regional, linguistic and tribal communities as nations actually means a plea for protection of their cultural autonomy. If they have viable size and a territorially base, it is their aspiration that they be conceded an appropriate level of administrative and political autonomy within the framework of the Union. Further, while the content of both nationality exists where culture and territory are fused (as in the North-East). In a nation the internality of the constituent elements is not questioned, but ethnicity emerges as a resultant of disengagement between culture and territory. Ethnicities get defined as

outsiders. Both secessionist and assimilationist communalisms constitute major sources of instability (Ahmad, 1999).

Ethnicity is a western concept which entered India in relatively recent years. The exporter was mainly the United States where the problems of the black population as well as the expanding number of Hispanics was seen as an ethnic challenge to the assimilated nature of the melting pot of European immigrants. Currently, India's diversities are almost universally seen as an ethnic factor. Taken as an ethnic factor, the problems of ethnic diversities now appear to be almost insurmountable. The liberal state which was created after independence has not been able to create space for the increasingly diverse ethnic elements in the population, particularly as a result of high political consciousness and slow economic progress. The challenge of ethnicities acquire aspects of ethnic political pressures upon the state. The institutions of the liberal state which were created along with the launching of the democratic public have remained fragile under the pressure of ethno-political diversities. Society is in a state of turmoil. In the words of V. S. Naipaul, there are a million mutinies in India now. There is no doubt that the liberal state is under severe pressure (Sengupta, 1998).

Ethnicity in India is a complicated issue mainly because numerous groups living inside the same geographical territory. They all claim to be indigenous to their particular land. That is why, they demand sovereign homeland to endorse a number of socio-political goals. Most of the movements which have turned violent and even insurgency has disturbed approximately many parts in the region at different period (Meetei, 2014). The cultural and ethnic identity of different groups are not respected by the Indian State while struggling herself into a nation. Even our country does not identify that the tribals have specific culture and a religion of their own. The tribals themselves determined to homogenise and monopolise their cultures and livelihood respectively (Fernandes, 1999).

The notion of stability is conceived of as having distinct political (the problem of coalitional arrangements), social (corruption and violence), and economic (inadequate or lopsided development) dimensions. But it is also seen as integrally connected to another notion, namely "security", itself understood in conventional strategic terms. The idea of stability and security is strongly state-centric and territorial. A stable or secure India is one whose territorial integrity is maintained, where the sovereignty of the state is secure, whose "national interests" are met, where economic growth can cope with the pressures of rising mass expectations (Vanaik, 1998).

India's Developmental Governance and Northeast: Promises and Pitfalls

Challenges to India's security are divergent, not only due to a developing Third World country, but also because of its geo-strategic situation, historical inheritances, socio-political, economic and cultural setting, and, its external policies and outlook. Some viewed security as an integral element of India's development model, which has converted into a segment of the very core of India's being (Manoharan, 2011).

Northeast India popularly known as the Seven Sisters encompasses of the states of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram (part of colonial Assam), and Manipur and Tripura (part of princely states) (Das, 2013). The last state to have a member of the North Eastern Council was Sikkim. This region is profusely blessed with natural resources, herbs and medicinal plants. It is also renowned with one of the hotspots of global biodiversity (Pattnaik, 2016). The substantial portion of population being completely dependent on the natural resource livelihood here. Historically, Northeast known as the corridor for the people, commodities and ideas between India and eastern neighbours. Borderland character secluded its links and interrelations with national mainstream and other countries. It is distinct from other parts because this region is most diverse and heterogeneous (Das, 2013).

Despite its tremendous potentialities, Northeast India is at an obvious disadvantage due to being landlocked, physical distance from the rest of India, telecommunications connectivity, poor market links, inadequate infrastructure, complications in land owning, widespread usage of outdated methods of farming, and so on (Pattnaik, 2016). However, the overwhelming challenges that Northeast India faces in terms of development as Baruah argued, because of its landlocked condition. According to B. G. Verghese the Partition of British India 'caused the extreme isolation of the Northeast.' He labels the Northeast region as South Asia's third landlocked 'state' accompanying Bhutan and Nepal. He said the weakening of connectivity and market access as a result of the Partition fixed its economy back by at least a quarter century (Baruah, 2005). India's Northeast is more problematical and has the irreplaceable peculiarity of facing violence for the longest period of time. For this reason, some call it as a region of "thousand mutinies". Militancy continues even today in one form or the other. Thousands have died as a result, apart from affecting normalcy and development in the region. Numerous militant groups are hostile for several reasons stretching from separatist to autonomist in the region. Here, armed insurgency has led to widespread violations of human rights. The undeniable fact is that the roots of the multiple insurgencies and autonomist movements lie deep in the history and geography of the region. The underlying issue is the inadequate cultural and, emotional

assimilation with mainstream India. Unfortunately, despite the presence of immense resources, most of the states in the region are not self-sustaining; they mostly depend on the Centre even to fund their day-to-day administrative expenses. This has created a chronic 'dependency syndrome' and fiscal irresponsibility (Manoharan, 2011).

Government of India started showing interest in Northeast region, only after the Chinese invasion in 1962. Earlier the focus was on security, rather than on economic development. The North Eastern Council created in 1971, also remained a security oriented one. Absence of economic development gave rise to despair and despondency which in turn led to growing problem of insurgency. The invasion by the illegal migrants confounded the situation in the region (Chetty, 2009). One eminent journalist and writer also says, "border guards and Congress Party refuses to acknowledge the problem of illegal migration because of its vote bank" (Hazarika, 2004, p. 778). Whereas Northeast India's each community is categorizing themselves with a specific zone of land, the key drivers and practices of globalisation mark it critical for people to migrate to mainland India, if not other parts of the world. These migrant workers become an easy target of attack in all places. Baruah argues the Northeast people especially from the first-generation middle class who comes out from their places faces racial discrimination inside India (Das, 2013).

Development is necessary for sound governance of a political system and it is developmental governance which can resolve violence as well as insurgency that has persisted in the region mainly since independence (Das, 2013). Globalisation has engendered outstanding prospects and posed incomparable challenges for development. The side-lining of countries and of the people from globalisation is a fact of life, which is relatively accountable to the logic of markets. Nevertheless, there is a robust analysis and dominant outlook that 'globalisation is the way to development during the first quarter of the twenty-first century'. The issue is that democracy, while beneficial and necessary, is not adequate to produce development. The excellency of governance is the significant element of success and failure of development (Nayar D. , 2008). India is one of a few Third World countries with a long democratic tradition. It adopted a democratic constitution in 1950s, and nondemocratic rule prevailed only once, for eighteen months, from 1975 to 1977, during the so-called emergency declared by Indira Gandhi. Democracy, however, at the national or widest level of the political system does not mean that all the states has attained it. The Congress party reached its dominant place in India's vast landscape by making alliances that prescribed the traditional forms of domination. The patronage political party Congress had positions which it not wanted to lose by changing social organisations of the grassroots level. In adjusting with local circumstances, the Congress Party

increasingly became tied to conventionally prevailing status and leadership.” Against this background, it is not surprising that democratic India has set in motion programs that, although appealing to endorse good governance from the local level participation, it had the reverse result- leaving the poor poorer and strengthening out-dated organisations of dominance and subordination (Sorensen, 2008).

After liberalising its economy in 1991, India did a turnaround in its economic growth by clocking 8-9 percent growth rate. At the same time, liberal economic modernisation and development policies, unfortunately, left certain section of people unattended. In fact, it did not take into consideration the diversity and complexity of a developing society like India. At its extreme, these policies resulted in exploitation. For instance, because of its mineral wealth (like coal, aluminium, iron ore, cement, and uranium) and carving of ‘Special Economic Zones’, some of the tribal and peasants of central India faced multiple displacement without proper rehabilitation and livelihood opportunities. The other aspect is that liberalisation could not reach backward areas like Bihar and the Northeast due to lack of basic infrastructure, connectivity and proper administrative set up (Manoharan, 2011). One economist argue that the financial crisis of the government was the reason behind the evolution of liberalisation in India and not the fiscal primacies of the individuals or by durable development objectives.

Planning Commission of India 2002 reported that insurgency and violence can be tackle by development and it as a tool for good governance of course was the realisation of today, if not before. While economic growth rates of India have raised to about 6% in the early 1990s after the introduction of economic reforms, Northeast State of Assam, for instance, again remain neglected. Statistical data of various sources point towards a ‘long term economic struggle in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), almost around 3.5% yearly. Assam Development Report promotes that “insurgency can be control by faster economic growth because lack of economic development leads to social tension and fuel insurgency”. The idea of surpassing violence and insurgency through development and economic growth is recent and viewed as a revolutionary step in the philosophy of governance and technologies in the region. Samir Kumar Das cited that “If India’s Northeast region become incapable to develop on its own, the right course of action is to connect the Northeast to the global markets by changing domestic policy and strengthening institutions, and finally supporting the region for the technological improvement” (Das, 2013, p. 10).

The thought that increased economic growth will benefit all like the “rising tide lifts all boats” is practically ill-founded. The rising tide has lifted only huge ships; small boats, in fact, are submerged. There is a ‘development deficit’ in parts of the country leading to ‘India-Bharat’

dichotomy. It is not an urban-rural divide, but a cleavage between the 'haves' and 'haves not'. Problems like unemployment, unattainable to resources, poor agriculture, unhappy wages, physical segregation, and absence of effective land reforms persisted. After liberalisation, tribal areas, which were rich in forests, minerals and water resources, suddenly became important. When such grievances are continually ignored or denied, they grew into demands for sovereignty, as it was gradually "realised" that justice would not be available under the existing dispensation (Manoharan, 2011). Sanjib Baruah argued in his famous book *Durable Disorder* (2005) that "In Northeast India questions of social justice are relatively diverse these days than what existed during British rule" (Baruah, 2005, p. 197).

Look East Policy:

Politicians and leaders since the early 1990s realised developmental governance incapable to deal with the insurgency problem of the Northeast and shifted to a new strategy, i.e. foreign policy model. Das has argued that "armed ethnic conflicts can be addressed by the better economic connectivity between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia. Because of lack of alternative livelihood opportunities youth ranging from 14 to 24 had joined armed groups. Hence only if such substitute that is look east policy would address permanent way out to the violence and insurgency related problems in Northeast India" (Das, 2013).

The year 1991 manifest a vital transformation in India's political system from inward development model to an economy integrating global markets (Sikri, 2009, p. 132). In that innovative year, there was also a change in thinking relating to the role of defence expenses in national security and, outstandingly the relative rank of social and economic development as well as human security in national security and stability. A valued economic partner of India, the Soviet Union was on the verge of collapse, despite having emerged as one of the post-war 'superpowers'. In the midst of a fiscal and balance-of payment crisis, India learnt its lessons quickly (Baru, 2017).

Shivshankar Menon stated that Manmohan Singh and P.V. Narasimha Rao were among the first to see some coherent apprehension of the new economic focus of our diplomacy. When Rao announced in Tokyo in April 1992 that India would 'Look East', the choice of place and time were both thoughtful and insightful of the shift of economic and, ultimately, political power to the Asia-Pacific. The Kaifu government in Japan had been helpful during the worst of our economic crisis and Japan was, in Manmohan Singh and Rao's minds, a critical partner and pole of a Look East Policy that sought also to influence complementarities with ASEAN, Vietnam, and South Korea. Primarily economic in its initial presentation, the Look East policy

had implicit political overtones, which soon became apparent as the 1990s progressed and India began defence cooperation and other forms of political engagement in the region (Menon, 2017, pp. 165-174).

So the chief focus of new foreign policy model, Look East policy had been on expanding India's outward economic engagement with Southeast Asian countries, Myanmar in particular (Chetty, 2009). The security factor remains as a main issue in India-Myanmar relations. In the early 1990s, New Delhi decided to make a good relation with Myanmar's military rule, both governments uniting in handling cross-border terrorism, insurgencies and drug trafficking. India's interest was to take Myanmar's help in combatting the smuggling of drugs from Southeast Asia into India. The problem of insurgency in Northeast India cannot be controlled efficiently without the help from Myanmar.

Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC), famously known as the Tri-Services Command indicates India's capability for checking the oceans to its east and stopping narcotics and gun-runners from providing weapons to India's conflict-ridden northeast region (Thomas, 2005, pp. 297-316). It also gave the authority to regional naval capabilities of India and attitude in the Bay of Bengal and its connecting areas. In 2001 Jaswant Singh, the then External Affairs Minister inaugurated the 160-km Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemyo road in Myanmar. It was our gift to Myanmar. Inaugurating the road Singh in his speech stated that 'an ordinary movement of goods and products, people and services for the region is not through Calcutta'; and he described the significance of 'opening up the natural outlet of the Northeast' (Baruah, 2005, p. 224). In fact, the Look East policy was the product of change in perceptions, numerous compulsions, and opportunities for India in the transformative global scenario (Haokip, 2011).

The economic reforms, the author have noted above, do not pay sufficient attention to good governance. While governance is mostly about rules and institutions that control the public realm in civil society. In simple words, no doubt economic progress is likely to stop insurgency and violence in the region if the centre implements the policy of economic reforms in Northeast which work for other parts of our Country. It can be possible if the central government recognise and accompanying development of Northeast region with reforming traditional tribal institutions. Because these institutions based on social cohesion, a collective will as well as the leadership of elders. It also works on the basis of both justice and honour. Thus, this could be first step toward unity of Naga tribe.

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