



The North Eastern Council

**Organisation, Management
and Its Role in Socio-Economic
Development of North-East India**

Manjula Dowerah Bhuyan

North East India with its huge untapped resources like hydel power, mineral resources, virgin forests, fertile land, vast water resources and potential human resources remain in the backyard of development. In the twenty first century the crucial challenge facing North East India is how to achieve a balance between economy and ecology in order to ensure sustainable social and economic development preserving the basic cultural matrix, ethical values and equalitarian ethos. The aim of this book which is based on an empirical study to analyse the working of the NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL set up by the Central Government in terms of the provision of the NE Council Act 1971(Act No 84 of 1971) for integrated and co-ordinated development of the entire region. The study is confined in NEC,s role during the period 1972-1997 for reducing backwardness of the region by initiating measures of infrastructure development in Agriculture and Allied sector , in the sphere of large scale and small scale Industries and in respect of Manpower development. The focal point of this study is on the NEC,since its inception in 1972 to the end of eight five year plan in 1997, which could be the institutional mechanism as a regional body for development pervading the region. Further no systematic study has been done on this subject so far covering various aspects of NEC. It is my sincere hope that the study is likely to be of immense value to the academics and policy makers.



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AND ITS ROLE IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

By

Manjula Dowerah Bhuyan

Reader

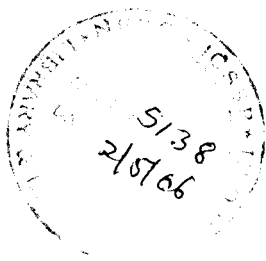
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Introduction

I

Problem

The North Eastern Region (NER) of India, consisting of seven political units of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura is unique in many ways, a remote but strategic part of the country. This region is rich in minerals and forest wealth with a rich heritage not only in life and culture but also in flora and fauna. This part of India possesses a distinct regional and geo-political character because of its distant location, diverse physio-graphic framework with more ethnic diversity, economic backwardness with disparity in levels of development. The region is a mosaic of incredible ethnic and linguistic diversity. Moreover, the region is surrounded on all sides by international borders of four foreign countries- China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan. North East (NE) India is located between latitudes 21.25° degree North and 29.28° degree North and longitudes 89.41° East and 97.25° East and the region covers a land mass of 2.55 lakh sq.km of uneven surface (70% of it being hilly and 46.88% of being under forest) supports a population of 31.54 million (as per 1991 census), which accounts for 7.7% of the total land surface and 3.72% of the total population of the country respectively. While the rest of India either has direct access to sea or to the capital city of New Delhi for contact and trade, India's North-East is virtually a land locked region.

The region is connected with the mainland by a narrow corridor of foothill land in North Bengal, which is 33 kilometers in width on the eastern side and 21 kilometers on the western side and is subjected to occasional disruptions due to heavy rains and floods in the monsoon season. Such terrestrial location of the region converts it into an isolated pocket where feelings of alienation tend to germinate easily among the population. The popular proverbial expression "poverty in the midst of plenty" does not seem to fit in so appropriately elsewhere in the country, as it does in the NER of India. The region is a miniature India. However, on account of geographical isolation of the region and the policies pursued by the British during the pre-independence period, economic development of the area had been neglected with the result that at the dawn of independence, it constituted one of the most backward areas in the country. It is only after Independence that systematic attempts have been made to develop the region.

NE India is a region endowed with rich natural resources, but economically backward with intra-regional disparities in levels of development. The states of the region share certain physical, social and cultural pattern including three types of fundamental backwardness, namely, areas of tribal concentration, hill areas and chronically flood-affected areas. For historical and geographical reasons a sense of neglect continues to be a note of so much of people's grievances and feelings in the region that the region's integration with the national mainstream gets impeded. There is, therefore, a necessity to foster the cause of the integrated development of the region as a whole and removal of inter-regional imbalances within the region. But while doing so, it is equally important that the cultural, ethnic and linguistic mosaic of the region is not disturbed and that development takes place in various sectors of the economy in tune with the sustenance of the cultural heritage of the people.

Physical Features of North Eastern Region (NER)

The physiography of the region is divided into three divisions, namely, Meghalaya Plateau, the north eastern hills and basins and the Brahmaputra valley. The northeastern hills and basins alone accounts for 65% of the total land area while the

Brahmaputra valley and the Meghalaya plateau covers 22% and 13% of the area respectively.

Arunachal Pradesh- The hill ridges in Arunachal Pradesh are situated in a very haphazard manner. As soon as one ridge ends, the other starts either in opposite direction or in a parallel manner. At these intervals, the wide and narrow valleys come into existence. Because of these ridges and the valleys, the surface of Arunachal Pradesh is found varied almost everywhere, which also results into numerous geographical isolation of pockets caused by various rivers and streams traversing the region.

Assam- Assam can be divided into two physiographic divisions, the plains and the hills. The hills division separates the two valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak rivers. The Brahmaputra valleys being formed by river Brahmaputra which really is one of the greatest river systems of the world. The valley covers 56,000 sq.km of alluvial plains interspersed with small hillocks and swampy low lands, which are subject to annual floods. The Barak valley covering about 7000sq.km is an undulating plains area with small hillocks and swamps at intervals. The hill division consists of part of Barail and Meghalaya ranges.

Manipur- The ridge and valley character of the eastern mountains is more pronounced in Manipur from the Tuensang hills in the north . The eastern boundary runs along the frontier between India and Myanmar and western boundary is against the Cachar plains and hills. The Barak is the largest river in the Manipur hills.

Meghalaya- Physiographically Meghalaya has two hills, Khasi and Jaintia hills and Garo hills. Garo hills tract covers 800km and has enabled the Brahmaputra to change its course from the west to south along its western edge. The Tura range and the Simasang valley are the two most important physiographic units of this region. The central and eastern parts of Meghalaya covers 14, 375 km.

Mizoram- Mizoram is situated in the extreme south of NE region, the Mizo hills comprising long north-south spreading parallel ranges and intervening valleys which are unique in nature. It has long borders with Myanmar.

Nagaland- The state is bordered on the east by the Naga range which forms the watershed between India and Myanmar. The Teju is the only river that has cut through the Naga range and flows east to the Chindwin river of Myanmar. In the west are Kohima hills, the range and valley type of topography dominates the greater part of the Kohima hills.

Tripura- The state comprises of long ranges alternating with valleys. This range and valley type of topography has rendered communications very difficult and the transport problem in the state has been acute since the partition and presently Bangladesh almost encircles it. The Tripura hills have four valleys and the Gomti is the largest river.

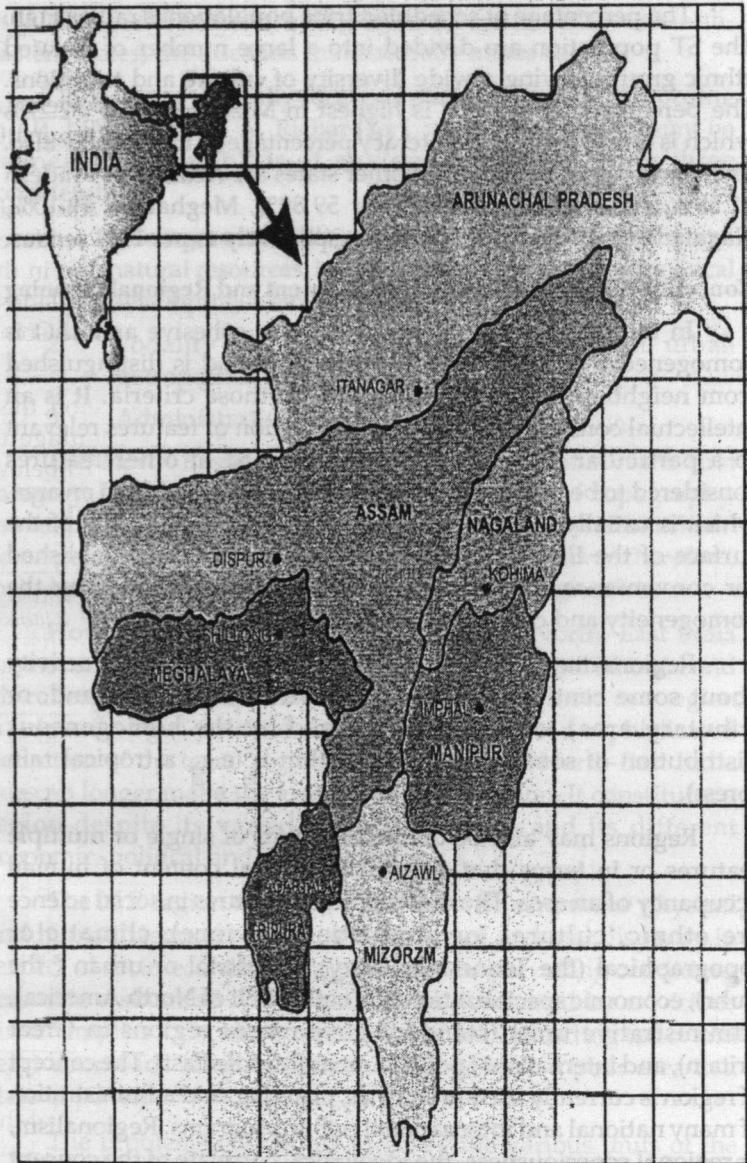
The geographical area of the seven states of the region, their total population, their density of population, percentage of scheduled tribe and literacy rate are presented in Table 1.1 below.

TABLE 1.1
Area and population of NER

Area and population of NE region state	Geographical Area (sq. km.)	Total Population (in '000)	Density of population sq. km.	Percentage of scheduled Tribes (1991)	Percentage of literacy (1991)
Arunachal Pradesh	83,743	864,558	10	63.66	41.59
Assam	78,438	22,414,322	286	12.82	52.89
Manipur	22,327	1,837,149	82	34.41	59.89
Meghalaya	22,429	1,774,778	79	85.53	49.10
Mizoram	22,081	689,756	33	94.75	82.27
Nagaland	16,579	1,209,546	73	87.70	61.67
Tripura	10,486	2,757,205	263	30.95	60.44
Total	255,083	31,547,314	123	-	
All India	3,287,263	864,302,688	273	8.01	52.21

Source: (i) Census of India, 1991, ii) Basic Statistics of NER, NEC, 2000.

Out of the constituent states, Assam accounts for 75% of the human population with highest density of 286 persons per sq.km., Tripura is next in the density of population having 263 persons per sq.km., while the rest of the states are rather thinly populated, Arunachal Pradesh having lowest only 10 persons per sq.km.



Map of NER. The maps 1, 2A & 2B Depicted the North Eastern Region of India, Density of Population in NER and Urbanisation in the States of N E Region as per 1991 Census.

The percentage of scheduled tribe population is rather high. The ST population are divided into a large number of isolated ethnic groups having a wide diversity of culture and traditions. The percentage of literacy is highest in Mizoram being 82.27% which is one of the highest literacy percentage in the country also. The literacy percentage of the other states are Arunachal Pradesh 41.59%, Assam 52.89%, Manipur 59.89%, Meghalaya 49.10%, Nagaland 61.67%, Tripura 60.44% respectively as per 1991 census.

Concept of Region, Regional Development and Regional Planning

In the Social Sciences, a 'region' is a cohesive area that is homogeneous in selected defining criteria and is distinguished from neighbouring areas or regions by those criteria. It is an intellectual construct created by the selection of features relevant to a particular problem and the disregard of other features considered to be irrelevant. A region is distinguished from an area, which is usually a broader concept designating a portion of the surface of the Earth. Area boundaries are arbitrary, established for convenience. Regional boundaries are determined by the homogeneity and cohesiveness of the section.

Regions may be nodal, defined by the organisation of activity about some central place (e.g., a town and its hinterland, or tributary area), or uniform, defined by the homogeneous distribution of some phenomena within it (e.g., a tropical rain forest).

Regions may also be defined in terms of single or multiple features or in terms that approach the total content of human occupancy of an area. The most common features in social science are ethnic, cultural, or linguistic (Province), climatic or topographical (the Tennessee Valley), industrial or urban (the Ruhr), economic specialization (the cotton belt of North America), administrative units (standard government regions in Great Britain), and international political areas (Middle East). The concept of region is currently used in analysis, planning, and administration of many national and international public programs. Regionalism, or regional consciousness, the ideological correlate of the concept that develops from a sense of identity within the region, is important in many historical, political, and sociological analyses¹.

Now to define the term 'region' in the context of seven North-Eastern states, the question that naturally arises is:

Do these units ideally form one planning region? According to J.R. Meyer and H.W. Richardson, a planning region may be delineated on the basis of any one of the following three considerations²:

1. Homogeneity with respect to topography or climate, natural resources, level of special economic and political development etc.
2. Nodality or polarization centering on some urban metropolitan area.
3. Administrative coherence or identity.

The North Eastern Region (NER) clearly falls in the first category. Its homogeneous features in the field of topography, rainfall, level of socio-economic development are well marked.³ Some geographers and regional planning experts have therefore, included these states into one macro- planning region.⁴

However, the term 'region' as applied to North- East India has never been clearly defined. In the words of Sunil Munshi and his colleagues,⁵ "the identification of North- East India as a region is primarily a geo-political accident". The lack of a sophisticated definition of the term 'region' in the context of North-East India does no longer make the area other than a region. It constitutes a region despite its varied physical features and its different economic, political and social systems.

The N E region which is endowed with enormous physical and human resources presents a picture of regional disparity in respect of socio-economic progress and the prevailing conditions resemble a situation which tends to be dominated by a 'vicious circle'⁶ implies a circular constellation of forces tending to act and react upon each other in such a way as to keep a poor area in a state of poverty.

The problems commonly faced by the various units of the region are in the shape of lack of infrastructural facilities, low level of economic development, continuation of the colonial exploitation of resources, tardy pace of industrial development, prevalence of

a primitive type of agriculture marked by jhumming and non-application of modern technology, existence of a large subsistence elements and a traditional social structure. It has been pointed out by Census of India 1961, "that the NE region has immense resource potential but the technical know how is yet deficient and the socio-economic obstacle to 'technological transformation' of the resources do still persist."⁷ This census report still valid in respect of this region.

In the context of the NER a rational spatial pattern of production, consistent with general economic and social objectives is justified in view of the economic homogeneity and interdependence in respect of infrastructural development. The policy of exploitation of economic resources in a colonial pattern pursued by the British still continues even in the post-independent period. It has been admitted in the draft of the Fifth Five year plan of Assam that the pattern of investment and exploitation of rich resources of the state in the shape of tea, jute and oil continued on old colonial pattern.⁸ The statement may also be made in respect of other territorial units where, poverty, stagnation, unemployment loom large inspite of vast resource potential. The structural pattern of the economy demands an integrated approach to the problem.⁹

The term regional development¹⁰ is defined as, any government program designed to encourage the industrial and economic development of regions that are stagnant or in which a large portion of the population is experiencing prolonged unemployment. The measures taken may include loans, grants, and tax incentives to private industries relocating in such areas; assistance in developing power, light, transportation, and sanitation facilities; and various degrees of central control over the location of plant construction and expansion. Most of the more industrialized countries have adopted some type of regional development program since World War II. An alternative approach to the problem, also widely practiced, is to retrain and relocate workers. Regional development may be favoured if the inhabitants have a strong attachment to the area or if the population density in cities where they might relocate is already unmanageably great.

The most common method of encouraging industry to enter such areas is to offer grants, loans, and loan guarantees to

companies relocating or expanding in such areas. France, for example, has given subsidies related to the amount of investment and the number of new jobs created, as well as loans, interest subsidies, and free land sites. Japan has made state-owned land available for private industrial development. Loan and interest assistance have been elements in area development plans in West Germany, The Netherlands, the United States, Great Britain and Japan. Great Britain, Sweden and France have maintained some central control over the selection of sites for industrial construction and expansion. British Board of Trade approval, for example, is necessary for new large industrial project sites. The Economic and Social Development Fund of France has exercised negative sanctions by withholding building permits for unapproved sites. Sweden's Labour Market Board, by refusing to approve loans, can direct new business investment out of labour-shortage areas.

France and Japan are among countries that have extended various tax incentives to companies investing in depressed or rural areas. In Great Britain the Board of Trade can offer assistance in developing the regional organisation necessary to economic expansion; this help is also an element in some U.S. programs. Another measure to facilitate economic development is the provision of low-cost housing; some West German and U.S. programs provide for financial assistance in this area.

According to Friedman and Alanson,¹¹ the regional development issue is particularly in the early stages of economic development, when the tendency for concentration of development in the core area is strong and when the political pressures exerted by the peripheral regions for diversion of development to them create tensions, Hirschman,¹² on the other hand, has analysed the inter-regional disparities in terms of 'growing points' and 'lagging regions'. An empirical verification of the situation in India led the Committee on Industrial Development stated that it is "a matter of history"¹³, and that it cannot be 'linked up straight way with an index of local potential or human endeavour'. It is in a class by itself and remedies have to be sought in "an industrial and exploitation of resources in developing economies is a legacy of the past and it has been rightly stated that the colonial era has left the people of the young independent states a whole skein of regional problems which demand urgent solution."¹⁴

Regional planning has assumed particular significance in the developing countries where spatial disparities are clearly visible. For any developing country it is only natural that early emphasis has been laid on areas, which has already developed an infrastructural growth natural for the colonial periods. Regional imbalance is thus 'partly a function of allocation of limited resources and partly a legacy of colonialism'.¹⁵

In the context of India the problem of regional disparities is multi-dimensional and it resembles Friedman's "syndrome of collective poverty".¹⁶ Various attempts have been made to explain the problem of regional imbalances at a theoretical level. Gunnar Myrdal has put forward the hypothesis of circular and cumulative causation as an explanation of the backwardness of developing nations.¹⁷ Myrdal has explained the tendency of regional disparities through mechanism of 'backwash' and 'spread' effects and without state intervention, spatial differences in development will tend to widen. Myrdal's hypothesis seems to be better suited to explain the relative backwardness of the NER and its inability to participate vigorously in the process of planned development that started in India in 1951. Following the prediction of Myrdal's theory, both social and economic forces have produced tendencies towards disequilibrium (regional divergence) in the Indian economic scenario.

The growth of the advanced regions like Punjab, Maharashtra, Haryana and Gujrat have much greater "backwash" effects than "spread" effects on the economy of the North-Eastern region in spite of the center's policy of generous resource transfer to this region on plan and non-plan accounts. The green revolution have greatly bypassed the NE region, the states of NER are helplessly dependent on import of essential primary products, like rice, fish, wheat etc. along with the manufactured items from the rest of India. Capital, entrepreneurship and even skilled labour have been concentrated in the advanced regions. Assam and other NE states have not been able to strengthen their economies as their base mostly consist of traditional peasant agriculture (along with semi-primitive shifting cultivation), small and cottage industries and only few modern enterprises connected with natural oil and gas extraction, oil refinery, power generation, paper mills, jute mills etc. and the crisis ridden plantation sector unable to generate dynamism.

Therefore, the planning of NER is differentiated from the rest of the country through the three lines formula of the National plan, the Regional plan and the State plan. Moreover, from the past experience it is found that simply spending of more money in a backward region does not bring about the desired result of improving the living standard of the people. The problems of development of backward regions can be effectively tackled only if action is initiated for the simultaneous development of all the three sectors of production namely, primary, secondary and tertiary. For the development of one will be dependent on and sustained by the development of the other sectors. Just as agriculture production would increase if transport lines are extended into the remote interior areas so also the availability of transport facilities in the forms of trucks and railway wagons would depend on the rise in agricultural production sufficiently. Similarly, increased industrial production is as much dependent on development of infrastructure as the latter is to be sustained by raising volume of industrial production. Again industries cannot be developed without having improvement in agriculture. Agriculture development is also facilitated by the supply of power, machinery, fertilizer, etc. which are the products of industries. For the development of all the three sectors the organization of economic activity must be on a sufficiently wide resource base so that simultaneous development of all the sectors is possible. Only then, the aggregate growth rate of the region will be accelerated.

The creation of the North Eastern Council (NEC) perhaps, convinces the central government that the development of this region needs a regional approach for some sectors like transport and communication, power, industry, manpower development etc. Thus, though politically the region has been reorganised to meet the political aspirations of the people of different ethnic groups yet the central government seeks an economic integration through the NEC as an advisory body in regional planning. The NEC is expected to achieve the above objectives by formulating unified and coordinated regional plan for development of the region, fixing priorities of projects and also their phasing out from the point of view of their implementation and routing flow of funds from the center for investment in the regional development projects.

The concepts of regional planning has no conflict with state authority. Because, though the overall development plan relating to the infrastructure and soil- use pattern will be formulated by the NEC, the projects and schemes falling within the area of each state will be executed and administered by the respective state government administration. As NEC is an advisory body, most of its effective decisions would be arrived at through consensus of opinion of all the members. The regional plans to be prepared by it, will also reflect agreement among the members about the need for and the location of different projects. The different members of the NEC have their respective state planning boards, which draw up five year and annual plans for their respective states and get them approved of by the Planning Commission at the Center. An important function of the NEC would be to ensure that the state plans are dovetailed to each other as also the regional plan. In this respect it will not only be a link between the different political units of the council but also between the state planning boards and the planning commission. It is worth noting here that the planning commission also believes that the NEC should be able to "contribute significantly towards the development of the various units in the NE region by preparing a regional plan to provide infrastructural facilities and for taking up projects of a multi- state character".¹⁸

Administrative History of North Eastern Region (NER)

Historically, the North Eastern area originally comprised the composite state of Assam and the two native states of Manipur and Tripura. After the British annexation in terms of the Yandaboo Treaty 1826, Assam more explicitly than before formed part of the British Empire of India. Gradually British extended their administration to the different hill areas in Northeast India. The (British) colonial government adopted a policy of keeping the tribal areas isolated from the rest of the country. The government of India act 1935 provided for delimitation of excluded and partially excluded areas, which were kept practically outside the powers of the legislature and were under the direct administrative control of the Governor. Simultaneously, the British government established the inner line to control the entry of outsiders in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. The scheduled

district Act of 1874, Backward Tracts Act of 1919, Excluded and Partially excluded areas Act of 1935- a colonial process that culminated in independent India's Sixth schedule to the constitution in 1950. Initially, all the tribal areas of the region, except Manipur and Tripura, were within the state of Assam. Arunachal Pradesh, then known as North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) had a special arrangement. Though, it was constitutionally a part of Assam, it was kept as an Agency, to be administered and developed under the special care of the central government, and ultimately passed over to the administrative jurisdiction of Assam. Some autonomy, in the matter of the administration of tribal areas in Assam, was provided for in the form of district councils. But as time passed, the district councils failed to satisfy the aspirations of the tribal people. From the very beginning Nagaland opposed the provision of district council and with the Naga insurrection, which began in 1950 under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo gaining ground in voicing for separate statehood within the Indian federal setup.

These developments led to the emergence, first of Nagaland as a state in 1964 and subsequently of Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura also became states in 1972, by the enactment of the North Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act 1971. After independence administrative reorganisation of North Eastern Region completed in 1987 when Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh became the 23rd and 24th state of the Indian Union.

The government of India soon realised that for two major things, a balanced socio-economic growth and security of this highly strategic region bordering on China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan, it was absolutely necessary to treat and bind the seven individual political entities as one single macro-economic unit. Nothing was more convenient than to start referring to this region of seven States as the North East, but there had to be some official agency or structure to bind the seven units together under a joint forum. Therefore, immediately after the reorganisation of the North-Eastern states, the North Eastern Council (NEC) was setup in 1972, under an act of parliament. Thus NEC can be viewed as a corollary to the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation Act, 1971 and it was conceived as a catalytic agent to bring about integrated development of backward units.

The NEC had its first meeting on November 7, 1972 when it was formally inaugurated by the Prime Minister who announced the government of India's decision "to make available to the council an amount of Rs.50 crores for such regional projects as it might draw up during the remaining period of the fourth plan"¹⁹ and put it under the overall charge of home ministry as an agency of home ministry. In that meeting the Chief Ministers of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Manipur welcomed unequivocally the formation of the council and assured their cooperation to achieve coordinated and balanced development of the region. The NEC's mandate was to formulate unified and co-ordinated regional plan in regard to matters of common interest, fixation of priorities of projects and schemes and their phasing from the point of view of implementation, deciding on the location of projects and recommending the allocation of benefits and expenditure to the member units with regard to the projects in the regional plan among others. Since its inception 28 years ago, the NEC has emerged as one of the foremost consultancy organisations in the country and has built itself up as an important technical guide to the constituent units of the NE region in respect of integrated planning. The council being an advisory body, it in no way infringes upon the political autonomy of the constituent units.

The idea of regional co-operation for removal of the basic constraints on development of the region called for an awareness of the regional nature and concerted efforts and the co-operation on the part of the political units of the NE region. The NEC act 1971 was passed to underline the geographical unity in economic planning and growth. There is an urgent need for an integrated approach in development planning for this region. The council began functioning from Shillong in 1972 with much popular expectation and hope, that the economy of the entire North-East is interdependent and needs to be developed on an integrated regional basis. For this purpose the NEC rightly projected and wanted harnessing of the untapped natural resources of the region. The wide infrastructural deficiencies, in the matter of road, railways, water resource development, maintenance and improvement of ecological balance of the region, can be achieved only on an integrated regional basis.

The creation of NEC in 1972 was only a clear recognition of this imperative need for regional economic planning as a strategy of balanced development of the area. This land locked geographic region was taken to be coterminous with a planning region primarily on the basis of its special characteristics encompassing the seven states whose fate is bound together not only in terms of backwardness but also in terms of psychological oneness and solidarity often presumed to exist and faced with common threat of identity. The socio-political development of the region during the colonial period has also been on the strength of considerations not made applicable in the rest of the country.

Over the years the central governments accorded primary importance to political expediency over economic calculation in tackling issues like immigration, cut-off date, ethnic violence and photo-identity cards, which in the past afflicted the whole of NER. The socio-economic roots of the insurgency problem and autonomy movements have always been overlooked, although the theory of relative deprivation may partly explain the possible political consequences of continued backwardness. In the process, the repressive state machinery has only extended the fire of discontent. Today, the whole of North East is in ferment and various state governments seek legitimacy of their inactivity in the name of insurgency. Politicians in the corridors of power also try to reap the political benefits out of the presence of numerous insurgency outfits. Development has thus taken a backseat and a staggering amount is being wasted on the maintenance of security and paramilitary forces. While conceding that autonomy movements are often democratic movements, economic development is the only guarantee to political extremism prevalent in the entire North-East region. The carrot and stick policy of the government has already produced negative results.

The present work is a humble attempt to understand the above problems of development in the North East particularly in the light of the working of the North Eastern Council (NEC) since its inception in the last two years of Fourth five year plan (1972-74) to the end of Eighth five year plan (1992-1997), which aimed at providing an impetus to economic growth of the region. The need of the hour is adoption of regional planning and to remove the

paradoxical situation of underdevelopment prevailing in resource abundant region of the country. The focal point of this work is on the NEC, which could be the institutional mechanism as a regional planning body for development pervading the region. It is obvious that the states of the region will have to rise to the occasion and provide the much needed support through resource mobilisation and inter-state co-operation.

Significance of the Study

Several studies have been made in recent years on Development of North East Region of India, some of which have been reviewed in Section III of this chapter. Besides, various studies have been conducted by the NEICSSR²⁰ from time to time on different aspects of NE India. Moreover, NEC²¹ has also done several studies on NE India. However, there is still an ample scope for further probes in this area.

It is to be noted that although a few studies have been made on various aspects of Development in North-East,²² no significant and systematic study has been done so far on development of seven states of this region with special reference to the working of North-Eastern Council (NEC) since its inception till the demand for the restructuring of this body with a view to making it more functional and dynamic for an integrated development of the whole region. The present study is a modest attempt in evaluating the working of NEC during the period from Fourth Five Year Plan (1972-74) to the end of Eighth Five Year Plan period (1992-1997) in this direction.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the major objectives of this study:

1. To examine the role of North Eastern Council as a regional council, its political, administrative dimensions and powers and functions as given by the NEC Act of 1971.
2. To examine the economic backwardness of North-Eastern region and the role of NEC in development of agriculture and allied sectors as the primary sector of the economy.

3. To examine the backwardness of industry and low development of infrastructural facilities in the region and the role of NEC in infrastructural development in North- Eastern region as a pre-requisite for industrial development.
4. To examine the non-availability of skilled manpower to promote the development programmes in the region and the role of NEC in skilled manpower, social and health sector development in the region.
5. To conclude the study with a summary of findings and recommendations for future.

Major Hypotheses of the Study

The following are the major hypotheses of this study:

Due to re-organisation of NE region seven political units have been brought into existence. These units are too small for the full development of their natural resources for economic development in their respective units individually. At the same time they are underdeveloped and economically not viable. The NEC was established in 1972 under the special provision of Indian parliamentary Act 1971, 'to play a purely economic role in respect of planning and development of seven states which are facing common problems that are beyond the capacity of the individual states to tackle. The establishment of NEC has accelerated the economic development of the region by establishing infrastructure for agriculture & allied industry and manpower development in the region.

In many respects, there is an ample scope for improvement of the functioning of the NEC as a regional planning body by restructuring it with more powers and representation from the constituent units of the region.

Methodology

The present study is based on historical, observational, and analytical method. An interview schedule is also used to collect Data and searching of basic source materials from official records, proceedings of the meetings, of the NEC, NEC's reports and documents both published and un-published, from the office of

the NEC secretariat, Shillong. The study also collected secondary source materials from books, journals, government reports, seminar reports, and Newspaper articles. The interview method and statistical method are also followed in analysing many aspects of the study for an empirical evaluation of the study.

Relevant data on the topic have been collected from secondary sources available mostly in the leading libraries, Dibrugarh University Library, NEHU Library, NEC's Documentation Center, ICSSR North East Centre (Indian Council of Social Science Research) Library Shillong, Documentation Centre ICSSR, New Delhi, and Teen Murti Library, New Delhi. The data, thus collected have been systematically tabulated and analysed within the framework of content analysis.

II

Organisation of the Study and Chapterisation

The present study is organised into six chapters including conclusion in the following manner. The first chapter is devoted as an introductory part of the study with a definition of the concepts of region, region planning and regional development, the need of a regional body for socio-economic development of the region. The second chapter presents an overview of NEC as a regional council in political and administrative dimension, the development of North Eastern Council as a regional planning body in our federation as a result of Reorganisation Act of 1971 and its powers and functions. In the third chapter, the focus is on economic backwardness of the region, the role of agriculture in the region's economy and the NEC's role in development of agriculture and allied sectors for socio-economic growth in the region. The fourth chapter examines the slow progress in industrial development and lack of necessary infrastructure for industrial development in the region and the role played by NEC towards the development of infrastructure in the entire region for a balanced development of the whole region in industrial growth. The fifth chapter emphasizes the importance of manpower to carry out the development programmes in the region and the NEC's initiatives towards manpower and entrepreneur development throughout the region to shoulder the development programmes in the region. This

chapter also examines the social, cultural and health sector development in the region towards the socio-economic development of the region at par with the entire country. Finally the last but not the least, the sixth chapter is a concluding part of the study, with a summary of findings of the entire study.

The following are the nomenclature of chapterisation of the study:

Chapter I– Introduction

(I) The Problem, Physical Features of NER, Concept of Region, Regional Development and Regional Planning, Administrative History of NER, Significance of the study, Objectives of the Study, Major Hypotheses, Methodology of the study, (II) Organisation of the Study and Chapterisation & (III) Review of Literature.

Chapter II– Development of North Eastern Council

(I) Political Dimension: The evolution of the Regional council in India under federal Co-ordination (II) Administrative Dimension: The Constitutional provisions, composition, powers and functions (III) NEC as a Regional Planning Body

Chapter III– Role of NEC in Agriculture and Allied Sectors Development.

(I) Economic Backwardness of the Region and (II) Role of NEC in Agriculture and Allied Sectors Development

Chapter IV– Role of NEC in Industrial Development

(I) Economic Backwardness of NER & need for Infrastructural development (II) Transport and Communication sector (III) Power generation Sector (IV) Banking and Financial Institution in NER, and (V) Promotion of Industrialisation in NER.

Chapter V– Role of NEC in Manpower development and Social Sector Development in North-Eastern Region

(I) Manpower Development Programmes, (II) Entrepreneur Development and (III) Social and Health Sector Development.

Chapter VI– Conclusions

Summary of findings.

III

Review of Literature

Since the purpose of the study is to examine the role of North Eastern Council in socio-economic development as a whole in the North East India, studies available on North East particularly social and economic development have been reviewed in this section.

Pankaj Thakur's (Edited) study²³ on '*Profile of a Development Strategy for India's north- East*', focuses on a single aspect of the regional reality-the wide and ever increasing development gap between this region and the rest of the country. Paradoxically, the backdrop to this phenomenon is a rich and a fairly diversified resource base that comprises among others a third of the country's hydel- power potential¹, the largest inland source of petroleum products, besides extensive forest resources. The paradox is heightened by the fact that even after nearly five decades of planning, the economic distance between this region and the rest of India has gone on increasing instead of closing in, as should have been the case in a planning regime geared to minimisation of regional imbalance. The backwardness is total, pervading all major areas of development from agriculture, irrigation, power, transport and communication, industry to housing and human resource development to curb the unemployment situation. The situation has underlined the need for re-appraisal of the current development approaches that have led to such grotesque results. It is precisely such a re-appraisal that has been undertaken in this study covering all the key areas indicated above.

R.K. Samanta's (Edited) study on '*India's North-East-The Process of change and development*'²⁴ devoted on the various view points of change process for development in the region. This study is aimed through exploring the reasons for backwardness of this region and providing strengths and means to overcome the limitations of change and development in the region. In B.B. Dutta's article on, '*Insurgency and Economic development in India's North-East*' found out that insurgency created an atmosphere in which financial accountability and internal resource mobilisation have become the main casualties and to that extent insurgency has vitiated the true logic of development in the region. In A.K. Agarwal's article on '*Demographic features and Migration in*

North-East India' arrives at a conclusion that population growth rate in the region is very high, the problem of unemployment is acute in many states of North-East like in Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Nagaland and migration into North-East is causing serious economic and socio-political problems and pose a grave threat to the cultural identity of the region. Now it has become compulsory to check further immigration into the region. R.K.Samanta's article on 'Issues for Agricultural Development in Tribal Dominated North-East India' suggested to improve agriculture and to control jhum cultivation by a well conceived viable alternative to be comprised of mixed agriculture, i.e. containing components of agriculture, horticulture, irrigation, animal husbandry, forestry, even cottage industry in the region. This volume has in all nine independent chapters on various issues under title theme, change and development process written by eminent scholars of North-East India and the study is serving dual purpose i.e. academic as well as applied.

Bimal. J. Deb's (Edited) work on '*Regional Development in North-East India-Issues and Prospects*²⁵', is a collection of some articles to appreciate the present situation in North-East and some pragmatic policy suggestions to face the issues. This study finds that North-East India is lagging far behind in structural development of their economy. The present state of underdevelopment is due to (i) inability to take into account the specificity of the socio-economic formation of a large number of ethnic groups of the region, (ii) the backward effects of national process of development to which North-East is increasingly exposed, (iii) the misutilisation of the regional resource base leading to net transfer of resources from the region accentuating its poverty and severe eco-degradation and (iv) the low level of consciousness and the organisation of the people is unable to evolve an alternative model.

Dr. B. Datta Ray's (Edited) work²⁶ on "*Social and Economic Profile of North-East India*" devoted to understand the basic problems of development in social, economic and political field of North-East India, a region geopolitically so sensitive, ethnically and linguistically underdeveloped. This study helps to understand that the key attitude to development is that of mutual inter-dependence and integrated approach to development.

Dr. Joysanker Hazarika's study²⁷ on "*Geopolitics of North-East India-A strategical study*" analyses regional geopolitics of the area and the state formation process in North-East India. The various geopolitical problems in NE India are basically the fallout of colonial administration, later followed by the national government. The study also suggested that the seven states of NE India can prosper only when there is a viable symbiotic relationship decrying parochial identity, in the search of a more widely defined national goal. This region of diversities can, in a sense, be termed homogenous in respect of its backwardness compared to the other states of India. Therefore, the states of this region should be inter-dependent and complementary to each other to emerge as a distinct geo-political region of India. All the necessary organisational set up for such a co-ordinated development of the whole region should be provided by the central government.

Prof. B. Pakem's (Edited) study²⁸ on "*Insurgency in North-East India*" is a collection of papers devoted on the subject of insurgency in North-East India which is not only a burning problem of NE region but also sensitive due to security point of view. The region in recent decades has fallen behind the rest of the country in terms of every yardstick of development, although it was a pioneer in the development of fields like oil industry, natural gas and tea industry in the country. The economic policies taken by the central government also contributed to regional disparities. As a result, there has been a decline in the working population in the region. The problems of unemployment in the NE region has been increasing in its intensity. Lack of employment opportunities contributed to the growth of hopelessness and frustration among the youths of the region leading to militancy in them. They feel alienated from the rest of the country. In order to remove alienation in the region, a congenial investment climate is to be created in the field of agriculture and allied sectors and also in industrial fields to accelerate the economic growth of North-East India, thereby creating employment opportunities. The insurgency in North-East India is the result of total lack of agriculture, industrial and other development works. There is a perception gap between government and the people of the region which should be bridged without delay by constant interaction between the two, i.e. government and people.

Dr. B.Datta Ray's study²⁹ on "*Tribal Identity and Tensions in North- East India*" has made an attempt to delve into the concept and the theoretical framework of ethnicity in the context of the question of tribal identity in North East India. The study gives an insight into the ethno-cultural situation in the region. An assessment of the demographic feature as well as the ethnic affinities of the population of the area under study has been suitably shown. This study is a useful addition to the literature of the tribal people of North-East India.

In V.S.Mahajan's (Edited) study³⁰ on "*Emerging Pattern of North-Eastern Economy*" given ideas of economic theories based on the problems of lack of development for these seven North-Eastern states are explained in a lucid manner, as one knows that the theory of development is itself a conglomeration of confronting ideas. Part I of the study includes twelve papers dealing with the macro aspects of economic analysis, and Part II contains seven papers dealing with the micro aspects of the economic theories.

B.B.Kumar's study³¹ on *Reorganisation of North-East India (Facts and Documents)* deals in detail about the reorganisation of North-Eastern India in the light of various facts and documents. The existing framework of linguistic and bigger states was challenged for the first time in North-East resulting into the formation of Nagaland in 1964. The process further continued and Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh were born. The initial attempts to satisfy various ethnic groups by giving district level autonomy could not satisfy them. The need of an additional instrument for Regional Planning was actually felt after reorganisation of the North- Eastern region into smaller states. This necessitated the establishment of North Eastern Council and the last chapter of the study discusses about it as a regional planning body.

P. Baishya, D. Bhorali, G. Bordoli, A.K. Neog and T.N.Saikia's (Edited) study³² on, "*Development Issues of North-East India*", devotes on analysing select sectors of the regions economy, by throwing light on their specific problems and by adding new dimensions to the measuring rod of development, this study serves this purpose to a considerable extent. This study is a collection of twenty five papers of many writers in this field which is arranged in the

following order: (i) Development issues, (ii) Agriculture, (iii) Industry, (iv) Finance and (v) Tertiary sector. Each author has taken pains to present fresh insight into the economic issues of they dealt with.

Prof. P.C. Goswami's study³³ on "*The Economic Development of Assam*" is a path breaking and pioneering work of this regions in sixties where he looked at the development issues in a variety of environments differing from the geographical space to the socio-cultural space.

Sanu Mukherjee, F. I. Hussain, P. Chakravarty, G. Das (Edited) study³⁴ on "*Demographic Profile of North-East India*" deals with the population dynamics in North-East India. All process of social and economic development must take into account the demographic dimension. This study has seventeen articles of various scholars and they correlate the demographic features and the structure of development planning in a region like North-East India for adopting a meaningful strategy of growth. The articles included in this study put stress on factors like density of population, higher annual population growth, major physical factors, paradox of high activity rate with low economic development, growth of population and its effect on environment. This study will help to understand the demographic scenario of North-East India.

Dr. A.K. Agarwal's study³⁵ on "*Economic Problems and Planning in North-East India*", deals with the diverse economics of seven states of this region and divided into five parts namely, structure of regional economy, planning and economic development, basic issues in agriculture, industrial development and problems and banking in North-East India. The author has hardly left any facet of the regional economy untouched be it natural resources, human resources, demography, infrastructure, unemployment, seminal efforts of the NEC, system of cultivation, land tenure and reforms, irrigation, agricultural marketing, co-operation in rural development, industrial development, cottage industries and banking system in the region. Indeed, the study is very handy as a treasure of information.

R. Gopalakrishnan's study³⁶ on "*The North-East India : Land, Economy and People*", attempted to develop a 'geographical

perspective' and facts for an understanding of the North-Eastern Region of India. The author meticulously showed the 'Evolution of territorial Administrative complexes (pp.29-44), since 1826 to the present time and in this context he showed how geographical features influenced socio-political aspirations of various collectivities of this region which eventually shaped compartmentalisation in the forms of political units or states. Another geo-demographic factor- migration is disturbed the socio-religious profile of the region with special reference to Assam, Tripura and Meghalaya. Authors detailed follow-up survey (pp.132-142) not only gives a historical development of North-East Regions demography-density, occupation, age & sex composition, migration, rural & urban population distribution, language and religious distributions- but also convincingly leading his argument that it is geography of the region that shapes the population settlements i.e., socio-cultural dimension as well. It is fact that over all the economy of this region is termed 'backward economy' which he argues is mainly due to 'geographical inertia, infavourable locational factors from the point of view of market, accessibility, investment, development and so on (p.145).

Dr. B. Datta Ray's(edited) study³⁷ on for "*North-East India 2000A.D, Perspective for Futurology*" makes a systematic analysis of the entire north-east India through a futurological perspective examining the basic issues of ecology, population, physical resources, scientific and technological application, planning management, cultural resources, and institutional framework. It examines the whole complex of problems taking much more holistic approach. It is a valuable contribution to the futuristic study of north-east India to assure ecological balance, social justice to the people and long term higher quality of life. This is an exploratory study to the progress of North-East India and its projected picture in 2000A.D.

Dr. Anand kumar Yogi's study³⁸ on, "*Development of the North-East Region- Problems and Prospects*" deals with the development of an area as a cumulative outcome of several processes which operate continuously embracing political, social and economic facts and factors. The development of the North-Eastern Region has been a more complex problem because of its strategic location, typical

topography, existence of a multiplicity of ethnic, linguistic and tribal groups etc. Yogi has analysed the process of economic development in the region in this given framework and has also critically examined the investment patterns and plan priorities that have been followed in the region so far. In the overall context of planning and development authors reference to the emerging role of North Eastern Council is quite appropriate and relevant.

N.N. Bhattacharya's article³⁹ on "*Viability of the states of NE India*" describes the degree of economic viability of these small states of North-East India. The study points out that the region is economically backward and there has been no improvement in the general lot of the vast majority of population. Perhaps the chief beneficiaries of the conferment of statehood are the few urban elites and politicians. Thus the entire North-East of India exposes of our wrong policy and lack of purposeful planning, as the author concludes in the study.

Prakash Singh in his article⁴⁰, "*North-East: The Frontier in Ferment*" discuss about the insurgency and separatist movement in NE, Peace Accords, political measures, economic development and cultural and social integration is necessary and the region need proper attention from the central government by evolving a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy to tackle the problems of the region with the full involvement and participation of the state governments.

S.B. Medhi in his article⁴¹, "*Dialectics of Development in Assam*" discuss about the factors of production, reasons of poverty and unemployment, slow industrial development due to lack of proper infrastructure in Assam. As well as that the author concludes that maladministration and insurgent conditions are feeding upon each other making the economic development of Assam the major casualty.

M.P. Bezbaruah in his article⁴², "*A review of Economic Trends in India's North Eastern Region since Independence*" discusses about dependence of living from subsistence agriculture, impact of partition and re-organisation after Independence, slow industrial development in the region. Author concludes that whatever economic development the country has achieved in the fifty years

since independence, the share of NE region in it has been less than proportionate. The region is deficient in economic infrastructure of roads, railways, power supply, irrigation and communication. Upgrading the economic infrastructure will require a massive dose of investment for which resources from internal mobilisation is unlikely to be adequate and funds will have to be acquired from governmental and non-governmental sources from outside. But such a programme of investment will be difficult to implement effectively unless the climate in terms of socio-political factors also looks up.

B.G. Verghese's book⁴³ on "*INDIA'S NORTH EAST RESURGENT, Ethnicity, Insurgency, Governance, Development*" discuss North East India's problems of ethnicity, governance, insurgency and development that have marked its evolution. Mongoloid India defines a distinctive ethno-cultural region with hoary external historical, cultural and commercial linkages, which merit renewal. The North East is here more realistically defined as encompassing the entire stretch of territory east of Sikkim and the North Bengal Dooars, bounded by Nepal, China/Tibet, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The hill tracts, home to a myriad tribes speaking a babel of tongues, were deliberately isolated as a matter of imperial policy and then relegated by Partition. These factors have no doubt contributed to the lack of knowledge of this richly endowed and strategically important region on the part of the rest of the country and vice versa. This volume is intended in part to fill that void. The author brings out, Assam was in some ways in the vanguard of India's early industrial modernisation and globalisation but then turned inward for a variety of reasons. As India now moves into a new era of economic reform and globalisation, the North East too can rediscover opportunity and will find strength in integrating more closely with the national economy and opening out to the dynamic economies of East and Southeast Asia beyond. Development can be a solvent for many of the economic and aspirational problems of the region and give it self-assurance and channelise the energies of its youth from barren violence, insurgency and drugs to more constructive endeavour. The book contains eighteen chapters to look at problems of ethnicity, governance and development in the North

East. The region is here defined to include the seven states of the North East proper as well as Sikkim and the Darjeeling-Gorkha Hills area is part of West Bengal, all of North Bengal beyond the Siliguri corridor is integrally linked to the Greater North East.

The nine units included in this study are Sikkim, the Darjeeling-Gorkha Hills, Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. These units are spread over an area of approximately 265,000 square kilometers and had a population of about 32.7 million in 1991 census which may now be of the order of 36 million. This represents some eight percent of the country's total area and approximately four percent of its population. The major rivers of the region, the Brahmaputra and the Barak, and its serried mountains have shaped its ecology and the lives of the people.

The population in most units is predominantly tribal, the percentage variation ranging from 22 to 30 percent in Sikkim and Tripura to 63 to 94 percent in Arunachal and Mizoram respectively. The tribal population of Assam is lower, at 12.82 percent, but is numerically larger than elsewhere, being in the region of 2.87 million (1991). This is explained by the presence of considerable tribal tea-garden labour from Middle India.

This study presents a broad-based macro view of the Greater North-East and highlights both origins and contemporary directions as much as future trends and options. It is concerned with policy issues that need to be more clearly enunciated and with suggesting an over-arching strategy for safeguarding and enhancing the future of this rich and fascinating fragment of Mongoloid India. It seeks to interpret the North-East to the rest of India as much as the whole to the part in a fast changing world.

In the Journal of North East Council, in two issues, the first one the commemoration of two decades of service 1972-1992 and the second one the special issue on 25 years of NEC, is a rich contribution of various informative articles about the NEC's role in the development of various fields in socio-economic sectors of the seven North-Eastern states.

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