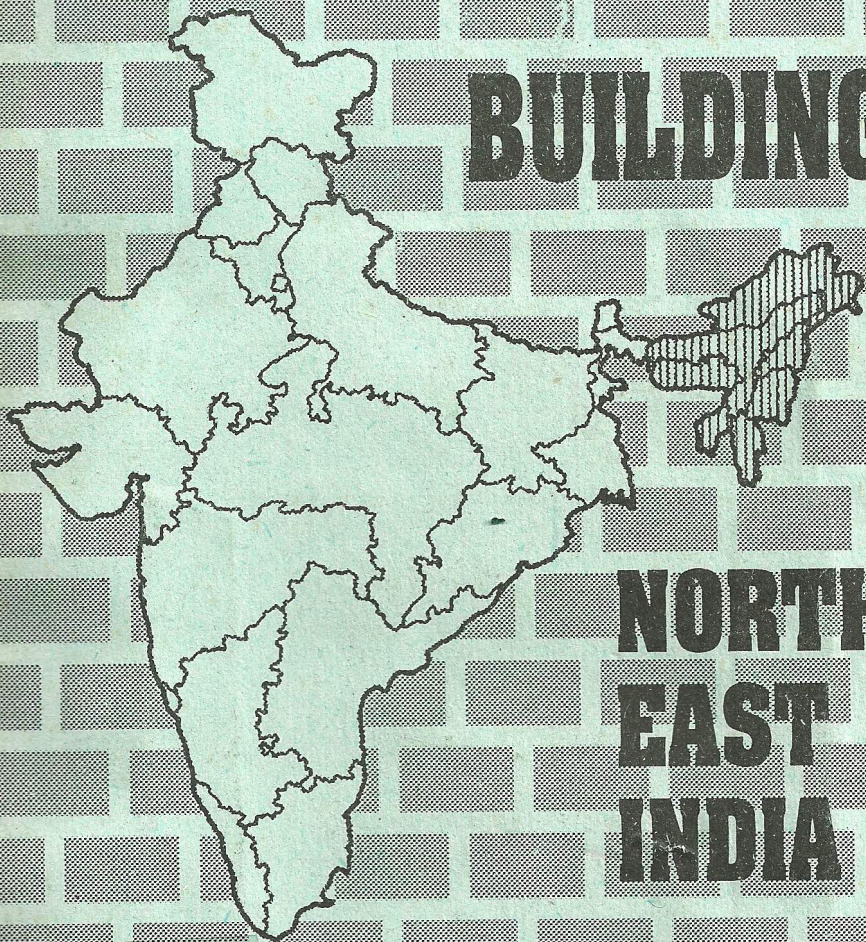


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A.K. NONGKYNRIH

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BUILDING NORTH EAST INDIA

A.K. NONGKYNRIH



1999

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PREFACE

Let me begin with these words, You don't need to be literate to criticise but you need guts, wisdom, commitment and will-power to bring about constructive transformation of society. The ideas put forward in this book relates to the concern of development in N.E. India. Readers can think, analyse and utilise the ideas and information for building a better society. Likewise, Should you (reader) think that these ideas presented are irrelevant please discard them partially or totally.

I thank Indo-German Social Service Society, New Delhi (IGSSS) and its head, Mr. Eric D'Sauza for the fellowship support. Bro. Valeri and Bro. Muscat, Don Bosco Press for printing and those who have supported by sharing of ideas or giving encouragement to complete it, to name a few: Mr. Mebansan Lyndem; Mr. Ahu Lhoungu; Mr. Shanbor Thangkhiew; the students of the Department of Sociology, NEHU; and Ms. Miranda K. Syiemiong.

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FOREWORD

'Development' is the most frequently used word today in the contemporary discourse in social science. In freely indulging in its usage, we tend to think it to be simple. But, if we care to subject it to a conceptual analysis, we are bewildered at its complexity. The concept of development, we notice, admits several determinants within itself, not necessarily complementary, if also at times contradictory, to one another. Is development object-oriented or subject-oriented? Has it a reference to the goods that we possess or the good that human beings are said to embody in themselves? Is it a matter of having or being in human life?

Development is often understood as the growth of the Gross National product (GNP). Here, it is clearly understood as the wealth of the nations. A country with a strong economy in virtue of its wealth, both natural and generated, may be said to be a developed country. But the problem with such an understanding is that it may leave out the welfare of the people, for whom development is ultimately meant, in as much as it exclusively focusses on the material wealth of the nation. It is shocking to realize that in the midst of economic plentifulness of a miniscule section of the society, the vast majority of the same society may be struggling to meet their basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. It is possible that the wealth of the nation may be concentrated in the hands of a few individuals. These privileged few may have the monopoly not only over the raw material, the capital and the means of production, but also over the markets both inside and outside their country.

What is more, the above understanding of development as the growth of wealth has a peculiar dynamics in it : the growth of wealth in the hands of the privileged few has a direct bearing on the deprivation of the vast majority of the poor. The growth of wealth of the former is inversely proportionate to the

impoverishment of the latter. We all know that in a materially limited world, there cannot be an infinite growth. In a limited world, one man's profit is another man's loss; one man's enrichment is another man's impoverishment; one man's development is often another man's underdevelopment. Thus, it is perfectly understandable that there can be a society with a high degree of growth in GNP, where prosperity and poverty exist side by side. In that society a few oasis of development dot here and there the vast desert of poverty of the masses. This then hardly merits the title of development.

If development cannot be equated with the mere growth of the wealth of the nations, our new understanding will have to be in terms of the good of the people as a whole. One may say that it should be directed to the 'maximum happiness of the maximum number of people'. Put negatively, we could define development, at its minimal level, as the elimination of poverty. Positively, however, it is the satisfaction of the fundamental needs of food, shelter and clothing. And, if we are to raise it to the higher levels, it is, beginning with the satisfaction of the basic needs, a creation of a socio-economic infrastructure that guarantees to all people a qualitative sanitation, medicare, education, a decent and honest means of livelihood, healthy recreation and a worry-free old age. This would at once suggest that all people are provided with opportunities for the fuller development of their human potential in the field of science, technology, arts, both fine and humanistic, philosophy and religion. In short, development is what conduces to enhance the quality of human life.

It now goes without saying that, while quality of life has to do with human happiness, in general, we cannot afford to ignore the material, or economic, base of human life. Not on a hungry stomach can we build up a culture and civilization, that is to ensure the

enhancement of the quality of life in its totality. Development then ought to have a holistic perspective for man. It has to do total justice to the total life, physical, physiological, psychological, scientific, technological, artistic, moral, religious and spiritual. The material base of the higher aspects of human life is increasingly acknowledged today. The satisfaction of the basic needs is a prerequisite for the pursuit of 'higher pleasure' of human life. For a certain amount of leisure, made possible through of the economic and material prosperity, is an essential condition for the pursuit of the specifically human goals, which alone can enhance the quality of life.

How have we been strengthening the economic base of our life in India? We have been witness to the several of economic development around us. The capitalistic, socialistic and mixed economies are in operation in different parts of the world. Collapse of the Soviet Union may be said to have sounded the deathknell of socialistic economies. But the socialistic economic have not altogether disappeared. Yet, with the failure of the Soviet Union, the model of mixed economy, too, has greatly suffered. Its success in the Indian experiment seemingly has not been spectacular. On the contrary, the capitalistic economies of the North American continent, the countries of the western Europe and the select East-Asian countries, due to a host of reasons, have been remarkably successful. They have succeeded in strengthening not only their domestic economies, but also in establishing their hegemony over the world markets, thus ensuring the strength of their domestic economies. Through such economic institutions as the world trade Organization (WTO). General Property Rights, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB), and their mind-boggling inventions and discoveries in science and technology, that has a direct bearing on every aspect of human life from entertainment to remote sensing, they have been eminently successful in the establishment of a new

global economic order. This has brought about a virtual 'Neo-colonialism of the Market'. No country can ever hope to develop in isolation. In its depth-analysis, this is what the much talked about liberalization of economy is. Marshall McLuhan was the first to coin the term, 'globalization', to indicate the essential economic dependence of the sovereign states. Nowhere is the play of interdependence of the nations more perceptible than in the markets. Multi-nationals (MNCs) have captured the markets all over the world. In India, not only in the urban, but also in the remote corners of the rural, life, they are in full operation with their aggressive and competitive products, prices, policies and personnel. Markets are under their control from soaps to spaceships.

After the initial resistance, hesitancy and confusion, India, too, opened itself up, in recent times, to the economic liberalisation. It is still suffering from the after-shocks of the transition from mixed economy to market economy. The forces of liberalisation and globalisation are now fully active. Their operation is now palpably felt not only in such consumer goods, ranging from toothpaste to automobiles, but also in such other sectors as services, mass media, fast-food chains and channels of entertainment. It is now generally felt that the liberalisation of economy has become a necessity to us, if we, as a nation, are not to be left behind in the race for garnering profits accruing from the globalisation of the economy. It is further contended that the process is necessitated, not merely on account of the collapse of the Soviet Union, that had so far supplied us with such models of planning as the Five Years Plans but, more importantly, on account of the emergence of the new economic order in the world.

In the unipolar world, dominated by the U.S. superpower, its capitalistic and laissez faire economic model, today, holds sway over the new economic order.

What is more, there are salutary lessons to be learnt from the countries, known earlier for their open hostility to free enterprise, for our economic development. Thus even China has been increasingly, but cautiously and judiciously, opening its economy to free enterprise, to take advantage of the new global economic order. When the global economic order is rapidly changing all around us, we cannot adopt a 'touch-me-not', isolationistic, economic policy. Our development plans will have to take into consideration the new economic movements at the global level. It has become now manifest that both cooperation and competition constitute important features of the new economic order. This has compelled sovereign states to come together in specific recognisable economic and trading blocks, like European Union (EU), G-7, G-15, Association of the South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), South-Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and so on. Nations of western Europe have even ventured on the adoption of a common currency, Euro, to facilitate trade among themselves, and also to offer an effective challenge to other currencies like U.S. dollar, and Japanese Yen. Such economic ventures could not even be dreamt of in the lives of the sovereign states a few years ago. At best, some forms of cooperation among the nations were forged in the past in the arena of defence. But, now, such economic unions have become commonplace in the area of trade and commerce. India is now fully submerged in the new economic order, notwithstanding a few isolated protests by the left parties and the votaries of swadeshi. It is not uncommon today to see the Indian leaders trotting around the globe for the sake of canvassing for the foreign investment in the country. They further assure the potential investors, whenever the country is faced with the instability of the government, that our economic reforms are irreversible.

Development in the North-East India will have to be viewed against this general background of the global

and national economy. For what is happening to India at the global level is inextricably linked with whatever is happening to the North-East at the regional level. Once we have opened ourselves up to the processes of liberalisation and globalisation, willynilly the market forces will inevitably take over. If we are not to be swept away under the strong and swift currents, we, in the in the North-East, have got to clearly see, understand, master and play out these forces collectively. Market forces do not honour any forms of protectionism, least of all monopoly trade and reservations. They do not tolerate tardiness, incompetence and sloth. This is a frightful thought which we all in the North-East have to fully wake up to. Even at the cost of being gravely misunderstood, let me spell out the unpleasant truth that the policy of reservation is not going to last forever. Sooner or later, the policy of protective discrimination, practised in reservation, monopoly trade, tax-holidays and subsidies will come to an end. This, despite the political parties which make the policy of reservation an electoral ploy. For it is not so much the governments as the forces themselves of market economy that will simply sweep them away. For the markets operate on the principle of 'the survival of the fittest'. They permit the survival only of the best, be they product or personnel. We will have to be prepared to face this hard fact.

We, in the North-East, too often have grown up with the habit of looking up every time to the centre for cent percent grants and subsidies for the region. Claims are made to be heard through threats of insurgencies and secessions. We are satisfied with less than the average performance in every sector of life, personal or public. We harp on our complaints that our backwardness is due to the paucity of funds from the Centre. The question itself of how best the funds received are utilized for the developmental works in the region is surely relevant. People will have to be politically conscientised to take their political leadership

and bureaucratic machinery for their economic accountability. This apart, and more importantly, However, the attitude itself of being a sort of a 'clinging vine' is neither economically healthy nor pragmatically conducive to the development of the region. This is so for two reasons. For one thing, siphoning out of the scarce resources to states that do not contribute to the national exchequer will be increasingly resented by other states, not covered under such protectionism. For another, it is salutary for us to recognise that no people have ever developed from the sops doled out. The economic 'salvation' of the region, therefore its development, will have to come from the people themselves of the region.

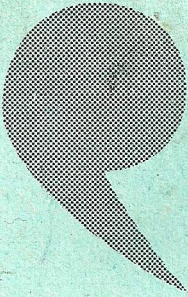
This at once calls for the urgent need that the states in the region will have to generate and mobilize their own resources, and vigilantly monitor its utilization for the developmental programmes. Only then a developmental programme is felt and appropriated by the people as their own. A programme that is thrust upon them from up above is naturally to the people; they do not involve themselves in it, for it is not viewed as fulfilling a felt need of their own. Hence, rather than wait for the inflow of investment into the region from outside, people themselves will have to invest a portion of their earnings, however small it be, in the developmental projects. For example, what hinders the people, who enjoy the benefit of tax-exemption, from investing this entire amount in significant developmental projects? They have to get into the mindset of involving themselves in the entrepreneurial ventures. They can float registered trusts and societies to establish and run the professional institutions for technical, technological, medical and management education. To link a remote village to the district headquarters by way of road transport surely does not demand an investment beyond the means of many in the state. Again, investment can also be skewed towards establishing small scale industries for the production

of consumer goods for which raw material is already and easily available in the region.

We will have to realize that such well-meaning tax-holidays announced by the centre for the industrial investment in the region may not deliver goods. For no investor from outside, much less the MNCs, will venture an investment in the region, unless there is first an industry-friendly atmosphere, a work-culture among the people, besides the minimum infrastructure in terms of easy accessibility to power, transportation and communication. What impedes up from taking up floriculture, fructiculture, apiculture, pisciculture, poultry and dairy farming on a commercial basis in those regions climatically suited for them? Time has come for us to shake off our lethargy, to peel off the scales that have dimmed our vision of the future to develop an entrepreneurial spirit.

It is precisely at this juncture that the booklet, Building North-East India, by Dr. A.K. Nongkynrih become contemporarily relevant. The young scholar with a rare foresight has addressed himself to some of the pressing problems of development affecting the North-east region. As someone, who has observed his own Khasi society closely from within, he is eminently suited to lay his finger on the social, economic and political melee afflicting his own society. He is also intellectually gifted to make concrete suggestions to overcome these problems. His writing is characterized by a sound social analysis, a wide ranging politico-economic consciousness, a certain management skill and, above all, a passionate commitment to the development of the region. It is cogent and direct with easily understood examples and statistics. His is the voice of reason, care and concern crying out to all in the region. Will it be heard?

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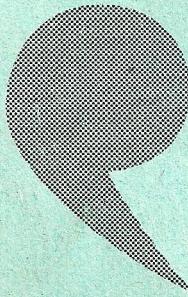
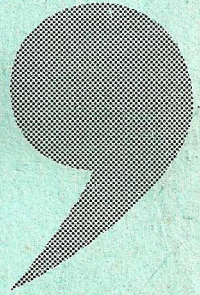


Each of us must endeavour to influence and change our society based on principles of self-offering, self-discipline and self-responsibility.

- Isao Nakauchi

We need to avoid regulations that are not enforceable, that have outlived their usefulness and that penalize economic activity.

- Peter Drucker



Tomorrows leaders will have to learn how to create an environment that actually embraces change, not as a threat but as an opportunity.

- Warren Bennis

