

POPULATION
POVERTY
and
ENVIRONMENT
in
NORTH EAST
INDIA

Edited by

B. DATTA RAY ♦ H. K. MAZHARI
P. M. PASSAH ♦ M. C. PANDEY

About the Book

The papers in this volume deal with the population dynamics, poverty and environment in North East India which are inter-linked. All pro-cesses of social and economical development planning must take into account, the demographic dimension, levels of poverty and the physical and social environment in which the people live. The right size of population and the human quality are important factors for social and economic development. The quality of life in terms of infrastructure like road, potable water, health services, education etc. is determined by the assured and required income level. Even in North-East India Tribal areas, the inbuilt environmental defence mechanism is fast breaking down. The volume analyses and suggests remedies for countering the degrading social situation. The towns are fortresses of wealth surrounded by hungry people, the victims of poverty. The poverty is due to low land-man ratio, dependence of the poor on wage income and their inability to find wage employment throughout the year in the villages. The papers included in this volume are an attempt to study the issues.

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Dr. B. Datta Ray is a veteran freedom fighter, a *tamrapatra* holder and a social scientist. He is the founder Secretary of North East India Council for Social Science Research since 1974.

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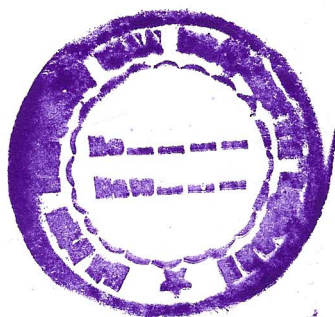
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INTRODUCTION

The papers included in this volume were presented in the seminar held in 1996 organised by North East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong, the premier Social Science Research institution in North East India since 1974. The papers in the volume deal with the population dynamics, poverty and environment of the region, which are very much interlinked. All processes of Social and Economical Development Planning must take into account, the demographic dimension, levels of poverty and the physical and social environment in which the people live. The right size of population and its quality are important factors for Social and Economic development. But the population growth in a stagnant economy leads to the decline of capital formation and increase the unemployment and poverty. In such a situation as in North East India, it has led to an adverse situation on land-man ratio. As a result of immobility of the people of North East India, both in respect of space and occupation, the economy is over burdened, particularly agriculture is over crowded. As a result, poverty is wide spread and nutritional level is low. Though the growth of urbanization between 1981-91 has not been spectacular compared to 1971-81 decade, when the rate of growth was 46 per cent for the decade, during 1981-91, the growth has been only 36 per cent, the poor infrastructure, growing population and the housing shortage have been making the living condition in the urban areas of the country pitiable. The major investment in urban infrastructure have gone, by and large, to the major metros. Though the overall level of urbanization in North East India has been low, hardly 18 per cent, as compared 27 per cent for all India average, the pace of urbanization has been rapid at least in Mizoram, currently 46 per cent, and Manipur, 28 per cent. But the civic infrastructure, like roads, sewage, water supply and municipal services are deplorable. The rural scenario is no better. The environmental hygiene is appalling

both in rural and urban areas in North East India. The quality of life in terms of infrastructure like sewages, roads, potable water supply, primary education and health services is determined by the assured and required income level. The degrading urban-rural scape in the region needs immediate attention of the leadership. Even in the North East Tribal areas, the inbuilt environmental defence mechanism is fast breaking down due to wide spread poverty in North East India. It is important to analyse and suggest counter remedies for the degrading social situation. The papers included in the volume is an attempt to study the issues.

The minimum needs of the people are, primary health services, primary education, supply of potable water, basic sanitation and shelter. In North East India, of the total 31,547,314 people at least 52 to 63 per cent of the population in the rural areas and 33 to 37 per cent in urban areas live below the poverty line as determined by nutritional level. The consumption needs like minimum clothing should also be considered in estimating poverty line. At least 40 per cent of the people, particularly women of the region are illiterate. In urban areas, potable water supply is most inadequate of the total population of 31,547,314 (1991) the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes forming 6.85 per cent and 25.81 per cent of the total population are mostly victims of poverty. The rapid growth of population and environmental degradation are ultimately traceable to the appalling poverty of the people of the region which is one of the poorest areas of the country.

This grim situation is the result of rising poverty level created by an unequal socio-economic and political forces. The land relations in North East India is chaotic. Except in Assam, land reform legal measures are non-existent, particularly in the tribal areas. In Assam, land reform measures remain hidden in papers. In the tribal areas, the community ownership of land is, by and large fictional. The 'Benami' transfers, in favour of rich owners are rampant. In Manipur and elsewhere tribal chief own major tracts of land and forests. There is growing army of landless agricultural workers even in a tiny state of Meghalaya. The urban areas in tribal states offer a misleading picture. The towns are fortresses of wealth surrounded by hungry people, the victims of poverty due to unequal production relations. The

poverty is due to low land-man ratio, dependence of the poor on wage income and their inability to find wage employment throughout the year in the villages. They migrate to the towns in search of employment. The towns are unable to offer them, gainful employment, most of them being illiterate and unskilled labour, there is no worthwhile employment to sustain urban growth in a stagnant economy.

B. DATTA RAY

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Shillong

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