

NORTH-EAST INDIA 2000 A.D.

PERSPECTIVE FOR FUTUROLOGY

Edited by

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Secretary

North-East India Council for Social
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INTRODUCTION

North-East India is a unique ecological setting. Its role in the time perspective of the next fifteen years will become more significant due to political, social and economic development in the rest of the country. If haphazard development continues, it will result in deterioration of quality of life with the decline of its resources. Therefore, a systematic analysis of the total North-East India is urgently required examining the basic issues of ecology—population, human settlement pattern, physical resources, scientific and technological applications, planning management, cultural resources and institutional framework. We should think in terms of whole complex of problem. There is now becoming a need for much more holistic approach where a desirable state for the total system is postulated first and then realistic adjustments made to that end rather than an attempt a piecemeal problem solving. It is this idea that will be of the most value in a future study of North-East India. Based on this perspective, alternative plans for North-East India should be prepared and implemented in order to assure ecological balance, social justice to the people and long-term higher quality of life. Such a vision can be realised through a futurological perspective, long-term planning and people's participation in the implementation. The papers included in it raised a lot of issues which are not confined to individual paper. These include the dilemma of top-down against bottom-up input of science and technology and the importance of the social and economic background to the relevance of technological inputs. The structure of society and of the administration is a vital factor. It is held that no futurological projection can be made by abstract analysis to be imposed on North-East India. A meaningful interaction with local people should be relied upon. All policies and plans of development must adopt the active involvement of people of the region. The inadequacy of the analytical methodology must be kept in mind as the analyses are

mostly based on macro-level and aggregative perspectives, which are likely to be nullified in the context of the plural society of North-East India. The pace and development processes have to be determined by the people of the region because of certain unique characteristics of North-East India. The egalitarian ethos of the people of North-East India has to be preserved. A variety of techniques for technological forecasting are available but we are to be aware of pitfalls of technological forecasting in the absence of sociological parameters. North-East India societies lack proper communication network. Communication media are urban oriented. Recently, some progress has been achieved in the form of mass-media transmission by radio and T.V. But there are apparent contradiction between avowed policies and programme executed in the field of communications. There seemed to be low emphasis on relevant social values. We need to talk with the people and not merely to them in a participatory democracy we desire.

The region being ecologically vulnerable, the unplanned and reckless exploitation of land, forest and water resources will have to be stopped. The existing pattern of exploitation of forest resources has resulted in denudation of forests causing serious ecological imbalances. The classical case of Shifting Cultivation in Mizoram may be cited here. There is a distinct trend of change in accepting the terraced and settled cultivation in the tribal areas of North-East India.

North-East region is earthquake prone. The construction of huge dams, creation of urban agglomerates and deep exploitation of minerals in the region are likely to lead to major ecological disturbance. The reckless destruction of forests has adversely affected the delicate eco-system.

The existing trend of land use pattern indicates that there will be increase in gross cropped areas and the area under operational holdings. Because of likely change in cropping pattern, land-based employment opportunities and of the existing inequitable land relations, the problem of rural unemployment would become more acute by the turn of the century. This will result in a sharp fall in the nutritional standard of the people of North-East India which is already very low. These are some of the crisis points highlighted by some of the papers.

There has been expansion and diversification of productive activities during the last few decades. A climate for further

relevant technological change has to be created. A technologically feasible land use model, which will not disrupt the ecological balance has to be tested over wide areas. Water-shed management has to be introduced for soil conservation and protection of forest resources of North-East. The greatest enemy of ecology is mass poverty of the people of North-East, particularly of the hill region. We need to raise the nutritional level. For this the low profile infrastructure of public distribution system has to be strengthened and wider coverage provided. The basic problems of land relations in North-East India have to be solved in near future for realisation of social justice.

The need for industrialization cannot be over emphasised. For it, emphasis should be laid on the generation of surplus within the region. There will be a need for the flow of funds from outside. The development process is not a costless one, and efforts should be made to minimize these costs. We are to chart the types of industries which are likely to come up in 2000 A.D. The pace and content of the industrial development process have to be determined by the people of the North-East instead of being thrust upon from the distant Planning Commission. The democratic and egalitarian tradition of the nationalities of the North-East India need to be protected and projected to 2000 A.D.

On the basis of infrastructure available, only small industries can flourish in the contemporary situation of North-East India. Small industries should take their nourishment from the local resources. Therefore, efforts should be made to develop local skills in agriculture and village industries and to fully involve the local people in the development processes. This calls for an adequate and relevant manpower training programme.

The problem of industrial management is acute. There is an urgent need for change of attitudes of the entrepreneurs towards the workers for carrying North-East India to 2000 A.D. Industrialisation would inevitably lead us to urbanization. There is now a need for policy decision for decentralisation of urbanisation, i.e. policy of creation of small urban centres for avoiding the maladies of large urban growth.

The kind of educational inputs available at the moment in North-East India have been creating a trend for white collar jobs, urban migration and the resultant neglect of primary agricultural sector leading to a decline of traditional arts and crafts. This has

to be corrected. The quest of the small communities in North-East India's plural societies for identity within their traditional ethnic boundaries is coming up. With the expansion of Television network, the mass media are likely to play a crucial role in universalisation of the desired primary education by 2000 A.D. reinforcing the cultural traditions of the people of North-East India.

A change in socio-economic set up is bound to bring about changes in cultural fabric. As culture emanates from social growth based on material progress, it will assume an autonomous character, assimilating the cultural traditions in the process, when economy and society are modernised by the application of science and new technology setting a chain of progressive changes for 2000 A.D. This growth must take place from within the society by a rational exploitation of resources, both material and human.

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MIZORAM AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT CENTURY : A CASE STUDY

V.S. MAHAJAN

This paper is divided into four sections. Section 1 emphasises both the necessity for futurology exercise as well as difficulties faced while working it out for the tribal societies in the North-East. Section 2 is devoted to the survey of plus points in the recent development of Mizoram. And Section 3 on the other hand, has a dig at the negative areas of the recent development. The last Section 4 tries to spell out the type of Mizoram likely to emerge by the beginning of the next century and closes with a note of optimism emphasising that the Administration is likely to play significant role in this achievement.

1. INTRODUCTION

While prediction for future is a difficult exercise it is even more difficult for the tribal societies in the North-East which have been till the other day practising primitive modes of production. Thus with slow change from past to present and lack of any worthwhile record of the past performance of these economies any prediction about their future is faced with many imponderables.

And yet such exercise is essential for a smooth and meaningful change of these economies in order to bring them into the mainstream of the rest of the country. Further the division of the North-East into seven units is a positive aid in this direction because of dealing with smaller areas and population, the latter is mostly of homogeneous character. Also thanks to recent thrust for planned development accelerated from the early 1970s, when the task of carving out all

the seven units in the North-East was completed, attention had begun to be focused on the collection of data for the various units. Notwithstanding rudimentary character of the data it nonetheless provides benchmark for working out futurology.

2. MIZORAM HAS FAST TRANSFORMATION

This paper is addressed to the Mizoram economy, which like other units in the North-East is still following primitive practise of jhum (shifting) cultivation in agriculture which is the main source of income of its population, though lately there has been diversified growth of its economy with emphasis on commercial farming, and trade. There has besides occurred rather fast expansion of civil administration which has encouraged concentration of population in a few urban centres.

Such diversified development had begun to take place from the middle of the last decade, after the Mizoram was declared as a separate unit and the Central Government began to allocate liberal resources both for its planned as well as maintenance development for speeding up the growth of this mainly jungle and steep mountainous territory with very little of plain land. As a consequence there began to occur a fast expansion of basic facilities like roads, electric power, water supply, educational institutions, hospitals and dispensaries, *et al.* Also much emphasis was laid on the development of the farm sector with liberal flow of improved seeds, fertilisers, farm equipment and extension facilities. Side by side agro-based industries for processing the newly emerging surpluses from farm and horticultural sectors began to take shape.

With the expansion of communication facilities there had as well as occurred growth of all types of mechanical transport especially the goods carriers for transporting Mizoram products as well as to bring in a host of commodities from other parts of the country. The linking of Mizoram with other parts of the country has as well encouraged mobility of the local population and Mizos began to travel to other parts of the country in good number mainly for higher education and for business and trade. This in turn has helped to bring in new ideas into the local economy. Further with the growth of urbanisation there has emerged construction activity in a big way mostly with the imported materials.

The Government has also played a significant role in this transformation by monitoring new information to the farmers and encouraging new modes of production and thereby helping these farmers to emerge from subsistence to commercial farming. The I.R.D.P. and other related programmes for the rural development have been adopted with vigour. Thus considerable emphasis has been laid on rural development which, as also mentioned earlier, constitutes the biggest sector of Mizoram's economy.

Further with emphasis on promoting higher education there have emerged these institutes imparting education both in art and science courses. Such growth has helped to broaden the outlook of the local youth as well as many of them have been absorbed in middle and senior positions in the government and semi-government organisations.

Briefly the period following the middle seventies has been one of considerable upsurge in the Mizoram economy—such upsurge was unheard of in the past history of this territory.

3. MAJOR SNAGS

However this period had its snags as well. The growth was not properly planned. It was both haphazard and uneven. This has resulted in creating some serious problems for the economy.

To begin with, while agriculture is the major sector of the economy, unfortunately not much has been achieved to transform it from the traditional to modern one. It is of course not an easy job. The jhum system has been in vogue from times immemorial and naturally to expect it to be transformed within a few years would not have been possible. There is not surprise that even today over 90 per cent or 80 per cent of population dependent on agriculture is still practising the jhum mode of cultivation.

Even in a fairly developed village like Lungdai, which is 25 kilometers from Aizawl and located on the main Silchar-Kolasib-Aizawl highway, it was found during a recent survey done by the department of Economics of the North-Eastern Hill University (Mizoram Campus),¹ that the percentage of population engaged in

1. This is the first ever detailed survey undertaken in Mizoram to bring out the social and economic change that has occurred in the rural societies as a consequence of planned development. This, as well as other similar surveys, would help to build up the future course of development of this state on more sound and firm footing.

jhum cultivation was as high as 70. If this is the state of affairs of a developed village with literacy rate as high as 80, one can well imagine the state of affairs in less fortunate villages.

Urbanisation

While the rural areas continue to stick to the traditional mode of production, high emphasis on education has greatly helped to raise the expectations of youth for better opportunities which unfortunately are available in the urban areas. This in consequence has resulted in high urbanisation in Mizoram. The population of Aizawl itself has more than trebled since 1971 from 30 thousands to nearly one lakh now.²

The problem of urbanisation in the hill areas are vastly different from those in the plains. While in the latter a vast area of flatland is easily available for further expansion, this is not the case in hill areas. The situation is still more complicated in a territory like Mizoram interspersed with frequent jungles, forests and highly steep terrain with hardly any plain land. For instance again taking the case of Aizawl, where there is hardly any further scope for expansion, a high population pressure in recent years has resulted in terrific crowding, haphazardly planned and often unsafe buildings, insanitation, poorly maintained and dusty roads, very narrow and endlessly winding lanes, and a high pressure on services which are not adequate for half the population. In fact all the worst features of urbanisation are to be found in Aizawl.

While such population pressure on the one hand is causing high pollution and creating environmental problems thereby endangering the health and welfare of the residents, the reckless burning of the jungles on the other hand for jhums has been responsible for causing major ecological imbalance. The latter which has been going on for over unknown period has resulted in destroying green plants, trees and fauna of this area. Most of the hills are now bare of greenery and turned into patches of endless dust.

While no estimate is available about the annual loss caused to forests from fires to raise jhums, it is very likely that the loss runs

2. If we consider the surrounding villages as well which have almost become part of Aizawl town, then the population of this town would be still higher.

into several crores of rupees. Further because of continuous periodical burning a large tract of land has turned barren and unproductive and nothing grows there except thorny bushes.

Thus the tragedy is that while the jhum system of farming is harmful as it destroys valuable forest wealth, creates environmental problems, disturbs the weather cycle and exposes the lush green area to frequent dusty storms and terrential rains, it at the same time does not provide sufficient income to the farmers.

Settled Land Use

The Mizoram Government has recently come out with proposal for closing down jhums by the end of this century by providing land for settled cultivation and allied activities, and as well as means and facilities for promoting such transformation.³ Further as marketing of surpluses has been an important snag in the promotion of settled land use, the Mizoram Government has also come out with schemes for providing comprehensive marketing opportunities.

It is of course too early to state the outcome of the Governments' new land policy. However, looking into the past experience it is apparent that unless appropriate facilities like rural paths, irrigation, new seeds and other inputs, marketing and credit, are available in liberal dosage the farmers would be hesitant to take to such land use and thus jhum system of agriculture would continue to prevail.

Putting the above briefly, we notice that while the period over the last one decade or so has been that of vigorous growth and development in Mizoram in terms of communication and transport facilities, travel, trade, growth of various government activities, including social overhead capital, etc., it has as well led to a high rate of urbanisation, slow development of the rural areas and poor growth in industrial sector. The jhum system of cultivation is still the main source of livelihood for the majority the rural population and emphasis on education, communications and mobility has helped to impose a high pressure on urbanisation with the resultant emergence of pollution and other environmental

3. *Vide* their decision taken on 24th November, 1984. It is mentioned that "Jhuming in the traditional system in the form of jhum land (distributed by village Council shall be completely abolished by 1974.

problems.

Settled cultivation, diversification of the farm sector to make it income-generating and market-oriented and the growth of agro-based industries have yet to take their strong roots.

4. FUTURE PICTURE

On the basis of above, let us now speculate about the possible picture likely to emerge of Mizoram say around the beginning of the next century, say after about a decade and half.

Let us first of all consider population. Recently Mizoram, like most other tribal societies has witnessed a high growth rate in population—a situation that occurred in most other parts of the country during the pre-1950s period when both birth and death rates were high. However, with control of diseases like malaria, cholera, dysentery, etc., which accounted for a high mortality rate and as well laying emphasis on family planning there has been fall in the death as well as birth rates.

This phenomenon is going to be repeated in the North-East. Already with the spread of health facilities in most areas as well as emphasis laid on literacy and family planning programmes, tribals are becoming conscious for smaller families. In the survey that the department of Economics of North-Eastern Hill University conducted of the village Lungdia, also mentioned above, an attempt was made to assess the attitude of the rural people towards family planning. By and large women appeared to be inclined for small-sized families, though men preferred rather larger ones particularly in view of the fact such size lent greater support to the earning capacity of the family particularly when in Mizoram women like men contributed to the family income.

However, this picture is likely to change when there is change in the mode of production in agriculture. The present mode of jhum cultivation was far more labour intensive than alternative either settled cultivation or allied pursuits like horticulture, vegetable gardening, coffee plantation, cattle raising etc. This fact was clearly brought out when we made a study of the family size among the jhum and settled cultivators in the village.

As the Government is already well aware of various obstacles in the way of change over from jhum to settled land use and is keen to speed up this proceeds and for which as it was pointed out

above it has laid down deadline, one can therefore expect positive results in this direction. While closing down all jhums by the end of the century would be an optimistic view, nevertheless it should be possible to close down around two-thirds of these. Further with the emergence of alternative diversified activities on settled lands yielding fair and dependable incomes the remaining one-third of jhums would as well be closed down during the early part of the next century.

With higher productivity from agriculture and allied pursuits and more opportunities for employment in trade, business and industry, the average income and standard of living would rise. This coupled with greater awareness for small families to maintain high standard of living as well as give greater care to children, would also promote reduction in birth rate and thus make for quicker decline in the population growth rate. However, in terms of the size of the population and particularly the number of people added to the active labour force, a difficult situation would have to be faced by the beginning of the next century.⁴ Here thus the pressure of the young members on the labour market would be substantial which of course would decline gradually as the next century proceeds.

While the newly created economic activities would result in large job potential, such potential however might not be adequate for the new labour force. Aside speeding up its economic growth programme to absorb such labour force, the Government would have to be pragmatic in its approach towards population control. While this control is likely to come quicker as deliberated above, however for its smooth and even more quicker a hievement some positive measures would have to be adopted which at the present state of affairs are woefully inadequate. Here factors like high literacy rate among Mizos in particular, which is the highest among the seven units and further awareness of the benefits of small families, should be exploited for creating family welfare facilities all over the area. Simultaneously the Administration

4. For instance, even if the population growth begins to decline from the next decade, those who are born in late 1970s and the present decade (1980s), would be entering the labour market during the later part of the 1990s as well as the early part of the next century. This therefore, explains the paradox of the high pressure of youth on the labour market even while the population itself is declining.

would have to speed up its statewide programme of marketing and processing of raw materials through the setting up of agro-based plants, which as we have observed earlier, hold out a high potential in raising income and employment of the people.

Further the emergence of settled land use as well as marketing and processing facilities would help in restoring forests and which in turn would not only help in restoring the ecological balance it would as well help in adding to the revenue of the exchequer. As industries-based on the utilisation of forest products—like bamboo and several other species—hold out a good scope, these would greatly assist the economies of backward areas. While the forest department is already alive to such potential, what is now needed is the translation of such potential into actual realisation.

Also as Mizoram has an extensive forest area, most of which still lies unexplored and is said to contain many precious trees and plants possessing commercial as well as botanical and medicinal potential, a long-term and well planned approach in this direction would yield rich dividend for years and years to come.

Urbanisation

While the trend towards urbanisation is likely to grow further in future as commercialisation of the economy and growth of industry and trade would bring more and more people to the urban areas, but at the same time with growth commencing from the rural areas upwards the pattern of urbanisation itself would be of decentralised type. That is, instead of population conglomerating in one or two towns like the present, there would emerge several urban points. Thus the new form of urbanisation which does not put pressure on one or two towns but is evenly spread over the territory, where more important villages in due course are raised to the status of towns, would indeed be welcome.

With the fast emergence of communication facilities, already there has been encouraging development in this direction over the past few years, and the availability of additional power and transport facilities, there would be more scope for the growth of small sized industrial units using latest technology. Also with growing mobility, a question of higher education and entry into various administrative and technical positions—already among all the tribals Mizos are on the top in the country's administrative

services—Mizos would be participating in a big way in the administration and economic development of their territory.

Therefore, considering the overall picture the plus points far outweigh the negative ones and support transformation of Mizoram into a new era of economic development with higher productivity, income, output and employment while it enters the next century. Here we have as well discussed the central role of Administration in speeding up such transformation. And interestingly it is the Administration which is quite keen on transforming the economy as is evident from its various programmes, the most important being the dating of closing downs the jhums and bringing in their place settled land use. No other unit in the North-East has come out with such a bold policy frame though they face problems very similar to that of Mizoram. This itself showed the dynamic role that the Mizoram Administration is already playing in transforming the economy of this area.