

POVERTY
ALLEVIATION
AND
RURAL
DEVELOPMENT

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**Poverty Alleviation
and
Rural Development**
A Case Study of Manipur Valley

Janatun Begum

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PREFACE

With around three-fourths of India's population living in the countryside, where majority of the people live below the poverty line, poverty alleviation programmes assume a significant role in socio-economic transformation of the rural areas. The increasing proportion of poverty inflicted population in the country has affected the planning scenario in the country to much extent.

In many parts of the country including Manipur, where larger section of population lives life in deprivation, the programmes for economic transformation have to be people-oriented with greater stress on the poverty alleviation programmes to bring a positive change in living of the tribal and non-tribal people alike. Viewed in this perspective, the present study attempts to deliberate on the problems faced by the rural poor in Manipur valley and programmes taken up by various agencies to eliminate poverty from the rural tracts of the state.

The author expresses her sincere thanks to Professor R. P. Singh, Head, Department of Geography, Manipur University for his valuable suggestions, supervision and help which enabled her to complete this study.

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She acknowledges with thanks the cooperation and congenial attitude of the officials and their staff at the district and block headquarters in the Manipur valley, while collecting data and information from their respective offices. She is especially indebted to the Deputy Commissioners of Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur districts for their valuable help.

She thankfully acknowledges the help of the authorities of the Directorates of Census Operations, Economics and Statistics, and Planning for providing her the required data and official reports about the demographic and poverty situation in the region. Besides, the positive response and help of the people, interviewed during the field survey, enabled her to understand the problem at the grassroot level.

Her thanks are also due to Mrs. A. Sanahanbi Devi, her nephew Md. Azad and sister Nazma Begum and several others for their help in accompanying her during the field work for collecting materials in connection with this work. She expresses indebtedness to her parents Md. Ibocha and Ayesha Begum and sisters, who have always inspired and helped in carrying out this work smoothly amidst congenial domestic environment.

She gladly acknowledges her indebtedness to the authors of various books and articles listed in the Bibliography, whose works have helped her immensely.

Finally, she wishes to express her gratitude to the authorities of the ICSSR for awarding the Doctoral Fellowship, which immensely helped her in completing this work. She also thanks Shri M. L. Gupta of Rajesh Publications, New Delhi for timely publication of this work.

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Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Problems associated with the development of an area and its people are multidimensional. One major dimension of the issue is the growing imbalance over the regions and across the social strata. As such, planning has its spatial, social and financial aspects, which are to be taken simultaneously for formulating any development strategy. A planning frame imposed from above may not suit well in an area owing to divergent character of its priority issues as well as growth and development processes. These priorities and processes vary in magnitude and scale of social justice.

The system in which plans are prepared, regional coordinates get distorted and lead to social as well as economic imbalances. It is, therefore, needed to bridge the social and economic gaps in this context. Every region is endowed with particular potentials for its development and as such its planning process has to be conceived in that light instead of imposing a given frame for all regions irrespective of the growth potentials.

The conceptual framework brings following departures from the earlier approaches. The concept of development regarded so far took in its perview the growth generating indices over the period and across the region. However, the present work conceives this concept to be a dialectical one, in which the role of regional development has to accelerate the process of growth and development, keeping social justice as its main focus. Unless social justice is ensured, no development effort will be appreciated by the people. Therefore, the socially desirable development is conceived to be the goal in this case.

Secondly, planning process has been conceptualised as dose curing ills and evils of the area and accelerating its growth trend. Planning is conceived as a measure of correcting imbalances, accelerating faster growth in case of poor, and maintaining upward growth trend for the other sections of the society. Besides, it looks into the issues of future projections and prosperity to enjoy in times to come. As such, it is a long-term multi-dimensional concept that leads to corrective growth and balanced impacts.

Manipur valley (Area : 2,067 km²/Population : 11,51,946 in 1991), the central alluvial tract of the State of Manipur in the north-eastern part of India (Fig. 1.1) is characterised by high density of population, low level of land-man ratio, relatively low per capita income, food deficit and frequent floods followed by droughts. Such a system has posed many questions related to poverty, unemployment, regional disparity and social inequality. These questions put together raise major issues in favour of planning for the socio-economic well-being of the people, especially for the poor and downtrodden. This latter section of the society is growing in backwardness putting the entire result of planning in the lowest gear. The rural poor is seriously affected by these questions and is perhaps least benefitted by the schemes of planning. It is, therefore, desirable to identify the social and regional questions and impact of planning directly on the poor residing in the valley. Having identified those issues, it will be possible to develop a planning strategy to create a congenial atmosphere in which the area and the people in general and the poor in particular develop at a desirable rate. Such a system may lead to a balanced regional development and will be able to achieve social justice in course of time.

1.2 Concept of Poverty

Poverty is a complex phenomenon in its content and scope. It is widespread and intensive, and related to socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-economic factors in the society. At a broad conceptual level poverty signifies insufficiency of goods and services which are requisite for an individual to maintain himself and those dependent upon him for health and vigour.

Poverty must be regarded as a general form of relative deprivation which is the effect of the maldistribution of resources. That section of

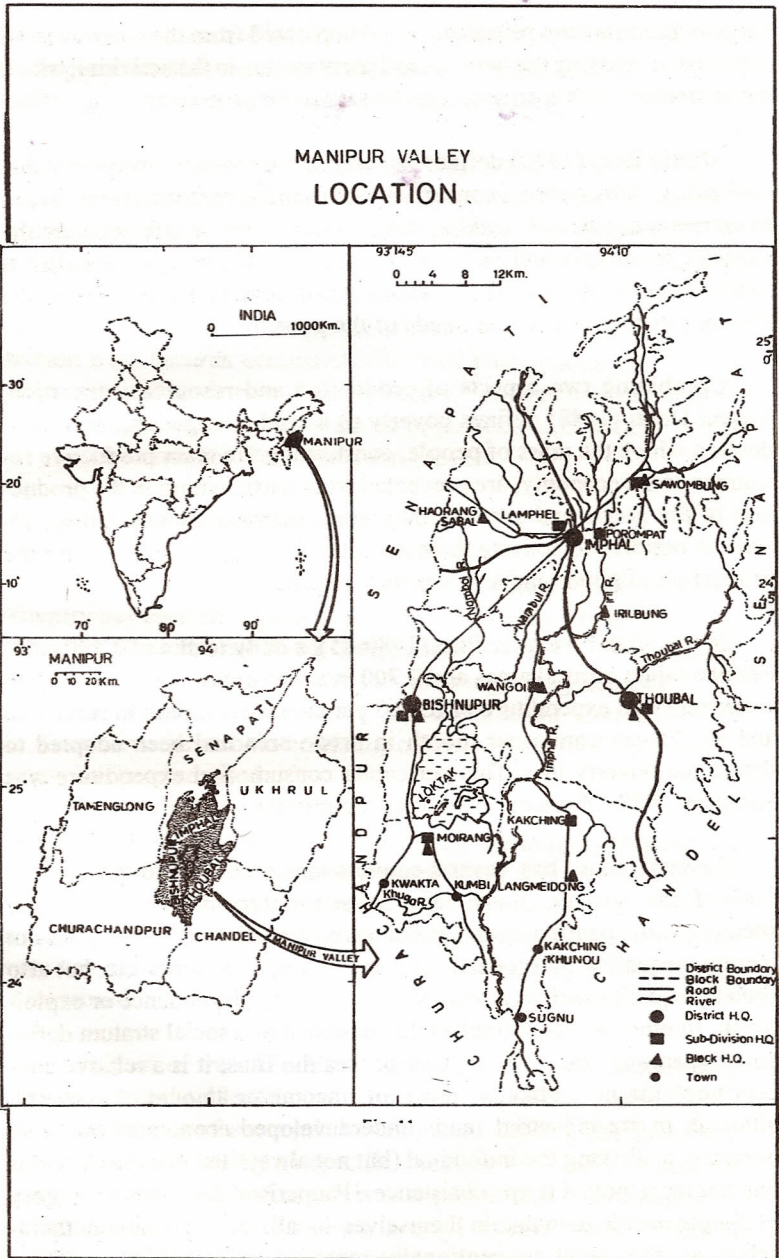


Fig. 1

the population whose resources are so depressed from the mean as to be deprived of enjoying the benefits and participating in the activities, which are customary in that society, can be said to be in poverty.

Martin Rein (1970) defines poverty as subsistence, inequality and externality. Subsistence is concerned with the minimum provision needed to maintain health and working capacity. Its terms of reference are the capacity to survive and to maintain physical efficiency. Inequality is concerned with the social consequences of poverty for the rest of the society rather than with the needs of the poor.

Combining two aspects of production and resources utilisation, Vasant Desai (1988) defines poverty as a kind of organisation of production where the mass of people, constituting the main productive resources of the economy, are prevented from participating in the production of the goods and services they need, because the non-human resources required to activate them are owned by a few who use it for the production of goods and services they require.

In the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-85), a daily intake of 2,400 calories per capita in rural areas and 2,700 in urban areas, corresponding to a consumption expenditure of Rs. 65 per capita per month in rural area and Rs. 75 per capita per month in urban area had been adopted to define the poverty line. This per capita consumption expenditure was based on 1977-78 prices (Planning Commission, 1980).

Poverty, thus, has several connotations according to the conventions of the society. It can be visualised in three distinct forms - the social poverty, pauperism and moral poverty. Social poverty implies not merely inequality of property, income, living standards etc. but also social inequality such as a relation of inferiority, dependence or exploitation. In other words, it implies the existence of a social stratum definable by, among other things, lack of wealth. Thus, it is a relative concept implying no particular level of income or amount of property, although in pre-industrial and underdeveloped economies the level normally qualifying the individual (but not always the class) as 'poor' is one not far removed from subsistence. 'Pauperism' describes a category of people unable to maintain themselves at all, or to maintain themselves at the level conventionally regarded as minimal, without outside assistance. Moral poverty defines the place of poverty in the

value system of a society or of its sub-groups and institutions, that is, it implies whether poverty is morally acceptable and what status it confers or prevents the poor man from enjoying.

Since the distribution of income and wealth in the world is highly structured by geographic location, occupation, social class, nationality, race, education and age among other factors, the poor generally differ from non-poor in predictable ways. The penalties of poverty are severe. The poor always appear to have shorter lives, more illness, more physical and mental defects, more personal crisis, less education and less protection from hazards compared with their contemporaries. Poverty occurs because of one's own undisciplined way of life, neglect of their duties and responsibilities, inequalities in possession of wealth or because of such calamities like floods, famines etc.

1.3 Poverty Alleviation Programmes

Within the institutional framework of a democratic welfare society, the country has been struggling to provide a better quality of life to the masses ever since she achieved Independence in 1947. Development and social justice have been the most important guiding elements of the 'Directive Principles of State Policy' laid down in the Constitution of India. To achieve these socio-economic objectives, a mixed and planned economy has been adopted.

During the last four decades of planning, the Indian economy has shown considerable dynamism with consequent increase in national income as well as per capita income, capital formation and consumption expenditure. But the number of persons living in poverty in the country has not decreased. Inequalities in distribution and wealth too have increased.

The problem of transforming an underdeveloped economy into a self-generating and self-sufficient economy calls for the adoption of a meaningful strategy of economic development. During the first three Five Year Plans (1951-66), no specific attempts were made to remove the mass poverty of individuals. It was expected that macro-approach will eliminate the poverty of masses through 'trickle down' effects in due course. Projects of intensive agricultural development including high yielding varieties programme were initiated for transfer of

technology through demonstration effect for increasing agricultural production.

Special programmes were introduced during the Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans for the poor and relatively less privileged classes and backward areas. These programmes may be categorised as Area Development Programmes and Family/Beneficiary Programmes. The objectives of these special programmes were transfer and creation of assets, skill development and creation of infrastructure as well as to take up directly development works in the backward areas. The area development programmes were Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP), Integrated Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) and Food for Work Programme/ National Rural Employment Programme (NREP). The family/beneficiary programmes meant for direct attack on poverty were initiated during the Fourth Five Year Plan. Some of the important family/beneficiary programmes were Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDA), Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Agencies (MFAL), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Scheduled Castes Component Plan and Training of Rural Youth for Self Employment (TRYSEM).

The present research exercise is oriented to fit in the objectives of the foregoing governmental programmes.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows :

- i. To identify the degree of imbalance in economic growth of the social groups.
- ii. To review the planning schemes for the poor and their impact in balancing the social inequality.
- iii. To suggest remedial measures to make the poverty alleviation programmes a strategy for rural transformation, and
- iv. To chalk out the programmes for development of weaker sections in temporal, spatial and sectoral perspectives.

1.5 Review of Literature

Poverty is associated with the history of mankind. Since the human being came into existence, it also faced the problem of poverty. Right from ancient times attempts have been made to solve this problem. The social scientists, particularly the geographers, economists and sociologists, have been trying to develop models for solving this chronic problem affecting our social fabric.

In the last two decades a cluster of researches have been made confirming strong relationship between the planning and its effect over the people and area. Scholars ventured specifically on the issues of development and planning. The studies conducted so far on the poverty oriented themes are briefly reviewed herewith.

Dandekar and Rath (1971) discussed "Poverty in India" on the national scale. Bardhan (1973) also suggested in his paper 'On the Incidence of Poverty in Rural India of the Sixties' that in 1968-69 about 54 per cent of rural population and 41 per cent of the urban population lived below the poverty line. Bhatta (1974) in his paper 'Inequality and Poverty in Rural India' discussed the problem of poverty in the national frame. In his 'Disparities in Per capita Household Consumption in India' Chatterjee (1976) studied on the national scale the variation of consumption expenditure among the poor and rich. Ahluwalia (1976) in his 'Inequality, Poverty and Development' Datta (1981) in 'Measurement of Poverty in India - Statewise Estimates'. Dandekar (1981) in "Land, Labour and Rural Poverty - Essays in Development and Economics", all studied the poverty situation of the country as a whole. Dantwala (1986) in his 'Growth and Equity in Agriculture', Das Gupta (1982) in 'A Cross-sectional Analysis of Poverty and Under-nutrition in Rural India', Hirway (1988) in 'Reshaping IRDP : Some Issues', Gaur (1988) in 'Extent and Measurement of Poverty in India', Dev Mahendra (1990) in 'Rural Poverty in India', and many others have made indepth studies of the poverty situation in the regional frame for various parts of India.

As against the work done so far, the present study attempts at a detailed investigations taking man as the centre of the theme and area as its periphery. The poor in a predominantly rural set-up continues to register a downward trend of growth in the process. The study, there-

fore, reviews the planning done so far for alleviating the lot of the poor with focus on how poor has been able to assimilate himself in the socio-economic milieu of the region. The study, thus moves from the poorer to the poor region and finally scales to reach the height of a developed region. All this would be possible through continued effort of identification and evolving a new approach to see the entire issue from the angle of the poor.

1.6 Research Methodology

The Manipur valley with about nine per cent of the state's area, accommodates around two-thirds of the state population. There are about 405 villages and 28 towns in the valley. The average size of the villages is of 1,717 persons and of the towns 16,297 persons. The average household consists of six persons. In the year 1988, the persons who lived below the poverty line were 4,79,090 in 81,604 families. But according to the survey conducted by the block offices in the year 1991, the total number of families living below the poverty line was 71,698. The universe of the problem of research covers all sectors of economy, viz. agriculture, forestry, industry, transport and communication, public utility services and social facilities. It also includes all sections of the society covering poor classes comprising of agricultural labourers, marginal and small farmers, rural artisans, fishermen, scheduled caste and scheduled tribe communities, besides the people below the poverty line, who form over two-fifths of the total population of the region.

To get the data about poverty at the district level and about many programmes which have been taken up by the Government to solve this problem, the reports and records of the District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) were consulted. The secondary information for all the villages were collected from the block development offices. But to get the actual situation of the poor people and impact of poverty alleviation programmes on them, a grassroot level study was conducted at Laphupat Tera, a village located in the inter-riverine tract of Imphal and Khordak rivers and surrounded by Loktak and Pumlun lakes at the tri-junction of Imphal, Bishnupur and Thoubal districts, which presents a true picture of mass poverty in the state.

Both statistical and cartographic techniques have been used to analyse the collected data and comprehend the existing situation and also

to substantiate the results. Techniques of dot, isopleth, choropleth, proportional circles, pie graph and other diagrams and curves have been utilised to give visual dimension to the situation and to support the findings.

1.7 Research Design

The entire study has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter, including this section, deals with the conceptual framework and the concept of poverty. It also reviews the existing literature on the poverty situation studies besides outlining the objectives, methodology and relevance of the present study. In Chapter Two, an assessment of the study area, interpreting the physical and cultural parameters such as geological outline, relief, drainage, climate, soil and natural vegetation, economic and demographic structures, which determine the pattern of socio-economic development, have been made. Chapter Three portrays the profile of poverty in the Manipur valley in temporal as well as spatial frames. The poverty alleviation programmes taken up by the governmental agencies and their impact have been discussed in the fourth chapter.

Chapter Five deals with the impact of poverty alleviation programmes at the grassroot level taking example of Laphupat Tera, a village with mixed population in Imphal district and overseeing the Loktak and Pumlun lakes in Bishnupur and Thoubal districts and recommends an appropriate strategy for poverty alleviation to solve the problem of poverty in the Manipur valley. Chapter Six summarises the observations and findings in the concluding part of the study.

1.8 Relevance of the Study

The study has a greater significance in the light of the Eighth Five Year Plan which lays major emphasis on the programmes for alleviation of rural poverty. The approach of the plan is to achieve social justice through planned efforts in a given period. As such, it emerges from the theme itself that poor has to be uplifted to the level of an average person. It is in this light that the present study is not only as per the need of national priority but also to the need of regional development ensuring socially viable growth and development.

About the Book

India lives in her villages where about two-fifths of the people live in abject poverty. The ratio of poor people is slightly higher in the North Eastern States particularly Manipur where around 45 per cent of the population live below the poverty line.

The book deals with the problem of poverty in the Manipur valley, which accommodates about two-thirds of the state population in less than one-tenth of its area. In the backdrop of the physical and cultural setting of the region, which determine the pattern of socio-economic development, the present study portrays the profile of poverty in temporal as well as spatial frames. The study highlights the impact of poverty alleviation programmes at regional and grassroot levels and recommends an appropriate strategy for amelioration of poverty in the state.

The study as such will be immensely helpful to the people, planners and the politicians who look towards the poverty alleviation programmes from their own angles.

A must for the students of Geography, Economics, Sociology and Rural Development Studies.

Rs. 200.00

About the Author

Dr. Janatun Begum (b. 1962) obtained her Master's degree in Earth Sciences (Geography) in 1989 from Manipur University. She was awarded Ph. D. degree in Geography in 1994 from the same University, where she served as a part-time teacher for about two years. She has also published a number of papers in the geographical journals.

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