

Problems and Prospects of Bodoland

Amalesh Chandra Banerjee
Sourabh Singha Roy



A Mittal Publication

**PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS
OF BODOLAND**

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PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF BODOLAND

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PREFACE

This Field study of the socio-economic conditions of Bodoland is first of its kind since the formation of Bodo Territorial Area District. We are grateful to the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies for extending us the opportunity of conducting the field study of the Autonomous District Council of BTAD.

This is the Final Report of the study. Earlier we submitted three Reports. This Report is the comprehensive work of the field survey conducted by us in all the four districts of BTAD. During the field survey we received co-operations from the BTAD Administration, Officials of the Assam Government, Leaders of the All Bodo Students Union and the distinguished citizens of the civil society. We are also grateful to the Districts Officials, BRPL Management and UCO Bank Officials for supporting us in collecting the field information.

Finally, we express our gratitude to the young boys who have come forward to us to give vent to their visions and imaginations about the future prospects of the BTAD.

**AMALESH CHANDRA BANERJEE
SOURABH SINGHA ROY**

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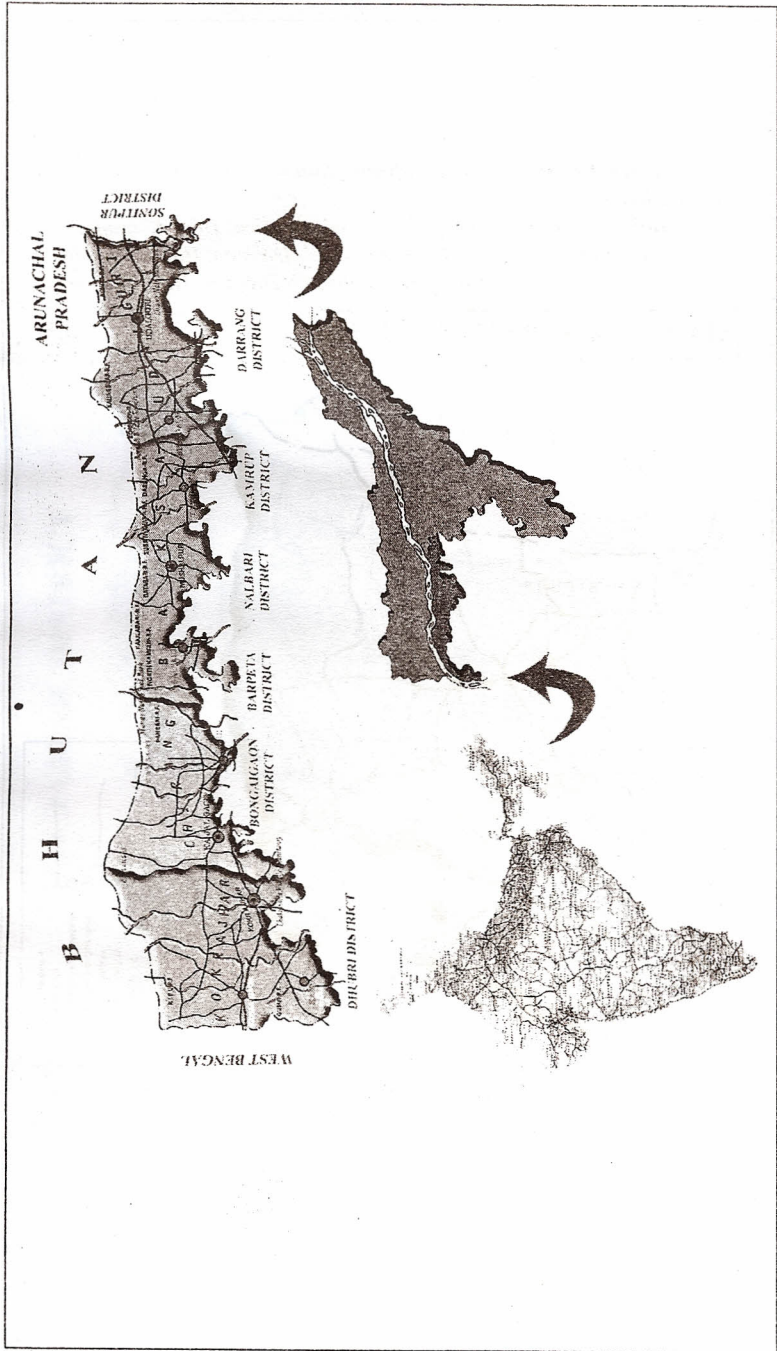
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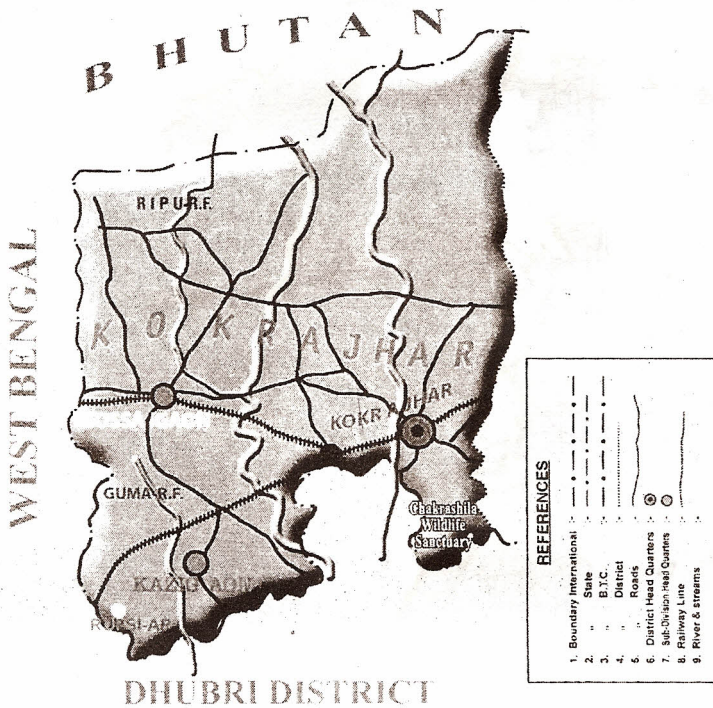
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There are 4 (four) districts with the following Sub-Divisions as Civil Administration set up.

1. **Kokrajhar District** (i) Kokrajhar Sub-Division, Hqr. -Kokrajhar
Hqr.- Kokrajhar (ii) Gossaigaon Sub-Division, Hqr. - Gossaigaon
(iii) Parbatjhora Sub-Division, Hqr. - Kazigaon

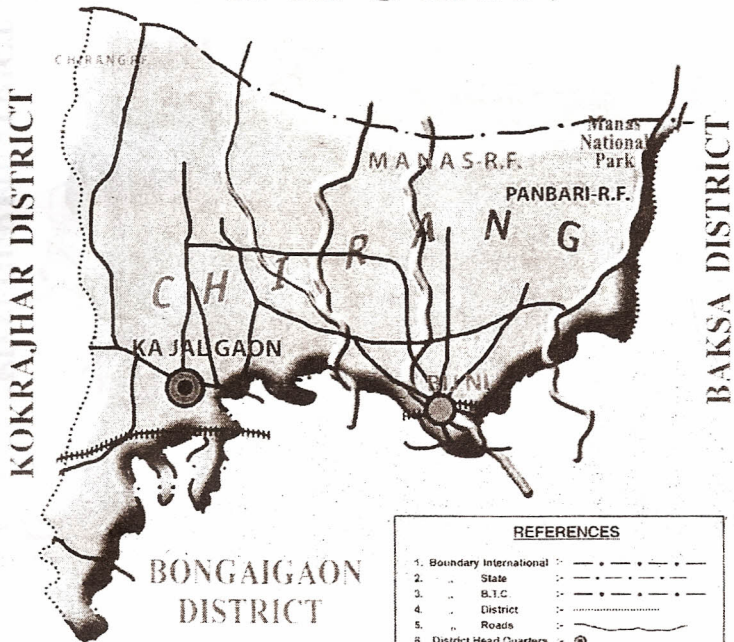
MAP OF KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT



2. *Chirang District* (i) *Chirang Sub-Division, Hqr. - Kajalgaon*
Hqr.-Kajalgaon (ii) *Bijni Sub-Division, Hqr. - Bijni*

MAP OF CHIRANG DISTRICT

BHUTAN

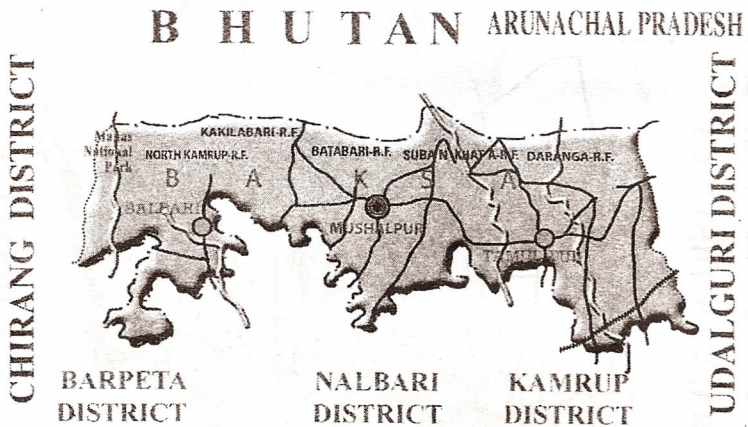


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| 2. " State | — · — · — · — · — · |
| 3. " B.I.C. | — · — · — · — · — · |
| 4. " District | — · — · — · — · — · |
| 5. " Roads | — · — · — · — · — · |
| 6. District Head Quarters | ⊙ |
| 7. Sub-Division Head Quarters | ⊙ |
| 8. Railway Line | — · — · — · — · — · |
| 9. River & streams | — · — · — · — · — · |

3. **Baksa District** (i) Salbari Sub-Division, Hqr. - Salbari
 Hqr. - Mushalpur (ii) Tamulpur Sub-Division, Hqr. - Tamulpur

MAP OF BAKSA DISTRICT

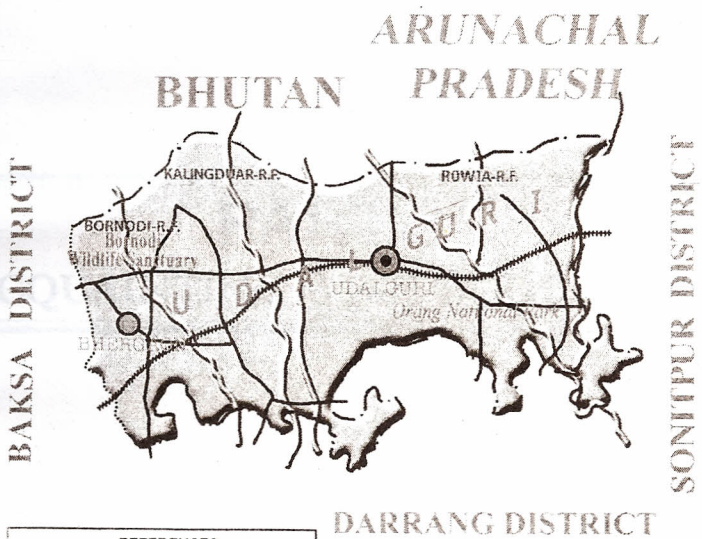


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4. " District	- - - - -
5. " Roads	— — — — —
6. District Head Quarters	⊙
7. Sub-Division Head Quarters	⊙
8. Railway Line	— — — — —
9. River & streams	~~~~~

4. **Udalguri District** (i) Udalguri Sub-Division, Hqr. - Udalguri
 Hqr. - Udalguri (ii) Bhergaon Sub-Division, Hqr. - Bhergaon

MAP OF UDALGURI DISTRICT



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4. " District	⋯ - - - - -
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6. District Head Quarters	⊙
7. Sub-Division Head Quarters	⊙
8. Railway Line	— — — — —
9. River & streams	~ ~ ~ ~ ~

PART I
ACQUAINTING WITH BODOLAND

1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Assam is a multi-racial and multi-lingual state. It is inhabited by a number of ethnic groups and tribes with rich cultural heritage. Even before the Independence of India, these tribes were asserting their independent status. During the freedom struggle most of the tribes actively participated, particularly, at the time of Non-co-operation Movement and the Quit India Movement of 1942. After the Independence a new scheme of administrative structure for the tribal men of certain Hill districts of the then state of Assam was recommended by Bordoloi Sub-Committee.¹ As a result the recommendations of the Committee (known as North-East Frontier Tribal and Excluded Area Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly) were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India.² This has provided for the Constitution of India to have the Autonomous Districts Council (ADC) for major tribes and Autonomous Regional Council (ARC) for the minor tribes within the districts. As a result, Autonomous Mizo Hill District Council and other district councils have come up for major hill tribes, viz. Khasis, Karbis, etc. The formation of Autonomous Hill Districts' Councils in Assam has subsequently led to the formation of separate states in some cases, such as Mizoram, Meghalaya, etc. Ultimately the multi-racial state of Assam has broken into a number of smaller states. However, some major tribes are still having their separate identity under Autonomous District Councils, such as, Karbi-Anglong, North-Kachar Hill District Councils.

Bodoland is the latest regional tribal development area constituted under a special enactment of the Constitution of India. Bodo Territorial Council is the outcome of an Agreement reached at among the Government of India and Government of Assam and

the Bodo Liberation Tigers in February 10, 2003. Bodos are a traditional tribal ethnic group in Assam primarily concentrated in the Bodoland area, which is adjacent to West Bengal. Bodos are also sparsely inhabited in other areas of Assam. Assam has many other ethnic groups, such as Dimasas, Kukies, Mishings, Kochas, Hamas, Rabhas etc. Earlier, such territorial councils have been sanctioned in the Karbi-Anglong and North Cachar Hill districts.

But Bodos are a big ethnic community with a long tradition of culture and literature. Bodos have been struggling for their autonomous status since long and the youth organisation, in the name of Bodo Liberation Tiger, has been spear-heading their movement with the active support of Bodo Sahitya Sabha (BSS).

With the formation of the BTC (Bodo Territorial Council) a new vista of development has begun. BTC is now preparing the Bodo Territorial Area Development Plan and the Central Government sanctioned funds for the development of the area. BTC is a Para-state administrative body with its separate Executive Council and Administrative Staffs. The present study intends to capture the problems and prospects of the New Chapter of Bodoland which has opened up with the sanction of the autonomous power to the Bodo people.

1.2 Highlights of the Subject

The study intends to focus on the major areas of potentialities of development of the Bodoland. It encompasses the demographic aspect, the physical aspect, the financial aspect and the cultural aspect of the Bodoland. The study is carried out in the perspective of diverse multicultural dimension of Assam. We therefore make some reflections of these colourful multi-racial aspects of the state of Assam as a reference perspective.

The highlights of the study, therefore, have three dimensions: (a) The Socio-economic Problems of Bodos, (b) The Development Council, and (c) The multi-racial character of Assam as a point of reference.

Bodo Development Council is the latest of the type of Autonomous Development Councils framed in different parts of the State of Assam as also in some other north eastern states. The formation of special Development Council hinges on a basic issue. The question is to find out how the different undeveloped regions of the state can catch up with the development of other districts. Secondly, how the sub-nationalities i.e. different ethnic

groups can be brought up to a higher level and be rehabilitated as a strong and distinct ethnic society contributing to the composite character of the Indian society. While examining the Bodo case, from its very start, right now, we try to explore these two broad questions. Modern world has a dynamic character of growth perused by the adoption of technology and interaction of multiple groups of people, economically and ethnically quite apart.

In India with hundreds of ethnic groups, having historically separate identity, this process of dynamism and synthesis is relatively late. So, after the colonial rule when we started development planning and political and social interaction under the Constitution, we find a sort of assertion of the individual character of the different ethnic groups. Since the forces of urbanisation and administration were relatively weak, the integration process is making a slow progress.

In the north-eastern states due to historical and physical condition of the country, this process of assimilation has been the weakest trend. In fact, the state formation itself has been very late in this area. And the governance of the states is also very poor. Therefore, the entire region faces distortions due to this halting process of planning for assimilation and development.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this specific study of the socio-economic conditions of Bodoland are to find out the causes of backwardness, the potentiality of development, the administrative structure formed for this purpose and finally, the wider cultural character of the north-eastern states and the country as a whole. Therefore, the objectives can be stated briefly as follows:

- (a) We shall identify the nature of backwardness in the Bodo inhabited area and in the Bodo society itself.

Bodos are largely inhabited in the foothill areas of the Himalaya on the north bank of Brahmaputra. Therefore, there are important reasons for backwardness of the land.

- (b) The second objective is to identify the potentialities of development of Bodo territorial area. This will facilitate to formulate planning programme for development and to implement any action programme for the Bodoland. Bodoland has important potentialities of development such as agriculture, forestry and cottage industry. If the action programme starts from the development of the human

resources and then exploitation of natural resources, the Bodo territorial area will rapidly develop.

- (c) We shall examine the administrative structure constituted under Bodo Accord. How will this newly formed administrative structure under the Sixth Schedule of Indian Constitution facilitate rapid development of the Bodoland?
- (d) Our next objective will be to examine how this development process of Bodoland and the Bodo people will facilitate the process of assimilation of Bodo culture and the Bodo identity in the wider frame-work of multi-racial society of the country. Here we shall examine the potentiality of assimilation and the danger of destruction of the sub-nationalities. Development councils are practically half-way to a separate state which have been reorganised in India on language basis in 1956. Since then, from time to time, crisis have developed either on ethnic front or on cultural front or on both sides. We are now, almost, half a century ahead of that experiment started in 1956. We shall have to examine how the formation of Development Council as a technique of administration is strong enough to bring about the assimilation of these two issues-economic and cultural.
- (e) An important question is the relevance of the decentralised planning. The decentralised planning and the Panchyati Raj has already assumes an accepted pattern of rural development technique. Over last few decades, this technique has been successfully applied in some states for ethnic development and empowerment of the people. While studying the nature of formation of the Bodoland Administrative structure we are to assess the importance of Panchyati Raj System (PRS). Is it complementary or irrelevant under the new administrative structure of Bodoland? How far the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution is relevant in this case?³

1.4 Hypothesis

The study of the socio-ethnic condition of the Bodoland is based on a number of hypotheses. We have seen that Development Councils of different ethnic groups in other parts of the north eastern states and also in other parts of the country are functioning with mixed results. In some Council areas, the progress is

satisfactory but in other areas progress is not so prominent. There are various reasons for that. These experiences provide lessons for drawing useful hypothesis for study of Bodo development council. On the basis of experiences we can draw up a set of hypothesis stated below, which can help the plan formulation for the development of Bodoland.

- (1) The first premise of development is literacy. It is established that, the universal literacy is the most potent force for overall development.
- (2) The larger the extent of human development facilities the greater the urge for the development of Bodoland.
- (3) Proper exploitation of natural resources for production and for consumption of the people of Bodoland will result in building a self-generating or sustained process of development.
- (4) Equality in respect of asset holding is a powerful force of development. Here the ownership of the holding of land and forest resource is important.
- (5) Improvement of the indigenous skills is an important step towards higher level of development of Bodoland.
- (6) Dissemination of modern technique of production and scientific knowledge and equipment has a far reaching implication for transformation of the backward society. Scientific awareness is the most powerful instrument for piercing the barriers of backwardness of Bodoland.
- (7) The market connectivity among the villages and towns of the region is a powerful process of income generation and inter-regional flow of resources.

1.5 Methodology and Data

The present study is primarily based on the field study of the present state of the socio-economic conditions of the districts of Bodoland. We followed the method of stratified random sampling combined with multistage random sampling. We also used quota sampling for eliciting public opinion. Urban and the rural areas have been covered. The general principle is to investigate the style of living of the people below the poverty line.

As such the questioner has been prepared and the investigations are carried out in different stages.

At the first stage, the field investigation has been restricted to

limited households of the BPL categories of the selected villages of the Kokrajhar district.

In the second stage selected villages of all the four districts are chosen for investigation.

In the final stage extended investigation has been carried out of the package of villages of each district.

The data collected are largely based on the face-to-face interview of the households with the investigators.

Secondly, the data have been collected from administrative sources. The Bodoland administration has provided us with some information which they have recently compiled for administrative purposes.

Informal talks with officials of Bodoland administration and the resource persons of the Government of Assam, have also been useful.

Finally, the historical documents have been discussed in understanding and examining the materials collected from the field study.

1.6 Limitations

The study has of course a few limitations:

- (1) The present districts of Bodoland are carved out from the original bigger districts of Assam. As such, it imposes some unavoidable restrictions:
 - (a) The complete census data of the present newly formed Bodoland districts are not available.
 - (b) Bodoland authority has not yet completed their separate information directory.
- (2) The Second limitation is the element of bias. By interviewing the households it has been found that the people of Bodoland give expression of their dissatisfaction with the erstwhile Assam Government Administration.
- (3) The third limitation is the absence of infrastructure. The administrative structure of the four new districts of Bodoland has not yet been set up. In some places even the administrative buildings have not been built. Hence, some information has to be collected from the organisation of the civil society like youth organisation and NGOs.

NOTES

1. Shri Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Chief Minister of Assam was selected as a Member of the Constituent Assembly. A Sub-Committee was formed under his Chairmanship to consider the constitutional position of the different ethnic groups of North East India. Other members of the Sub-Committee were Rev. J.J. Nichols - Roy, Rupnath Brahma, A.V. Thakkr. The recommendations given by this Sub-Committee were incorporated in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
2. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administrative set up of the Hill areas of the state of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur and Mizoram. Just after the enforcement of the Constitution only provisional District Councils as Tribal Advisory Committees were constituted in each tribal districts of Assam. From 1952, the District Councils had been constituted under the Sixth Schedule in all the Hill districts except Naga Hill districts. The Nagas refused to accept the Sixth Schedule and were demanding for sovereign state.
3. The 73rd Amendment of the constitution relates to the Panchyati-Raj Institution. Under the provision Panchyati Raj System has been granted extensive power for development of the rural sector. Under this provision the Panchyats have been empowered for mobilisation of the resources and rural development works.

Bodo Territorial Area District (BTAD), popularly known as Bodoland come into being as a result of an agreement signed among the Bodo Liberation Tigers, Government of India and the Government of Assam on 10th February, 2003. The Agreement is the culmination of the protracted movement of the Bodo ethnic group for a separate state. Under the agreement an Autonomous Council representing the different sections of the population was formed and a package of substantial amount of money was granted by the central government for development of the Bodo inhabited districts. The Agreement under the 6th Schedule of the Constitution of India, confers upon the Bodo Council a series of special rights which will be the guidelines of development of the area.

The study is the first of its kind regarding Bodoland and Bodo movement. It captures the socio-economic status of the Bodo people through extensive field study of all four districts of Bodoland. The field survey was done under the sponsorship of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies. The study brings out the strong points of Bodo socio-economic status and makes a projection of Bodoland development based on these positive factors. The study examines how an ethnic aspiration can be productively channelised under the constitutional guarantee of sub-state format.

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AMALESH BANERJEE is a distinguished scholar with his teaching experience spanning over more than five decades. He served as Professor and Head of the Department of Economics of Rabindra Bharati University and as a Guest Professor of Jadavpur University. As a specialist of Northeast India economy, he made important contributions. He has published a dozen of books and 160 research papers at national and international level. The main thrust of his research is macro economics and development economics. He was a Fellow of Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies. He was President of Bengal Economic Association and also the Vice-President of India Economic Association. Professor Banerjee is the Chairman of the Institute of Business Management and Research, Kolkata and President of Global Centre for Development Studies.

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