

HILL AREA DEVELOPMENT

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**THE GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF
NORTH-EASTERN HILL REGION (INDIA)**

SHILLONG

1990

Geo

Published by :

**Geographical Society of North-Eastern Hill Region (India)
Department of Geography
North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong-793014**

	India	Foreign
Price :	HC Rs. 250.00	US \$ 25.00
	PB Rs. 150.00	US \$ 15.00

1990
SHILLONG

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309.23095416
HIL; 10

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Authors

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 Date 15/3/02
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 Entd. by
 Transcribed by
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Printed at :
Archana Press
Cuttack-1, Orissa

PREFACE

North Eastern Region of India consisting of seven States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagland and Tripura is a geographic microcosm of the Indian macrocosm. With a geographical area of 255,000 Sq. Km. (constituting 7.7 per cent of the land area of the country) and 26.6 million population (1981) constituting 4 per cent of the national population, the region manifests unity in many a diversity. Both its physiography (representing all the three macro-regions of India) and social mosaic are widely diverse (specially, the ethnic diversity possibly unparalleled anywhere in the world) yet it presents the romanticism of that dew-drenched, quiet morning, full of potentialities, hopes and aspirations of a brighter and happy day ahead. Compared to India's 30 per cent areal coverage of hills and mountains, N.E. Region presents 70 per cent of the geographical area under mountains, hills and plateaus, idyllic but often, highly inaccessible. Except the valley regions of Brahmaputra and Barak (with addition of some plains of Tripura adjacent to Bangladesh) the population density is thin and widely scattered. The economy and the society in these hill areas are still in the womb of traditional ethos struggling to emerge to the vibrance of modernity. The pre-capitalist societal and economic relations are giving way to unimaginative and distorted capitalist relations on the basis of a century old history of colonial exploitation and its contemporary continuance in various forms.

102 While in the hill areas of the North East Region, ethnic diversity is one of the main features, at a general socio-economic level it presents the commonality of concentration of scheduled tribe population and Christianity. Therefore, while on the sociological sphere this region presents fascinating possibilities, on the economic front it represents one of the most neglected areas of the country needing urgent and adequate attention. Not that it is possible to formulate a development policy for the hilly areas of the region in isolation, it is more of an attempt to keep the focus on the problem area while analysing the issues in a larger regional scale.

It is with this ambition that this Seminar on "Problems of Hill Area Development" was specifically planned, initially in the summer of 1987, but due to prevailing uncertainties in Shillong

was given final billing for March 26-27, 1988. The co-sponsors of the Seminar were the Geographical Society of the North Eastern Hill Region (India), the ICSSR-NERC, Shillong, and the North-Eastern Hill University, the host institution. It may not be out of place to mention that without the ready support of the ICSSR-NERC and the NEHU, Shillong, organisation of the Seminar would have been rather difficult.

As it happens, often high expectations are generated out of seminars. While agreeing that seminars ideally need to be purposeful coming out with clear cut recommendations, the allied interests of interaction between academicians working at different institutions on a common problem, dialogue between the academia and the bureaucracy (the main instrument of policy implementation) and finally, the inspirations, encouragements and exposure received by younger researchers are of the greatest value.

The seminar was organised with the specific objectives of

- (a) discussing a framework of 'development' in the context of the North Eastern Region of India;
- (b) analysing the environmental system of the region which is extremely fragile;
- (c) looking at the hill agricultural system which happens to be the chief mode of livelihood of the people; and
- (d) finally, discussing issues on industrialisation, transport and communication and other modern sectors of the economy which are increasingly crying for attention.

The present proceedings volume is an attempt not only to present the technical papers discussed in the seminar in a succinct, presentable and readable form, but also to bring out the opinions and recommendations to the larger academic and governmental attention for appropriate policy formulations and their implementation. On the other hand, this volume may prove worthwhile to students of social and environmental sciences in an otherwise scanty literature base of the N.E. Region.

The book is organised principally in four sections, i.e. Section - I, dealing with the general theoretical context of the 'development' issue and its applicability in the specific regional context. It contains five technical papers, the first four prepared by A.C. Mohapatra, B.S. Butola, P. Nayak, and D.K. Nayak largely dealing with theoretical issues related to political economy of

development, the development paradigm, social and political development of peripheral regions with specific suggestions in preparing strategies of development for the region. The last paper by C.R. Pathak, deals specifically with development strategies for the region as a whole.

Section II deals with the "Environmental Basis of Development in the Hills" and includes four technical papers. The first paper by M.C. Pandey on "Control of Environmental Degradation in the North Eastern Region", highlights the degradation of the hill ecology due to deforestation and shifting cultivation practices (Jhumming) and presents a blue print of hill agriculture management in the region. The second paper by J. Diddie and P.R. Karmarkar analyses the management of culturable wasteland in the Western Ghat hills. The third paper by L. Pachhuau and R.K. Rai deals with the geomorphological constraints on agricultural development in the State of Mizoram. The last paper by M. Konwar discusses the land utilization and cropping practices in the West Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya, one of the most vulnerable hill ecologies of the region.

Section - III of the book emphasises on the position of agricultural development in the hills, which forms the backbone of the economy. It contains five full papers and one short paper. The first paper by Shri Prakash and Taru Jyoti provides a detailed analysis of agricultural growth in the region through a decomposition algorithm. The second paper by S.K. Mishra measures the system efficiency in agriculture sector by introducing a new measure based on the assumptions of weak rationality and incomplete information. The third paper by S.K. Mishra and B. Howbora that deals with the problem as to how social and cultural practices affect agricultural productivity, is a village level comparative study between the tribal and non-tribal farmers. The fourth paper by H. Saikia and R.K. Rai deals with the farm size and productivity in a village level study of Nowgong district of Assam. The fifth paper by S. Sarma deals with the shifting cultivation in Meghalaya. The sixth paper by H.J. Syiemlieh deals with rice cultivation and associated problems in Meghalaya.

Section - IV dealing with infrastructural factors in development of hill areas is by far the largest section containing six full papers and four abridged ones. The first paper by Ali Ahamad analyses the linguistic diversity in the region and how in certain cases it is linked with political and economic development in the region. The second paper by N.P. Goel and S.K. Mishra deals with an inter-community comparison of Manipur in terms of disparities in educational achievements. The third paper by R. Gopalakrishnan deals with the process of state formation in the region. The fourth

paper by J. Khan and B.N. Mishra deals with a study of slums of Shillong. The fifth paper by N. Srivastav and E.D. Thomas is a detailed evaluation study of the IRDP in Meghalaya. The sixth by S.J. George deals with rail transport development in the region. The short papers by B.S. Mipun, N.N. Bhattacharjee, P.K. Guha and G. Bardhan deal with varied topics, literacy in Meghalaya, development of Arunachal Pradesh, road development in Meghalaya and small scale industries.

The technical papers are preceded by the Inaugural Address by Mr. P.A. Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya and the keynote address to the seminar by Professor M. Taher, Department of Geography, Gauhati University. Both these papers provide a worthy beginning to the proceedings of the seminar and set the tune for discussion. At the end of the technical papers printed is the report and recommendations of the seminar by Shri D.K. Nayak, Organising Secretary.

We must acknowledge our gratitude to the contributors to the seminar, who while finalising the proceedings cooperated unflinchingly in giving shape to the volume. We must thank the ICSSR-NERC, Shillong, for whatever small contribution they have promised in publishing this proceedings volume. Finally, our heartfelt gratitude to our printers, M/S Ri Khasi Offset Press, Shillong, who very readily offered to print this volume in record time despite pressing problem. We will be very happy if this effort is well appreciated by our readers.

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