



NORTH EAST INDIA

GLOBALIZATION AND SARVODAYA

J.N. Nanda

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This book takes stock of the planned development being attempted in North East India, especially in the light of globalization. It studies the situation in the region and its environment for identifying the roots of disaffection of the disgruntled elements in the region. It further provides grist to the mill of speculation about the boastful unity of the country and the lasting cohesion of the structure of the Indian Civilization. It also emphasizes that the Sarvodaya is the panacea for resolving the grievances of the people, and pleads for all-sided progress and development of North East India, giving fillip to the local autonomy, preservation of their cultural ethos and providing the tribal people an honourable place.



J.N. Nanda, with a string of academic distinctions including two earned doctorates, multitude of awards from the IBC and American Biography Association, and other national and international awards, is a distinguished scientist, thinker and writer. Prof. Nanda attended on Invitation in USA, the International Conference on the Unity of Sciences. He has led Indian delegations to Australia, UK, and had invitation visits to Prague, Washington DC, Tokyo and London. He has been the founder president of the Secular Life Society of India. He has summarized his all embracing philosophy and religion as New Mahayana in which all 'isms' co-exist. Among his scientific contributions, mention can be made of his new light on the earth's internal structure, the origin of the moon and the origin of earth's magnetism etc. He has travelled practically in all continents and studied many languages. Besides his scientific books and publications, mention may be made of his book "*Science and Technology in India's Transformation*", released by the President of India at the Rashtrapati Bhawan in 1986. Other important books are *Foreign Policy of Co-existence—India*, *Glimpses of Indian History and Culture*, *and Co-operative Development of Marine Resources*, *Religion and Philosophy for Modern Youth*, *Bengal, the Unique State*, *Human Eternity: Stone Age to Mustopia*.

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Sarvodaya**

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CONCEPT PUBLISHING COMPANY, NEW DELHI-110 059

Cataloging in Publication Data—DK

Courtesy: D.K. Agencies (P) Ltd. <docinfo@dkagencies.com>

Nanda, J. N. (Jatinder Nath), 1920-

North East India : globalization and Sarvodaya / J.N. Nanda.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.

Includes index.

ISBN 13: 9788180695018

ISBN 10: 8180695018

1. Globalization—Social aspects—India, Northeastern. 2. India, Northeastern—Social conditions. 3. Sarvodaya movement—India, Northeastern. I. Title.

DDC 301.095 41 22

5803
09/09/09

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ISBN-13: 978-81-8069-501-8

ISBN-10: 81-8069-501-8

First Published 2008

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Published and Printed by
Ashok Kumar Mittal

Concept Publishing Company

A/15-16, Commercial Block, Mohan Garden
New Delhi-110059 (INDIA)

Phones : 25351460, 25351794

Fax : 091-11-25357103

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Introduction

North East India

North East India (NEI) deserves special attention of India of which it is an integral part. Communications within NEI are underdeveloped like those in other neighbouring countries. In earlier times when communications were primitive restricted to traffic on foot or in small boats or on elephants for crossing jungles that abounded in this region, it acted as the hub of the wheel of trade between India and its Bengal plains with countries of the north and east like Tibet, Nepal, Bhutan, China, Myanmar, Malayasia, Java and Thailand. Pre-historic migrations of people occurred along the Brahmaputra valley and the valleys of its tributaries. Some scholars hold that a section of ancient Hindus travelled south along the Brahmaputra from the north. They cite proofs from names of villages and lakes that the Ramayana story actually was enacted in the Brahmaputra valley and point out ancient true sites of Ayodhya, Janak Puri and Sri Lanka (an island in a vast lake formed by the river Brahmaputra).

The seven Indian states that comprise NEI are: Meghalaya, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram Manipur and Tripura. Five of these states were parts of Assam province of British India. About 50 per cent of the population of NEI is tribal. The tribes constitute in their reckoning many independent tribal "nations" jealous of their traditional culture and autonomy. A central tribal authority

was never in the reckoning. In the 14th century, the Ahoms who had carved a home in Myanmar on migration from Thailand, stormed into NEI and occupied Assam which they ruled as Hindus for next six centuries, defending the integrity of their empire from in-roads of both Pathans and Moguls and later from the tentacles of the British East India Company entrenched in Bengal. In the 18th century, the proud king of Myanmar laid claim to be the overlord of Assam and his forces laid waste the peaceful kingdom of Ahoms. The British would not relish having a strong Myanmar on the doorstep of their possessions in India. The defeat of the Burmese king by the British company's forces led to the annexation of Assam to the Indian empire of the British, but the British did not relish direct control over the ever feuding tribes and decided to perpetuate the tribal authorities of various clans and to exercise indirect control over the area. They reasoned from anthropological basics to allow natural evolution of the tribes and desired to leave them alone so long as they were not disturbing the life of peaceful plains people in Bengal. In place of growth of traditional culture, the central indifference led to the expected decay in the tribal life and loss in the natural quality of the tribal people. The only civilizing influence allowed to function by the British and then by scholarly Nehru was the activities of various Christian missions and later by the Hindu missionary societies. The new features introduced by these were the wide adoption of the Roman alphabet and the introduction of English as a language among the native dialects of the NEI. Since the Christian Karen's opposition to the independence of Myanmar, the Indian political parties were not friendly to the conversion of the tribals to Christianity.

In the struggle for Indian independence, many Assamese and Manipuris as well as others participated and were active in the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly that architected the new government of free India with

assurance of autonomy to minorities, minority languages and minority religions. India was reorganized into autonomous linguistic states of the future with special consideration of underdeveloped hill states.

End of British Rule in 1947

The British quit India in 1947. The tribal leaders also dreamt of riddance from any central authority and of curbs on their exploitation of the superstitious tribal population. The Nagas were in the forefront of the rebellions for independence. The Indian authorities had a serious problem of controlling the Naga movement. It has not completely died yet and it gave rise to many parallel movements for independence of other groups notably Mizos and some factions of Nagas in other states of the North East. The Bodos of north hills region of Assam are the latest to join the clamour for an autonomous district. The rebel bands when chased, often found sanctuary in Bangladesh which had won freedom from Pakistan with the moral and material support of India, but had entrenched in its governing strata pro-Pakistan elements which still held on to the policy discarded even by the people of present Pakistan, that of India baiting. Bangladesh was also afraid that India will try to throw out illegal Bangladeshi settlers from NEI including Hindu-Buddhist Chakmas that had been expelled from East Pakistan (or Bangladesh) through communal atrocities on non-Muslims there. Mizo rebels had created their own sanctuaries on Bhutanese soil. In support of Indian policy, the Bhutanese eventually destroyed these sanctuaries and the Mizos seem to have settled in peace in their autonomous full-fledged Mizoram state. All the while the government of India has tried to make progress in the development efforts. Many new institutes that provide know-how and training of various kinds have been set up. The NEI is covered by forests and homesteads. The inefficient Jhum cultivation is giving way to settled

agriculture, but there is acute land hunger and it is difficult even to meet essential land requirements for institutional development or for development of agricultural extension and for popularizing new agricultural methods.

The current friction between Naga ambition of an extended Nagalim and historical existence of Manipur state with overlordship over its hill Nagas will ease out in view of a united effort for democratic advancement of the entire NEI. The development effort must persist but it should be pursued with consideration of tribal sensitivity. Adequate compensation and consideration should be given to tribal leaders when they show a spirit of cooperation in the coming period of globalization and development over the entire world. The significance of growing pre-eminence of UN governance must not be lost on the local leadership. The states of NEI when they dream of independent nationhood seem to have no concern for feasibility or economic viability. They seem to rely on a wild belief in their violence against unarmed villagers and success in past local strife. For the ethnic militias, the major financing has been from the extortion demands termed taxation by the rebels who claim to run a parallel government in some disturbed areas. Some of these bring to mind the happenings in Angola before it ended its civil wars. For some time insurgency is countered by counter insurgency. This leads to further impoverishment since true advance will only come through more production and better development effort. The sooner better agriculture, forest management and animal husbandry are attempted, the better it will be for the economy of the NEI.

Social pressures have created fake myths of ancient greatness of vanished cities and forgotten grandeur. There is considerable glory in the imagined past from the surmised spread of Hindu-Buddhism across these territories into Myanmar and beyond. All this can lead to considerable lucrative tourism and safaris in the NEI when supported by the required tourism, the infrastructure for which has yet to be in place.

Prologue

NEI started its modern period in 2001 when India set up a ministry at the centre to push the development of NEI. Certain states had been created to meet the demands of the insurgency by acceding to give full state status to Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland in 1972 and Meghalaya and Manipur got full statehood in 1992. Some autonomous districts were also created and are now functioning. The 21st century is crucial to its advancement and marching with India to a new world of internal and external security assured by the developing UN system of governance of democratic participation of all. This prologue deals with happenings since Indian hegemony began with the British Indian acquisition of Assam after the defeat of the Burmese occupation forces in the NEI and the treaty of Yandabo in 1826.

There was regular trade between Bengal and Khasi hill areas. Later, imported steel replaced the native product. Other trade items were coal and horticultural products. But all trade was in the hands of Bengalis and Manipuris. British occupation of Khasi hills helped trade to grow. The tribal folk bought and sold slaves which was frowned upon by the British. The economic and mineral resources have never been properly assessed so far. The Assamese took to trade and business very late. A section of Bengali middle class shifted to Assam to assist the colonial administration and to carry on their own clerical and professional advancement. Bengali speaking minority in Assam is sizeable (22%). There was unrest when Assamese was made the language of courts and given the status of primary language of Assam. The Assamese and Bengalis are however well integrated. This familiarity with Bengali culture and Bengal administrative skill will stand NEI in good stead in future when cooperation with Bangladesh and impetus to communications with India and Myanmar across Bangladesh will enhance trade, commerce and industrialization of both.

Khasis of Khasi hills could not forge unity. They had numerous chiefs known as Siems. Assam suffered terrible chaos during Burmese invasion of 1817-1824. The Ahom kingdom got recreated in 1833. Marwaris and Bengali Muslims came as traders or they came to help grow rice on terraces. Settlers among them soon became part of the new middle class. Ethno national upsurges are a challenge to the national state. The world has more than 2000 homeland claims based on ethnicity. Only modernization and development based on equality can satisfy them. Multi-culturalism has to be reinforced. The Soviet experiment of a multi-national state has failed, but this prescription is still voiced by the communists of India. The melting pot theory is also discredited. Distinct cultures do not give up their identity easily. Drastic measures for the submergence of mini cultures or ethnic purification are repugnant to the human sense of fair play. The state must exist to enforce its laws so that the citizens live in harmony. India is pumping in money through the newly set up ministry at Centre for the development of NEI and for counter insurgency. The ULFA fighting for the liberation of Assam is countered by the counter insurgents SULFA from the surrendered rebels. The future lies with strengthening of democracy and regard for human rights of all. Bureaucratic enthusiasm often produced criminalization of the tribes. The government must pursue its policy of finding democratic solutions by discussion. Already demands for homelands for the Mizos and the Nagas have been met. The situation is of increasing demands for homelands by many tribes which would mean break up of NEI into non-viable autonomous units or to the balkanization of NEI. Where possible, district councils with some judicial powers and own police force have been established. Re-organization of Assam in 1972 gave full statehood to Nagaland, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. Meghalaya and Manipur also became separate states. Future now lies with

the Indian and global institutions active in the peace and progress of NEI. We need cohesion of all people in India.

A middle class has emerged in Assam as in other Indian states out of government servants, lawyers and those having rights in land. Assam is the home of Indian silk production and most girls are expert in weaving which they learn at the mothers' knee. Assam has been exporting metal wares, mats, ivory, timber and timber products. Final British imperial battle with the Nagas ended in 1858. The British decided to leave the tribes alone so long as they did not raid civilian targets in Bengal and Assam. A technical institute was established in 1932 in Shillong. Garos had rapid change for the better from taking to plough cultivation, Christian educative intrusion and the development of communications. Communists were active particularly in Tripura where an anti-Bengali agitation erupted. Tribal priests replaced Brahman priests in certain temples. Landlessness and indebtedness arose during the British occupation as in other parts of India. Protective discrimination in favour of tribals has continued. The constituent assembly did not concede the formation of a Khasi state; only in 1972, Khasis became chief constituents of Meghalaya. The tribal districts of north Cachar decided to cast their future with Assam. Bodos demand of a homeland or autonomous district north of the Brahmaputra is pending and so are some other homeland demands. What is urgently desired is scientific management of forests as has been demonstrated under UN auspices in Guatemala of South America. There has been large influx of Biharis and Nepalīs causing further shortage of land for the native population especially where Jhum cultivation is still practiced. Several tribes still treat women as a commodity. The education is a big task. Some relief must be found from the existence in NEI of 325 distinct languages and twenty-five scripts. Hindi, Assamese, English and Bengali have a lot of scope to flourish in these areas.

Nagas and Manipur

On India's independence, Nagas and Manipur both were not much interested in merging with India and preferred independent treaty relationships with India. India could not very well agree to this. Nehru was willing to launch armed forces to effect integration of any such areas. Due to playing faction politics India succeeded in providing the boon of affiliation to India, but discontent continued to simmer. The insurgents could get sanctuaries outside the country. India had to weather the harm from insurgency and counter insurgency. The democratic process however continued and Jamir, a Naga leader became the chief minister of Assam. Phizo, the rebel Naga leader who usually stayed abroad finally agreed to give up confrontation if statehood was accorded to Nagaland, the compact Naga area at the border with Myanmar. Manipur had a Hindu faction, but its majority population particularly in the hill tracts to the north was Naga but a different clan from the one in control of Nagaland. When soon the Nagas started an agitation for greater Nagaland at the cost of Manipur, any acceptance by India would be to alienate completely the Manipur state and the Manipur Nagas. Both sides have to be satisfied in mutual interest by living in harmony. It is like the conflict situation in unified state of Bombay combining Maharashtra and Gujarat. India almost forced them to continue to hold together, but to no avail. Soon these had to be separated and there is no longer any animosity between them. This separation already exists between Nagaland and Manipur but both are unhappy with the *status quo*. The Manipuris cite historical conflict free co-existence of Manipur population of all races and creeds. They blame India for speedily agreeing to full state status of Nagaland, which is just a cluster of Nagas of various clans and now they are ambitious to expand their hegemony over other Nagas. The democratic solution would be a popular vote of hill people in Manipur. The best way to get to the desire of the

population would be to hold elections to Manipur Assembly with the revised electoral lists and then allow the representatives from the hill areas to meet separately for a vote for rejoining their colleagues of Manipur or for opting out. In that event the best way would be to give them an autonomous district free from control from Nagaland or from Manipur. There can be common governor for Nagaland and Manipur with special interest in justice to minorities of both states. The suspicions, we are certain, will fade away if administration is on the road to *Mustopia* with goodwill for all. Governance through rebellion and violence is no longer a viable alternative in India wedded to democracy and justice for all. Manipur will be within its rights to accord English the status of preferred language along with Hindi and other languages. The Manipur University may have a separate unit for the hill people of Manipur and admit others who may qualify for entrance including other Nagas in the NEI.

It is quite in the interest of the Manipuris that militancy ends there and the state settles into peaceful mode of reconstruction. The violation of human rights will continue if the state continues to be governed by armed forces special powers as if it is war time. Naga leaders both in Nagaland as well as of the Naga tribes in Manipur should seriously work on the organization of a joint Nagalim-Manipur state as Jammu and Kashmir is constituted. Bodos and Korbis demands of autonomous districts could be extended to other areas, if necessary, of the joint large state. It is too late for a mini constituent assembly for the NEI to focus on all pending aspirations including those of Bodos and Korbis. It should be clarified at start that full-fledged appendage of an assembly, a governor, and ministers will not be possible for every autonomous district. They can only get a single administrator holding an elected office for five years with a budget allotment each year by the state and central governments. The administrator will be head of the district police, district planning board and the administration will be through existing channels keeping the administrator fully

in the picture. The popular government need not be top-heavy. It should be the cheapest form of governance with the cooperation of the public.

Why Develop?

The primitive slash and burn agriculture cannot support even the much lower population than what is now driven to much less land. Even the gathering of jungle produce and catching of fish are insufficient. The tribal people were ever alert against intrusion of outsiders. In Mizoram there was violent expulsion of outsiders and refugees from Myanmar. There arose practically mob rule everywhere and the administration never reached the hills and valleys of NEI away from large towns. The government and police were enmeshed in insurgency and counter-insurgency. The government of India accepted the policy of positive discrimination in favour of the local people and residents who were recent immigrants and not second generation immigrants without voting rights could in principle be deported. The refugees and permitted immigrant workers could corner all available land by benami transactions. Even land essential for communication and education infrastructure was scarce. The population had increased four-fold in the first 50 years after independence. Trade, commerce, the engines of prosperity of this area were now languishing on account of unsettled conditions and lack of entrepreneurial skills. In the climate of might is right, the primitive tribal democracy was crumbling along with tribal organization of the Nagas. There was non-traditional exploitation by the elected officials. The tribal strife came in the way of democratic representation on the autonomous district councils. The Naga National Council, United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), the Tripura Upjati Samiti only looked to the privileges of specific groups or clans. Only the government claimed to protect the human rights of all, but its writ was severely eroded by insurgency. Still there

was hope for genuine service. The tribes had responded well to the spirit of service shown by Christian and Hindu missionaries. There was hope that outsiders can again be welcome if they come on invitation as agents of change and assist in training and development as per requirement of the local authorities. The experts believe that the NEI with its unutilized resources of raw materials, waste lands periodically inundated by flood waters, thick forests and scenic beauty when properly developed and supported by tourism infrastructure can easily bring about prosperity to the entire population. They must start with a will on the development course involving setting up of agricultural, animal husbandry, forestry and engineering workshops. Education has to spread and the gains in popularizing the Roman alphabet and common use of English as the vehicle for higher learning have to be expanded. Linguistic chauvinism should be replaced by pragmatic policies of hard work and diligent apprenticeship of every kind that can promote entrepreneurship and setting up of secondary repair shops and first processing of agricultural and forest produce. There is great potential of export of fruit and flowers, timber and timber or cane products. The NEI can develop and export hydroelectric power and even ask for a contribution from plains people who use the water flowing out of NEI, but the NEI should also have expertise of flood control that damage the land in the plains.

Khasi alphabet was developed by the missionaries and first Khasi press started in 1896. Assamese language is rich in literature. Manipur has contributed to eastern literature profusely. The NEI has only to shake away failed dogmas of development and take to the time tested path of service and cooperation to get out of the pond of despair and dependence. They have all the ingredients for development.

Historically NEI was ravaged in 1817-1824 by the invasion of the Myanmar king. The primitive society had hardly recovered when the comparative isolation was shattered by the influx of refugees due to partition of India

and then was bedeviled by the insurgency and counter insurgency. The insurgency was only for the right of the ethnic population. Now the whole world and particularly India is for their rights and even positive discrimination in their favour. A number of autonomous states and district councils have been set up meeting most of the wishes of the tribals insurgency. All realistic advances in political organization which do not impinge on the democratic rights of others have an element of possibility now without hindering the march to progress and globalization of trade, commerce and investments as well as expansion of training avenues.

Development of NEI

The pseudo intellectual leaders suspect all development projects as snares to divert people from the true struggle in class war against feudal and exploiting capitalists. They believe in heating up the revolutionary struggle and anarchy so long as their leadership at the end is assured. A developed and peaceful countryside would mean an end to their fishing in troubled waters. Tribals anarchy suited them and the traditional leadership. The entrepreneurship class is blissfully missing and so are the trained manpower to man even the minor technical or administrative positions. The state and central governments as well as the emerging educated and budding capitalists from among retiring officials would like to forge ahead with development projects utilizing controlled temporary import of workers and technical and administrative personnel from neighbouring states. Already the British have demonstrated the success of tea plantations in Assam by such means. But the critics point to the exploitative nature of imported workers who have not made the tea industry really an Assam industry. Only now with the imported Indian capital and expertise some progress is being made in indigenizing the tea production and marketing. Assam has been rich in mineral resources and the proper pace of development has never

been attempted. First there was the imperial interest of British entrepreneurs and later the continuation of anarchic uprisings thwarted the development efforts. The real shortcoming in educational and technical competence will have to be rectified by a concerted programme of providing technical institutions for all levels of workers. The NEI in vast spaces is like the darkest of dark Africa. Slowly the tribal diffidence from using helping hands from their educated compatriots will ease and development projects and necessary institutes for education and training will be allowed to come up. The central government is evidently willing to make the seed financial investments. Tax income is necessary but "taxes" collected by rebels go into counter development. Peace is a necessary condition for lasting development efforts. The creative talents of the population as are obvious in their artistic creation in straw and weaves have to be harnessed to increase trade and commerce which are the sinews of progress. The globalization is bound to increase tourism and any expansion of infrastructure to help tourism will help NEI. The limited bus and train communications can also serve for tourist stay for a day or so at the terminal stations in the absence of hotels and city market places. Traffic junctions can also create temporary local production emporia for the visitors. It was most interesting to see the entire railway staff both on the train or on the stations on the way, pitching in as salesmen.

Plus Points

The NEI has many plus points for its future prosperity. It exists on the periphery of India, a nation committed to peace and friendship with other countries. India believes in the development of the entire nation including the lowliest in income and education. India is continuously improving its laws and court procedures in favour of removing bottlenecks created by vested interests in the development work. India is against any doctrinaire opposition to creation of wealth

and entrepreneurial activity in the expansion of production. It believes in the fact that when the poor grow richer, the wealthy also benefit. During the period of British rule, the Indians were naturally suspicious of the British development efforts which however were sometimes quite sincere based on the efforts of well meaning British educated civil servants. The inertia of suspicion should give way to welcome of development efforts on merits since the basic philosophy is of total development and not development in the interest of any vested interests. There is the accepted goal of *Sarvodaya* or progress of all as enjoined by Mahatma Gandhi. India is a firm supporter of UN governance efforts. The NEI could welcome re-building of communications with neighbours. The NEI needs enormous wealth and international cooperation to control flood devastation each year and to preserve its forest wealth with proper management. The people of NEI have only to affirm their belief in themselves, shed suspicion of "foreign settlers" who have made NEI their home of second generation. The Indians or Bangladeshis should be welcomed for their past and future contribution to their own and NEI prosperity for all its residents.

Globalization

Globalization of trade and commerce has reached the institutional stage. And the people are taking to it because of convenience and personal gain. It is spreading due to increasing individual consciousness of the global situation due to media coverage and easy communication. Globalization is not global sameness but through promotion of local heterogeneity, peace and co-operation, easy transfer of skills and investment funds. Global taste is developing for variety in cuisine. Urban middle class is increasing and cheers for globalization. UN governance is taking on more tasks and is attempting to take on guarantees for internal and external security of nations through worldwide interest in peace, and cooperation for world development and for

making the nature's experiment of mankind a success for the eternity of earth's existence. Policies of coexistence and tolerance, democratic discussion route to solution of problems are in evidence. The global culture is not conflictual but invites people to freely enjoy their culture or mixture of cultures. Such developments are in tune with the complexity of human mind and agreement on millions of years being available for continued progress or for decline through defective thinking for limited selfish objectives. Globalization and transnational manufacture spreads vocational training, creates more jobs. It spreads small ancillary businesses and workshops and education. There is increasing coinage of international parables, proverbs, songs and short stories. The vision of worldwide peace and progress is now glowing bright and beckoning the whole world to develop together.