

Disparity in Socio-Economic Development and Its Implications on Communal Conflicts:

A Study on India's North-Eastern Region

Debasis Neogi

Abstract—India's North-Eastern part, comprising of seven states, is a lowly developed, tribal population dominated region in India. In spite of the common Mongoloid origin and lifestyle of majority of the population residing here, sharp differences exist in the status of their socio-economic development. The present paper, through a state-wise analysis, makes an attempt to find out the extent of this disparity, especially on the socio-economic front. It illustrates the situations prevailing in health, education, economic and social cohesion sector. Discussion on the implications of such disparity on social stability finds that the causes of frequent insurgency activities, that have been penetrating the region for a long time, thereby creating communal conflicts, can be traced in the economic deprivation and disparity. In the last section, the paper makes policy prescription and suggests how by taking care of disparity and deprivation both poverty and the problem of communal conflicts can be controlled.

Keywords—Disparity, Development, Deprivation, Communal Conflicts.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE incidence of uneven development is, in general, a special characteristic found among the developing nations.

With the concentration of development around the center, the peripheries often do not receive even the percolated benefits of such lop-sided development. Though the Neoclassical theories postulate that it is through the mobility of capital stock, technology transfer and labour movement, the development gap between the center and the peripheries will eventually reduce, in reality such dynamics itself become a function of a set of other factors like the topography of the region, its geo-political sensitivity, political will of the authority and most important of all the awareness of people for development. The proposition of Growth Pole theory refers to the concentration of industries around a central core of other industries and acting as channel of growth in the area. However, it has not been much fruitful to reach its objective even in the developed economies. The most frequently cited example of the attempt to create an artificial growth pole occurred in the Mezzogiorno (south) of Italy, with industrial complexes planned at Taranto and Bari. However, such

artificially created growth poles could not bring in regional development to the extent it was expected. Thus, it is quite unlikely that the theory will find more effective application in the backdrop of a developing economy.

On the other hand, the concept of development often confronts with conflict in the academic circle. In fact, the process of economic development itself has undergone paradigm-shifts over time. While, on the one side, such changes were inevitable as they were the timely responses to the contemporary necessities, on the other, the differences among the scholars originate mostly in the interpretation of the concept and in the outcome of various strategies implemented. With the introduction of globalization, the debate has become more intense. In globalization the market has emerged as the driving force of the economy and the development strategy initiated by this economy operates with its usual exclusion principle. The produce of development reaches that section of the society, which fits well in the market dynamics, ensuring survival of the fittest. However, the development ethicists have put strong objection to such exclusions. They argue that at least some of the development ideologies should address the problems of the excluded – mostly the poor and the vulnerable section of the society. A complex and unresolved empirical question regarding the relative contributions of local and global factors to the wealth and poverty of the societies still exists [30]. In this context, the role of different development agents becomes crucial. These agents at both governmental and non-governmental level have to shoulder the responsibilities of ensuring social upliftment and for that the best possible development strategy has to be devised.

The notion of convergence is also of much importance when developmental gap exists in the society. A number of theories have been put forward at different point of time. Most of them are based on empirical experimentation on the developed economies. As a matter of fact, even though the incidence of convergence is noticed among the developed countries, the developing nations are still facing wide spread regional disparity. The Human Development Reports from such countries show the lacking equal distribution of development there. For example, the UNDP Report of Zimbabwe finds out the level of illiteracy to vary from 33% to just over 6% across the provinces; while access to safe drinking water varies from just above 28% to as low as 1% [33]. According to the Philippine Human Development Report 1997, a comparison of the Human Development Index (HDI) across various provinces between 1990 to 1994, reveals that extent of dispersion varies from an increase of 25% to a decrease of 4% [18].

Dr. Debasis Neogi is Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences of National Institute of Technology Agartala, Tripura, India (Ph. No. 91-(0)-94365 03427, Fax. 91-381-2346360, email: dnecon@gmail.com)

A wider regional disparities in terms of Human Development Index and Human Poverty Index have been reported in the Human Development Report of the I. R. of Iran 1999 [29]. The outcome of such dispersion is found in migration of population – especially the work force – in large scale from provinces with low HDI to provinces with high HDI. Considering the gravity of the problem it has been suggested that more equitable distribution is needed more specifically in health and education sector along with accelerated economic growth to overcome the problem of ‘deprivation’ among low ranked provinces.

The case of India is also no exception to that. The estimates of Human Development Indices across the states make the fact more evident. Among the low ranked states of the country, the cluster of states in the North-East India (NEI) is the focus of the present study. The region is economically backward, characterized by low rate of growth and pre-dominance of agriculture as the main source of livelihood. The region comprises of seven states and is dominated by tribal population. The socio-economic status of the seven states of NEI is as diverse and as heterogeneous as the varieties of tribe found in the region. However, their topological similarity is worth mentioning. The existence of huge tea production with wide spread market had started to enrich the region long back. The finding of underground coal and oil in Assam had led to the upcoming of forestry and mining in the region. The population started to grow surrounding these centers. Well connectivity with other parts of the country and abroad by rail heads and river through Calcutta and Chittagong had made the region prosperous. Depending upon the economic progress of Assam, the only state in the region to have majority of the area plain, the economies of the other parts of the region, which has more than 80% of the area covered with mountainous range and dense forest, could have also developed. However, the partition of the country at the time of its independence in 1947 and the consequent reshuffling of the region had left an adverse impact on its economy. Added to that was the commencement of a series of never ending insurgency problem and communal conflicts that crippled the economy further and disrupted the efforts for development of this promising zone.

The isolation that started with the partition of the country has postponed all developmental work in the region. Moreover, expenditure on defence and on maintenance of law and order has increased enormously. The typical topography, believed to be the heaven for hide out of the insurgents has made the problem worse. The tribesmen living on the hilly stretches and dense forest thus remained cut off from the ‘main land’ of the country. The urge for survival coupled with the absence of any other effective alternative source of livelihood has led them to turn towards agriculture, which is still considered to be the main occupation in the region. Inadequate information and less interaction with the outside world have made them ignorant about the technological advancement around. As a result, we find late arrival of fertilizers and fertilizer-based production in agriculture in this part of the world. The shifting cultivation is still wide spread. As per the Report of the Task Force on Shifting Cultivation of the Ministry of Agriculture (1983), as many as 4,43,336 families practice shifting cultivation in the region. Out of that

54000 are from Arunachal Pradesh; 58000 are from Assam; 70000 are from Manipur; 52290 are from Meghalaya; 50000 are from Mizoram; 116046 are from Nagaland and 43000 are from Tripura. The average fallow period was 3-10 years in Arunachal Pradesh; 2-10 years in Assam; 4-7 years in Manipur; 5-7 years in Meghalaya; 3-4 years in Mizoram; 5-8 years in Nagaland and 5-9 years in Tripura. In the absence of any artificial manure, these fallow periods are used to regain the fertility of the soil. Besides agriculture, cattle breeding and hunting supplemented their economic activities. With a low density of population the region has over 84% of the population living in the rural parts.

Given the similar geo-political identity, analogous topographic features and common tribal identity of majority of the inhabitants, any policy prescription for development of the region should aim for equal distribution of the fruits of development. Since independence of the nation, Government of India has taken a number of initiatives for development of the region. However, the benefit did not percolate to all sections of the society – making the development an asymmetric one. Moreover, apart from asymmetric development and concentration of economic power, a ‘dependency syndrome’ has started to operate. The dependence is on central grants, which have been flooded in the region under various development schemes. But development, in its real sense, has never occurred at the desired rate. According to Meier [17], development is a combination of growth and change. So it must essentially have qualitative dimension. But in Northeast India only various schemes were introduced, without confirming the qualitative norms of the projects. Because of such a lop-sided development practice, India’s Northeast is still identified as one of the most underdeveloped regions in the country. Moreover, such backwardness has posed a serious threat to the entire nation in the form of unemployment, poverty and insurgency – all of which are interwoven. Now it is the prime task of the policy makers to review the ongoing development strategy and try to evolve one, which ensures inclusion of the excluded through the process of social transformation and development. In the back drop of such lop-sided development, the present paper attempts to find out the extent of disparity, especially in the socio-economic front, existing among all the seven states. Since the region is infamous for extremist activities, the implications of asymmetric development, especially on social cohesion and stabilization is also crucial.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

The focus of the present study is to determine the comparative state of development of the seven sister-states of the NorthEast India. While the cross section survey highlights the disparity among the states, the time-specific comparison will reveal whether such disparity is reducing or is diverging over time. Two specific periods are chosen for such comparison – one is the years surrounding the mid-1990s i.e 1995 and the other is one around mid-2000, i.e 2005. As many as fifteen parameters on different socio-economic aspects are selected to judge the relative progress of the states.

The number of parameters considered for analysis is fifteen. Out of that four parameters – number of primary health centers without doctors, number of primary health centers without any pathological laboratory, population per doctor and proportion of household having access to safe drinking water are used to construct the Health Index. The Education Index also has four components – pupil-teacher ratio, proportion of trained teachers, literacy rate and female literacy rate. The Social Cohesion Index has four components too – literacy rate, female literacy rate, sex ratio and proportion of household living in pucca houses. The index gives an idea of the extent of social inequality. The economic index has five components – per capita income, proportion of gross sown area in agriculture having irrigation facility, NEI's share in the total employments in the small scale industry in the country, volume of registered unemployed as proportion of population and extent of rural electrification. This index, besides highlighting the differences in per-capita income, covers performance of the states both in agriculture and in non-farm employment generating sector. The extent of rural electrification has impact on the economic upliftment of the rural masses as it helps in rural industrialization. In all the cases an unweighted arithmetic mean of all the components gives the required indices. All the indices will reveal the Strength Weakness, Opportunities and Threat (SWOT) of each of the states.

The study has used a number of statistical tools for the purpose of analysis. The coefficient of variation of the parameters for both the periods will find the relative variation of the respective parameters across different states of the region. The Ginni C Coefficients for all the parameters suggest the relative concentration of these parameters across the states. A Composite Socio-Economic Index is formulated for both the years. The index is formulated with the normalized data set following the method used by UNDP in the construction of Human Development Index (HDI). The ranks of the states show the socio-economic progress of each state in comparison to the other. Changes in their ranks between these two years reflect whether the states' performances improved or deteriorated in relative term over the decade. The section Inter-State Disparity in North-East India finds out, using all these measures, the extent of socio-economic disparity existing among the states. The section – Implications of Disparity on Social Stability discusses the effects of such disparity on the social stability. It tries to explain that the on-going insurgency activities and communal conflicts are rooted partly in such asymmetric development.

The entire analysis is based on data collected from secondary sources that includes the related Government published documents. Issues of 1990s and 2000s upto 2007 of Economic Survey, published by Ministry of Finance, Government of India; issues of 2002 & 2006 of Basic Statistics of North-East Region, published by North-Eastern Council, Government of India; issues of 1998-99, 2001-02, 2004-05 and 2006-07 of Statistical Abstracts of Arunachal Pradesh, published by Department of Economic and Statistics, Government of Arunachal Pradesh and issues of 1999-2000 and 2006-07 of Economic Review of Tripura, published by Department of Economic Affairs, Government of Tripura are the sources of the entire data set. Besides that official websites

of the Department of Rural Development, Government of India; Ministry of Finance, Government of India and North-East Council, Government of India have also been consulted for preparing the paper.

III. INTER-STATE DISPARITY IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

To find the relative variation in the performances of the parameters, the Coefficient of Variation and Gini C Coefficients are calculated separately for each of the parameters both for 1995 and 2005. The results are given in Table – 1. The crucial observation from Table – 1 is that relative variation has been different for different parameters as far as the measurement of such dispersion are done through coefficient of variation.

TABLE I
COEFFICIENT OF VARIATION AND GINI C COEFFICIENT FOR THE PARAMETERS

Parameters	Coefficient of Variation		Gini C Coefficient	
	1995	2005	1995	2005
Primary Health Center without any doctor	1.02	1.13	0.50	0.60
Primary Health Center without any Pathological Lab.	1.32	1.13	0.56	0.55
Population per doctor	0.53	0.64	0.27	0.32
Percentage of rural household with access to safe drinking water	0.47	0.41	0.25	0.21
Teacher-pupil ratio till high school	0.22	0.21	0.11	19.57
Percentage of trained teacher in schools	0.27	0.43	0.13	40.71
Percentage of Country's total Employment in SSI	1.16	1.24	0.48	0.28
Percentage of Gross Sown area with irrigation facility	0.51	0.55	0.26	0.28
Registered unemployment as percentage of total population	0.86	1.00	0.43	0.47
Percentage of rural village electrified	0.41	0.36	0.21	0.18
Literacy rate	0.22	0.16	0.11	0.08
Female literacy rate	0.30	0.21	0.14	0.10
Per Capita Income	0.09	0.13	0.04	0.06
Sex ratio	0.04	0.03	0.02	0.02
Percentage of household living in pucca houses	0.55	0.40	0.27	0.19
Poverty	0.01	0.24	0.01	0.13

The same observation almost holds when the parameters are measured in terms of Gini C Coefficient. In the health sector, variation among the states has increased in provisioning of basic necessities i.e doctors in the primary health centers. Gap between the states has also increased in population-doctor ratio. Dispersion has reduced, though marginally, in case of PHCs without any pathological laboratory. Similar improvement has also been noticed in provisioning of safe drinking water to the rural people. In education sector gap increased in provisioning of trained teachers in the schools. In the economic front, inequality increased in terms of

availability of irrigation facility in agriculture, level of unemployment and per capita income. All these have aggravated the rich-poor gap among the states. In case of two parameters – teacher-pupil ratio and employment opportunity in the small scale and cottage industries, the convergence or divergence of inequality could not be ascertained.

While in case of former, only the Gini C Coefficient, in case of later only the Coefficient of variation indicates increase. However, in both the cases, the other measure indicates the opposite one. Apart from that for the rest of the parameters, over the decade the extent of inequality has decreased.

In order to find the overall socio-economic reality of the individual states, a Composite Socio-Economic Index has been constructed incorporating all the indicators. Though the relative importance of the indicators are different for the community as a whole, for the sake of simplicity in analysis, all the indicators are statistically weighted equally in the construction of index. Table 2 gives an account of the index both for 1995 and 2005.

TABLE II
COMPOSITE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INDEX OF THE NORTH-EAST INDIAN STATES FOR 1995 AND 2005

State	Composite Socio-Economic Index (1995)	Rank	Composite Socio-Economic Index (2005)	Rank
Arunachal Pradesh	0.54217	5	0.510492	4
Assam	0.607162	7	0.652122	7
Manipur	0.467432	4	0.48369	3
Meghalaya	0.436182	1	0.429338	2
Mizoram	0.440617	2	0.382661	1
Nagaland	0.447605	3	0.544485	6
Tripura	0.558964	6	0.543514	5

The absolute value of the indices for the two series can not be compared because of the adopted methodology of construction of the indices. However, the ranks of the states in 1995 and 2005 and changes in ranks over the decade can be compared and interpreted in terms of relative improvement or deterioration of the respective states. Thus, though a state might have improved on the socio-economic front, if its rank deteriorates the inference can indicate inadequate development. From this consideration, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura have improved over the decade, while Meghalaya and Nagaland have shown deterioration. The condition of Assam remained the same.

The indicators can be further classified to develop sector-wise indices for health, education, social cohesion and Economic aspects. The poverty index is calculated from the estimates of the proportion of household below poverty line. Table 3 has the indices for 1995 and Table 4 has the same for 2005. The relative position of the states in terms of these

parameters can be ascertained from the bar diagram presented in Figure 1.

TABLE III
SECTOR-WISE INDICES FOR THE NORTH-EAST INDIAN STATES FOR 1995

State	Health	Education	Social Cohesion	Economic	Poverty
Arunachal Pradesh	0.0686	0.8773	0.8056	0.5337	1.0000
Assam	0.6093	0.7640	0.5132	0.5988	0.6345
Manipur	0.3162	0.6309	0.54567	0.5381	0.0000
Meghalaya	0.2624	0.7600	0.4648	0.4732	0.1827
Mizoram	0.7711	0	0.0934	0.6818	0.1827
Nagaland	0.3971	0.5305	0.51590	0.3892	0.4315
Tripura	0.4761	0.6425	0.5001	0.6165	0.5279

TABLE IV
SECTOR-WISE INDICES FOR THE NORTH-EAST INDIAN STATES FOR 2005

State	Health	Education	Social Cohesion	Economic	Poverty
Arunachal Pradesh	0.1054	0.9380	0.8965	0.4501	0.1576
Assam	0.5847	0.6562	0.6779	0.6492	1.0000
Manipur	0.2937	0.6270	0.5297	0.5021	0.5457
Meghalaya	0.3564	0.6135	0.3524	0.5901	0.0000
Mizoram	0.6458	0.0001	0.2549	0.5039	0.0000
Nagaland	0.5731	0.4805	0.6741	0.4434	0.7942
Tripura	0.2889	0.6456	0.5688	0.5502	0.9007

The ranks of the states in terms of all the indicators suggest that in health sector majority of the states retained the same status. However, Manipur and Nagaland deteriorated, while Tripura has improved a lot within the span of one decade. However, the data reveals that in Arunachal Pradesh, number of primary health centers without any laboratory and technical facility increased from 36 to 78. In the same period, the population–doctor ratio has also increased from 2352 to 3755.

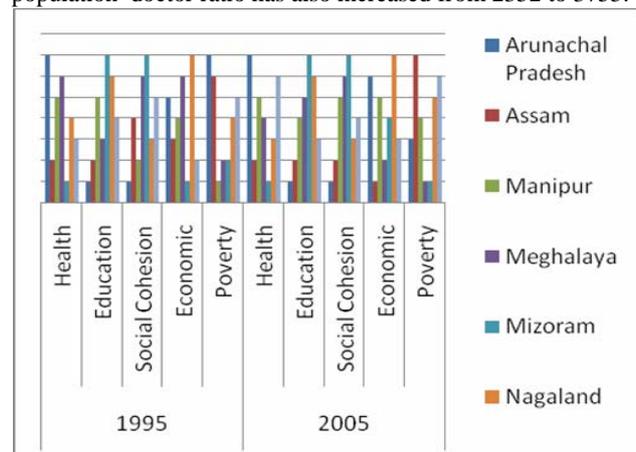


Fig. 1 Relative position of states with respect to the category-wise Indices for 1995 and 2005

In Meghalaya, the health centers without even a single doctor emerged in 2000s. Infact, it grew from 0 to 6. However, one significant improvement is that currently no reported health centers run without lab-tech facility. The population-doctor ratio has also improved moderately from 5581 to 5411. In Nagaland, the number of primary health centers increased from 9 to 27, though proportion of doctors has increased relative to that of population. It points to the concentration of medical facilities within a narrow segment. At the same time, the number of health centers without any lab-tech facility has increased. The health facilities remained same in this period for Assam. However, Manipur and Mizoram have improved significantly in this period. In Manipur the health infrastructure has improved a lot. The existence of health centers without any doctor has come down to 0. Similarly, number of health centers without pathological lab has also decreased from 42 to 17. The population per doctor has also shown improvement. In Mizoram, the population – doctor ratio remained stagnant, though the lab-tech facility has improved in the state with drop in primary health centers without such facility from 52 to 2. The largest improvement in health sector was, however, noticed in Tripura. With increase in the proportion of doctor, the population doctor ratio in the state has decreased significantly from 4693 to 3720. The number of primary health centers without any doctor has also come down from 9 to 6. With more investment in the health sector, a large number of health centers have been set up, though the laboratory facility is yet to be installed in all these centers. This is indicated by an increase in such health centers in the state without any lab-tech facility.

In education sector also the same trend follows. The Education Index comprises of overall literacy rate and female literacy rate in the state. A comparison of the education index reveals a better picture with most of the states improving in this sector. Infact, all the states have improved both in terms of overall literacy as also in terms of female literacy. Mizoram remained the best performer in this front throughout the decade with its overall literacy increasing from 82% to 89% and female literacy increasing from 79% to 87%. The proportion of literate population in Assam increased from 53% to 63% and that of the female counterpart increased from 43% to 55%. In Manipur the increases were from 60% to 71% and from 48% to 61% respectively. The same for Meghalaya were from 49% to 63% and from 45 to 60%. In Nagaland, the increases were from 62% to 67% for overall literacy and from 55% to 62% for female literacy in the state. In Arunachal Pradesh, in 1991 census the overall and female literacy rate estimates were 42% and 30%. In 2001 census the estimates stood at 54% and 44% respectively. As far as teacher-student ratio is concerned, for all of the seven states there have been improvement indicating drop in the ratio. It also indicates availability of more teachers upto high school level. However, such an increase has been associated with decrease in proportion of trained teacher in five of the seven states, though the degree of such decrease has been different. These states are Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura. Only Assam and Mizoram have increased the proportion of trained teachers. Out of that the progress of Mizoram is much better as compared to Assam. Infact, the highest proportion of trained teachers are in Mizoram.

In terms of Social Cohesion all of the seven states have improved on account of standard of living, as in each of them the proportion of households living in pucca houses has increased. One of its components is sex ratio – an indicator of gender structure and progressiveness of the society. The 2001 Census report reveals that all the states have improved in sex ratio – thereby making the society more balanced – over what was there in 1991 Census report.

In employment scenario, represented by a proxy of registered unemployed as proportion of total population, majority of the states have shown improvement with decline in value of the indicator. This reduction has been maximum in Mizoram and minimum in Manipur. However, in Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura the relative unemployment has increased and the increase is more in Tripura. In economic front, however, the relative position of all the states have changed except Nagaland that remained the best performer. Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura have improved, while Meghalaya and Assam's position dropped. Infact, in 2000s Assam became the worst performer in economic development. In the agriculture sector, most of the states have improved their coverage of irrigation in sown area. The exceptions are Assam, where the coverage dropped significantly from 13.54% to 5.51%, and Nagaland, where the fall is marginal from 26.83% to 26.01%. In case of rural electrification, all the states have enlarged their coverage of households enjoying the facility of electricity. In the industrial front also most of the states have been able to increase their shares in generating employment opportunities in the small scale sector relative to that at the national level. Between the end of 1999 and end of 2004, only Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura have shown a downward trend in generating employment in the small scale industries compared to that at the national level. As far as per capita income is concerned in between the years 1994-95 and 2006-07, it grew for all the states. The largest increase of per capita income of over 96% was found in case of Tripura, followed by over about 85% in Arunachal Pradesh. The economy of Mizoram grew at 72%. The Manipur economy grew at 70%. The per capita income of Assam increased at a rate of over 64%. While the growth of per capita income of Nagaland was 53%, the same for Meghalaya was very less – over 25%. The changes in poverty index shows that proportion of households living below poverty line has decreased comparatively in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Mizoram in 2005 as compared to 1995. Meghalaya and Mizoram remained the most successful states in poverty alleviation. However, over the decade the situation has become grimmer in Manipur, Assam, Nagaland and Tripura.

It can be easily noticed though many of the states have apparently shown improvement on various accounts, the socio-economic development of the North Eastern region as a whole has deteriorated, though by a very narrow margin, in the 2000s as compared to that in the 1990s. It is manifested when the averages of the composite indices for the two periods are compared. It indicates a moderate deterioration, by 2.65%, from mid-1990s to mid-2000s. More significant part is that all the states, instead of converging towards each other, has actually diverged on these development parameters over the time. The standard deviation, taken as a measure of dispersion indicates that while constructed composite index

for the data set of the 1990s is 0.079879, while it is 0.484869 for the data set of 2000s – an increase by 44.26%. This is an alarming situation as it implies increasing inequality among the states.

IV. IMPLICATIONS OF DISPARITY ON SOCIAL STABILITY

India's North-Eastern region has tremendous strategic importance. The longest international border – a total of more than 5000 km, has turned the region into a geo-politically sensitive one. The region, as a whole, has only about 2% of its boundaries attached to the 'mainland India' and around 98% border with Bhutan (650 km), China (1000 km), Nepal, Myanmar(1450 km) and Bangladesh (1640 km). More than that, the Northeast India is emerging as a gateway for cross border trade. The importance of the region has further increased with the international proposal to set up a South Asia Development Triangle that connects India through its Eastern and Northeastern corridor with Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Through this Triangle, India's connectivity will be further extended to Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and the Southwestern part of China. The existing Burma Road and the proposed Trans-Asian Highway and railway can facilitate such connectivity. India – especially its NorthEast will, then, have access to a larger market. While on the one hand the potentials for economic development of the nation and also for improving the country's external relations with its neighbours are centered around the region, on the other hand because of such proximity to the long international border, many parts of which is still lacking effective manning and monitoring, and also because of the hilly terrain and dense forest covering over 80% of the land surface, the region is penetrated time and again by the insurgency activities and communal conflicts. Over the past decade, the insurgency activities have increased many folds in Assam, Nagaland Manipur. A number of studies have already pointed to the link between poverty and such extremist activities. The results in Alesina et al [2] suggest that it is the poor economic conditions that increase the probability of political rebellion. The economic variables often become the root cause of civil war and when compared with political variables, the economic ones are found to have more negative impact on such destabilizing forces [28]. A study on African countries also found the increasing probability of civil war as and when the economic growth faces negative exogenous shock [14]. Thus, all these studies point to the fact that inadequate development can cause social destabilization in any region.

The present study wants to move a step further. The existence of disparity increases the gap between the privileged and unprivileged. This, in turn, generates grudges among one community against the other, which results in communal violence. Though the region is dominated by the tribal population, whose mongoloid origins are associated with similar food habits and life-styles across all the tribes, the gap erects psychological wall between these two groups. As a result, in recent years the incidence of inter-tribe conflict has increased. For instance, communal clashes between Nyishi and Adi tribes in Arunachal Pradesh and even between two sub-tribes Idu Mishmi and Digaru Mishmi in the same state, besides the commonly held clashes between tribal and non-

tribal population are the manifestations of the growing inter-community differences. Given the strategic location of the region, such communal differences creates a much larger problem in the broader issue of social imbalance.

One effect of such social imbalance is internal displacement of population. Infact, besides rural to urban migration within the state, across the state movement of population is also noticed in a large scale. It also has negative repercussions. In the era of globalization, when different communities and cultures coexist, as an offshoot of such practice, competitive attitude of people leads to forceful display of the superiority of one culture over the other. This, infact, disturbs their peaceful coexistence. As a result, conflict over the area of domination surfaces. Today, the demand for a separate Bodoland by the Bodo people, for Greater Nagaland by the Nagas or the demand of the Kamtapuris to have a separate state or the demands of ULFA in Assam and Meiti communities of Manipur are the outcome of such ill effects. Besides the effects of globalization, the persistent regional imbalance also creates panic among the communities to get control over the limited economic resources. It again leads to communal violence. The case of Karbi-Anlong in Assam, where clashes between Dimasas and Karbis left almost 50,000 people displaced (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, 2006). The root cause of the clash had been the demand of the United Peoples' Democratic Solidarity, a Karbi militant organization for removal of a designated camp of Dima Halam Dogo, a Dimasa militant outfit based in Karbi-Anlong. The demand for inclusion of common land into their respective proposed homelands led the clashes to escalate further. Urge to get control over the prosperous capital town and its nearby locations in Arunachal Pradesh results, recently, in frequent clashes between Nyishi and Apatani tribes, who had been living peacefully in the neighbouring localities since a very long time.

The course of uneven development and the instance of associated ethnic unrests were again noticed when it was proposed to construct Tipaimukh dam in Hmar region, reactions from within Hmar community were not uniform. While one section welcomed the decision, the other section was skeptical regarding the rehabilitation and loss of agricultural land. The non-Hmar community, however, reacted more vigorously. The people of Zeliangrong Naga villages, which were expected to be the worst affected, opposed the dam construction. They felt it was the development of one community at the cost of others. Similar is the case of Thengal Kachari tribe of Assam. Unfortunately, inspite of their tribal identity, they were never enumerated separately as scheduled tribe community. Not getting proper recognition, soon they started to demand for an autonomous council and get their demand approved.

The long standing border disputes between Assam and Mizoram has also originated out of economic necessity. The problem started during the colonial period, when the land consisting of both sides of the border of the present two states was acquired by the colonial rulers for plantations. The present state of inequality in opportunities for livelihoods also works as a destabilizing force in the society. Given that still over 60% of the population in this region depends on

agriculture for their livelihoods, the uneven distribution of irrigation facilities across the states and also within the states leads to differences in the land productivities. The competition to get control over the fertile lands is again a source of intra-tribe conflict often found in the states like Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur Mizoram and Nagaland. Taking a look at the data on irrigated land reveals that a low proportion of gross sown area, in the entire region has irrigation facility. Out of that in 2005, Manipur has the highest proportion of 38%, followed by 27% in Nagaland and 22% in Meghalaya. The other states have much lower irrigation facility available. Disparity to this extent can lead the underdevelopment to a vicious circle where unequal distribution of development generates communal conflicts, which in turn, hampers any further development activity.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The basic focus of any development activity, especially in a lowly developed region, is to combat poverty and thus maintain the social stability. That the development initiatives so far undertaken in North-Eastern part of India is grossly inadequate can be manifested by the existing poverty ratio. However, it is the deterioration in the poverty scenario, as compared to that at the national level becomes more crucial issue than the mere existence of poverty in the region. Data show that, while in 1970s, the poverty ratio in any individual state in the region was less than that at the national level, in 1990s, barring three states – Manipur, Meghalaya and Mizoram, the poverty situation in rest of the other states became grimmer than the national poverty level. During 1999-2000, only Meghalaya and Mizoram were found to have less poverty ratio than that at the national level. The insurgency activities and communal conflicts, which has been continuing in this part since India's independence, has in fact increased many folds since 1990s and the resultant communal conflicts has caused economic slowdown of the region.

All the measures, so far taken by the authorities – local, state or central, have mostly called for uniform policy prescription for the entire region. The North-Eastern Council (NEC) and the Department of North-Eastern Region (DONER) – two wings of Government of India are responsible for implementation of various Government sponsored development projects in the region. International agency like the World Bank is also there to take care of the problem. But the World Bank sponsored projects are generally for improvement of infra-structure. Initiatives are required to take care of the growing socio-economic differences among the communities. It can be done through empowerment of the tribesmen which will enable them to understand the nature of the problems and also to come out with effective solution. In this way, their participation in the governance can also be ensured which, in turn, will maintain the spirit of democracy. This will also remove the state of isolation, that the people here are facing. Employment generation through creating more infrastructure in agriculture and through creating opportunities in non-farm sector will hammer at the root of poverty. Given the typical climate existing in the region, service based employment opportunity can also be created.

Education is one sector which, besides creating human capital, can also create employment opportunities. So far all the Central Educational Institutions are set up in the capital cities only. Of them the largest concentration is found in Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya. This type of concentration needs be broken and opportunities should be created at the district level also. Apart from the existing sectors, planners can also think for an extension of these. For instance, the cold climate prevailing in many parts can also become the hub of watch industries. What is required on part of the Government is to arrange training program to equip people with enough skill which will ensure success of the venture. Border trade is another important medium of income generation. Given the existence of a large volume of informal cross-border trade, mostly through head-loads and also with the help of other mode of transportation, the need of the hour is to formalize these informal activities. There is potential for a large volume of such trade through Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya border. If production of those items – especially the agricultural, agro-based industrial and processed food products, which are mostly traded, can be facilitated in the border states through creation of necessary overheads and proper training of local manpower, the level of income in the region will not only increase but also sustain at a higher level.

All these initiatives require proper planning and its implementation. For effective result of any development initiative, the approach should be a need-based one. The measure of disparity exhibited in the present paper points to the differences in the status of the states in the ladder of development. The Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat Analysis (SWOT) analysis, though based on a limited number of parameters, indicates the relative weaknesses of the states which vary from one state to another. So, any initiative should incorporate such diversity of the problems and frame problem-specific and location-specific policy measures to take the states out of underdevelopment and thus break the vicious circle of poverty in the entire region.

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