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Editorial

Currently, the North-east of India is one of the most happening regions of the country. The region is going through large scale transformation in its development space. The scale of development particularly in its infrastructure space is momentous. An examination of the development imperatives of the region largely brings out the critical role of Infrastructure, Institutions and Innovations. In addition to an increased central allocation for infrastructure development in the region, specific schemes like PM-DevINE are being undertaken at the behest of the central government to fund infrastructural gap, support social development, enable livelihood activities for the youth and women and fill up developmental gaps in various sectors. Past experience shows that when a comparatively secluded tribal region having its own social and cultural institutions, undergoes immediate large-scale economic activities, the existing equilibrium between its socio-cultural and economic institutions gets disturbed. Addressal of such problems requires critical understanding of them through informed deliberation and relevant research. ICSSR-NERC, being the premier national level social science research promotion institution has a role in this regard. In this context, our Journal Man and Society provides a crucial platform for academicians, researchers and development practitioners to mainstream these issues, debate and discuss them and provide appropriate suggestions for solution. It is against this background, the current issue of our journal includes seven research articles. All of them critically analyze the recent developments in the economic, socio-cultural and political arrangements of the region having their explicit implications for policy making at different levels of the Government, Market and Community. I am confident, academicians, policy makers, development practitioners, community leaders and researchers will find this volume very relevant.

I take this opportunity to thank the copy editor Ms. K.I. Lyngdoh and the concerned office staff Mr. Romauldo M. Pasi and Mr. Temberly R. Kharbani for methodically working at various stages of studying and processing of these articles. I also express my appreciation to 'Eastern Panorama Offset' for undertaking the printing job of this issue at a short notice with all sincerity.

Bhagirathi Panda

Relationship and Challenges in the Political Economy of Tourism Entrepreneurship: An Assessment of North-east India

Benjamin F. Lyngdoh*

Abstract

Globally, tourism is one of the most vibrant sectors contributing 5% to world GDP and around 7% of total employment. In India, its contribution is 6% and 9% respectively. Tourism is considered as an engine of growth and a development tool. This is more relevant in the case of North-east India as the region has lagged behind in terms of economic progress. Notably, it has a rich tourism potential. Tapping it requires a political economy with a robust goal towards shaping tourism entrepreneurship. Political economy forms the pivot around which tourism can prosper. Numerous studies have corroborated to this interaction. In North-east India, the dynamism of tourism entrepreneurship is an evolving area of study. Accordingly, this paper aims at assessing the political economy of tourism entrepreneurship through a focus on tourism regulation. The analysis mainly focuses on relationship and challenges. It is found that political economy leads to the initiation of business, trade and commerce within the framework of policies and schemes. This opens an opportunity for scaling towards a full-fledged regulation of tourism and tourism entrepreneurship. The way forward is to embrace regulation through active participation of the government, tourism thinkers and the grassroots stakeholders.

Keywords *– Political economy, Tourism entrepreneurship, North-east India, Relationship, Challenges*

I Significance of tourism entrepreneurship

The creation of wealth and economic dynamism depends upon the competitiveness and capabilities of the entrepreneur (Busenitz, et al., 2003; Cuervol, Ribeiro & Roig, 2008). The term 'entrepreneur' is French

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and it is derived from *entreprendre* which means *to do* or *to undertake*. It comprises of *entre* meaning *between* and *preneur* meaning *taker*. Hence, an *entrepreneur* is a *between-taker* or a *go-between* (Filion, 2011). They predict and act upon changes within markets thereby bearing uncertainty (Knight, 1921) and are innovators who implements change in markets through new combinations (Schumpeter, 1934). These entrepreneurial activities define entrepreneurship (Ahmad & Seymour, 2008). It is a dynamic function enveloping a plethora of managerial aspects under the management discipline (Busenitz, et al., 2003). It involves a range of roles and functions which are aimed at value creation for the consumers. In the tourism sector, 'tourism entrepreneurship' is an important driver of growth. Globally, tourism has grown with direct and indirect effects on fronts such as economic, social, political, cultural, overall national development and international relations (Ashley, 2000; Brida, Carrera & Risso, 2008; Coetzer, 2001/02; Fayissa, Nsiah & Tadasse, 2007; Goodwin, 2006; Othman and Rosli, 2011; Vellas, 2011; World Tourism Organisation [WTO], 1995; World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2006, 2012; Zortuk, 2009).

The entrepreneurship focused upon tourist clientele is classified as tourism entrepreneurship (Aghapour, Hojabri, Manafi & Hosseini, 2012). The businesses that hawk goods and services such as arts and crafts to tourists are tourism enterprises (Hjalager, 2002; Koh, 1996; Sterren, 2008; Taskov, Metodijeski, Dzaleva & Filipovski, 2011). They are in the form of guide services, small spa and massage facilities, specialized bakery and pastry shops, coffee shops, souvenir trading and crafts shops, travel agencies, small tour operators, small lodges rented, lodges, small hotels, larger restaurants, recreation businesses, bus companies, taxi drivers, food and beverage producers, trading shops, pharmacies, photocopy shops, etc (Sterren, 2008). The provision of tourism goods and services is dominated by micro and small enterprises in both the developed and developing economies (Koh, 1996; Manyara & Jones, 2007; Shen, Hughey & Simmons, 2008; Sterren, 2008; Taskov, et al., 2011; Tourism and Transport Consult International, 2011; UNESCAP, 2005). The same is prevalent in India.

Tourism impacts upon gross domestic product, tax revenue, sales value, investment, increases income, improves infrastructure, foreign exchange earnings and creation of micro and small businesses (Fayissa, et al., 2007; Flecha, Fusco, Damiani & Amaral, 2010; Kim, 2002; Mshenga & Owuor, 2009). The critical element in these gains is tourism entrepreneurship (Ashley, Roe & Goodwin, 2001; Awang, Aziz & Samdin, 2012; Komppula, 2009; Liu & Var, 1986; Othman & Rosli, 2011; Sheldon, 1993; UNESCAP, 2005; WTTC, 2006). It provides employment and earnings, collective benefits for the community, capacity building, education and training, better health and education, increased pride and self confidence, etc (Ashley, Brine, Lehr & Wilde, 2007; Ashley, et al., 2001; Jamieson, Goodwin & Edmunds, 2004; Othman & Rosli, 2011; Rola-Rubzen, et al., 2011; Taskov, et al., 2011). The grassroots are involved as individual producers, employees, casual labourers and operators of micro and small enterprises (Ashley, et al., 2001; Awang, et al., 2012). All of these are possible as the enterprise start-up costs and barriers to entry are relatively low and can be accessible to the poor (Othman & Rosli, 2011; UNESCAP, 2005). The local people have opportunities to earn income by selling produce or offering services directly to tourists (UNESCAP, 2005).

Tourism entrepreneurship contribute to raising productivity, dispersal of economic power base through enterprise ownership, employment, commercialising innovative products and creating new markets (Awang, et al., 2012; Kreag, 2001). It impacts upon the earnings of entrepreneurs, livelihood strategies of local households, business climate for small enterprise development, patterns of growth of the local economy and the infrastructure or natural resource base of a destination (Ashley, et al., 2007). There is appreciation in financial assets, physical assets like life-stock and agriculture, skills like communication and coordination, social capital through trust and networks, regular wages/salary, profits from the enterprise and decreased household economic vulnerability (Ashley, 2000). Overall, tourism is having a substantial influence on local people and local economies of developing countries. In the 'best case' scenarios estimates show that

the earnings of local unskilled and semi-skilled people are equivalent to approximately a quarter of tourist spending at the destination level (Ashley, et al., 2007; Brida, et al., 2008; Fayissa, et al., 2007; Jamieson, et al., 2004).

II Political economy of tourism entrepreneurship

Political economy refers to the distribution of political and economic power in a given society and how that influences the directions of development and policies that bear on them (Bardhan, 1998; Poulton & Douarin, 2009). It refers to the fusion of politics and economics. It is the integration of two distinct domains into a potent subject-matter that has significant bearing on the growth and development of an economy (Nurmi, 2006; Serrat, 2011). The phrase 'political economy' was first used in 1615 by Antoine de Montchrétien in his *Traité d'economie politique*. It posits that political government was not simply a hierarchical control of the many by the few, but provides rules for the economy that had been shaped by spontaneously evolved practices. From the mercantilism period of the 18th century, the phrase was used in the publications by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, James Steuart, Adam Smith, David Ricardo and Karl Marx (Mayntz, 2019). It is the interplay of elements such as the people, government, governance, regulations and laws, trade and commerce, socio-economic growth and equity, economic justice and national development. The elements are supplementary in nature and their interactions determine the vibrancy and dynamism of an economy and its contributions towards socio-economic equity. It focuses upon the determining of which choices should be made by those in power and authority in order to use resources most effectively (Ajulor, 2006). The creation of a favorable framework which is opportunity driven is the primary role of the government through its governance, regulations and laws. The business environment should be such that it opens up opportunities for growth through entrepreneurship. This is the primary role of political economy.

Political economy leads into the initiation of business, trade and commerce thereby leading to short-term and long-term development.

However, that is not the end in itself. Its essence is also to ensure a fair, just and an equitable economic development as depicted in terms of inclusiveness, affirmative action, income, income disparity and per capita income. The intention and drive is to carry everyone in the path of economic growth and development (Ajulor, 2006; Bardhan, 1998; Nurmi, 2006). Consistent with the goals of political economy, the effective tapping of human and non-human resources by the state, its allocation, resource implementation policy formulation and its execution is an important aspect of discourse. This corroborates with the reality that the resources in any state is always limited relative to requirements. The constraint poses as a major challenge for political economy and calls for strategies to overcome them. It is the ability and capacity to mitigate such constraints that determines the success of political economy in as far as holistic growth and development. As such, political economists study interrelationships between political and economic institutions and processes to investigate how power and authority affects economic choices in a society (Serrat, 2011).

On the above backdrop, regulations and laws within the larger framework of political economy is the pivot around which everything revolves. It is an important element and it influences the process of development (Nurmi, 2006). In the end, political economy is about how politics affects the economy and vice versa (Frieden, 2020). It determines a direction and lays down pathways for the economy to move both in the short and long terms. It is concerned with how political forces influence the economy and economic outcomes (Frieden, 2020; Poulton & Douarin, 2009). Political economy analyses and explains the ways in which governments affect the allocation of scarce resources in society through laws and policies and the ways in which the nature of economic systems and the behavior of people impact governments and the laws and policies they formulate (Mayntz, 2019; Serrat, 2011). This reciprocity in laws and the economic system that prevail is the crux of political economy. It also establishes that laws are the driving forces for the nature of economic systems in a market. This is consistent with the perennial existence of politics in human society. These relationships

portrays the true nature of 'political economy analysis' epitomizing that development cannot be understood, analyzed or managed without explicit recognition of the roles of politics and institutions in shaping what happens (Bardhan, 1998; Nurmi, 2006; Reich & Balarajan, 2012).

Britton (1982) highlights the application of tourism as a development strategy in third world countries. Tourism development in developing countries is influenced by the political economy of the land (Duffy, 2015; Ferguson, 2010; Gibson, 2009; Hill, 2017; Sinclair-Maragh & Gursoy, 2015). It provides a framework for the nurturing and growth of the various elements such as food and beverages, accommodation, transportation, recreation, entertainment, etc and the demand for tourism under a regulatory mechanism (Bianchi, 2018; Desforges, 2000; Hall, 2004; Jeffries, 2001; Page, 2007; Pearce, 1996). The regulatory environment shapes the context for tourism production (Bianchi, 2018) and the active role of the state in nurturing skills and curbing excesses of competition contributes to the economic success and balanced distributional outcomes of tourism development (Mackun, 1998). Bianchi (2018) points out that despite the potential of tourism to accentuate socio-economic inequality; there was little or no substantive engagement with development theory or political economy. This deficit can be attributed to the fact that tourism has predominantly been observed from an applied and business-oriented perspective (Ateljevic, Pritchard & Morgan, 2007; Bianchi, 2009). Nonetheless, the role of political economy through its regulatory framework on driving tourism is a contemporary and developing area of interest. In this context, the part played by tourism entrepreneurship is critical. The political economy of India is driven by democratic values with features of a welfare state, government involvement in business and large-scale regulations. The focus is on attaining a stable and nurturing business environment for the initiation and growth of small businesses.

Accordingly, the study aims at assessing the political economy of tourism entrepreneurship of North-east India through a focus on tourism regulation. The study primarily focuses on the relationship and challenges aspect.

III The relationship

The central form of relationship in political economy is classified into three, namely, political processes and actions impacting on economic phenomena, economic processes and actors impacting on politics, and political and economic actors or processes influencing or impinging on each other (Mayntz, 2019). In holistic viewing, the relationship between regulation (as a political process) and tourism entrepreneurship (as an economic phenomenon) has features of all three forms. The continuous interaction between regulation and tourism entrepreneurship act as a basis for improvements on both aspects. In the long-run, it turns into one of the influencers and drivers of tourism growth and development. The importance of these interactions on the dynamism of the tourism sector requires continuous research and deliberation. In the absence of regulation, tourism entrepreneurship cannot prosper and in return the practice of tourism entrepreneurship helps in identifying areas requiring attention through regulation. This mechanism is continuous and critical in meeting the needs and demands of the tourist.

Britton (1982) viewed political economy of tourism under the context of dependency approach. Tourism progress and development is primarily an outcome of politics and policy with regulation as an integral element in the grand scheme of things. The regulation aspect of politics acts as one of the drivers of tourism development which in turn depends on the dynamism of tourism entrepreneurship. The interaction between regulation and tourism entrepreneurship forms as the heart of the political economy of tourism discourse. This conceptualization of political economy holds true for the destinations in north-east India as tourism in the region is relatively new as compared to other parts of the country. Similarly, in factoring global tourism destinations with a long and rich history of tourism development, all the three forms of relationship in political economy are prevalent. In such cases, the starting point in the relationship is the 'political processes and actions impacting on economic phenomena' and gradually deriving characteristics of the other two forms. In keeping with the nascent stage of tourism development in North-east India, the political economy of

tourism is predominantly an assessment of how regulation influences upon the initiation, progress and growth of tourism entrepreneurship. On this backdrop, the basis of the current assessment is established.

In recent decades, political economy has been more or less synonymous with Marxism and an analysis of the capitalist mode of production (Hill, 2017). This renewed focus of political economy is of significance to the tourism sector as the majority of the stakeholders are micro and small enterprises at the grassroots which engage unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled workforce. The inherent nature of provision of tourism goods and services creates opportunities for a wider involvement of the workforce. The degree of training and development of human resources for sufficiently serving the tourist can be absorbed adequately in a short period of time. Short-term and medium-term training are sufficient for effective and satisfactory service quality in tourism. The only major requirement is an attitude and motivation towards hospitable and efficient behaviour. This enables tourism to positively impact upon the livelihoods of the grassroots at large. It can be posit that no other economic sector has the potency to influence socio-economic change more extensively than tourism (as seen in Ashley, et al., 2007; Ashley, et al., 2001; Awang, et al., 2012; Brida, et al., 2008; Fayissa, et al., 2007; Jamieson, et al., 2004; Komppula, 2009; Othman & Rosli, 2011; Rola-Rubzen, et al., 2011; Taskov, et al., 2011).

The above evidences make a case for a robust and effective business and regulatory framework. In the presence of such, the growth and development of tourism entrepreneurship can be streamlined. An enabling environment with a nurturing system for the initiation and growth of tourism entrepreneurship can make a significant contribution to the socio-economic development of North-east India. The enabler is an opportunity driven macroeconomic setting which is shaped by effective regulation. A meaningful regulation is the starting point for economic growth (Bianchi, 2018; Britton, 1982; Frieden, 2020; Mackun, 1998; Mayntz, 2019; Nurmi, 2006; Poulton & Douarin, 2009). This is because in the absence of appropriate regulation, the opportunities available in the business environment would

be opaque. It would be difficult to identify opportunities for initiation of business combined with the difficulty of operations. There would be no tourism development schemes and/or lack of awareness of such schemes. As an outcome, the tourism sector would suffer. It is in this context that tourism regulation for the initiation and growth of tourism entrepreneurship is a must.

On the basis of the above, Annexure A highlights the political economy of tourism entrepreneurship for the eight states of North-east India. Within the broad ambit of regulation, in the current analysis, policy and schemes are also considered as its important elements. This is relevant in the context of North-east India as tourism is primarily evolving at its nascent stage and predominantly unregulated. There are no specific regulations per se; rather these manifest in the form of policy and schemes. It is observed that constituting within the framework of a policy and schemes, certain elements of regulation are visible in its structural make-up. These are mostly related to the initiation and growth of tourism entrepreneurship. The collated annexure portrays that only Nagaland has a regulation in tourist trade. It is a two decade old regulation since the year 2000. The signature tourism festival known as 'hornbill festival' is a significant contributor towards the existence of this regulation. In relation to tourism policy, all the eight states possess such developmental guidelines. Some states like Mizoram, Sikkim and Tripura have both tourism policy and a more focused ecotourism policy. The policy of Arunachal Pradesh is ecotourism oriented only. With regards to tourism schemes, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya do possess them precisely with a goal to promote tourism entrepreneurship.

Annexure A also highlights that the focus of political economy is more on critical elements that shape and contribute towards tourism development consistent with the rich flora and fauna of North-east India. The major elements comprises of sustainable tourism development, conserving natural and cultural diversity, responsible tourism, benefits to the local community, ecotourism promotion, biodiversity preservation, marketing, human resource development, innovative practices, self-employment opportunities,

public-private participation, quality facilities and infrastructure, learning experience and social justice. The emphasis on these elements creates a frame of relationship between political economy and tourism entrepreneurship. This is a relationship that is seen at the ground level and the grassroots by encompassing the various stakeholders who earn a living out of tourism activities. It drives and makes pathways for the initiation and progress of enterprise and business. It can be said that in the absence of this relationship then various tourism entrepreneurship endeavors such as travel agencies, tour operators, guides, food and beverages services, accommodation services, transport services, recreation, etc would be difficult to initiate.

In tourism development, the role played by political economy is indispensible. In North-east India, it is seen in terms of regulation, policy and schemes. These are closely related to the development of tourism in the region. The regulation indicates the interest taken by the government on streamlining tourism activities. It acts as the ultimate indicator to the stakeholders that tourism is an important component of government planning. The policies give a concrete shape to tourism entrepreneurship development through specific guidelines and targets. It tells the stakeholders where a particular state stands in tourism status and what are the ways and strategies ahead. This motivates the stakeholders into the sector through entrepreneurship. The schemes are the final piece in the jigsaw puzzle of political economy. It comes as a relief for the talented and innovative entrepreneurs to exploit the business opportunities available through the start-ups. Overtime, new dimensions of tourism progress and development emerge. These are recognised through political economy which then further generates new and sustainable pathways of economic growth and development.

IV The challenges

The area of political economy is a dynamic one. It is also influenced by the very business environment it is designed to influence. As per the discussion in the earlier section, the political economy of tourism entrepreneurship in

North-east India is confined to the scope of 'political processes and actions impacting on economic phenomena'. A relationship to this end has been established. This comes with its own set of challenges. This is more when tourism is at an early evolutionary stage. The purpose of delineating the challenges is to identify the problem-areas thereby looking at mitigating measures as an outcome. The challenges can be classified as structural and organizational. The former is related to the nature and design of tourism, whereas the latter is confined towards the operational and process aspects of the tourist trade.

The structure of tourism has been a leading agenda for the tourism stakeholders, particularly for the ones who are involved in entrepreneurship. However, none of the eight states have dealt on it with a degree of effectiveness. The only exception that can be stated is Sikkim. It has a more robust, professional and streamlined structure to its tourism activities as compared to the other North-east states. Nonetheless, there is room for improvement. For the region as a whole, this improvement can be viewed as scaling up from policies and schemes towards a full-fledged regulation of tourism. This will primarily involve the regulation of tourism entrepreneurship as it is the main component in the delivery of services to the tourist. Such a regulatory framework will have to percolate from a well-defined tourism vision and mission. Without these any regulation would lack effectiveness. This is because regulation is the linkage between the vision and mission and what is actually executed on the ground by the tourism entrepreneurs. The tourism policies of the states have mentioned vision, mission, etc. However, if the structure of tourism is to be clearly defined, the vision and mission are to be conceptualized on the basis of a holistic research on the resources, strength, weakness and goals of tourism development. The basic question to be asked here is 'What is to be achieved through tourism and how it is to be achieved?' This acts as an ultimate guide towards tourism development through regulation.

Tourism in North-east India is primarily nature-based. The tourism activities are all built on the back of a pleasing environment. The very

nature of tourism prevalent in the region is climatic. The climatic events such as rain, mist, fog, snow, etc are the hallmark of the tourism products on offer. This also highlights the sensitivity of tourism in the region. In an era of excessive and accelerating climate change, tourism in North-east India is also in danger. The unique selling proposition of the region is fast dwindling. Quantum deforestation, pollution of the rivers and water bodies, unscientific and unsafe constructions, poorly designed properties such as resorts, hotels, etc leading to visual pollution, unsustainable use of natural resources like ground water; improper sewage disposal, poor waste management, etc together pose threats to the pristine environment. These unhealthy practices are a clarion call for the regulation of tourism activities. The regulation will go a long way in ensuring that the tourism sector and its activities are structured appropriately. It will also contribute towards the development of a more responsible and sustainable sector. This is important as without nature and the environment, tourism in North-east India would largely be non-existent. Such regulation will also streamline the tourism service providers such as food and beverages, accommodation, transportation, recreation and entertainment, etc into having more environment and tourist friendly business models. In such a case, money and margins will no longer be the ultimate driver of business, rather sustainability, responsibility and the delivery of impeccable service quality.

The organization of tourism is an important element that has received less focus. It concerns operations and processes of tourism entrepreneurship for the delivery of services to the tourist. Today, tourism is not only sightseeing in nature. The tourist seeks learning. It is the age of tourism experience whereby the tourist is interested not only on the sight and sounds of a destination, rather the services being offered and the manner in which it is being served. Service quality is a key and it defines the tourism success of a destination. Its assurance by the tourism entrepreneurs implies the meeting of specific guidelines. A regulation so as to ensure its attainment can contribute to better tourism services. The tourism entrepreneurs will do well to come together to work towards this goal. It is factual that tourism employs labour

across skill levels. A number of them are unskilled or semi-skilled. This makes the sector invaluable to the grassroots and their livelihood. However, in striking a balance there is a need to migrate towards the employment of more skilled workforce. An efficient and effective strategy for attaining this goal is required. Keeping this in mind, a medium to long-term skilling intervention is required. The training of the current and potential workforce is a must for better tourism outcomes for both the tourist and the host. A regulation on training and capacity building of the workforce on soft skills can make significant contributions towards entrepreneurial success. It is also related to sustainability of tourism. Here, political will and cooperation of the stakeholders is required.

The effort towards regulation (be it structural or organizational) cannot be ambiguous. There are stakeholders that advocate for tourism to be largely unregulated. There is a thought process on letting tourism develop as it is. Many do point out that tourism and its related activities have been developing despite specific regulations. As appealing as it may be, the ground realities are that non-regulation of tourism has resulted in the sector being unorganized and susceptible to haphazard development. The arguments to this effect are already highlighted in the above paragraphs. It is time for the North-east India states to realize that the benefits of regulation far outweigh the limitations. The advantage is the development of streamlined tourism and efficient service delivery systems that garner well for the livelihoods of all the tourism stakeholders.

V The way forward

The benefits of regulation do make a strong case for its formulation and implementation. Although there are challenges, they can be overcome. The current relationship between political economy and tourism entrepreneurship has highlighted many opportunities that can be explored and exploited. The opportunities are of a bigger market share in national and international tourist arrivals through more attractions, tourism products and better service quality. These can be attained through tourism regulation. The presence of

regulation acts as a medium to structure and streamline the sector and its activities. It acts as a guideline for professionalism and efficiency in tourism organisation and entrepreneurial effectiveness. The presence of regulation will contribute towards a networking and synergy of tourism components such as service providers and other developmental initiatives of the state governments such as agriculture, horticulture, rural development, forest conservation, culture and trade and crafts, etc.

While factoring the potential contribution of regulation, the way forward calls for a three-pronged effort. Firstly, the governments may involve in extensive studies on the impact of regulation on tourism. A comparison between two scenarios, namely, status of tourism without regulation and with regulation may be adopted. This will generate a clear picture on the benefits and limitations of regulation. As an outcome, a cost-benefit assessment can be conducted before taking a final decision on the impact of regulation. Secondly, the tourism thinkers and strategist from amongst the stakeholders can initiate a brainstorming on the advantages and limitations of regulation. The approach adopted may be similar as in the case of governments. However, since they are directly in contact with the grassroots stakeholders (with some of the thinkers running tourism enterprises), they possess a ground-level knowledge on the status and progress of tourism in the absence of regulation. This helps in the generation and analysis of specific ground data/information of the tourism entrepreneurs such as food and beverages, accommodations, transportation, etc. This data is invaluable and as such provides an unequivocal argument on the benefits of regulation as against the current trend. Lastly, the grassroots stakeholders who make a livelihood from tourism will need special care and attention. They are to be provided with awareness programmes on the subject-matter and be encouraged to derive their own inferences on the benefits and limitation of regulation. Here, the major concern will be the impact of regulation on their business operations and processes. This may be mitigated through a dynamic plan of assistance for training and skilling of their workforce in the medium and long-terms.

VI Conclusion

Political economy leads into the initiation of business, trade and commerce by carrying everyone in the path of growth and development. The regulation(s) within the framework of political economy is the pivot around which everything revolves. It affects the economy. It is in this context that the political economy of tourism entrepreneurship is conceptualized. The role of regulation is aptly seen particularly in terms of relationship and challenges. The focus is more on the critical elements that shape and contribute towards tourism development such as sustainable tourism development, conserving natural and cultural diversity, benefits to the local community, ecotourism promotion, learning experience, social justice, etc which is seen in the tourism policies and schemes of the region. This is the frame of relationship at the grassroots. It sets pathways for entrepreneurship. In its absence, travel agencies, tour operators, guides, food and beverages services, etc would be non-existent. As such, the policies give a concrete shape to tourism and entrepreneurship development through specific guidelines and targets.

The challenges to the political economy are structural and organizational. North-east India can benefit by scaling from policies and schemes towards a full-fledged regulation of tourism. This will lead to well-defined vision, mission and goals. Regulation can contribute to an effective structure that would lead to responsible and sustainable tourism and the streamlining of tourism entrepreneurs into more environment and tourist friendly business models. The organization of tourism is critical as it concerns tourism services being offered at the destination and the nature of service quality. A regulation can contribute towards the employment of a more skilled workforce. As such, the thought process that tourism continues to be unregulated as in the past does not bode well for its long-term development. The non-regulation of tourism has resulted in the sector being unorganized and haphazard.

The future is to embrace regulation of tourism and tourism entrepreneurship in particular through active participation of the governments through research and the cost-benefit assessment of regulations, tourism thinkers

and strategist cooperate with the government, and the involvement of the grassroots stakeholders through awareness on the benefits and limitation of regulation.

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Annexure A: The political economy of tourism entrepreneurship

State	Regulation	Focus	Features
Arunachal Pradesh	Tourism development**	Tourism marketing, human resource development and research	Collective involvement of the public and private sector in tourism processes
	Ecotourism policy, 2018*	Conserving natural and cultural diversity, economic benefits to local communities and creation of a premier ecotourism destination	Community-based tourism, low impact on the environment through a 'code of conduct', Arunachal Pradesh Ecotourism Development Society as an agency for strategy implementation

Assam	Tourism policy, 2017*	Tourist hub for north-east India, innovative forms of tourism, all season destination, community involvement in tourism	Brand building, transit tourism as tourist travel through Assam, development of alternative forms of tourism, destination quality audit, public-private partnerships, incentives and subsidies
	Aamaar aalohi (rural homestay)**	Improved facilities in homestays, self-employment opportunities for rural youth	Covers both new and existing homestays, located in rural/non-urban areas, homestay proximity to tourist spots including places of fairs and festivals
Manipur	Tourism policy, 2014*	Creation of employment opportunities, sustainable tourism development, cultural and natural heritage	Revisits by the tourists, service quality, public-private partnership, private sector in building and managing tourist facilities, local community in projects, usage of technology, niche/alternative forms of tourism
Meghalaya	Tourism policy, 2011*	Holistic growth with private sector and community cooperation, environment conservation and sustainable tourism practices	Tourism experience through impeccable services, nurturing an investment friendly climate, public-private partnership, encouraging alternative forms of tourism, community participation, creating a brand Meghalaya
	Tourism development and investment promotion scheme, 2012**	Creation and management of homestays and resorts, minimum standards of service quality (for both human and non-human resources i.e. equipments, kitchenware, etc)	Financial assistance for construction of homestays/ resorts, minimum contribution (2% of project cost) by the entrepreneur, specific instruction on the size and make of properties e.g. maximum four rooms in case of homestays

Mizoram	Responsible tourism policy, 2020*	Responsible tourism development, quality infrastructure, local entrepreneurship, community participation	Empowering local community, preservation of culture, sustainable tourism, adventure, wildlife and ecotourism, heritage tourism, music, fashion and film tourism, voluntourism
	Ecotourism policy, 2017*	Develop ecotourism potential sites, capacity building of stakeholders, conserve biodiversity and culture	Publicity, awareness and education on ecotourism, coordination of partner departments and stakeholders, research and monitoring, ecotourism management plan
Nagaland	Tourism policy, 2001*	Infrastructure facilities development, marketing of tourism, encouraging entrepreneurship, conservation of natural resources	Capacity building of human resources, financing for tourism circuits, development of ethnic; cultural; adventure and ecotourism, push for the growth in accommodation and tour operators/travel agents
	Registration of tourist trade act, 2000#	Development of tourism and the registration of persons dealing in tourism	Registration and black-listing of dealers on complaints of malpractice, registration of hotels and travel agents, offences and penalties
Sikkim	Tourism policy, 2018*	Tourism as a key sector in economic development, low impact sustainable tourism, round the year destination, social justice	Sustainable tourism with an emphasis on ecotourism, institutional structures for responsible tourism, capacity building and service quality, high value and high quality products, enabling environment for tourism stakeholders
	Ecotourism policy, 2011*	Ecotourism based on global sustainable tourism criteria (GSTC), management by local communities, high quality learning experience	Planning and zoning of ecotourism sites, capacity building of local communities, self employment and benefits to the disadvantaged, stakeholder partnership, product and infrastructure development, ecotourism marketing and feedback mechanisms

Tripura	Tourism policy, 2020-25*	Sustainable tourism, socio-economic development for local communities, all-season tourism destination tag, religious-based tourism, public-private partnership	Destination and basic infrastructure development, improving connectivity and human resource development, attracting international tourist, emphasis on safety and security, focus on ecotourism, adventure tourism, film, tea and golf tourism
	Ecotourism policy, 2004*	Sustainable use and management of resources, self-employment opportunities for local communities, traditional artisans and artists	Marketing, education for visitors, education and training for the staff, local community capacity building, security, infrastructure development, on-site and off-site interpretation centres

#Regulation, *Policy, **Scheme

Source: Department/Directorate of Tourism of respective state governments; Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

Impact of COVID-19 on Informal Manufacturing Sector: A Case Study of Wearing Apparel Enterprises in Assam

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Abstract

The present study is about the critical impact that COVID-19 had on the Informal Wearing Apparel Manufacturing Enterprises (IWAME) in the economy of Assam and the coping up strategies that these entrepreneurs adopted. The most visible impact that COVID-19 had on majority of the IWAME was loss of income and employment. Categorising the degree of the impact in terms of a binary magnitude like 'large impact' and 'small impact', our analysis shows the explicit disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the IWAMEs. The findings revealed that variables such as type of ownership, savings and financial aid are positive and significant in explaining the probability of enterprises having a large impact. As a coping up strategy, strengthening of social safety nets and incentives to reduce operating costs of enterprises have been prioritised highly by entrepreneurs as compared to public assistance programs for skill development and financial support.

Keywords*: Informal sector, Informal manufacturing sector, Wearing apparel manufacturing sector, COVID -19, Economy of Assam.*

I. Introduction

The informal sector occupies a critical place in the development practice of many developing countries including India. The sector constitutes around 93 per cent of the world's informal employment (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2018) and 50 per cent of GDP (Kalyani, 2016). The dependence of India's labour force on the informal sector is as high as 90

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per cent (National Institution for Transforming India [NITI Aayog], 2018). Murthy (2019) highlighted that around 86.8 per cent of the workforce are employed in the informal sector in India as compared to 13.2 per cent in the formal sector. The predominance of the informal sector in the economy of India can also be known from the fact that it constitutes a significant share of 422 million workers from a total employment of 465 million workers. The Periodic Labour Force Survey (2017-2018) of National Statistical Office (NSO) reported that 49.6 per cent of the informal workers do not get any social security benefits coupled with 71.1 per cent with no regular job contracts and 54.2 per cent with no paid leave contracts, which is why they are considered the most vulnerable category of workforce (Mohanty, 2019). Within the informal sector, the manufacturing and service activities together constitute around 84 per cent of the total employment (Dev & Sengupta, 2020). Although a major share of value addition comes from the formal manufacturing (80 per cent), the sector generates only 20 per cent of employment compared to 80 per cent of employment generation from the informal enterprises (Unni & Rani, 2003).

Thus, in an economy like India, dominated by the informal sector, it's inevitable that the economic ramification of COVID-19 pandemic has severed the livelihood and earnings of majority of the labour force. A number of studies undertaken in this context have analysed the impact of COVID-19 on the informal sector primarily with respect to employment, income and coping strategies. For instance, Mohanty (2019) and Vyas (2020) have explicitly brought out the impact of COVID-19 on significant reduction of employment. Thomas (2020) highlighted the income losses among the informal sector workers induced by COVID-19.When it comes to coping up strategies, informal sector enterprises across the developing countries have adopted strategies to make their ends meet, namely, productive strategies, sacrifice strategies and external support strategies (Pitoyo et al.,2021; Roever & Rogan, 2020; Dev & Sengupta, 2020; Sangwan et al., 2021).

Within the informal sector in general, and the manufacturing sector in particular, the Wearing Apparel sector occupies a prominent place.

Around 5 per cent of the GDP and 12 per cent of India's export earnings is contributed by India's apparel and textile industry, implying that the sector occupies a significant share in the manufacturing sector. Considered as the second largest employer, the industry also provides employment to around 45 million people (India Brand Equity Foundation, 2022).

In developing countries, this sector acts as a hub for the low skilled workers often characterised by undesirable working conditions (Luginbuhl, 2019).They are largely susceptible to external shocks due to their larger share in the industry (Castaneda et al., 2020). Kelly (2020) pointed out that around 400 million industrial workers were engulfed in a circle of vulnerability due to closedown of the factories caused by COVID-19 in this sector. Studies undertaken (ILO, 2020; Mirdha, 2020; Ratan et al., 2020) reveal a grim picture of the overall impact on employment and income in this sector due to the pandemic. The crisis had also brought into our sharp notice that the COVID-19 led challenges of financial impediments, household expenditure reduction compelled them to look for coping strategies such as turning their units into production for medical and cloth masks with the rise in demand of protective masks around the world (Vietnam Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2020; Women in Informal Employment: Globalising and Organising [WEIGO], 2020; ILO, 2020; Khan, 2020; Jayaram et al. 2020). Called as a 'short term opportunity', Narula (2020, p. 307) pointed out that the shortages of face masks along with other protective equipment can be met by these informal workers and can serve as a good opportunity for them. Other strategies include lowering prices, promotion of products through social media (Wardana & Darma, 2020) and street vending (Kabir et al., 2020).

Most of the existing studies documenting the severity of the COVID-19 crisis on the wearing apparel sector had focused on the major clusters of the country such as Tirupur and Ludhiana (Mehta & Kaur, 2021; Mahajan & Bains, 2020; Krishnan, 2021). There are also available studies of impact of the pandemic on the apparel manufacturing centres of the world such as Bangladesh and Myanmar (Sen et al., 2020; Kabir et al.,2020; Chakraborty

& Biswas, 2020). However, when it comes to North-east India, we don't find a single study undertaken with respect to impact of COVID-19 on the wearing apparel sector. It is to be noted that in the economy of the North- eastern region, the manufacturing of wearing apparel plays a critical role. In the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Assam and Tripura, during the year 2015-16, the share of IWAME in the total urban informal manufacturing sector comes to 42.4 per cent, 41 per cent, 30 per cent and 21.4 per cent respectively (National Sample Survey Office [NSSO] 73rd Round, 2016)

A pilot survey of 30 IWAMEs conducted by us during early January-February,2021 in Guwahati city revealed some interesting findings. Although, the severity of the pandemic caused huge repercussions on the business operations, some enterprises were highly impacted, while others were able to weather the crisis better and alleviate their suffering than the rest. The limited overview on the entrepreneurs' coping measures also showed that it would be interesting to analyse it in details for a larger sample size.

Further, from the literature available on informal sector in general, the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on income and employment loss was analysed by authors mostly by addressing the gender (Desai et al.,2021, Yildirim & Eslen-Ziya, 2021), sector (Anuja and Aheja ,2020) , region (Kesar et al.,2021, Ram & Yadav, 2021), healthcare (Singh et al.,2021) disparities. For the wearing apparel sector in particular, most of the studies had analysed changes in employment and income for major garment clusters (Nguyen & Mai-Nam, 2021; Kabir et al., 2021). However, the *severity* aspect of this COVID-19 impact within the different enterprises in the wearing apparel sector hadn't been studied explicitly, with respect to North-east India. Our paper tried to address these gaps, by focusing more specifically on how the impact had been disproportionate within the sector by identifying factors that had led some enterprises to endure a higher impact.

Our paper addresses three research questions, (i) What was the impact of the pandemic on the entrepreneurs' and workers during the first phase of COVID-19 in terms of employment and income losses? (ii) Were there differences in the degree of impact of the pandemic on the IWAME? (Essentially this question would like to explore the segmentation aspect of the IWAME). (iii) What were the coping up strategies adopted by the entrepreneurs to face the challenges caused by the pandemic?

This paper is divided into four sections. In addition to the Introductory Section I which covers the review of literature, significance of the study and study area, Section II is about the data sources and methodology; Section III brings out the important findings of the study; and Section IV provides the conclusion and policy implications.

Study Area

Our study area happens to be the city of Guwahati in Assam, North- east India. Stretching 600 km along the Brahmaputra River valley, Assam is the largest and most accessible of all the North-eastern states. It is divided into 35 administrative districts. Guwahati belongs to Kamrup Metropolitan district and is Assam's largest city. It is a major commercial centre and is the node that connects six other North-eastern Indian States of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Tripura. It is the major hub of economic activity in the entire North- east region.

One of the fastest growing cities in the world and the fifth fastest growing cities among the Indian states, Guwahati has witnessed migration of people all over the states which has resulted in the heavy concentration of informal enterprises. During the period 2001-2011, the informal sector accounted for around 90 per cent of city's total employment level (Das, 2011)

II. Materials and Methods

Data

The primary data have been collected in Guwahati city during the period of 2020-2021. The city has been divided into six zones by Guwahati

Municipal Corporation Area and we have gone by such classification. First hand identification of the population/ universe was done by enlisting all the IWAME from each of the six zones in the Guwahati Municipal Corporation Area and subsequently adding them up. The final population/ universe consisted of all the IWAME currently in operation in all these six zones. These were identified through street counting, snowball sampling and through information collected from handloom expos, boutiques, readymade garment shops, households and tailoring shops. It was followed by construction of the operational sampling frame which consisted of those sampling units with less than 10 workers and that are at least in five years of operation or more. Also, unincorporated enterprises which excluded (i) enterprises registered under sections 2m(i) and 2m(ii) of the Factories Act , 1948 or bidi and cigar manufacturing enterprises registered under bidi and cigar workers (condition of employment) Act, 1966 (ii) government/ public sector enterprises were also covered under the sampling frame.

The size of the sampling frame was 1200 enterprises. After constructing the sampling frame, the proportionate sampling method was adopted to decide on the no. of samples to be taken from each zone relative to the entire population. A total of 500 sampling units were chosen for the study (Table 1). The present study considered Jan 2019-Dec, 2019 as pre-COVID-19 period and Jan 2020-Dec, 2020 as during COVID-19 period.

Table 1: Proportionate Sampling technique

Zones	No. of enterprises	Proportion to total	No. of sample units for zone	Actual no. of sample units for the study
Dispur zone	385	0.321	160.42	160
Lokhra zone	54	0.045	22.50	22
East zone	270	0.225	112.50	113
Central zone	202	0.168	84.17	84

South zone	112	0.093	46.67	47
West zone	177	0.148	73.75	74
	1200		500	

Source : The Authors

Methodology

To determine how the severity of the pandemic had been disproportionate between the IWAMEs, a logistic regression model was used. The logistic regression model had been extensively used in studies to assess the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 (Desai et al., 2021; Kesar et al., 2021; Banna et al., 2022; Singh et al.,2021). From the literature available, we felt that the disproportionate impact will be brought out clearly by employing this model too. The dependent variable, in this context, has been found by calculating the variability of annual income level of the enterprises between the pre-COVID-19 period (Jan 2019-Dec, 2019) and the next period of COVID-19 (Jan 2020-Dec, 2020)[1]. On the basis of the percentage change in the income levels, we have built an index for the COVID-19 year shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Index of Impact of COVID-19

Indicators	Description
Enterprises which showed less than 60 percent decrease in income	Small impact (coded as 0)
Enterprises which showed 60 percent or more than 60 percent decrease in income	Large impact (coded as 1)

Source: The Authors

Eventually, we have tried to analyse the likelihood of the factors that led to certain enterprises having a large impact due to COVID-19 .After conducting discussions with selected respondents, we included the variables considered to be important for the study such as: gender of the entrepreneur, total workers employed, type of establishment ,ownership of the enterprise,

whether there was transfer of financial aid for the enterprise, whether the entrepreneur had alternative employment and accumulated past savings.

The logistic regression model is given in the form (Arimah, 2001):

$$Log\frac{P}{1-P} = a_o + B_i X_i$$

Solving for P,

$$\frac{P}{1-P} = e^{a_o + B_i X_i}$$

$$P = (1 - P)\, e^{a_o + B_i X_i}$$

$$P + Pe^{a_o + B_i X_i} = e^{a_o + B_i X_i}$$

$$P(1+e^{a_o + B_i X_i}) = e^{a_o + B_i X_i}$$

$$P = \frac{e^{a_o + B_i X_i}}{1+e^{a_o + B_i X_i}}$$

$$P = \frac{1}{1+e^{a_o + B_i X_i}} \qquad (1)$$

Equation (1) denotes the cumulative logistic probability function, where

P= Probability of a large impact due to COVID-19

a_o= Intercept

B_i= Parameters to be estimated in the model

X_i= Regress and values

Following the iterative maximum likelihood procedure, the regression is estimated, the results of which are shown in Section III. Additionally, the responses of the entrepreneurs relating to their problems and coping up strategies due to COVID-19 outbreak on their enterprises and households was measured on a 5-point likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Factor analysis was also employed to provide a summary of the COVID-19 induced challenges and issues faced by them in the aftermath of the lockdown.

III. Results and Discussion

First Phase of COVID- 19: Perceived Impact on the Entrepreneurs and Workers

As lockdown was enforced to curb the spread of the virus, work in most of the IWAMEs came to a standstill. In this section, an analysis is made into the entrepreneurs' and workers' problems which they faced during the first wave of the lockdown through a likert scale analysis. A likert scale was employed as it provides the simplest way to measure the strength of one's point of view (Alonazi et al., 2019). The mean scores was calculated by the formula: Gap width= series width/number of the group (Aydin et al., 2015) .The interpretation is shown in Table 3 and the summary of the results obtained are presented in Table 4.

Table 3: Interpretation of 5-point likert scale

Item	Item description	Score range
5	Strongly agree	4.21-5.00
4	Agree	3.41-4.20
3	Neutral	2.61-3.40
2	Disagree	1.81-2.60
1	Strongly disagree	1.00-1.80

Source: Aydin, Yalriz and Siramkaya (2015)

Table 4: Descriptive statistics on the entrepreneurs' and workers' perceptions towards the impact of pandemic on their business operations

Statements	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
There was a positive impact as it provided new avenues to development.	500	1	5	1.768	1.00807
There was a decrease in consumer demand	500	2	5	4.21	0.79698

It was difficult to maintain the daily operations of the enterprise.	500	2	5	3.926	0.84969
There was household expenditures reduction of the workers.	500	1	5	3.982	0.77903
It was difficult to make payments of wages/salaries to the workers.	500	1	5	3.47	0.84767
There was no direct impact to the enterprise.	500	1	5	2.114	0.80641

Source: The Authors

The findings from the analysis showed that 40.6 per cent of entrepreneurs strongly agreed that they faced the problem of decrease of consumer demand leading to near closing down of their enterprises. The mean score of 4.21 confirmed that majority of the entrepreneurs faced this problem to a large extent. Next, with a mean score of 3.92, 50.2 per cent of them agreed it was difficult to maintain the daily operations of the enterprise in terms of payment of electricity bills to repairing furniture and machines. Also, 46.4 per cent agreed to the statement that there was difficulty in making payments of wages/salaries to the workers. Like the rest, the mean score was also higher at 3.47. In the fourth statement, with a mean score of 2.11, 56.2 per cent respondents disagreed that there was no direct impact on the enterprise. The statement of whether there was a positive impact as it provided new avenues to development was strongly disagreed by 55 per cent of respondents with a mean score of 1.76. Considering the problem of household expenditures reduction, 52.4per cent of the workers agreed that

due to less work, their payments slumped down which led them cut down their household expenses..

With an aim to analyse some of these problems and deduce them into fewer factors or components, which can strongly explain the relationship among variables, factor analysis was used. Entrepreneurs were asked to put their opinions on the extent of the problems they faced post -lockdown which was measured on a likert scale ranging from 'extremely' to 'not at all'. The overall reliability of the scale was measured by Cronbach's Alpha. According to George and Mallery (2003), the values above 0.7 are considered acceptable and in the present data set, Cronbach's Alpha was found to be 0.714. The sample adequacy was tested by KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity as shown in Table 5. The KMO value ranges between 0 -1 and values above 0.5 are considered satisfactory (Kaiser, 1974). The KMO value in the present study was 0.774. Furthermore, the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity shows $\chi 2 = 620.653$; $p < .001$ which implied that the variables are significantly related.

Table 5: KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.774
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	620.653
	df	21
	Sig.	.000

Source: The Authors

Table 6 presents the results of the principal component analysis with varimax rotation along with the corresponding eigen value of factors, percentage and cumulative percentage of variance for the individual factor loadings. The factors with eigen values equal to above 1 were considered for the study. The results showed that two components were extracted capturing 52.74 percent of the variability in data. The statements that load highly on factor

1 are related to financial instability and the statements that load highly on factor 2 are related to conduct of business operations as explained below:

Factor 1: Financial challenges

Consisting of five items, this factor explained 38.18 per cent of the variation. As observed for most of the respondents, there were difficulties in making payments for house rent or shop rent, repayment of loans taken from different sources and delay in payment for worker's share of salary. Financial constraints were faced which led some to seek for financial help further adding to their burden.

Factor 2: Problems in conduct of business operations

This factor explained 14.6 per cent of the variation. Consisting of two items, the problems were related to the owners hiring part time workers since they didn't receive regular orders. As previously mentioned, some products were also sold at lesser rates due to limited orders.

Table 6: Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation

Variables	Factor 1	Factor 2
I asked for financial help	.770	
There was difficulty in loan repayment	.749	
There was difficulty off payment for rent and hired materials	.731	
There was delay in payment of worker's salary	.635	
I faced financial hurdles	.550	
I hired contract labour due to irregularities of orders		.892
I charged low prices for the final products		.566
Eigen value	2.672	1.020
Percentage of variance explained	38.176	14.566
Cumulative percentage of variance explained	38.176	52.742

Source: The Authors

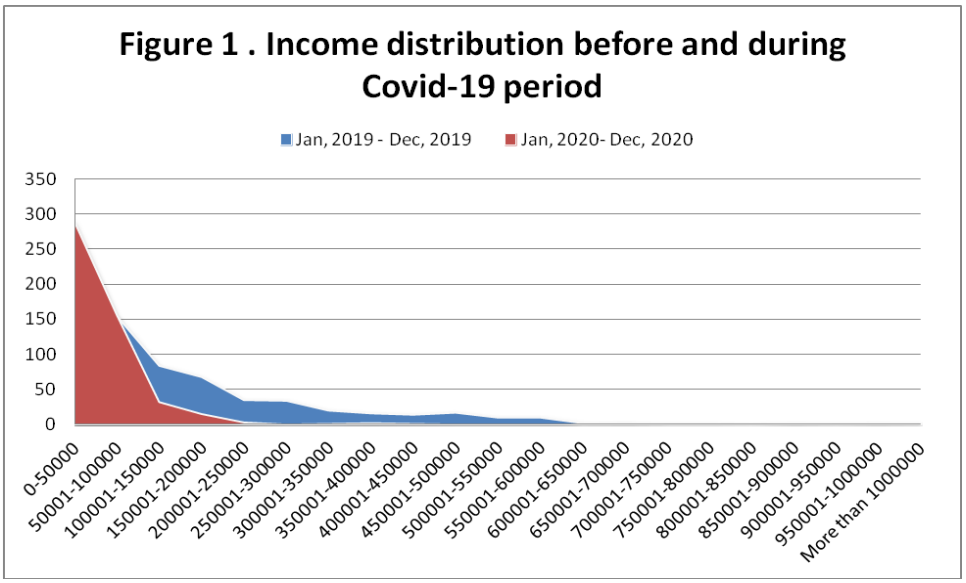
Income and Covid-19 Outbreak

Figure 1 shows the impact of the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns on the annual income distribution of the IWAMEs to understand how annual income patterns have changed over the two years. Two series of time periods have been shown to understand the differences in yearly income before the outbreak and during the COVID-19 period. The lockdown was imposed in the month of March, 2020 and the duration of closure of the enterprises varied across the sampling area. Accordingly, we tried to estimate the monthly incomes from the enterprises excluding the months which didn't generate any income to calculate the annual income for the COVID year. The income categories have been arranged into clusters of Rs.50000 and categorised from lowest 0-50000 to more than Rs.1000000.

Based on the data, it can be inferred that the distribution of income in both the periods are aligned to the left side of the figure. In the period of Jan 2019-Dec 2019, average annual income for majority of the enterprises fall within Rs.50001-100000 income group (31 per cent). Around 16.8 per cent, 13.6 per cent and 7 per cent earned in the income groups of Rs.100001-150000, Rs.150001-200000, Rs.200001-250000 respectively. Additionally, 20.2 per cent of the enterprises earned between the income group Rs.250001-500000. It implies that average annual income of the enterprises fell within these groups of income. However, we observe that there is a gradual decline of income in the subsequent categories- around 4.8 per cent of enterprises earned around Rs. 500001-700000 and 1.4 per cent around Rs.700001 to 1000000. Coming to the COVID-19 period of Jan 2020-Dec 2020, the survey revealed that the decline in income for many of the enterprises started from first week of December, 2019 following the Citizen Amendment Act movement. However, on the other side, some enterprises were earning well before the announcement of lockdown on March, but it went downhill subsequently. For some, in the aftermath of lockdown, bulk of masks orders and wedding garments were received to manufacture. The observations from Figure-1 show that the earnings of majority of enterprises were till the income group Rs.200001-250000. Around 57.8 per cent of enterprises

fall into the 0-50000 income category and the rest 41.2 per cent earned between 50000-250000 income group. There is sharp decline of earnings of the enterprises in the higher income categories. Around 0.4 per cent and 0.2 per cent of the enterprises earned between earnings in Rs.350001-400000, Rs. 400001-450000 respectively.

The overall observation is that during the COVID-19 year, the average earnings of the enterprises were less than 450000. More than half of the enterprises were in the lowest income category (Rs.0-50000). On the other hand, in 2019, the earnings were mostly concentrated below 450000 income group but the spread was comparatively uniform. Around 9.8 per cent enterprises reported to have earned between 450001 to more than 1000000.



Source: Field survey

Impact of Covid-19 and Copping Strategy: Regression results

The findings from the field survey showed some interesting results. As mentioned previously, although the first wave of lockdown triggered income losses to many IWAMEs, it was found that the severity of the crisis was uneven and varied across enterprises based on different factors. In this

backdrop, we have divided the enterprises into two categories: those which got impacted by '*small'* extent and those who were "*largely*" impacted (See: Table 2). Accordingly, a binary logistic regression was performed to determine the effects of certain variables on the likelihood that enterprises were largely impacted. The predictor variables taken to affect the binary dependent variable, that is, large impact are: the gender of the entrepreneur (GEND), type of establishment (ESTA), type of ownership of the enterprise (OWN), whether financial aid received during lockdown (FIN), total workers employed during the period (WORK), whether there were accumulated savings of the entrepreneur (SAV), whether the entrepreneur had alternative income source (ALT).

$$P_i = f(GEND, ESTA, OWN, FIN, WORK, SAV, ALT)$$

Here, P_i indicates the probability of a large impact due to COVID-19 crisis (1=large impact, 0= otherwise).

It is to be noted that there will be a problem of endogeneity or simultaneity issue in this regression. This may be due to the movement of workers to their native place during the COVID-19 year, which may cause disruption in production and at the same time the production also cannot take place due to lock down. Thus, factors like issue with availability of workers have been controlled in the regression by selecting only those enterprises where the total workers have remained the same during both the periods. The summary statistics for the variables in the final sample are given in the Appendix: Table 7. The descriptions of the predictors are displayed in Table 8.

Table 8: Description of the predictors

Predictors	Description
ALT(Alternative employment)	(Dummy) Yes=1, No=0
FIN(Whether financial aid transfer)	(Dummy) Yes=1, No=0
GEND(Gender of the entrepreneur)	(Dummy) Male=1, Female=0
WORK(Total workers)	(Continuous) total workers during Covid-19 year
SAV(Savings of the entrepreneur)	(Dummy) Yes=1, No=0

ESTA (Type of establishment)	(Dummy) Permanent=1, Temporary=0
OWN(Type of ownership)	(Dummy) Family based enterprise=1, otherwise=0

Source: The Authors

The enterprises run by a female entrepreneur which are temporary in nature, employed less workers and didn't receive any financial transfer are expected to have a higher likelihood of being impacted by a large extent. It is also expected that there might be a differentiable impact based on whether the production unit is family based or not. Further, the exercise was conducted by considering some entrepreneurial characteristics: it is envisaged that entrepreneurs with neither savings nor alternative sources of income will have a higher likelihood of their enterprises impacted by a large extent.

The logistic model is highly sensitive to the problem of multicollinearity (Bozpolat, 2016). Thus, for the dependent variable, we need to validate that the model doesn't suffer from multicollinearity between the independent variables. For that, tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were calculated. According to (Field, 2009, p. 242), the tolerance value should be greater than 0.02 and VIF less than 10. The results shown in Table 9 shave validated the assumptions.

Table 9: Tolerance and VIF between the independent variables

Variables	Tolerance	VIF
SAV	.861	1.161
FIN	.869	1.150
WORK	.761	1.313
OWN	.972	1.029
ESTA	.882	1.133
GEND	.888	1.127
ALT	.963	1.038

Moving ahead, Table 10 shows the model fit statistics. Also, the estimation results of the parameters and the log ratios are shown in Table 11.

Table 10: Model fit statistics

Log likelihood	388.553
X2	28.288*
(df)	7
Nagelkerke R square	0.102
Overall predicted accuracy	82%
*Significant at 1 per cent level of significance	
Note: Hosmer-Lemeshow test [$\chi 2$=4.427 (non-significant) (p> 0.05)] shows that the model is a good fit	

The regression equation is written as:

Ln (odds large impact) = -0.335 + 0.565SAV +1.135FIN+0.027WORK+ 0.898OWN -0.132ESTA + 0.234GEND +0.484ALT

Table 11 : Results of the logit regression model

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
SAV(1)	.565	.278	4.136	1	0.042*	1.760
FIN(1)	1.135	.329	11.918	1	0.001**	3.112
WORK	.027	.101	.070	1	0.792	1.027
OWN(1)	.898	.335	7.187	1	0.007**	2.454
ESTA(1)	-.132	.288	.211	1	0.646	.876
GEND(1)	.234	.287	.666	1	0.415	1.264
ALT(1)	.487	.267	3.322	1	0.068	1.628
Constant	-.335	.487	.472	1	0.492	.715

P<0.01**

P<0.05*

Here, the reference category for the categorical variables have been taken as the last category (coded 1).The findings showed that variables such as SAV (B=0.565), FIN (B=1.135) and OWN (B=0.898) were positive

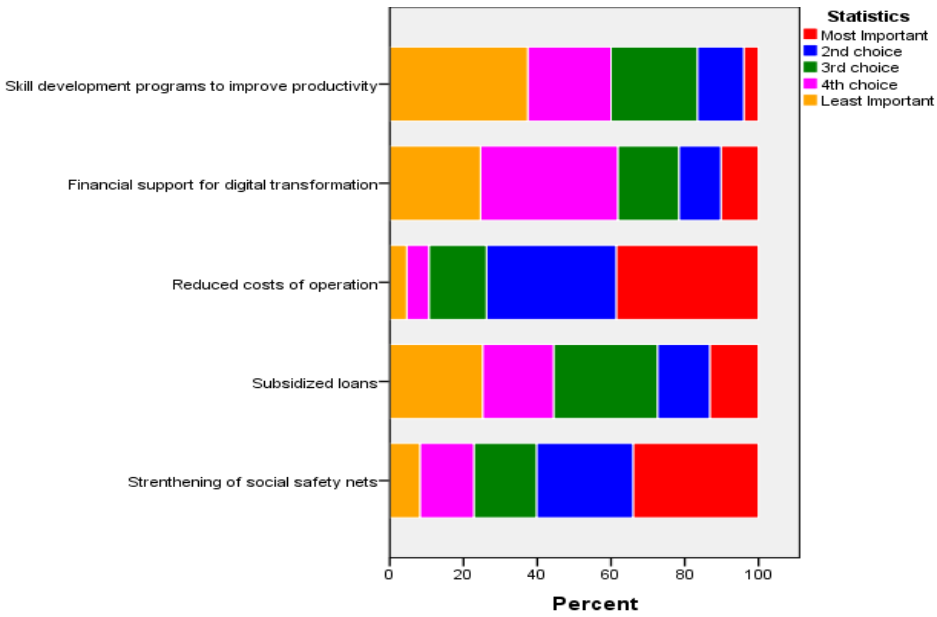
and significant in explaining the probability of enterprises having a large impact. For the variable SAV, the effect size is also large as shown by the odds ratio (1.76), implying entrepreneurs with no savings were 1.76 times more likely to have their enterprises impacted by a large extent. This may be because with the upsurge in demand for protective masks during the COVID-19 period, there were many who used their savings to purchase raw materials to manufacture the masks. While some women manufactured masks made from traditional Assamese *Gamocha*[2], some tried to make surgical masks from home and sell them at a range between Rs 10 - Rs 15 per piece depending on the thickness of the layering. Some others also have used the raw clothing materials to make decorative masks and bags out of it. For the variable FIN, the odds ratio of 3.112 implies that enterprises which didn't receive any financial aid transfer were 3.112 times more likely to be affected by a large extent. The effect size is also large for the variable OWN, as shown by the odds ratio (2.45), implying that enterprises which are not family based were 2.45 times more likely to be impacted largely, than the family based enterprises.

COVID- 19, envisaged support and entrepreneurs' response

Before delving into the policy measures based on the findings, we have attempted to bring forward a likert scale analysis on the entrepreneurs' response towards the kind of support they need in times of distress. The results were measured on a 5-point likert scale ranging from most important to least important (Figure 2). As evident from the figure, higher priority was given to support for reducing costs of business operation, where 38.6 per cent and 35.2 per cent of respondents had put it as most important and second choice respectively. Further, the strengthening of social safety nets also was considered to be most important for 34 per cent of respondents .If we look into the need for subsidized loans, there was a mixed response from the respondents. Although 13.2 per cent found it to be most important, there were higher percentage of respondents who have considered it to be least important (25.2 per cent). This may be because taking loans also has the disadvantage of added pressure to repay back. When asked whether

there was a need for skill development programs to improve productivity, there was small percentage among the entrepreneurs who had prioritised it but a larger percentage of them (37.4 per cent) had considered it to be least important- the reasons being that they believed hands on training in the own enterprise had more value than getting trained elsewhere. They mentioned that they could not afford to go for training programs and lose their customers, however limited they may be. Finally, it was reported that financial support for digital transformation did not seem to be quite indispensable for them- around 37.2 per cent and 24.6 per cent had considered it as a fourth choice and least important respectively.

Figure 2: Kind of support in times of distress



Source: The Authors

IV. Conclusion and Policy Implications

The informal wearing apparel manufacturing sector is critical to the economy of the North eastern Region in general and Assam in particular. In the absence of any meaningful study based on field data to explain the

impact of Covid-19 on this sector in the North- east, this paper made an attempt to examine the subtleties of such impact and their implications for policy.

Majority of the IWAMEs suffered in the hands of the pandemic in terms of loss of income, employment and access to credit. The income levels in the COVID-19 year concentrated more in the lowest income category as evident from the findings. Categorising the degree of the impact in terms of a binary magnitude like 'small' and 'large', our analysis revealed that entrepreneurs not having accumulated past savings, in addition to enterprises which are not family-based and which didn't receive any financial aid transfer have higher likelihood of being affected by a 'large' extent. Further, examination based on likert scale and factor analysis shows how the first wave of lockdown brought challenges ranging from financial constraints to other conducts of business operations such as difficulties in making payments for house rent and selling products at lesser rates due to limited orders. It is also evident from the analysis that as a coping up strategy, strengthening of social safety nets and incentives to reduce costs of operating enterprises has been prioritised highly as compared to public assistance programs for skill development and financial support.

An investigation of the various relief packages provided to the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector during the pandemic by the state and central governments, showed that incentives were taken at different levels for their subsequent recovery (Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, 2020).However, the state support for this 'grey economy' comprised of the informal sector workers is found to be inadequate.

The pandemic impelled the entrepreneurs and workers in the informal wearing apparel manufacturing sector to develop a coping up mechanism by engaging themselves in various activities in order to diversify their income source. However, these coping strategies were all self-propelled without any kind of meaningful state support. These self-driven coping mechanisms have made us realise that in situations of economic upheaval,

our institutional arrangements are not very efficient to mitigate the problems of informal sector enterprises. This necessitates the implementation of effective policy measures. Being the most vulnerable group with inadequate social safety nets, provisions of similar institutional arrangements like that of the MSME sector are required for the urban informal sector. Our analysis shows how engagement in alternative opportunities can lessen the brunt of the crisis, for instance, finding opportunistic prospects in making masks from the available raw materials. It is thus imperative, that incentives to offer additional gainful employment opportunities must be one of the priorities and the institutional system should ensure that direct support is given to them from both the demand and supply sides. Thus, recognising these challenges is important for ameliorating the on-going labour market hardships in the IWAME sector.

Acknowledgement

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Appendix:

Table 7 : Summary Statistics

Variable		Frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D
Gender	Female	162	36.9		
	Male	277	63.1		
Total workers	Minimum(1)	126	28.7	2.53	1.5
	Maximum(8)	1	0.2		

Alternative employment	No	298	67.9
	Yes	141	32.1
Financial aid	No	158	36
	Yes	281	64
Accumulated savings	No	278	63.3
	Yes	161	36.7
Type of establishment	Temporary	145	33
	Permanent	294	67
Type of ownership	Enterprises other than family-based	378	86.1
	Family based enterprises	61	13.9

Source: The Authors

Endnotes:

[1] An assessment of the annual income distribution for both the periods has been done in Section III

[2] Thin piece of cloth material which is generally used as a towel

Strategizing Otherness: Myth, Memory and Representation in *The Legends of Pensam*

Aparna Singh*

Abstract

Mamang Dai's The Legends of Pensam, taps into the socio-cultural beliefs and practices of the Adi tribes of Siang valley by narrativising myths, oral legends, folktales and rituals. Blending myth, memory and history she outlines the multiple layers of history and culture – largely forgotten, marginalised, and silenced - unravelling in the process the incapacity of the official national narratives to fully accommodate or adequately express tribal sentiments. Her tales counterpose rational/national modernity narratives with a confident re-presentation of 'otherness', an 'otherness' that is primarily shaped by the exclusionary logic of the rational/reasonable. Dai, intertwines the personal and the political - the individual and the collective – while foregrounding the significance of memory and writing in the creation of oppositional agency. Deeply enmeshed in the Arunachal life and politics, the tales foreground an alternative aesthetic idiom and an anti-teleological enquiry to the established traditional (outdated) vs modern (progressive) rhetoric. The paper - drawing on Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism – attempts to explore Dai's bold narrative strategies that reorient and reimagine the popularly held beliefs about Arunachal, created and perpetuated by the culturally sanctioned hegemonic discourses on identity and authenticity.

Keywords*: Myth, Memory, Self, Other, Identity, Authenticity*

In the author's note Mamang Dai says:

Like the majority of tribes inhabiting the central belt of Arunachal, the Adis practice an animistic faith that is woven around forest ecology and co-existence with the natural world (p. 10).

Mamang Dai writes in English, a language that veritably embodies the

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dominant spirit of the so-called Indian intelligentsia. But what is remarkable about Dai is her ability to question and subvert the logic of the modern Indian nationhood premised largely on the rationale of progress and development. She carefully sidesteps the traps of writing in a language that by far does not inherit the political and ideological parameters of the national, the regional, or for that matter even the local. Having said this *The Legends of Pensam* is both unmistakably political and austerely apolitical in its attempt to find meaning in the largely forgotten and marginalised remnants of the nation's rhetoric of 'otherness'. This otherness is constituted in long-lost memories, narratives of existence, pain, happiness, failure, and death. When Spivak vouched for strategic essentialism, she was (de)politicising essentialism in the shaping of identities. She was strategically downplaying differences within a group or community so that a sense of unity – however temporary it might be – could be forged for certain political ends. According to Bottomley (1979, 1991) ethnic identities reflect a dialectical interplay of self-identification and identification by others, and of perceptions and structural forces. Hall foregrounds this very idea of how identities are strategic and positional (1988, 1991). Dai too in her representation of the tribes, in their myriad dispositions, tries to foreground an essentialism. This essentialism is a way of bringing forth their identity not merely as a politically and cartographically constructed one; rather as one that is rooted in the idyllic flora and fauna of the Siang valley. Although there has been an increasing surge of anti-essentialism (Brah, 1996, p. 92) one cannot dismiss the manner in which communities mobilise their sense of identity in specific circumstances (Gilroy, 1987).

Dai refrains, consciously so, from the self-chosen role of the Indian custodian of nation vis a vis the ubiquitous narrative frameworks (mostly situated within a political backdrop) that pervade its popular understandings. While inhabiting the margins with unassuming ease, she owns up the space and allows it to liberate her from the constraints of conventional representational strategies. Taking this further we can safely say that her narrative strands create alternative parameters of accessing the tribes. The

journey she undertakes to the central belt of Arunachal is a literal and a metaphorical one: "There are few road links in their territory. Travel to the distant villages still entails cumbersome river crossings, elephant rides, and long foot marches through dense forest or over high mountain passes" (author's note, p.10).

Firmly rooting her representation in the local sense of place - she creates an alternative world that is inhabited by myths, folklores, the supernatural, and traditional beliefs. She consciously shifts from the politically determined boundaries, the geopolitical machinations of the nation state and the logic of modernity that it inevitably invokes. In his book *Durable Disorder* Sanjib Baruah remarks that "those 'thinking from' Northeast India must take seriously the daily humiliations and violations suffered by the region's common people as the result of decades of low-intensity warfare, and the means through which they forge ways to deal with them. Literature and the arts have become a site for sorting out moral and ethical dilemmas." Baruah also highlights the way in which the North-east has often been reductively analysed as a homogeneous picture of nameless 'insurgencies' and Indian soldiers defending 'the nation' (p. 12, Preface).

In the *Legends* Dai seemingly bypasses these moral and ethical dilemmas, yet her engagement, however passive it might appear, is deeply imbricated in the culture and politics of the state. The insider/outsider perspective (a heavily loaded one when seen from the geopolitical topography of the Northeast) is roped in through Mona's perspective, the narrator's friend, a magazine editor. The communities that she talks about are extensions of the natural world and share a relationship of mutual respect. The cultural referents emanate from the natural ones and vice versa.

In a recent study, *Life Place: Bioregional Thought and Practice*, Robert L. Thayer Jr. defines a bioregion as follows:

> A bioregion is literally and etymologically a "life- place"—a unique region definable by natural (rather than political) boundaries with a geographic, climatic, hydrological, and ecological character

> capable of supporting unique human communities. Bioregions can be variously defined by the geography of watersheds, similar plant and animal ecosystems, and related, identifiable landforms (e.g., particular mountain ranges, prairies, or coastal zones) and by the unique human cultures that grow from natural limits and potentials of the region. Most importantly, the bioregion is emerging as the most logical locus and scale for a sustainable, regenerative community to take root and to take place (p. 3).

In this context the narrative scheme adopted by Dai can also be seen as a strategy to reinforce the missing link between nature and culture and probably also a subversion of the conventionally inherent binary of - superiority and inferiority - in them. The relation between nature and culture has generally been perceived in oppositional terms often envisaged as hierarchical. Dai re-envisions it as a symbiotic relationship, where one complements the other. In the words of Lawrence Buell, the environmental crisis is a crisis of imagination. In *The Legends,* imagination occupies a counterspace, a space that nevertheless creates a harmonious interface between man and environment. The imagination here is interspersed with forays into the past peppered with the workings of memory. Moreover the 'supernatural', very much the natural, is not disassociated from everyday world view. Robert Redfield in his theory of world view assigned a diminished role to supernatural beings, which is static and of lesser scope. He placed the supernatural beings in the category of 'other' – a world view universal, as opposed to the 'self' (Redfield, 1953). Dai insulates this notion of 'otherness', a self-sustaining category inhabiting an alternative time-space matrix that does not fit into the teleological accounts of progress and development fielded by the modern nation state. Nor does she play along its logic of refinement and expansion from a pre-existing cruder version of culture. Michel Foucault's account of genealogy, rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies. It opposes itself to the search for origins' so that 'what is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is 'disparity' (Foucault,

1977, pp. 140 -142). This 'disparity' and 'dissension' is in opposition to the preferred narrative of the nation, generally described as originating in the nineteenth century and as historically progressive. Also, the notion of society based on a linear concept of history was being countered by the notion of culture based on the multi-temporal concept of history where past and present coalesce and commingle (Confino p. 85).

Pensam, (means in-between in Adi language according to the author) a distinctive spatio-temporal framework, (re)created via a self-validating discourse does not depend on the conventional categorisations subsumed within modernism's logic of development initiated by scientific and industrial revolutions. It admits the existence of a diverse range of human cultures cutting across time-space constraints as much as it is embedded in an elusiveness, as Dai steers clear of romantic exoticisation or a static homogeneous description:

> In the beginning, there was only Keyum. Nothingness. It was neither darkness nor light, nor had it any colour, shape or movement. Keyum is the remote past, way beyond the reach of our senses. It is the place of ancient things from where no answer is received. Out of this place of great stillness, the first flicker of thought began to shine like a light in the soul of man. It became a shimmering trail, took shape and expanded and became the Pathway. Out of this nebulous zone, a spark was born that was the light of imagination. The spark grew into a shining stream that was the consciousness of man, and from this all the stories of the world and all its creatures came into being (p. 56).

Be it the mythical Biribek with a thorned head, or the indistinguishable man and animal analogy that Dai draws through the wide eyed naivete of Hoxo in the first chapter to the several belief systems that she enunciates on the legends of Pensam she deliberately refrains from a politically determined narrative. However, she hardly circumvents the violence that simmers, probably just under the surface, something that stands stark when

she passingly mentions the "arrival of firearms into these hills, hunting had become a passion" (p. 19). The pristine valleys are snapped – in almost a blink of an eye as it were - from their peaceful coexistence with nature. Hoxo's father is killed mistakenly for being a bear or probably a deer. Even the memory of the killer is flawed, considerably, as he could not remember killing a human. Just as the boundaries between nature and culture recede, it also becomes a dangerously amorphous territory. In a matter-of-fact manner this part of the narrative ends with the hunting expeditions that produced "one more widow in the village where so many young women had lost their men in hunting accidents" (p. 20).

Kalen's death too makes the remembrance of dead people an eerie experience. Mistaken as a monkey he is shot to death. The others carry back his body almost struggling to keep the pieces together. The mundane and quotidian everyday life is interspersed with stories of those who disappear in the world beyond the mountains and the river. Mona enters the narrative loom sympathetically weaving her own tale of loss into this intriguing intersection of narratives, akin to the Chinese box structure of stories; her narrative too becomes a part of a greater rubric, which in turn is situated within a larger scheme of the many accidents that life is witness to. Hoxo recalls a story of how a villager called Togum had killed a cobra that had transfixed the elephants with dread and rendered them immobile. The spirit of the cobra had possessed his infant son. After completing the narration Hoxo prophetically uttered: 'These things happen all the time, 'We only begin to know about them when they happen to us' (p. 30). The narrative incorporates memories as they interact, following the logic of association as much as their intersection in a timeless context of pain.

The harmonious coexistence of spirits and men was not new to the tribes. The divides between men and spirits were nebulous and did not augur well for some. The case of Kamur being possessed by the spirits makes him violent and murderous. He is completely taken aback by his own unprovoked acts of violence. The lines between reality and illusion were thin and slippery, yet it made them apprehensive of the wrathful spirits

and ghosts, or even wrong marriages, or right or wrong kind of life choices. The spirits had their own ways of redressing wrongs and humans did not interfere with them. The fate of humans was seen as subservient to forces beyond their control and it was only for their own good that they kept to themselves without disturbing the invisible aspects of existence.

Dai mentions the rain mother as a mythical woman with silver ornaments clinking as she rides the wind, brandishing her sword. The romantic image of the rain clouds rushing to protect her modesty as she nonchalantly twirls her skirt, soon segues into an ominous presence and the imminent flood they would bring with them: "Hidden by mountains and covered by a charcoal sky the forest and rivers become battlefields ferocious with the struggle for survival" (p. 41). Mona had seamlessly blended with this godforsaken place. And this camaraderie between man and nature, the outsider and the insider, is an interesting juncture that propels the narrative. This blend of perspectives and of differences makes the place an intriguing confluence of the old and the new. Things had begun to change in the 1800s, right from the colonial influx: "Since then, people from other worlds had come and gone, though the only records of their journeys are the stories that the older men and women remember" (p. 42). Very subtly Dai mentions the role memory and forgetting play in shaping the cultural identity of the tribes. The British are referred to as the Migluns who were apparently not as 'frightening' as the Americans. But both had similar interests in "building the great road for their armies to march against the enemy" (p. 43). The simplistically stated similarity underlines the politically motivated development projects that these countries undertook. These politically rife moments play out the masterfully construed narrative subterfuge.

> The migluns were terrifying in their energy and determination. In the lashing rain and the wet earth that buried men up to their waists they drove elephants to cross rivers, remove logs and trample the jungle. The elephants strained and quivered to the shouts of their mahouts, slipped, struggled, knelt, struggled on, and many of the poor animals lost their footing and hurtled off the mountainside

> bellowing like mythical beasts with their eyes rolled up skywards. It was unimaginable, what the migluns were trying to achieve. In the swampy valleys men died like flies, shivering with fever and fear (p. 43).

The road that was built out of the blood and sweat of these tribal men created a connecting link between Assam, Myanmar and China. The narrator is sure of the road's existence and she even ruminates on a future journey via the road. However, Hoxo's intervention disrupts her plans and she is forced to revise them: 'There are no villages. It is a no man's land and the only people living there now are the men with guns.' The men with guns are the insurgents who were using these roads to safely move to Myanmar.

The changes that had gradually but steadily enveloped these valleys are shown as a consequence of the fallout between man and nature, the material and the spiritual, the post-traditional and the traditional. The trees which were home to the spirits that protected these tribe were razed down - in the name of development - and so were the spirits. These spirits had departed, homeless, leaving behind a trail of changes. A new world of knowledge had suddenly opened for them.

The colonial past present as a hovering spirit, is interpreted through the panoramic and varied recollections of the village people. The killing of Noel Williamson (the white man), for instance, was popular among the tribes. Some attributed it to rumours about Williamson coming to destroy the village, some interpreted it as a response to an insult by the White man, some saw it as a result of a scandalous affair with a tribal woman. "Perhaps it was the memory of this event that was the cause. Everything is conjecture." (50) The mythical reversibility of time is situated within the fluid dimensions of memory. After his murder, violence (that has been referred to as a massacre) spread and it ultimately led to the death of forty-seven sepoys and coolies. This sudden eruption of violence is left largely unexplained and the stone that was raised in his memorial till date was looked after "just as the British had instructed". The relation between the past and the present is strangely

incongruous in episodes like these disrupting the logical linearity of temporal experiences and the simple opposition between remembrance and oblivion. The memorial stone becomes a site of memory and counter-memory at the same time. It signifies the perpetuation of colonial legacy as much as its anti-colonial subversive potential. Sites of memory are places where groups of people engage in public activity through which they express "a collective shared knowledge […] of the past, on which a group's sense of unity and individuality is based" (Assmann p. 15). While the earlier memories are passed on to the groups who visit these sites, new meanings are added to it by them.

When myth and memory merge indistinguishably the narrative begins to meander once again into the colonial incursions from the past. The anticolonial resistance is shown from the well delineated response to the outsider/the white man who claimed possession of the land and also heaped insults on these villagers. "Why should anybody look at a man with disgust when he was a man of the land and the other was a visitor trying to conquer the villages with lies and bags of gifts?" (p. 53) In the coloniser's account the forest is compared to a devious animal hiding deadly secrets in the form of hideous traps. The men were slowly moving through the formidable forest breathing down on them. By a quirky narrative twist, we are taken into a young soldier's burdened mind, revisiting his own native town (one young soldier had remembered that it was almost Christmas day). The locational paradox is clearly brought forth by the extreme inaccessibility of this town in the valley just across the river. The young white soldier is at cultural, social and demographic crossroads, exasperated at his misplaced presence in the wilderness. The narrative briefly entertains the outsider's perspective, bringing into context the alternative spaces that identity sought refuge in, at odds with the reality at hand. In another incident of mapping this unwieldy space Dai says:

> The man had come to map the wilderness and trace the source of a river. He was a political agent on a survey mission, and all he

> had discovered was that the river was a woman and that his soul was now forever drowned in the jade heart of water. What would come of this meeting? What exchange could be made? Lines would be traced on paper. A new picture would appear. Words would be written. A story would come to life in song and shining ink. But no one would ever know the other words, the secret whispers, tender, intense, spoken at first light. (p. 55)

The inability of the official records to represent these alternative spaces is pertinently brought forth here. It brings to mind Partha Chatterjee's (1989) exploration of the material and the spiritual domain of the anticolonial narratives. While the material domain assiduously catered to or followed the economic, technological and the scientific state paradigms, a domain where colonial superiority was ungrudgingly embraced, the spiritual was a place well within the jurisdiction of the colonised. It was here, the inner domain, that they asserted themselves in all kinds of unforeseen ways, culturally superior, and inaccessible to the coloniser. Dai refers to these secret (imagined and real) spaces that have remained elusive to the coloniser, and have evolved as a significant counter-establishment trope in the overarching nation building attempts even in the postcolonial contexts. Dai in her poetic rendering of these 'other/othered' culturally specific spaces implies an ever-present elusiveness (But no one would ever know…) in them. She unfailingly points to the failures of epistemic structures to grasp and know. The very desire to know or to form a knowledge base through data collection, cartographical detailing, and representation is far-fetched, at its best, with their limited applications and appropriateness. Said's notion of the Orientalist as someone who stands outside and apart - a political agent in this case - from what he is describing can be a useful reference point here.

Moments of grief and mourning are imagined as a collective social responsibility in *The Legends* quite in opposition to the individual centric identity paradigms propped by modernity: It is said that when a loved one dies those who mourn should not soil the passage of the soul from one world

into another with tears. Those who remember say that it was the village that mourned Nenem's death more than Kao, because, collectively, every man and woman mourned for Kao as well. (p. 112) As the soldiers of the new rulers replace the pre-existing ones, the plainsmen and the co-conspirators from the hills work together insidiously to distort the natural topography through deforestation and the razing down of mountains. Kao's deep-seated faith in nature's resilience invokes the classic nature vs culture conflict, something that invariably upholds the principles of natural resurrection, holding its own against invasive destructive intrusions.

The political is an integral component of this intrusive project and nature in its own indigenous ways puts up a brave front. Change - as children learnt new things, new languages and new scripts - was making inroads and it appeared inevitable, not because it is seen as insurmountable but because it is envisaged as a tiny inconsequential speck in the vast cosmic order of existence. With them were entwined memories of an indelible past, even as the material remnants (for example Losi's old tin trunk) of a vanished or vanishing past surfaced in its myriad manifestations: "The village had moved to its own quiet rhythm for centuries, with old certainties and beliefs, but the road was changing all that" (p. 128). This interplay between assimilation and differentiation, essentialism and hybridity invigorates the narrative. But despite the volatility that lies at the root of identity formation, Dai is careful about the sense of core that distinguishes the Adi tribes, however changing that core might be (Brah 1996, 123).

New government policies were being implemented and the promise of progress was finding new grounds as images of roads, vehicles and electricity emerged. This anticipated progress was however accompanied by a series of attendant miseries, one being the constant fear of burglars. Thus, the road ended up being bad news (p. 130). The transformation of unique places into mechanised spaces, as a concerted project of modernity invokes resistance and fear in the natives. The stories of transformation marked by temporal and spatial particularities become emblematic of the discrepant histories of the nation, multivalent constructs that subvert and contest each other. The

villagers wanted to be left alone, as the lure of fortune, and new identities did not interest them. They were caught at the troubled crossroads of a past they held on to dearly and the fast-changing present. “They did not want to join hands with the government. We are not seekers of fortune, they said. We are not seekers of words. We are not seekers of a new identity. Leave us alone.” (p. 135) Questions of survival gathered steam as the villagers struggled to come to terms with the changing scenario.

As the narrative reaches a workable blend of permanence and change, the latter, offering innumerable possibilities of rearranging the old with the new (p. 161) we are confronted with the advantages and challenges of preserving memories. When Mona informs the narrator that a film maker wants to make a film on the tribes, the narrator is sceptical. Her initial reaction is dismissive as she sees nothing ‘golden’ (“I couldn’t see what this golden chance was about” she says) about it. She is also wary of this remembrance project as she worries that it might not sit well with the older generation of men like Rakut. There is also the fear of never getting it right that further invokes the question of representational ‘authenticity’ especially when seen through the insider/outsider lens. But she gradually realises the importance of documenting these memories: “It was important to record our stories. The old rhapsodists were a dying breed, and when they were gone, who would remember? What happens to the people and the places we forget? Where do they go?” (p. 151)

Dai ends the narrative on a suggestive note; of readjusting the lens while looking at this part of the world. It’s an old binocular handed down by Hoxo, symbolically asking the readers to adapt their lens to get a clearer picture. The narrator, after refocusing the lens can see a canopy of trees and the river stretching like an ocean. On shifting the ring further, she saw narrow apartment blocks, grubby streets, and bamboo scaffolding. In his book *In the Name of the Nation India and its Northeast* Sanjib Baruah states while quoting the geographer Anssi Paasi, that the spatial categorization of Northeast is an ad-hoc constitution put together for mundane administrative reasons and for purposes of economic planning (Baruah p.42). By contesting

this politically contingent construction of the Northeast, the Siang Valley in particular, Dai reaffirms the spatial and cultural essentialism she began with, through a detailed description of tribal life, their culture, beliefs, myths and memories. She ends on a note of keeping them meaningfully connected with the changing scenario, and to not give in to the largely available colonial and post-colonial stereotyping of this region. Questions of identity are deeply entrenched in collective remembrance of shared norms and beliefs. Nature acts as the backdrop to these richly symbolic associations, colouring and shaping the nature culture relationship in numerous unexpected ways.

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Localising Sustainable Development Goals through Autonomous District Councils in the Sixth Schedule Areas of North-east India: An Exploratory Study

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&
Sumarbin Umdor**

Abstract

Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through local self-governments is a fundamental challenge for achieving the seventeen global goals. This paper explores the prospect of localising SDGs in the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), which are local self-governments in the tribal areas mentioned in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Deriving from policy documents, constitutional provisions, and legal frameworks, our study shows links between the thematic approach to SDG localisation of Panchayats and the legislative provisions of the village local governments of the ADCs. While also exploring the conformity of the goals and indicators of the SDGs with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, we suggest eight themes for actions at the district/regional level. Due to the distinct functioning of each ADCs, we believe that case studies and interaction with stakeholders could further help towards a bottom-up approach to successfully localising the SDGs in the ADCs.

Keywords: *Local government, Sustainable development goals, Panchayats, Autonomous District Councils, Sixth Schedule*

I. Introduction

Localisation of Sustainable Development Goals has been described by the UN Development Group (2014) as 'the process of defining, implementing and monitoring strategies at the local level for achieving global, national,

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and subnational sustainable development goals.' The basic concept of localisation was introduced at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where the UN adopted *Local Agenda*. The creation of local policies and programs to achieve sustainable development was a voluntary process that required local governments to consult with the local community, minority groups, businesses, and industrial organisations to, for instance, develop local environmental plans, policies, and programs.The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched in 2000 were not sufficiently localised, contributing to its limitations. With the adoption of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 as an improvement of the MDGs, localisation was considered imperative for achieving the seventeen global goals to be due in 2030.

In India, discussions and actions on localisation of the SDGs have been undertaken for the rural and urban local governments at a national level, involving Panchayats and Municipalities, the two primary forms of local governance in rural and urban areas. Apart from these two, local self-governance at the sub-state level in India also involves institutions established to protect and promote the tribal population in the form of Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) incorporated in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Since their constitutional provisions give autonomy, power and functions to the ADCs, they are also in a position to undertake developmental efforts, which include localisation of the SDGs in their respective areas, as in the case of the other forms of local governments. However, most ADCs lack a proper SDG localisation policy and rarely appear in the national discourse. This paper argues that it is feasible to localise the SDGs in the Sixth Schedule areas of North-east India through ADCs using their existing constitutional and legal provisions. To substantiate this argument, the study showed that Panchayat's thematic approach to localising SDGs could be adapted and linked with the legal provisions of the village bodies of the ADCs. The study also shows that the goals and indicators of SDGs conform to some of the existing provisions of the Sixth Schedule. Based on the evidence presented, common localisation

themes for ADCs at the district or regional level are suggested. The study utilises secondary sources of information, including constitutional and legal provisions, bare acts and their subsequent amendments, government reports, and other related studies.

The paper is divided into seven main sections. The current section introduces the basic concept of SDG localisation and the main argument of the paper. The second section briefly explains different types of local self-governance systems in India. The third section explicates the role of local governments in localising SDGs. The fourth section reviews studies relating to the past and ongoing efforts in localising SDGs worldwide, including India. The fifth section explores the space for dovetailing Panchayat's thematic approach to the enabling acts of the village bodies of the ADCs. The sixth section explores the prospective role of ADCs in localising SDGs at the district/regional level and suggests relevant themes for the same. The seventh section provides a concluding observation of the study.

II. A Brief Background on Local Self-Governance in India

The rural local governments in India are called Panchayats, and their origins can be traced to the Rig Veda, dating back to around 1200 BC. Sir Charles Metcalfe, the provisional governor-general of India from 1835 to 1836, termed them as 'little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations.'(Mookerji, 1920).The advent of the British in India led to a shift in attention from rural to urban local bodies. But the need for an independent republic, or a *village swaraj,*was stressed by Mahatma Gandhi, whose vision had possibly the most enduring impact on the successive debates on panchayats (Alok, 2006). After India's independence, there was a conflicting view in the Constituent Assembly where Dr B.R Ambedkar, the chairman of the Drafting Committee, called the village community 'a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and communalism.'(Malavya, 1956) Panchayats were not placed in the first draft of India's constitution but were later included in the nonjusticiable part under Directive Principles of State

Policy. The term 'local government' was included in five of the State List, but these provisions are only discretionary. Panchayats slowly and steadily evolved in the Indian federation, with their importance being stressed by different committees even though they had not been at the forefront of India's policymaking. For instance, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957 recommended that "public participation in community work should be organised through statutory representative bodies. Similarly, Ashoka Mehta Committee in 1977 recognised the districts as the administrative unit in the Panchayati Raj structure, and L.M Singhvi Committee in 1986 recommended that Panchayats be enshrined in the constitution. Despite these efforts, an attempt to assign constitutional status to the Panchayats was introduced in 1989 as the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill, which failed to become an act due to belief in the opposing side that it would become an instrument of the union government to bypass the state government to deal directly with the Panchayats. Over the years, consensus grew among all political parties favouring the Panchayats. After debate and discussion, a constitutional amendment bill was introduced in 1991 and became the Constitution (73rdAmendment) Act 1992 and was passed for the Panchayats on April 24, 1993 (Alok, 2006).The general structure of Panchayats is three-tiered, comprising district, block and village-level bodies. According to the Local Government Directory of the Government of India, currently, there are 665 district Panchayats, 6698 block Panchayats and 255600 village Panchayats in India.

The urban local government in India have a history of more than 300 years and has seen many momentous changes preceding Lord Ripon's resolution of 1882, which give Indians the right to local self-government (Mathur, 2006). Pannikkar (1963)observes that 'Lord Ripon's reform of local self-government laid the basis of local and municipal self-government, which soon took firm roots in India and became the groundwork for democratic institutions in the higher spheres.' As mentioned earlier, urban local governments were given more attention during the British period in India and found prominent places in government laws. The Government of

India Act 1919 made the local government a separate budget head and gave powers to levy different tax and non-tax revenues. Also, the Government of India Act of 1935 ended the diarchic system of administration and entrusted the provincial (state) governments with the task of defining the functions and tax powers of local governments. This model was followed with the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1949, which came into force in 1950, giving the subject of local government under the state list. However, along with the rural local government, the municipalities in India found their place in the Indian Constitution through the Constitution (74th Amendment) Act in 1992 (Mathur, 2006). At present, there are 4804 urban local bodies in India.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments covered most Indian states with two significant exceptions. The areas mentioned in the Fifth and Sixth Schedules of the Constitution are exempted from provisions of these amendments. However, the Fifth Schedule area, which spread across ten states of India, including Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Telangana, is brought under the system of Panchayats through Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996. This leaves the areas under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura in North-east India with a separate model of governance from the rest of the country in the form of ADCs. According to Hansaria (2005), the evolution of the ADCs can be traced back to British India,where the tribal areas in the North-east region, formerly known as the 'backward tracks', were administered with separate provisions. While framing the constitution, the ConstituentAssembly formed a sub-committee under the chairmanship of Gopinath Bordoloi to provide an appropriate constitutional arrangement for the tribal areas. The committee submitted its report to the Advisory Committee of the Assembly on February 1947. The subject was extensively debated and finally incorporated in Articles 244(2) and 275(1), better known as the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. There are ten ADCs under the Sixth Schedule in India.

Local Self-Governance in North-east India

North-east India, connected with a narrow land passage known as the *Siliguri Corridor* or the *Chicken's Neck*, a geopolitical and geo-economical corridor with the rest of India, has been an integral part of the Indian federation. Since many years preceding the advent of the British in India, different tribes in North-east India have practised indigenous forms of local governance. The present-day Assam was ruled by the Ahom dynasty for nearly 600 years, between 1228-1826 (Guha, 1983). According to Burman (2002), among the tribal communities of North-east India, three types of self-government are broadly found. They are self-regulated convivial type, republican type, and monarchical type. The self-regulated convivial type is represented by the Nishis of Arunachal Pradesh, the republican type of arrangement was largely found among the Naga group of tribes from Nagaland, even though not all Naga tribes are under the system. The monarchical type operates among the Wanchos of Tirap District in Arunachal Pradesh, Mizo-Kuki-Chin tribes spreading in Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, and Khasis from Meghalaya. Tripura also has a long history of Tripuri Kingdom in the state. These arrangements of self-governance have been transformed into and replaced by new forms of local governance over time. This has changed significantly after the formation of different states under the Government of India.

According to Aiyar and Tiwari (2009), decentralised governance in North-east India shows a wide diversity due to ethnic, linguistic and religious variance unparalleled in any other region. Rightly so, among the eight North-east states, Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim are the only states fully covered by the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendments. The ten ADCs constituted under the Sixth Schedule across the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura have a vast difference in the powers and functions and the governance structure existing below the councils at the village level. Assam and Manipur have autonomous councils constituted under state laws. Nagaland has village councils and village development boards constituted under the Nagaland Village Council (amended) Act, 2002 and the Village

Development Board Model Rules of 1980. In Assam, Panchayats and the two types of ADCs operate in different state regions. At the same time, Manipur has Panchayats in the valley and autonomous councils constituted under state legislation for the hill districts of the state. In Meghalaya, the whole state (except some areas of Shillong) falls under the three ADCs. In Mizoram, the three ADCs covered two administrative districts. The rest of the local bodies in the state, excluding the urban parts of its capital Aizawl, are in the form of village councils, and they are governed directly by the state government through Local Administration Department. Tripura has Panchayati Raj System in areas other than the ADC areas. The ADC area in Tripura is scattered across districts, unlike other ADCs, where the territory of the ADC is usually confined to a particular region. The ten ADCs in the four states of North-east India are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule in North-east India

STATE	ADC	Area (Sq. Km.)	Population (2011 Census)	Year of Formation
ASSAM	Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC)	78438	3151047	2003
	Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC)	10434	956313	1995
	North Cachar Hills ADC (NCHADC)	4890	214102	1995
MEGHALAYA	Garo Hills ADC (GHADC)	8167	1394362	1952
	Jaintia Hills ADC (JHADC)	3819	395124	1964
	Khasi Hills ADC (KHADC)	10443	1468040	1952
MIZORAM	Chakma ADC (CADC)	686.25	45307	1987
	Lai ADC (LADC)	1870	95705	1987
	Mara ADC (MADC	1445	56366	1987
TRIPURA	Tripura Tribal Areas ADC (TTAADC)	7132	1265838	1979

Sources: Websites of the ADCs

Grassroots Governance in the ADCs

In the ADCs under the Sixth Schedule, the provisions for constituting grassroots local governments are given in Section 4, which empowers the regional councils/district councils to make rules regarding the formation and functioning of village councils in their respective areas. Accordingly, Village Councils/Village Committees are formed in some of the ADCs, butin some ADCs, the traditional system of governance continues.As local governments at the village level in ADCs are not constitutionally recognised, as in the case of Panchayats, the functioning and pace of decentralisation to these local governments solely depends on the ADCs. An overview of grassroots governance in each of the four states is mentioned briefly in Table 2.

Table 2: Overview of Grassroots Governance under the ADCs of the Sixth Schedule areas in North-east India

State	Features of Grassroots Governance under ADCs
Assam	• In BTC, two local bodies existed along the lines of the Panchayats called Territorial Constituency Level Coordination Committee (TCLCC) and the Village Councils Development Committee (VCDC). The former functions at the block level and the latter at the village level, and the BTC subsumes the role of district-level administration. Usually, a VCDC has jurisdiction over 7 to 10 villages covering a population of 4000 to 7000. A VCDC comprises a chairman and at least one representative from each revenue village. • In NCHADC, the traditional Village Council comprising all heads of households, including one Sarkari Gaon Burah (SGB), exists. However, elected village-level bodies are absent in the area. • In KAAC, Each village has a hereditary headman, who can be removed only through impeachment. While the council does not provide for village-level representative bodies in rural areas, it has constituted several town committees.

Meghalaya	• A well-developed traditional institution of local government existed in the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo Hills before the colonisation of the area by the British. • After independence, the District Councils appointed the traditionally elected chiefs or traditional heads such as Syiems, Dollois, Wadadars, and Lyngdohships. In the case of selecting A. King Nokmaship amongst the Garo community, the traditional way of selection continued unaffected. • More recently, bills were passed by the ADCs and assented by the Governor in JHADC and KHADC for establishing village administration in the name of the "WahehShnong' and Village Development Committee in 2015 and 2021, respectively. These two bodies exist and are meant to function alongside traditional institutions.
Mizoram	• Mizoram abolished the traditional chieftainship, and Village Councils have become the state's only form of village governance since 1954. After attaining statehood, the village administration in Mizoram continues to function based on elected Village Councils. Accordingly, the three ADCs in the Sixth Scheduled areas of Mizoram also have elected bodies of Village Councils. Each ADCs enacted laws to form VCs in their respective council areas. • Currently, VCs in the CADC function as per Chakma Autonomous District Council Village Council Act 2003, while VCs in LADC as per the Lai Autonomous District Council Village Council Act 2010, and the VCs in MADC function as per the Mara Autonomous District Council Act 1974.
Tripura	• Village-level governance under TTAADC is termed "Village Committee," which derives its power and duties under sections 20 and 21 of the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District (Establishment of Village Committee) Act 1994. The VCs are also vested with certain powers and responsibilities for implementing developmental schemes of the state and central governments.

Sources: Acts and Provisions of the ADCs

We can see from Table 2 that most of the ADCs across the states have enacted laws to establish village-level bodies as provided in the Sixth Schedule. However, their grassroots governance has no uniformity in the model and provisions, unlike Panchayats. This could contribute to the problem of formulating a general local indicator framework of SDGs for all the villages in the ADCs across the states. Since the traditional system of village governance, along with the elected system of the village council, still exist under the Sixth Schedule, it became a significant challenge to understand the intricacies involved in localising the SDGs in the ADCs.

III. The Role of Local Government in Localising SDGs

According to Musgrave (1959), the government has three roles, namely, allocation of resources, distribution of resources, and stabilisation of the economy. Of the three, the local government's role is mainly in allocating resources, which refers to the provisioning of socially desirable public goods. Sharpe (1970) argues that the strongest justification for local government is its claim to be an efficient provider of services rather than its role as a defender of liberty or democracy. Oates (1977) demonstrates that sub-central governments' provision of public services, in the absence of scale economies, can result in significant welfare gains compared to the centralised solution of uniform supply. This theme seems to be highlighted under the modern government charged with economic planning (Hill, 1976). Some pluralist commentators similarly view allocative efficiency in terms of responsiveness (Smith, 1985). They argue that needs vary from locality to locality, as do wishes and concerns. Those local needs should be locally defined for the provision of appropriate services, for constant innovation, and for maximised public choice (Hambleton, 1988).

Local action plays a key role in advancing the SDGs by developing and implementing firm strategies, methods and instruments, taking contextual factors into account, and mobilising relevant and affected factors (Ansell et al., 2022). Local actors are considered to be intermediaries, which are defined as actors and platforms that positively influence sustainability

transition processes by linking actors and activities and their related skills and resources or by connecting transition visions and demands of networks of actors with existing regimes.The role of intermediaries in innovation and science and technology studies has long been acknowledged and has also been evolving in the context of sustainability (Kivimaa et al., 2019). Several studies on sustainable transitions have determined various intermediaries as key actors that connect different stakeholders to catalyse the process of sustainable development (Hodson et al., 2013).

Local governments are recognised as one intermediary in facilitating sustainable development. According to Bush et al. (2017), they are the only local actors with responsibilities and interests across all sectors. Gustafsson and Mignon (2020)also determined that they have the best potential to act as intermediaries because of their mandates, legitimacy, involvement with different sectors, and accumulation of experiences at the local level. Such a role necessitates understanding the role of local governments as intermediaries in-between collaboration or network governance with increasing resource needs, funding opportunities, andthe increasing number of stakeholders involved in SDG localisation (Okitasari et al., 2021).

IV. Efforts on Localising SDGs

While localisation was also promoted in the context of MDGs, the concept was introduced only in its implementation period. It was highlighted as a core necessity during the midterm evaluation in 2008, which indicated that the success of MDGs required ownership, local accountability, and efforts to keep local institutions (UN, 2008). Deriving from the MDG experiences, it has now been well established that achieving the SDGs strongly depends on local contributions and the capacities of local governments (Oosterhof, 2018).Slack (2014) identified the critical focus area that needs attention,including, among other things, identifying local stakeholders for implementing the framework, analysing and defining the role and function of local governments in implementing targets,defining mechanisms and processes to facilitate implementation processes and identifying capacity

gaps of local stakeholders; linking the process related discussions to the thematic areas agreed by the open working group. The challenges to localising SDGs globally, especially in developing countries, highlighted by Reddy (2016), include capacity development and institutional building, decentralisation and constitutional protection, adequate funding, weak local governance and accountability, high levels of corruption and access to local data.

Musekiwa and Mandiyanike (2017)analysed how the Botswana government could utilise the experiences of implementing the UN MDGs to localise the SDGs. They suggested the explicit recognition of local government as primary stakeholders, capacity building to enable local governments to deliver their mandated responsibilities and capacity building among local citizens and civil society to enable them to hold their local government accountable.Chakradhar and Pisupati (2018)gave accounts of SDG localisation efforts in San Jose, California, and Baltimore, Maryland, both in the US. In the former,the alignment of the city's existing long-term development strategy,'Envision San Jose 2040', was determined, and recommendations were made accordingly for SDG integration. In the latter, the SDG executive team identified a total of 56 indicators across the 17 SDGs, presented to and scored by the representatives who attended the 'Baltimore Data Day' which was compiled to create a 'draft Baltimore SDG Index' and from which the city identified a 5-year target for each indicator along with action plans to achieve those targets.Dziva and Kabonga (2021) studied the opportunities and challenges for Zimbabwe's local governments in localising SDGs. They found that the potential of the local governments to localise SDGs is limited by institutional capacity, resource constraints, limited autonomy and imperfect flow of information and data on SDGs, political patronage and corruption tendencies. They vouch for capacity building and resourcing of local institutions and their leaders to understand and effectively localise SDGs. A case study on Timor-Leste by Jain et al. (2021) also found the stakeholder inability to articulate a clear vision for the SDGs, lack of human capital and funds, a weak public administrative

system, strong political nuances, and poor governance infrastructure to support multi-stakeholder relationships.Yusof et al.(2022)review different strategies for the localisation of SDGs in four countries of South East Asia and found that the localisation of SDGs had been performed in the region mainly under three contexts, which include a) green initiatives and policy measures, b) stakeholders' partnership and c)public participation mechanism.

In India, NITI Aayog (2019) pointed out that empowering local self-governanceinstitutions at the sub-state level is the single most effective strategy for ensuring community ownership and integration of SDGs at the grassroots level since their members are directly elected by the people and are mandated to undertake planning exercises in consultation with the community. It also suggested that effective localisation would need to involve developing mechanisms for building rural-urban synergiesand linking budgets to the local plans, which in turn requires an approach that fosters vertical and horizontal convergence and capacity building for institutions at the local levels. Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2022), the Government of India has adopted a thematic approach to SDGs, which isan approach to ensure 'local action' for achieving a 'global plan.' The approach aims to localise SDGs in rural areas through Panchayats, particularly Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP), by clubbing 17 'goals' into 'ninethemes'. Those ninethemes include:1)Poverty-free and enhanced livelihoods village 2) Healthy village 3) Child-friendly village 4) Water sufficient village 5) Clean and Green village 6) Self-sufficient infrastructure in village 7) Socially secured village 8) Village with good governance 9) Engendered development in the village. According to Chakradhar and Pisupati (2018), the localisation of SDGs through GPDP presents a natural synergy between the two initiatives and provides GPs with a vision for development that is in sync with national and global priorities, providing the local thrust that is required for the SDGs to be a reality.On the other hand, a study by Vaidya and Vaidya (2018)highlighted that urban local bodies (ULBs) couldsynchronise their plans with SDGs by preparing a statutory master

plan or urban mission-linked city development plans.Moreover, each of the 18 functions of the ULBs mandated under the 74th Amendment contributes directly to realising India's commitment to the SDGs. They suggested and discussed three SDGs most relevant to ULBs, including SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere; SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all; and SDG11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. Bhatnagar et al. (2018)analysed the synergies between SDG 11 and India's Smart Cities Mission (SCM), launched in June 2015 and the UN New Urban Agenda (NUA). They found that eight out of ten SDG 11 targets conform to the SCM guidelines, and forty-six transformative commitments conformed to the ten targets of SDG 11. Notably, among the ADCs, BTC has launched its vision for achieving SDGs called'Peaceful, Green and Smart Bodoland', which was prepared through consultation across different departments of the council(The Hills Times, 2022). However, similar initiatives from other councils are not found.

V. Dovetailing the PRI thematic approach to SDGs with the ADCs: A Key Challenge

While exploring the relevance and direct applicability of the Panchayat's thematic approach to the SDGs,we acknowledge an issue of distinctiveness in the institutional structure of the Panchayats and the ADCs. While Panchayats have a more functional body at the grassroots/village level than at the block and the district level, the reverse is true of the ADCs, with a more functional body at the district level than at the village level. Moreover, the village administration in the ADCs does not have a parallel provision like the GPDP and often cannot exercise their roles and functions autonomously and effectively but rather work as an agency of the higher-level governments. Therefore, a successful localisation of SDGs involving not only influence from the higher tier of governments but also a bottom-up approach enabling these village bodies to exercise their roles and functions as mentioned in their enabling acts passed by the ADCs is needed. For this purpose, we examined the Village Development Councils/Village Councils/

Village Committees (hereafter village bodies)acts of the ADCs and found their connection with the Panchayats' local goals and local action points for localising SDGs. However, out of the ten ADCs, we could collect enabling acts of village bodies of the six ADCs, leaving out the three ADCs in Assam and GHADC from Meghalaya. As mentioned in Table 1, these four ADCs are governed more or less by traditional institutions at the grassroots level instead of established village bodies' acts. For the six ADCs we studied, we used their enabling acts/provisions as listed in Table 3.

Table 3: Enabling VC/VDC Acts of ADCs

State	ADC	Enabling VC/VDC Acts
Meghalaya	JHADC	The Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Establishment of Elaka and Village and Election, Appointment, Powers, Functions, and Jurisdiction of Dolloi/Sirdar and WahehShnong) Act, 2015
	KHADC	The Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Village and Town Development Council) Act, 2021
Mizoram	CADC	Chakma Autonomous District Council (Village Councils) Act, 2003
	LADC	The Lai Autonomous District Council (Village Councils) Act, 2010
	MADC	The Mara Autonomous District Council (Village Council) Act, 1974
Tripura	TTAADC	The Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District (Establishment of Village Committee) Act 1994

Based on the provisions of the above acts, we examined the nine themes of Panchayats in localising SDGs as given by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2023) and saw their applicability in the village bodies of the ADCs. For some themes, we also suggest a common goal(s) under which the village bodies of the ADCs might be activated to work for effective localisation.

Theme 1: Poverty-free and enhanced livelihoods village.

Corresponding to this theme, there are three local goals and seven local action points. This theme reflects SDGs 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,11,13 and 15.The area in which village bodies of the ADCs may participate includes.

- *Identification and selection of eligible beneficiaries under livelihood and social protection schemes*: Village bodies under both KHADC and MADC have provisions that enable them to participate in beneficiary selection. Village bodies under CADC and LADC do not directly have such provisions but have a provision that enables them to 'supply local information as and when required to the District Council or the State Government.' In JHADC, the *Waheh Shnong* which is the chairman of the village committee called *Dorbar Shnong* and is responsible for 'rendering all help and assistance to the District Council authority and government departments/agencies in all the programmes connecting with the development and upliftment of the village.' In the case of TTAADC, there is no such specific provision in the enabling act that would give the village bodies the responsibility to supply such information regarding beneficiaries. However, since the village bodies are the 'Executive Agency' for all the minor development schemes for their village areas, they can perform this duty legally.

- *Economic development and employment generation through individual/ collective Panchayat enterprises:* Village bodies under KHADC have a provision to 'promote the livelihoods and food security of the inhabitants by taking up various kinds of developmental activities.' The *Waheh Shnong* of the JHADC is also entrusted to 'the administration and affairs of the village ensuring progress and prosperity of the village.' However, there is no direct provision concerning this in the village bodies'act of the other four ADCs. The matter is a challenge for the ADCs to take up, as skill training and improvement of land productivity, and strengthening of self-help groups are necessary at the village level.

Theme 2: Healthy Village

This theme reflects goal number 2&3 of the SDG, and it envisions ensuring healthy lives and well-being for all ages. It aims to eradicate all forms of hunger and malnutrition from all community sections by promoting sustainable and integrated agriculture, improving nutritional status among

children, adolescents, women, and older people, and providing access to safe and quality health services. It has eight local goals and eight local action points. The following are the points where the village bodies can work on this theme based on their existing provisions.

- *Enroll, Ensure, and Monitor people of health-related programs and issues*: The village bodies of the three ADCs in Mizoram, viz. CADC, LADC, and MADC have similar provisions which entrusted them to take 'measures necessary for the preservation of public health,' 'taking of curative measures and preventive measures in respect of an epidemic,' and Anti-Malaria and anti-Kala-azar measures.' KHADC has provisions that enable the village bodies to 'train inhabitants of the village or town in various aspects concerning health and hygiene…' while the village bodies in JHADC does not have direct provision relating to this, and this seems a challenge under both the ADCs. VDCs under TTADC have a provision that gives them the responsibility for 'taking of curative and preventive measures of the epidemic diseases.'

- *Promotion of sustainable and integrated agriculture*: The village administration under different ADCs have different roles in agriculture and land-related issues in their respective areas. In CADC, LADC, and MADC, the village bodies are empowered to 'distribute *Jhum* land and subsidiary *Jhum* land for shifting cultivation.' KHADC has a provision to 'conduct and initiate sustainable management of natural resources .' At the same time, in JHADC, the *Waheh Shnong* is given the power and function for maintaining 'ecological balance.' In contrast, TTAADC has no specific provision that can be attributed to promoting sustainable and integrated agriculture.

Theme 3: Child-Friendly Panchayat

The vision of this theme is to ensure that all children have access to a safe and protected environment and quality education and health services. It reflects goalsnumbers 1,2,3,4 and 5 of the SDG and has seven local goals and nine local action points. While there are no direct provisions addressing

the concerns of children in particular, the village bodies have certain powers and functions which could enable them to provide a child-friendly village or community. For instance, apart from their responsibilities regarding public health mentioned in the previous point, the village bodies under the TTAADC are empowered with the function of 'maintenance of children, adult and women education.' The three ADCs of Mizoram have a provision that gives them the power and function for the 'establishment and maintenance of libraries and reading rooms, cultural clubs or other places for recreation and games,' which could be utilised for learning spaces for children. However, other specific provisions relating to this theme are not found concerning the remaining ADCs. Still, their general function regarding public health and the welfare of the people in the village may be sufficient to empower them to act towards achieving the goals and action points under this theme.

Theme 4: Water Sufficient Village

This theme envisions a village with functional house tap connections to all, with a targeted standard of quality water supply, good water management, adequate water availability for agriculture and all needs, water recycling, and harvesting. It has seven local goals and fourteen local action points and reflects goals 6 and 15 of the SDGs. The current powers and functions of the village bodies can be clubbed together under the following theme:

- *Ensuring access to adequate clean water and sanitation facilities in the villages:* Provisions related to this goal are found in all the village bodies' Acts. In all the three ADCs of Mizoram, there is a provision for 'sanitation and conservancy in the village area' and 'maintenance and improvement of village communications, drains, and waterways.' In JHADC, the *Waheh Shnong* has the powers and functions for maintaining 'ecological balance, cleanliness in the village in the village roads, public roads and footpaths, water sources and the like nature.' At the same time, in KHADC, the village bodies are not directly entrusted with water management. However, their role in this area exists in 'training the inhabitants of the village or towns in various aspects concerning health and hygiene, waste disposal etc.' Village

bodies under the TTAADC also have their functions such as 'sanitation and conservancy of the village areas', 'cleaning and maintaining of village roads and paths' and 'construction, maintenance, and improvement of village wells and tanks for the supply of water to the villagers for drinking, washing and bathing purposes.'

Theme 5: Clean and Green Village

This theme aims to create a village for the future of the children, which is lush and green with nature's bounty, using renewable energy, clean, protecting the environment, and climate-resilient. It has four local goals and ten local action points and reflects goal numbers 6, 7,12,13,14, and 15 of the SDG. The village bodies may be encouraged to act on the following goal based on their provisions.

- *Ensuring the conservation of biodiversity and sustainability of ecosystems:*The three ADCs of Mizoram are entrusted with functions including "conservancy' and 'planting of trees at the site of public places, on village roads and paths and taking care of them.' In JHADC, the *Waheh Shnong* is entrusted with 'maintaining ecological balance,' and the village bodies in KHADC are entrusted to 'conduct an assessment and initiate sustainable management of natural resources.' In TTAADC, the village bodies are entrusted with the general task of 'conservancy' in their area.

Theme 6: Self-Sufficient Infrastructure Gram Panchayat

The vision of this theme is to achieve self-sufficient infrastructure and ensure access for all to adequate, safe, affordable housing and basic services. It has four local goals and seven local action points and relates to goal numbers 1, 2, 4,5, 6, 9, and 11 of the SDG. Villages under ADCs are empowered in various ways to fulfil this task. For instance, the three ADCs in Mizoram are entrusted with the 'construction, maintenance and improvement of village communication, drains and waterways,' 'working and maintenance of public radio sets for the benefit of the villagers,' and 'establishment and maintenance of libraries, reading-rooms, social and

cultural clubs or other places for recreation and games.' The village bodies under the TTAADC are entrusted with the 'construction, maintenance and improvement of the village well and tanks for the supply of water to the villagers' and 'maintenance and construction of new building and houses'. In JHADC and KHADC, direct power and function regarding infrastructure are yet to be allotted to the village bodies.

Theme 7: Socially Secured Village

This theme envisions that every person in the village must feel cared for, and social security systems must cover all eligible. It has five local goals and four local action points. The common point on which the villages in the ADCs could work is given as follows.

- *Implementing and ensuring social protection schemes for all*: Most villages under the six ADCs have their role in selecting beneficiaries, as mentioned in the first theme. Apart from this, they can facilitate the implementation of employment programmes such as MGNREGA and help register people under the public distribution system. For instance, village bodies under the ADCs in Mizoram have provisions regarding 'measures of public utility calculated to promote the moral and material well-being of the villagers.' Village bodies in KHADC have provisions such as to 'promote and improve the livelihoods and food security of the inhabitants by taking up various kinds of developmental activities,' 'identify and select individual beneficiaries whether Below Poverty Line (BPL) or Above Poverty Line (APL) for various development schemes/projects/programmes of the government and the district council' and to 'identify and select beneficiary in various welfare schemes.' JHADC has no specific function allotted to its village bodies apart from being entrusted to "ensuring progress and prosperity of the village". No specific function relating to this theme is found in the provisions for the village bodies of the TTAADC.

Theme 8: Villages with Good Governance

The vision of this theme is to ensure the benefits of development under various schemes and responsive service delivery to all residents of GP

through Good Governance. It has four local goals and eight local action points. It reflects goal number 16 of the SDG. For this purpose, KHADC has empowered its village bodies to 'train itself to monitor and evaluate projects/ schemes of the government and the District Council' and to 'facilitate SHGs, potential entrepreneurs and micro-enterprise, village associations for the youth and women'. However, village bodies of other ADCs do not have direct provisions regarding the theme. Still, certain goals, including coordination and convergence among various institutions/stakeholders for the preparation of village plans and promoting better public service delivery by use of technology, can be accomplished through other provisions and functions.

Theme 9: Engendered Development in Villages

The vision of this theme is to achieve gender equality, provide equal opportunities, and empower women and girls in a safe environment. It has four local goals and thirteen local action points, reflecting goal numbers 1,2,3,4,5 and 8 of the SDGs. If we scan through the village bodies' provisions of all the six ADCs,specific provisions which empower them to fulfil the goals and local action points of the theme are not found. While efforts can be made to work on this theme through other provisions, it seems imperative to stress the importance of this theme at the ADC level and incorporate the same in the village bodies' acts.

We can establish from the above points that the enabling acts of the village bodies of the ADCs have several provisions for incorporating a number of the local goals and action points of the Panchayat's thematic approach. Nonetheless, as also pointed out, these village bodies are not always empowered in their provisions to take the necessary actions for the goals that necessitate strengthening their provisions and encouraging them to take action.

VI. Prospective role of the ADCs in achieving SDGs at the District or Regional Level

Since the ADCs are vested with powers and functions primarily undertaken at a district or regional level, we also examine and identify the areas where

they could contribute towards realising the targets and indicators of the 17 SDGs. As all the ADCs are subjected to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, the particular SDG targets and indicators are presented and juxtaposed with the provision of the Sixth Schedule, where they are possibly linked with the current role of the ADCs. The observation is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Goals, Targets, and Indicators of SDGs in line with provisions of the Sixth Schedule

Goal	Targets & Indicators	Role of ADCs (based on VI Schedule)
Goal 1: No Poverty	Target 1.5; Indicator1.5.4 – Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies with national disaster risk reduction strategies.	ADCs are not directly assigned the disaster risk reduction/management, but they can be an instrument in adopting state government policies.
	Target 1. a; Indicator 1.a.2 – Proportion of total government spending on essential services (education, health, and social protection.)	Section 6, Sub-section 1) empowers the ADCs to manage primary education. Section 3, Sub-section 1) Clause (f) empowers the ADCs to take care of health and sanitation, and Clausei) and Clause j) deal with marriage and divorce and social customs, respectively.
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	Target 2.4; Indicator 2.4.1 Proportion of agricultural area under productive and sustainable agriculture	Section 3, Sub-section 1 Clause (a) empowers the ADCs to allot land for agriculture. Clause (c) and Clause (d) also deal with canals for agriculture and regulation of jhum cultivation.
Goal 3: Good Health and Well Being	Target 3.9; Indicator 3.9.2 – Mortality rate attributed to unsafe water, unsafe sanitation, and lack of hygiene.	Section 3, Sub-section 1, Clause (f) empowers the ADCs to care for public health and sanitation.

Goal 4: Quality Education	Target 4.1; Indicator 4.1.1 Proportion of children and young people (a) in grades 2/3; (b) at the end of primary; and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex	Section 6, Sub-section 1 empowered the ADCs to establish, construct or manage primary schools.
Goal 5: Gender Equality	Target 5.5; Indicator 5.5.1 – Proportion of seats held by women in (a) national parliaments and (b)local governments Indicator 5.5.2 - Proportion of women in managerial positions.	Section 2, Sub-section 7, Clause (a) and Clause (b) gives power to ADCs regarding the formation of local/regional councils and their conduct of business. Section 3, Sub-section 1, Clause (i) and Clause (j) deal with making laws regarding marriage and divorce and social customs where gender-related issues can be tackled.
Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation	Target 6.2; Indicator 6.2.1 – Proportion of population using (a) safely managed sanitation services and (b) a hand washing facility with soap and water.	Section 3, Sub-section 1, Clause (f) empowers the ADCs to take care of public health and sanitation.
	Target 6. b; Indicator 6.b.1 – Proportion of local administrative units with established and operational policies and procedures for participation of local communities in water and sanitation management.	
Goal 13: Climate Action	Target 13.1; Indicator 13.1.2 – Proportion of local governments that adopt and implement local disaster risk reduction strategies with national disaster risk reduction strategies.	ADCs are not directly assigned the disaster risk reduction/management. Their other functions can be channelled toward this goal.
Goal 15: Life on Land	Target 15.1; Indicator 15.1.1-Forest area as a proportion of the total land area.	Section 3, Sub-section 1, Clause (b) empowers ADCs to manage forests other than reserved forests.
	Target 15.2; Indicator 15.2.1- Progress toward sustainable forest management.	

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	Target 16.7; Indicator 16.7.1-Proportions of positions in national and local institutions, including (a) the legislatures; (b) the public service; and (c) the judiciary, compared to national distributions of sex, age, disability, and population group.	Section 2, Sub-section 7, Clause (a) and Clause (b) gives power to ADCs regarding the formation of local/regional councils and their conduct of business. Section 3, Sub-section 1 Clause (i) and Clause (j) deal with making laws regarding marriage and divorce and social customs.
Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals	Target 17.1; Indicator 17.1.2 – Proportion of domestic budget funded by domestic taxes.	Section 7 laid down provisions for district and regional funds of ADCs, and Section 8 empowered the ADCs to collect land revenue and impose taxes.

Sources: Sustainable Development Goals of the UN & Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution

As shown in Table 4, targets and indicators of the ten SDGs out of 17 goals are identified to have a closer connection with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. A policy framework may be prepared for all the ADCs uniformly concerning each program. The amendment of the Sixth Schedule in 1995 also provides additional powers to some ADCs, including NCHADC and the KAAC. Similarly, the amendment of the Sixth Schedule in 2003 also confers certain additional powers to the BTC. The provisions of these amendments unfolded another area for a critical discourse that we acknowledge but will not include in the current study as we confine ourselves to our initial focus on mapping the SDGs based on their common constitutional provisions. Accordingly, based on the observations presented in Table 4, eight key themes are suggested for the ADCs to facilitate the successful localisation of SDGs in the Sixth Schedule areas in general.

ADC Theme 1 - Resilient and Climate-Sensitive Region

Implementation of national and state disaster/reduction policies to reduce exposure of the poor to climate-related extreme events. This will help in the progress toward both Goal 1 and Goal 13.

ADC Theme 2 - Clean and Healthy Region

Focus on public health and sanitation as empowered by Section 3, Sub-section 1, Clause (f) of the Sixth Schedule. This could enhance progress toward achieving Goal 1, Goal 3, and Goal 6.

ADC Theme 3 - Region of Productive and Sustainable Agriculture

As empowered by Section 3, Sub-section 1 of the Sixth Schedule to make laws and regulations regarding agriculture in the region, the ADCs can utilise this provision towards achieving productive and sustainable agriculture. This will help us progress toward Goal 2.

ADC Theme 4 - Region of Equitable and Quality Primary Education

Section 6, Sub-section 1 empowered the ADCs to take care of primary education in their area. This will be helpful in achieving Goal 4.

ADC Theme 5 - Gender-Sensitive Region

Goal 4, gender equality, can be achieved by ensuring that a more significant proportion of women occupy elected seats in the local government and managerial positions. This is enabled by Section 2, Sub-section 7, Clause (a) and Clause (b) of the Sixth Schedule.

ADC Theme 6 - Green Region

Forest management within their region is an important task entrusted to the ADCs, as given in Section 3, para 1 (b) of the Sixth Schedule. This will enhance progress towards Goal 15.

ADC Theme 7 - Region of Institutional Resilience

The ADCs are empowered to administer justice in their area by Section 4 of the Sixth Schedule. Moreover, Section 2, Sub-section 7 Clause (a) and Clause (b) empower them to form regional and village councils, and Section 3, Sub-section 1, Clause (i) and Clause (j) deal with making laws regarding marriage and divorce as well as social customs which could become an essential tool for ensuring peace, justice, and strong institutions as given in Goal 16.

ADC Theme 8 - Fiscally Decentralized Region

Domestic resource mobilisation is an essential target of Goal 17. Decentralising spending and taxing power isnecessary to increase the proportion of the domestic budget funded by domestic taxes. ADCs are empowered in this area through Sections 7 and 8 of the Sixth Schedule.

The above themes can be utilised to identify the areas in which the ADCs can contribute to the progress toward SDGs. The next step to successful localisation would involve mapping targets and a local indicator framework at the ADC level, as in the case of Panchayats at the village level. Due to certain gaps in information on the operations of the particular ADCs in each state, the task would involve case studies of each ADCs. This is a limitation of our present study and extends beyond the scope of our current exercise, which only illuminates the scope of localisation of SDGs as mentioned in their legislative provisions.

VII. Conclusion

The effective localisation of SDGs in the ADCs of the Sixth Schedule area may be done using the bottom-up approach by empowering the local governments at the village or district/regional level using their enabling legislation. The thematic approach of the Panchayats could be used as a blueprint to formulate local goals and local action points for the villages in the ADCs or dovetail the same with the enabling acts of the village bodies in the ADC areas. Since many targets and indicators of the SDGs are found to be linked with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, the bottom-up approach could also be utilised to formulate themes, goals, and action points at the ADC level. We hope that our present study illuminates the possibility of such an exercise.

We also acknowledge the limitation of our analysis since our study is confined to the SDGs' conformity with the enabling legislations and bare acts of the village bodies and the Sixth Schedule. It is our belief that for effective bottom-up localisation of SDGs in the ADCs, especially in the

villages, these enabling acts and provisions should be the basis of policy formulation. The major challenge that remains is understanding the effectiveness of the existing acts and the possibility of amending those acts to best suit the localisation of SDGs at the village or the ADC level. This is a demanding and necessary task that could be further explored by involving case studies and interaction with stakeholders at the local level.

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The Quest for Governance in Northeast India: A Critical Appraisal of Sixth Schedule in Bodoland

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Abstract

The problems that the Northeast region encompassed have no precedence, as ethnic nationhood started emerging, with demands for autonomy and separation. The non-state spaces which prevailed in the region during the British colonialism under the Excluded and Partially excluded areas have garnered political mobility alongside India's national building process. The immediate explosion was recorded in the Naga hills, but it soon engulfed the entire region with violent secessionism. Initially it was perceived as military adventurism, but as time passed, the situation in Northeast India had eclipsed into a parochialism and exclusivist mindset for homogenous territorial spaces. It is here in this context that this paper is going to look into the ethnic homeland demands by the tribal populations of the Northeast region. Under the heads for governance and autonomy, the ethnic mobilisation in the region is multi-faceted which include memorandums, protest, agitations, ethnic riots and insurgencies. This research study exclusively focuses on the ethnic mobilisation of Bodo tribes of Assam and how a political upheaval under the sixth schedule of the constitution is pacifying social-political unrest in the region.

Keywords*: Autonomy, Bodoland, Ethnicity, Governance, Sixth Schedule, Tribal*

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Introduction

Assertion of ethnic identities is a prominent trend across the developing world especially during the post cold war era. Post colonial states are struggling to accommodate various ethnic identities under a single political umbrella. Conflict among these ethnic groups have degenerated the socio-political institutions in third world countries. Mistrust and insecurity feelings are the most important factors that are instigating the clashes between these ethnic groups. Ethnic movements have become a serious concern for post-colonial nation-states and finding asolution to these problems is a topic of intense debate. Meanwhile, conflicts in India's Northeast is of the same nature. Ethnic groups in Northeast are demanding autonomy and self-rule based on ethnicity. The differences in ethnic identities have been a contentious issue in North-eastern states of India especially in Assam. The Nagas were the first ethnic group to secede from Assam and later followed by Mizos, Khasi, Garo and Jaintias. Now this conflict is continued by Bodos, Karbis and Dimasas in Assam. Bodos are the last group of tribal people who were given autonomy under 6th schedule of the constitution and the first group to enjoy the same among the plain tribes. BTC was able to fulfil the political aspirations of Bodo people. It provided a marginal degree of self-rule guaranteed under the constitution. But violence and urge for statehood had continued to strain the politics in Bodoland. It is in this context, this paper is trying to make an investigation into the Bodoland movement, thereby analysing the impact of sixth schedule in providing political autonomy and governance to the tribal populations of Northeast.

Background

The advent of British rule had altered the existing socio-political and economic structures of governance in the present-day North-east India(Ray 2015). One of the important reasons that is attributed to such an alteration was the consistent British policy of exclusion. British divided people in the region on basis of plains and hill dwellers and segregated each other through persistent policies and laws like the Inner Line Permits, Scheduled Areas and so on.It triggered erosion in traditional communication channels that existed between the plain people and the hills people (Ray 2015). This

policy of British resulted in the segregation and seclusion of the hill people from that of the plain people and thereby decreased their mutual contacts. It led to the rise of numerous misunderstandings among them, resulting in the development of a sense of alienation and suspicion among them (Bhaumik 2009).

During the post-Independence period, this sense of alienation and suspicion didn't change much. It is because; Independent India continued the same policies and programmes of exclusion. India's exclusionist policies were embedded in the sixth schedule of constitution under the heading Autonomous Councils. Sixth schedule exempted the applicability of certain state and central laws in Autonomous Councils. This decision was flown after long deliberations in the Constituent Assembly, regarding the administrative status of tribal regions in the hills of erstwhile Assam. Framers of Indian constitution argued while adopting the sixth schedule that it will protect the ethnic identities and cultures of tribal populations and provide a minimum degree of autonomy in their local affairs. These policies of India were also intended at the integration of sparsely populated tribal regions in the far eastern part of the country into the national mainstream (Sarmah 2015).

Meanwhile, the Autonomous councils continued the exclusionist policies where it contributed in the rise of mutual suspicion among tribal and non-tribal groups. This caused the hill tribes to demand separation based on their ethnicity. Nagas were the first to demand separation from the state of Assam through armed violence. This was closely followed by the Mizos in the Lushai hill district of Assam. Consequently, all the hill areas under the erstwhile Assam was separated except for the districts of Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao.This didn't conclude the separatist demands of these groups, but aggravated the situation through the proliferation of ethnic homeland movement all across Assam and Northeast India. As a result, India's experience with granting autonomy to tribal groups of North-east is filled with troublesome history accompanied by insurgencies and ethnic conflicts.

Autonomy under Sixth Schedule

Independent India's history of North-east is an uncharted voyage through rough waters. The question of administration of North-eastern region was a debatable topic from the very beginning. Constituent Assembly debates came up with varying options to govern the region. Among them, there were three distinct models recommended for the former excluded and partially-excluded areas of North-east India (Bathari 2015). The first model emphasised on the direct supervision and governance of tribal areas under the federal government in order to prevent the sensitive tribal groups in the periphery to lead a secessionist movement. The second model advocated for the control of tribal areas under provisional governments, with an intended objective to assimilate the tribal populations within the local and regional landscape. The third model suggested for granting autonomy to tribal areas, in order to protect their unique cultural traits and thereby integrate them to the national mainstream. Well, the constituent assembly experimented with both integrationist and assimilative mechanism for the tribal groups of North-east. It enacted the sixth schedule to the constitution thereby establishing autonomous councils for the administration of tribal areas in the North-east. Under the sixth schedule, the tribal areas were under the superintendent of Governors of states. Constituent Assembly thought that the interactions with state governments would enable the assimilation of tribal people to regional and then intothe national mainstream. They believed that the provisions of autonomy under the sixth schedule will be able to protect the tribal identities and prevent their exploitation by non-tribal populations. Despite such cautious planning, sixth schedule has failed to fulfil the aspirations of tribal populations in Northeast India, leading to resentment against the Indian state.

According to Agnihotri (1994), governance machinery established under the sixth schedule of the constitution is intended to provide autonomy for the tribal communities with regard to the protection of land, customs and cultural identity. But it failed to do so, due to the defects and problems inherited along the working of Autonomous councils. The lack of

financial powers, conflict between traditional and modern power centres, highhandedness of state governments and others factors have undermined the effective functioning of Autonomous councils in Northeast India.

Autonomous councils are also considered as anomalies in a contingent nation state, forming into enclaves governed by different administrative machineries (Sonntag 1999).India's liberal democratic structures were able to grant autonomy to its tribal populations. It established Autonomous Councils under the sixth schedule for people residing along the eastern frontiers. The Constitution also provided provisions for the safeguard of tribal population elsewhere in the country through the fifth schedule. Apart from the Autonomous councils of North-east, Indian state had also experimented with non-sixth schedule autonomous councils in Darjeeling, Jharkhand and Uttarakhand too (Sonntag 1999).

According to Stuligross (1999), the experimentation of Autonomous District Councils (ADC's)in Northeast had met with mixed results. ADC's have made their mark in the socio-political and economic life of tribal populations in North-East India. He says, ADC's are quite successful in the social and political spheres of tribal life, as they provided a platform for political representation and social institutionalisation of the tribal society. It also helped in addressing peoples grievances and discontent. The most important benefits of ADC's are that it provided an opportunity to institutionalise the social customs and traditions of the tribal society under the purview of a modern administrative structure. In the economic sphere, ADC's are devoid of sufficient financial resources which are quite an anomaly for autonomous institutes. As a result, the infrastructural development in ADC's were in a poor state of affairs, that they became one of the most underdeveloped regions in the country.

Rise of Bodo Ethnicity and Conflict

Before discussing on the topic of ethnic identities, one should first start explaining what is ethnicity?According to Philip Q. Yang (2000) "ethnicity is an affiliation and identification with an ethnic group". Horowitz (1985)

has mentioned ethnicity as a collective feeling of belonging to a particular ancestry or common descent group. It also includes various common traits like culture, linguistic, history and racial identity that share one's belongingness in a particular ethnic group. Sometimes religion also does influence the sense of belonging to a particular group (Varshney 2003).

According to Goswami (2001)ethnicity is a complex social phenomenon and it changes in accordance with the socio-political and economic environment. Hmar tribes in Mizoram were part of the larger Kuki-Chin-Mizo ethnicity, who after the granting of statehood, started asserting a separate identity for the establishment of Autonomous Council for them. Similarly,despite having a common heritage the Pawi, Zomi and Kuki tribes in Manipur are asserting their own distinct ethnic identities. In the beginning of the 20th century, almost every tribe in Assam traced their heritage to the great Kachari tribe. But as time elapsed the exclusive homeland demands started rising as a key feature of ethnic politics in Assam. This is why, the sense of ethnicity differs from place to place, based on the factors like economic domination, political exploitation, psychological operation and so on (Goswami 2001).

Ethnicity has both positive and negative traits. Positive aspect of ethnicity is that it creates the feeling of belongingness to a common ethnic group. But when it is encompassed by negativity, ethnicity damages the social harmony and peace in a plural society. It is the negative aspects of ethnicity which causes violence and socio-political instability in the society. When the socio-economicaspirationsintertwine with ethnicity, the demand for ethnic homeland pops up. This in turn causes the rise of ethnic sensitivity whichsubsequently led to ethnic polarisation.A polarised ethnic society is fragile in peace and prone to ethnic violence. It is in this background, India's North-eastern region; particularly Assam is studied here which faces problems of ethnic sensitivity and violence. Assam is home to different ethnic groups who have their distinct cultural and linguistic traits. These groups have been residing in Assam from time immemorial and regardless of the differences in time periods; scholars believe that these groups have all

migrated to Assam at different points of time (Phukan 2013).

During the pre-Independence period, the current Northeast region was comprised of the province of Assam and two princely states (Manipur and Tripura).But after Independence, the political landscape of the region has changed dramatically. As mentioned earlier, ethnicity in multi-cultural societies are harmful to peace and social harmony. Assam had also faced a similar crisis. From the mid 1950s, this region was grabbed by ethnic conflicts and violence, which in turn resulted in the division of erstwhile Assam into five different states: Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh.Ethnic tensions in the region had also escalated due to unchecked migration of illegal migrants from neighbouring Bangladesh. This became a rallying point for various ethnic groups in Northeast India, especially in Assam to mobilise mass movements.

According to Choube (1971), the assertion of ethnic and tribal identity by the hill people of undivided Assam in the 1960's had a 'Snooker effect' in Northeast India. Along with various hill tribes who enjoy Sixth schedule status, the plain tribes of Assam also started demanding autonomy and statehood within Indian Union. The Plain Tribal Council of Assam had spearheaded the demand for a tribal state for the plain tribes of Brahmaputra valley.One of the reasons which are attributed for the rise of ethnic assertions among the tribes in Assam are due to the rising conflict between the educated tribal middle class and the decadent traditional tribal leadership (Choube 1971). The tribal aspiration for autonomy and self-realisation against the political hegemony of Assamese elite had also served as a reason for ethnic assertion.

Dash (1989) argues that the marginalisation caused by the dominant and predatory communities in Assam have pushed the plain tribes to demand separation under the flag of Udayanchal movement during the 1960's. It is to be noted that the plain tribes of Assam were exempted from the protection of fifth and sixth schedule of the constitution. Their fear of land alienation and loss of tribal identity against the influx of much advanced non-tribal

populations into their traditional lands, coupled with the lack of sufficient protection under the constitution had forced the plain tribes to assert their ethnicity and thereby demand separation from Assam.

Bodos, who were the largest tribe in Assam, was an inalienable part of the Udayanchal movement. The forced eviction of Bodos from the reserved forests had created a deep scare in Bodo consciousness. This coupled with the imposition of Assamese language in Educational institutions and government jobs had further complicated the Bodo problem. The lack of protection under Assam Accord had added fuel to the discontent of Bodo people. Addition to this, the migrant Bengali population are occupying the traditional land of Bodos,taking away their jobs and economic opportunities. Thisled to the explosion of an outright protest and violence demanding a separate Bodoland state. These developments were unanticipated by the political elites of the country who thought that the plain tribes of Assam will gradually be assimilated into the larger Assamese society (Dash 1989). The failure of policy makers had resulted in the unprecedented rise of ethnic violence between Bodos and non-Bodos. Further, the emergence of armed groups affiliated to various ethnic groups had complicated the statehood and autonomy issues in Assam.

The single largest factor that contributed to the rise of Bodo ethnicity is migration. Migration is the sole element which altered the demographic landscape of Assam. According to Udayon Misra (2012) the influxes of migrants have altered the land use pattern in Assam causing the tribal people to lose their traditional land. The alienation of tribal lands to an advanced group of settlers have forced the Bodos to move deeper into forest lands. Misra also says that migration has a long history tracing back to pre-Independence when the British brought labourers to work in the tea plantations of Assam. In the meantime, Bengali peasants and farmers were also encouraged to migrate into Assam as a policy intended to increase the agricultural productivity. The influx of migrants caused the encroachment of traditional tribal lands. Coupled with these, the indifferent attitude of Assam government towards the socio-political and economic development

of Bodo inhabited areas had influenced the rise of Bodo ethnicity.

After Assam's reorganisation, the tribalareas in hills were granted statehood. Tribal areasin the plains were offered nothing as they lived in a plural society along with other non-tribal populations. This agitated the plain tribes who started demanding separation from Assam.Bodos were one among these plain tribes who also took part in the agitation for statehood. The reason behind Bodo's participation in the agitation is the insecurity created by the large scale influx of migrants into their lands. These migrants slowly changed the demographic landscape of the region. The fear of losing their land and livelihood had compelled the Bodos and other tribes along with the larger Assamese group to trigger a mass agitation in Assam called the Anti-Foreigners agitation.This was the culmination of an old conflict that existed between the indigenous people of Assam and the migrant Bengalese. As a result Bengali migration is the most sensitive political issue in Assam, since the pre-Independence period.

Bengali migration is a volatile issue which erupted into a mass movement and thereby increased the ethnic tension between various indigenous and migrant communities. Not only Bengalese, other migrant communities of Assam like the tea tribes whose ancestors were brought to work in the tea plantations by British, the Bihari peasants and even the marvadis were all clubbed into as migrants or outsiders by the indigenous population. This lead to a tense atmosphere in Assam and people rallied instantly for the issue of migration.

Bodos are the most sensitive people in the issue of migration, ever since the signing of the Assam Accord. Assam Accord provided a constitutional guarantee for the protection of Assamese identity which made Bodos the only major group in Assam to be left out from any kind of protection against the unhindered migrations. Hence they agitated and started the Bodoland movement in 1987, two years after Assam Accord. The agitation continued for more than three decades and succeeded in the signing of three different Accords.

It is in this juncture that Basumatary (2014) says that Assam is a place which was inhabited by migrants, which resulted in it to be a crossroad for different cultures and people. He also mentioned that Bodo speaking people are one among these migrants who settled mostly along the northern banks of Brahmaputra River. It is noted that Assam is inhabited by nearly 23 tribal groups in which Bodos are the single largest among them.

Table.1 has highlighted the major tribal groups of Assam. According to this table, Bodos are the largest among them comprising of about 40.9% of the total tribal population in the state. Bodos are the aborigine people of Brahmaputra Valley. They belong to the Indo-Mongoloid ethnic group and speak Tibeto-Burman language. In pre-colonial period they were referred as Kacharis and later got recognised as Bodos (George 1994). They inhabit the districts of Kokrajhar, Baksa, Chirang, Udalguri, Barpeta, Nalbari, Darrang, Dhubri, Kamrup and Sonitpur. But majority of them are found in Udalguri, Kokrajhar, Chirang and Baksa(Goswami 2001). These four districts were part of the Bodoland Territorial Area District (BTAD) and now under the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

The rise of ethnic violence in Bodo dominated territories of western Assam is associated with the demand forBodoland. The resentment against the failure of Assam Accord to provide adequate protection to Bodo identity had led to the outbreak of Bodoland movement. The movement was launched under the leadership of All Bodo Student Council, but later different socio-political organisations and militant groups came up to the leadership. The movement was peaceful during the initial phase, but soon took a militant form as Bodos unleashed a violent campaign against other ethnic groups in the area. The violent ethnic clash and socio-political instability compelled the government to sign an Accord in 1993, leading to the formation of Bodoland Autonomous Council (Pathak 2012).

Even with this, there was no decrease in violent clashes in Bodoland area. Violent conflicts had continued as Bodos tried to push the non-Bodos from the Bodo dominated territories with an intention to extend the

territorial jurisdiction of BAC by claiming a majority. The failure of BAC to become operational had exhausted the patience of some Bodo youth who then turned to armed means to achieve statehood (Das 2012). Ten years after the first agreement, another accord was signed between the government and Bodogroups in 2003. This time the accord agreed upon the establishment of Bodoland Territorial Council under the sixth schedule of constitution, a provision entrusted only to the hill tribes of the region.

The violence for Bodoland has evolved into a complex mix of armed militancy and electoral politics by various political and non-political groups (Pathak 2012). Bodos who demanded a separate homeland and protection of their distinct identity were vigorously opposed by the non-Bodo populations. These people were opposed to the political power granted to Bodos, a minority group,at the expense of majority non-Bodos. Due to this the non-Bodos also demanded certain protection and socio-political rights for guarding their collective interest which instead aggravated the insecurity feeling among the Bodos leading to more conflict and violence (Nath 2003).

Meanwhile, the expansion of Christianity is an influential factor in the development of ethnicity among various tribes in Northeast India. It helped first in breeding a new group of tribesmen who were educated in English language and became the new middle class in the tribal societies. This group, during the colonial period challenged the traditional power structures of tribal society and later demanded self-rule and secession in the post colonial period. Their struggle for political power were initially addressed under the sixth schedule but later statehood within India Union was granted to them. But still, violence continued as more and more groups demanded autonomy and separation. And Bodos are the last group of tribal people in Assam who secured autonomy under constitutional provisions. Consequently, Kumar (2005) says that the occurrence of ethnic conflicts in Northeast India is attributed to the struggle by various ethnic and tribal groups for political and economic power.

The Bodos felt that they were politically suppressed, economically

neglected and socially alienated by the dominant Assamese groups. It is these feelings that developed into an insecurity causing the Bodos to submit a memorandum to Simon Commission in 1929,demanding tribal rights (Misra 2012).Gradually this demand for tribal rights turned out into separatist tendencies as the tribal populations in the plains of Brahmaputra started demanding autonomy and self-governance.Feeling of insecurity was the main driving force behind the secessionist aspirations of Bodo people. This feeling got strengthened when Assamese language was imposed upon the tribal people of the state. As a result, tribal people agitated against the apathetic attitude of Assam government, thus leading to the rise of tribal identity assertion among various ethnic groups in Assam, including the Bodos.

Table.2 has highlighted various ethnic conflicts between Bodos and Non-Bodos in Assam. It also shows how sensitive the ethnic situation is in Bodo inhibited area that it caused more than nine major ethnic riots since 1993.It also reflected the magnitude of insecurity misperception which is driving the Bodos into conflict with other ethnic groups.

Bodos under Sixth Schedule

The resolution of Bodo insurgency is one of the most remarkable feat of political engineering in an insurgency-torn environment. The adoption of sixth schedule in Bodo dominated territories of western Assam has been both critically appraised and an issue of controversy. The Bodoland Territorial Council has provided a significant level of autonomy and self-governance to Bodo people to fulfil their political, economic and socio-cultural aspirations. People on the other hand also questioned the applicability of such an arrangement in a multi-ethnic society. This led to friction between Bodos and various non-Bodo ethnic groups in the Bodoland (Economic and Political Weekly 2008).

In the meantime,scholars questioned the plausibility of granting certain privileges to a minority while denying the same to a majority in a democratic setup. Sanjib Baruah (2003) argues that the policy of protective

discrimination under sixth schedule of the constitution is violating the principles of equality and considering a group of people as second class citizens. He also says that the provisions of sixth schedule has become obsolete since the originally envisaged autonomous councils are full-fledged states under the Indian Union. He also questions the suitability of sixth schedule among the plain tribes who resides in a multi-ethnic society.

One of the most noted feature of BTC is the impact it had on the people of BTAD. Baro (2017) argues that the adoption of sixth schedule has facilitated the overall development of infrastructure in BTAD. This was possible due to the fact that Bodos were given political autonomy to decide upon the developmental agendas for themselves. Baro again states that the improvement in political and infrastructural development was not any guarantee for the socio-economic progress of people whose standard of living and education was still in a poor state of affairs. The reason attributed to this condition is the association of Bodo ethnicity with that of insurgency and sectarian violence which worsened the ethnic tensions leading to further conflicts. It invariably led to the destruction of social harmony and economic wellbeing of the people in BTAD.

Establishment of political institutions based on ethnic lines to achieve autonomy and self-governance were detrimental in BTAD. It nurtured a political space among other marginalised ethnic groups who are now demanding similar political concessions. This led to violent conflict between Bodos and non-Bodo communities. The electoral politics in BTC have given Bodos a dominant share in the power structures who were otherwise denied of it, due to their smaller strength. Notwithstanding any of these, the overall political appeal of Bodo people have increased in Assam ever since 2003, consequently helping them to share power in the state cabinet too (Basumatary 2018).

The political space that developed after the formation of BTC was unprecedented in Bodo history. It increased the participation of Bodo people in political activities like never before. This subsequently led to

the increase in political consciousness among Bodo people (Karjie 2017). Though the Bodos are in a minority in BTAD, Bodoland People's Front which is the dominant political party representing the Bodo people have successfully captured power in the BTC Executive Body in the first three consecutive terms. It even became the single largest party in BTC after the election in 2020, but failed to form the executive body. BPF also enjoyeda relatively small support among the non-bodo communities in BTAD. This led to the allegation against BPF that it is pursuing an appeasement policy towards the non-Bodos especially the Bengali Muslim populations. Despite this, the politics in BTAD revolves around the fear of land alienation and demographic change. It is largely due to the lack of prominent Bodo political parties, other than BPF, for a much longer period in Bodoland which could stir the Bodo politics. Apart from this, the inclusion of non-Bodos in the executive body of BTC was also a remarkable achievement, where there is a majority reserved for the tribes(Karjie 2017).

One of the major drawbacks of sixth schedule is its inability to deliver effective governance to the tribal populations, as envisaged by the constituent assembly. The deliberations in constituent assembly to adopt sixth schedule was based upon the recommendations of Bordoloi sub-committee.Under the sixth schedule of constitution, autonomy granted to the hill tribes of Northeast is significantly meagre, and in practice these institutions are nominally powerful. This is due to the fact that constant conflicts arise between the District Autonomous Councils and state governments over the issues of fund allocations. Issues also arise over manpower recruitment and excessive control of state governments inthe day-to-days affairs of the councils. Even the appointment of non-elected members of the council by Governor are at the discretion of the state cabinet, which often falls prey to partisan interests of the ruling party at the state (Singh 2014).

Alternative Mechanisms for Governance

It is in this overall background of tribal and non-tribal conflicts, ineffective governance and rising demands for autonomy that an alternative to

Autonomous Councils are debated here. Pillai (2001) says that granting autonomy is viewed as an opportunity for demanding secession in the peripheral areas. Sinha (2001) argues that providing good and corruption free governance and economic development in Northeast is the path to evade violence in the region. Autonomous institutions of governance based on ethnicity are an area of contestation in Northeast India. Here, the ethnic identities are built and altered in accordance to the changing requirements for separate political administrations. This in turn resulted in the rise of ethnicities whose borders are blurred and ambiguous. Consequently, an environment is created in Northeast India were ethnic affiliations and loyalties are changing, depending on the circumstances and vested interests of tribal groups.

According to Phanjoubam (2001), there are conflicting territorial claims by various ethnic groups across North-east India. Government policy is to appease these groups by providing autonomy, which in turn has two sides. One it encourages other ethnic groups to assert their ethnicity for gaining special privileges and autonomy. Second the demand for autonomy is in conflict with competing ethnic homeland demands. The most tenacious situation of ethnic overlapping is seen in the state of Manipur. Proposals for providing Autonomous Councils under Sixth schedule for Nagas and Kukis in Manipur came under attack from Meiteis which is the main cause of ethnic tension and suspicion between these groups (Phanjoubam 2001). Similarly, the formation of BTAD had also galvanized opposition among the non-Bodo communities in the Bodoland area. Further the rising demands for separation and autonomy have led to the formation of three autonomous councils and six non-sixth schedule autonomous councils in the state of Assam.

The situation in Assam is intricate that it called for innovative actions by several scholars, all intending to provide an inclusive solution to the varying separatist aspirations of the people. Das (2002) proposes two options for reducing the ethnic divisions in Assam. The first option was to develop a consociation democracy in Assam by bringing various political elites of all

significant ethnicities for governance in the state. He argues that such an arrangement will ensure that no single group dominate the decision making structure in the state. All ethnic groups will be given equal access to power and responsibility in the socio-economic development of people in the state. Another option proposed was to establish a cooperative arrangement among various ethnic groups in Assam by cooperating with each other to protect one's ethnic identity and interest.

The sixth schedule is the only constitutional provision for granting administrative and political autonomy in India apart from statehood. So far the experience with sixth schedule is problematic. The constitutional guarantee of certain privileges to one section of the population at the expense of other is what raises the concern. According to Sarmah (2011), the question of Autonomy in Assam can be addressed through an intra-federal structure, reflecting the aspirations of various ethnic communities. This could prevent any further reorganisation of the state on ethnic lines. Sarmah (2015) emphasised on the plausibility of de-territorialised Autonomous councils as an alternative to the sixth schedule. The existence of non-sixth schedule autonomous councils in Assam for different ethnic groups has underpinned in fulfilling the aspiration for autonomy. As an alternative, these autonomous councils can form a Supreme Council of Autonomous Councils similar to that of a state Legislative Council. The overall focus of this particular alternative is to provide a federal structure of governance by incorporating representations from various ethnic groups, based on equal status. Another alternative is the introduction of three-tier Panchayati Raj system in the existing sixth scheduled Autonomous councils (Sarmah 2015). This would enable the substantial participation of minority groups in political and administrative functions of their respective localities, thereby preventing the fear of alienation.

Granting certain set of privileges to one group and denying the same to other is definitely not how democracies should function, at least, this is not the way to adhere equality in the society. The provision of protective discrimination are justifiable, until and unless it itself perverts into a status

or a privilege. The numerically weak tribal groups of Northeast requires certain protection, but not at the expense of economically weaker and marginalised sections. If it is so, protective discrimination will be a gross injustice to the poor. The opportunity for self governance should be equally availed to everyone irrespective of caste, creed and ethnicity.

To this end, Northeast India requires a holistic change in its approach towards governance. Statehood and autonomy under the constitution are not providing adequate mechanism of governance. The fulfilment of peoples aspirations for development and prosperity are far below the marginal lines. The gross effectiveness of state governments and autonomous councils in Northeast are under preview due to large sums of aids and grants received from Union government. The political structures are also alleged to be asserting partisan interests and parochial attitudes in administration and governance. Moreover social harmony is under severe agony due to ethnic riots and communal polarisations. Therefore, in this situation, a new model of governance needs to be created in Northeast which could encompass all its diversities into an inclusive system of administration.

What these authors like to argue here is that the current constitutional structure of India is limited to three institutions of political administration, that is, statehood, union territory and autonomous councils. But the Northeast region requires a fourth alternative, that is an Autonomous Region, but don't confuse it with the one in the Sixth schedule. This Autonomous Region would be comprised of all seven states of Northeast India (Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura, excluding Sikkim), unified under a single political unit. Though Sikkim is part of NEC, its geographical isolation from other states of the region and proximity to North Bengal places itself in a strategic position. Under this position, Sikkim has less things in common with that of Manipur and Mizoram, but clubbing it with an ethnically and racially similar profile might not necessarily resolve their developmental and governance issues. Instead North Bengal and Sikkim by its virtue can have a distinct identity which would facilitate economic development and socio-political cohesion.

Nonetheless, the above proposed Autonomous Region can include Sikkim and North Bengal within a larger contiguous territory. And also the above mentioned Autonomous Region will include smaller federating units, enjoying a structure similar to a Union Territory or an Autonomous Council must be established. Most importantly, these units will be devoid of any supervision but instead will be autonomous in nature.A new federal arrangement redefining the relationship between the Union government, the Autonomous Region of Northeast and the federating units under it needs to be formulated. Considering its unique geopolitical location, powers like preparing separate economic and developmental policies, regulating the border trade along her neighbourhood in South Asia and Southeast Asia and other powers with regional importance is to be granted to the Autonomous Region of Northeast. The federating units can have autonomy in socio-cultural aspects like Education, manpower recruitment, revenue administration and so on. And the Union government can take care of defence and other critical subjects of national importance. Thus, hereby, the Autonomous Region of Northeast will look over the issues of public order and regional development. Given such a structural modification in governance, it is possible that the region could be reverted to a peaceful and stable environment where all people take up their administration by themselves in a legitimate manner.

Conclusion

Autonomy under sixth schedule is not resolving the governance issue but instead is increasing the probability of other ethnic groups to pursue an armed struggle for achieving the same (Das 2009). The granting of statehood and autonomy are also aggravating the already prevailing ethnic divisions and separatist demands in the society. Baruah and Rouleau (2011) argues that the Indian model of asymmetric federalism and bicameralism has not provided self-rule or autonomy to the sub-national communities. The unequal representation in Rajya Sabha (Council of States) is a reflection of the impotency that the Indian federal structure has while providing self rule and autonomy to the minority groups and sub-national actors. Autonomy

under sixth schedule of the constitution provided excess powers to tribal groups ~~in~~ against the under-represented non-tribal populations. The granting of autonomy to the isolated tribal populations of the Northeast neither was fruitful in providing good governance nor did they decrease the plausibility for the outbreak of a violent separatist movement. As demands for autonomy and statehood are raised by various ethnic groups, the effectiveness of the Sixth Schedule is under question. Autonomous Councils are alleged to be inadequate in meeting the needs and aspirations of the people. On one side, Sixth Schedule has become obsolete for providing self-rule and autonomy for tribal populations. And on the other, it divided the plural societies into tribal and non-tribal categories (Baruah and Rouleau 2011). Northeast India requires a set of new administrative structures which should be different from the old institutions of statehood and autonomy. Instead it should adopt institutions that would reflect the demographic diversity and geo-political reality of a landlocked region which lies in the cross road between South Asia and Southeast Asia.

Table.1: Major Scheduled Tribes Population of Assam

Name of the Scheduled tribes	Total population	Percentage of the total Scheduled tribes population
Bodo	1,352,771	40.9
Miri	587,310	17.8
Karbi	353,513	10.7
Rabha	277,517	8.4
SonowalKachari	235,881	7.1
Lalung	170,622	5.2
Dimasa	110,976	3.4
Deori	41,161	1.2
Others	178,819	5.3
All Scheduled Tribes	3,308,570	100
Population of Assam	26,655,528	-

Source: Singh, M. A. (2010), 'Conflict in Assam', Bangalore: National Institute of

Advanced Studies (NIAS)

Table.2: Conflict between Bodos and non-Bodos

Year	Place/Districts	Name of the non-Bodo group/groups	Casualty
1993	Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon	Bengali-Muslim	61
1994	Kokrajhar, Bongaigaon and Barpeta	Bengali-Muslim	113
1995	Darrang and Nalbari	Bengali-Hindus, Nepali and Adivasi	16
1996	Kokrajhar and Bongaigaon	Adivasi	200
1998	Bongaigaon and Kokrajhar	Bengali-Muslim and Adivasi	186
2007	-	Bengali-Muslim	100
2008	Udalguri and Darrang	Bengali-Muslim	173
2012	Kokrajhar, Charring, Dhubri	Bengali-Muslim and Adivasi	114
2014	Baksa and Kokrajhar	Bengali-Muslim and Adivasi	83

Sources: Derived from various sources (Basumatary 2014, Goswami 2012a, Goswami 2001, Goswami 2012b, Haloi 2015, Hussain2012 and Shivananda 2011).

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Fund Devolutions to the Rural Local Governments and their Expenditures Patterns in Mizoram

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Abstract

The village administration in Mizoram which used to be at the hands of traditional Chiefs was abolished in 1954 by a bill passed by the Lushai Hills District Council (Mizo District Council). Henceforth, the old institution of chieftainship was replaced by a democratically elected village councils and this institution continues to function till date. It is not the same as Panchayati Raj Institutions in other parts of the country, but have similarities in many respects, especially after the Amendment of The Lushai Hills District (Village Council) Act 1953 in 2014. This study examines the financial positions of the village councils with special focus on the flow of funds from the upper-tier governments (central & state), expenditure patterns, and mobilisation of revenues from own sources.

Keywords: *Village councils, Property tax, Finance commission, Animal tax*

1. Introduction

Before independence, the village administration in Mizoram was carried out by the Chiefs, who were assisted by elder councils (called *upa*) in line with the Mizo customs, and the chieftainship was hereditary and authoritarian. However, people's consciousness about the significance of the democratic form of local government increased after independence and resulted in the formation of political parties. Meanwhile, the Lushai Hills District Council

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(which later changed to Mizo District Council in 1954) was established in 1952 under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. In the run-up to the first election of the District Council, the abolition of traditional chieftainship was the most significant election propaganda of the Mizo Union, which subsequently won the election. Consequently, the District Council passed a bill for the abolition of chiefs, The Lushai Hills (Chief Abolition) Act, 1952, as one of its first pieces of legislation effective from January 1953. However, the chiefs were allowed to function until another body was formed as a substitute. Later on, the Assam government passed The Assam (Lushai Hills Acquisition of Chief Rights) Bill 1954. As a result, the entire institution of chiefs within Mizoram was abolished, and all their powers and rights to receive customary gifts were automatically abrogated (Lalsangliani, 2009).

The institution of chieftainship was deposed by the democratically elected village council established in 1954 under The Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) Act 1953, simply called VC Act 1953. Since then, the Village Council (VC) have been the functioning rural local governments in Mizoram, and its structure and functions have been subjected to changes by the amendments of the VC Act 1953 by the state government from time to time. The village council is an entirely modern structure whose functions were fashioned with both custom and modernity (Singh, 1996). The VC is not similar to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) functioning in other parts of the country. It may be noted that Mizoram is exempted from the purview of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment 1992, and consequently, Part IX and Part IXA of the Indian Constitution do not apply to the state.

Given the need for the participation of grassroots administrative units in the implementation of various schemes under the state and central governments and the requirements imposed by the higher government to enable them to receive transfers of local funds, a significant amendment, The Lushai Hills District (Village Councils) (Amendment) Act 2014, was passed by the state legislature, hereinafter called VC Amendment Act 2014. According to this Act, the term of VC is now five years, the election is

conducted by the State Election Commission (SEC), reservation of seats is made for women, and the VC shall have Gram Sabha conducted regularly, which are all in line with the features of PRIs. This amendment in 2014 has been in effect in consonance partly with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 (Lallianchhunga, 2018; Doungel, 2022). Thus, though the institution of VCs is not similar to PRIs, Amendment 2014 has enhanced its functional capabilities given the growing need for their participation, as the PRIs do, in the efforts to achieve inclusive development.

This study attempted to examine the financial positions of the VCs in respect to the fund devolutions from the upper-tier governments (central & state) and the patterns to which they were expended for village development. It also attempted to evaluate the nature of own revenue receipts and the underlying problems regarding the resource mobilisation. The rest of the paper is divided into eight sections as follows: literature review, methodology, organisational settings & roles, sources of village council finances, fund devolutions, expenditure patterns, problems and challenges of village council finances, and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

There is a wide array of research studies on the working of India's rural local governments and their finances in particular. But only limited number of studies cover the finances of village councils in Mizoram, the only functioning rural local government in this tribal dominated state where the 73rd Constitutional Amendment 1992 does not apply. To enlighten this study and enable better understanding of the context of this study, a brief highlight of the literature related to the rural local governments is presented in this section.

It is accepted that rural governments are instrumental in fostering economic development in rural areas (Reddy et al. 2020) and that a critical factor necessary for strengthening these governments is to enable and empower them to enhance their own revenues (Rao and Rao, 2008). Although a significant component of the 73rd amendment vested fiscal powers to the

PRIs, the resources raised by them are abysmal (Reddy at al., 2020) and in practice, they play a small part in public service provision as majority of local governments do not collect any tax revenue from the sources they are allowed to, while those that do usually have only one source of tax revenue (Rao et al., 2011).

Among the sources of tax revenue, property tax is the most suitable tax handle with the local governments (Rao, 2013) and in most states, it contributes the maximum revenue (Reddy et al., 2020, Rao et al., 2011; Rao and Rao, 2008; Rani, 1999). However, this tax remains inelastic because of inefficient administration in its collection (Alok, 2006). Bahl et al. (2010) found that rural local governments raise very little revenue from own sources, and although there is variation across gram panchayats and states, the average is less than $1 per capita. In the case of Mizoram, collection of property tax has not been implemented and village councils do not have enough reliable sources of own revenue to meet the monthly salary of its members (Lallianchhunga, 2018). The only important non-tax revenue at the village panchayat level is the water charge; and village panchayats have found it difficult to collect user charges and whatever little revenue they collect is from the rents received by letting out their properties (Rao and Rao, 2008).

Since rural local governments are not able to collect revenue even when they are empowered to, rural local governments undoubtedly depend largely on financial support from their state and central governments. These local government bodies rely on fiscal transfers from the state and central government in the form of shared taxes and grants, which constitute the major revenue flow to the rural local bodies (Sethi 2004), as their sources of own revenue account for only 6 to 7% of expenditure (Alok, 2006). It was found that transfers from upper tier governments accounted for 25% of gram panchayat revenue and 94% of total revenue of the gram panchayats in West Bengal (Bahl et al., 2010). Most of these grants are for development programmes that are financed under centrally sponsored schemes (Rajaraman and Sinha, 2007) and the gram panchayats have little discretion to move

these funds to other purposes (Bahl et al., 2010), implying that there is little autonomy in their expenditure (Jha, 2002).

In respect to their tax-raising power for mobilisation of more income, higher-level governments (central & state) are disinclined to devolve tax-raising powers due to apprehensions of dwindling power, and decentralised authorities are also reluctant to impose taxes as it adversely affects their popularity (Alok, 2006). Other issues with revenue mobilisation include reluctance on the part of local residents to pay taxes, ad hoc assessment practices and low collection rates of taxes (Bahl et al., 2010), and embezzlement/diversion of funds to nonproductive use (Jha, 2002). Researchers also raised the issues of scarcity of information about rural local government financing (Rao et al. 2011; Bahl et al., 2010; Jha, 2002), lack of transparency (Aiyar and Tiwari, 2009) and inconsistency of fiscal data on urban bodies by all levels of government (Alok, 2008; Rao and Rao, 2008). The studies recommended more accountability of the panchayat leadership, greater tax powers (Rao and Rao, 2008), trained tax collectors in each of the villages (Rao et al., 2011; Jha, 2002), and strengthening the accounting system (Rajaraman and Sinha, 2007) so as to ensure efficient and effective improvement in fiscal autonomy. Although most studies found that rural local governments have not had a significant impact on the formulation of intergovernmental fiscal policy at the state level, they recognised that local governments are crucial for rural development but that these bodies need to be revitalised and rejuvenated by strengthening and empowering them so as to improve their finance and their subsequent service delivery.

3. Data and Approach

The main objective of this paper is to study the patterns of fund flow from the upper-tier governments, the changes that take place over time, the patterns of development expenditures, and the problems of village council finances in Mizoram. Data obtained from secondary sources, such as official records and documents of the Local Administration Department (LAD), Government of Mizoram, as well as information collected by the

Second Mizoram Finance Commission, and Finance Department of the State Government form the basis of the analysis. A field visit was conducted during July-October 2022 when VC members from 20 villages and key officals of LAD were interviewed. Moreover, while conducting field work, there were considerable number of interactions with some prominent citizens and knowledgable persons, and their personal opinions about the finances of the village councils were assessed. Focussed Group Discussion (FGD) was also conducted with the faculty members of the State Institute of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (SIRD&PR) on the matter of interest for this research. As the study is exploratory and documentary research in nature, we simply follow analysis based on abosulute amount and its changes and percentages, rather than using complicated statistical methods.

4. Organisational Setting and Role of the Village Council

As mentioned already, the VC Amendment Act 2014 reserves one-third of the seats for women, and the tenure of the VC is extended from 3 years to 5 years which starts from the date of the first sitting of the Council. Members are elected through universal adult franchise and its election is conducted by the State Election Commission (SEC). All individuals in the village who are above 25 years of age and belonging to a scheduled tribe (ST) are eligible to contest in the election. The President (VCP), Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary are the executive functionaries of the Village Council. The executive body of the VC is formed by an election among the elected members, while the post of Secretary is appointed by the State Government on the recommendation of the VCP. The VC nominates a *Tlangau* (village crier) to assist them in their discharge of work and dissemination of information to the villagers.

The Local Administration Department (LAD), established on 1st January 1973, is the nodal department of the state government for the administration of Village Councils and its allied subjects, except villages falling under the three autonomous district councils. The department's primary objective is to ensure the effective functioning of the VCs through empowerment and

providing a professional support system. It provides honorarium to each member of the VC. Moreover, stationeries and office equipment are also provided by the state government to the VC through this Department. Disciplinary actions, if necessary, on delinquent village councils are also taken up and enforced by this Department. According to the record of LAD, there are 817 Village Councils with 3676 elected Members in Mizoram in 2022. Of these, 284 VCs are within the three Autonomous District Councils.

The VCs are given executive, judicial and financial functions. Under the Lushai Hills District (House Site) Act, 1954 and The Mizoram (Land Revenue) Act 2013, the VCs can allot house sites within a village, and they are also authorized to allocate particular areas within the boundaries of their villages for *Jhum* cultivation for every year, subject to strict adherence to the provisions of The Lushai Hills District (Jhumming) Regulation, 1954. Furthermore, they can call community service or work, called *Hnatlang*, in the interest of the public from all the households in their villages whenever the occasion demands. Any household failing to participate in this work could be fined, called *run*, of a fixed amount. Meanwhile, the VC is accountable to the Gram Sabha (village assembly) for all its functions and decisions in its meetings. They also function as Village Court and are competent to try cases of civil and miscellaneous nature falling within the purview of tribal laws and customs.

The VCs, for being the only administrative bodies at the village level, are entrusted with several functions which are growing substantially over time, such as the implementation of grants received from central and state finance commissions, acting as implementing agency of government schemes/programmes (MGNREGS, etc.), sanitation, drinking water, solid waste management, control and taxation of animals, etc. Further, they are the grassroot stakeholders for development planning and formulation of schemes, while they are also the official monitoring body for most of the public projects implemented in the village. Their roles on the development of local infrastructure and services have become more critical as they are entrusted the roles of project selection and implementation under the rural

local body grants (RLB grants) instituted by central finance commissions, and after the institution of the state finance commission in Mizoram.

5. Sources of Finance

The revenue of the VCs comes from three major sources - state devolution, central devolution, and own revenue. State devolution consists of grants-in-aid (GIA) for salary of members and GIA (non-salary) for miscellaneous expenditures (stationeries, maintenance of streetlights, etc.), development grants (for asset creation, etc.), and tax devolution given by the state government according to the recommendations of the Mizoram Finance Commission (MFC) since 2015. The VCs also received fund devolution from the central government in the form of grants from time to time, central sector schemes, and RLB Grants given by the central Finance Commission.

The VC Amendment Act 2014 empowered the VCs to raise funds and are authorized to collect property tax within their jurisdictions on such items and at such rates as may be determined by the state government from time to time. They are also authorized to realize registration fees for any litigation within their jurisdiction. In addition, Section 8A of this Amendment allows the VCs to raise fund for public utility within its jurisdiction by passing a resolution subject to the approval of the state government. Meanwhile, VCs are empowered to assess and collect animal tax under The Mizoram Animal (Control & Taxation) Act 1980, which was replaced by The Mizoram Animal (Control & Taxation) Act 2014. As per this Act, the animals are to be taxed a rate of ₹50 per adult and ₹20 per young domestic animal and a registration fee of ₹10 and ₹5 for adult and young animals respectively. The revenue receipt from animal tax is to be shared between the VC and the Government in the ratio of 50:50, and the share of the latter is deposited to the Consolidated Fund of the State through the concerned Treasury Office, while the other part is retained by the former as VC Fund. The revenue receipts from animal tax and other internal sources constitute the own revenue of the VCs.

6. Patterns of Fund Devolutions

Table 1 presents the trends in fund devolutions to the VCs, from the central government as recommended by the central finance commissions and state government, as own revenue, and total revenue receipt (TRR). It can be observed that the financial position of the VCs is shaped by the amount of fund devolution from the state and central governments as they are endowed with only limited revenue-raising power from their respective jurisdictions. Given the minimal expenditure responsibilities and minimal revenue-raising power, most finance for local government services is obtained from intergovernmental fiscal transfers (Bahl, Sethi, & Sally, 2010; Rao & Rao, 2008). It is also observed that the revenue receipts have experienced significant changes with the coming of new fiscal regimes following the implementation of the recommendations of different central Finance Commissions, the 13th, 14th & 15th FC (i.e. FC-XIII, FC-XIV & FC-XV) and the first Mizoram Finance Commission (MFC). Further, the GIA transfers from the state government contributed less than 10% of the TRR in most years, except during the period of the 1st MFC (i.e. 2015-16 to 2019-20).

The award period of the FC-XIII (i.e. 2010-11 to 2014-15) showed a regular and substantial amount of transfers received from the central government, which accounted for more than 90% of the combined revenue transfers to the VCs from central and state government, while own revenue contributed less than 0.5% of the TRR. As a result, a total devolution of ₹8787.19 lakhs was received from the central government during these five years. Against this, only ₹869.53 lakhs was obtained from the state government. It should be noted that the central devolution in Table 1 also includes all other fund transfers received by the VCs from the central government, other than FC-XIII transfers, for the implementation of development works such as CSS, grants, etc. The pattern observed here shows the dominant role played by the central devolution to the financial positions of the VCs in Mizoram during the FC-XIII award period.

It may be worth noting that the FC-XIII instituted two components of grants, *basic* and *performance grants*, each for general and special category states. Based on the per capita per year criteria for the duration of FC-XIII's

award period, a *basic grant* amounting to ₹798 crores was allocated for 16 special category states, while ₹559 crores were allocated as *performance grants* for these states (₹10 per capita criteria in 2010-11 and ₹20 per capita after that). The share of RLBs in Mizoram in the total allocation for all special category states was approximately 1.13% for each *basic grant* and *performance grant,* which translates into a total amount of ₹900 lakhs and ₹630 lakhs respectively, during this period. Further, the FC-XIII prioritized sanitation, drinking water and health for the works to be implemented under these grants (Vanlalchhawna, 2022).

Table 1: Trends in Fund Devolutions to Rural Local Bodies (VCs) in Mizoram

₹ Lakhs

Year	Own Revenue (Animal Tax)	Central Devolution (13th/14th /15th FC)	State Government			Total Revenue Receipt
			Grants-in-Aid	Tax Devolution	Total	
2010-11	6.2	1971.96	151.67	---	151.67	2129.83
2011-12	3.28	1188	124.41	---	124.41	1315.69
2012-13	4.14	1188	145.42	---	145.42	1337.56
2013-14	4.92	3102.71	198.14	---	198.14	3305.77
2014-15	11.8	1336.52	249.89	---	249.89	1598.21
2015-16	7.88	---	258.09	---	258.09	265.97
2016-17	4.66	---	267.22	1092	1359.22	1363.88
2017-18	10.22	4544	266.92	1861.01	2127.93	6682.15
2018-19	3.81	---	---	2154.04	2154.04	2157.85
2019-20	6.32	---	2073.47	552.67	2626.14	2632.46
2020-21	8.51	9300	336.12	---	336.12	9644.63
2021-22	4.4	7344.29	1626.9	---	1626.9	8975.59

Source: Prepared from the data collected from (1) Mizoram Budget Documents (Demand for Grants), Finance Department, Govt. of Mizoram - Questionnaire on Local Bodies, submitted to 15th Finance Commission, 2018, and (3) the Office of the Local Administration Department (2022), Govt. of Mizoram.

Funds received from the central government showed a sharp decline with the start of the FC-XIV award period (2015-16 to 2019-20). The total amount of central transfers drastically declined from ₹8787.2 lakhs during the FC-XIII period to ₹4544 lakhs in the FC-XIV period. This is because the FC-XIV, unlike the previous one, did not recommend devolution to the

RLBs in the areas excluded from Part IX & IXA of the Constitution (called *Excluded Area*). However, one-time grants called *Excluded Area Grants* amounting to ₹4544 lakhs in the *excluded areas* was given by the Ministry of Home Affairs, under Article 275(1), as per the FC-XIV recommendation, which was realized in 2017-18. The reduction in the central transfer was well covered up by the sharp increase in the state devolution from ₹869.53 lakhs to ₹8525.42 lakhs during this period, following the implementation of the recommendation of the 1st MFC from the year 2015-16 to 2019-20, and the introduction of the New Economic Development Policy (NEDP) by the state government in 2016-17. Consequently, the share of central transfers reduced to 34.77% during the FC-XIV period from 91% earlier, compensated by the increasing share of state transfers from 9% to 65.23%. In addition to the MFC grants, the state government also allocated grants to the VCs through LAD for village infrastructure development amounting to ₹2000 lakhs in 2016-17, which significantly increased the actual realisation state transfer (here included under GIA category) received in 2019-20.

Again, the pattern of devolution to VCs has experienced a drastic change with the coming of the FC-XV award period since 2020-21, which saw a significant jump in the amount of central transfer accounting for nearly 90% of the total devolution. The central transfers jumped to ₹9300 lakhs in 2020-21 and ₹7344.29 lakhs in 2021-22, meaning that the transfers received during the first two years have exceeded the total central transfer during the last ten years, i.e., FC-XIII & XIV award periods, by more than ₹3000 lakhs.

7. Expenditure Patterns

Table 2 and Table 3 present the expenditure profiles indicating the utilization of grants received by the VCs from the 1st MFC and central finance commissions (FC-XIV & FC-XV) respectively. The amount of expenditures reported by the LAD presented in these tables do not exactly add up to the same amount as presented in Table 1, and the discrepancies are reportedly due to some issues in the accounting of works (e.g. ongoing work, spillover

of works, etc.). Despite this, it is expected that the pattern observed here is a fair representation of the expenditure patterns of the entire amount. It is observed in Table 2 that the main item for which nearly 80% of the MFC grants were used were *internal roads*, i.e. internal roads, PCC pavement, masonry steps, retaining walls, side drains, culverts, etc. This was followed by *community assets,* i.e. community hall, VC house, library or any other building, which accounted for 7.33%, and *sanitation & waste management,* i.e. sanitation, solid and liquid waste management, which accounted for 6.9%. Notably, more than 87% goes to the *internal roads and community assets*, while nearly 10% is utilized for *sanitation & waste management* and *drinking water* (drinking water, rainwater harvesting and any other water conservation works).

Table 2: Expenditure Profile of Village Councils on the Grants received from 1st MFC

₹ Lakhs

Category of Works		2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total	Percent
1	Drinking water, rain water harvesting and any other water conservation works	22.49	42.70	48.30	26.62	140.11	2.29
2	Sanitation, solid and liquid waste management	121.58	106.44	77.33	116.89	422.25	6.90
3	Internal roads, PCC Pavement, masonry steps, retaining wall, side drain, culvert and similar civil works	504.31	1303.03	1313.57	1772.84	4893.76	79.92
4	Solar streetlights and similar works utilizing solar energy	0.00	30.53	27.75	26.08	84.36	1.38
5	Maintenance of burial grounds	17.61	42.85	37.49	32.20	130.16	2.13
6	Health related works	0.26	2.49	0.58	0.61	3.94	0.06
7	Community Hall. Village council House/ Library or any other community building	49.61	166.42	109.72	122.97	448.72	7.33
Total		715.86	1694.47	1614.74	2098.22	6123.29	100

Source: Tabulated from the Data collected from the Office of the Local Administration Department (2022), Govt. of Mizoram

The utilization of grants received from the FC-XIV and FC-XV is shown in

Table 3. As noted earlier, though Excluded Area Grants were received from the FC-XIV in 2017-18, the actual expenditure was seen only in FY2017-18 and 2019-20. The Excluded Area Grants received during the FC-XIV period were oriented towards activities that supported Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and were made through demand or project base sanctions. Projects under this fund were to be formulated through Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) at the village level and further coordinated at the district and state levels for further submission to the central government for approval. However, as the government took longer than expected to finalize the projects, it was reported that the grant did not materialize immediately and had to spill over to the subsequent years. Moreover, the field observation suggested that the works undertaken under the excluded area grants are mostly construction & repair of internal link roads (steps, pavements, footpath, etc.), construction of VC house, etc., with a limited amount directed towards other SDG-compliant activities. It is shown that the reported total amount of ₹1011 lakhs, a sum of ₹936.5 lakhs was spent on village *internal roads*, which included construction and repair works of internal roads, steps, culverts, retaining walls, etc. *Internal roads* shared 92.6% of the expenditures, followed by maintenance of burial grounds (3%), *sanitation & waste management* (2.2%), and *community assets* such as community hall, VC house, etc. (1.7%). These four items constituted more than 99% of the expenditures from the grants received from FC-XIV.

Table 3: Utilization of RLB Grants (VCs) received from Central Finance Commissions

(₹ Lakhs)

A. 14th Finance Commission Period					
Category of Works		2017-18	2019-20	Total	Percent
1	Drinking water, rainwater harvesting and any other water conservation works	0.7	2.9	3.6	0.4
2	Sanitation, solid and liquid waste management	2.6	19.6	22.2	2.2
3	Internal roads, PCC Pavement, masonry steps, retaining walls, side drains, culverts and similar civil works	656.9	279.6	936.5	92.6

4	Solar streetlights and similar works utilizing solar energy	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
5	Maintenance of burial grounds	19.8	10.8	30.6	3.0
6	Health-related works	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
7	Education related works	0.0	0.7	0.7	0.1
8	Community Hall. Village council House/ Library or any other community building	3.8	13.7	17.5	1.7
Total		683.8	327.3	1011.0	100

B. 15th Finance Commission Period

Category of Works		2020-21	2021-22	Total	Percent
1	Drinking water, rainwater harvesting and any other water conservation works	3177.7	697.5	3878.8	36.2
2	Sanitation, solid and liquid waste management	1422.3	0.0	1444.5	13.5
3	Internal roads, PCC Pavement, masonry steps, retaining walls, side drain, culverts and similar civil works	3951.9	0.0	4888.4	45.7
4	Solar streetlights and similar works utilizing solar energy	8.5	0.0	8.5	0.08
5	Maintenance of burial grounds	91.1	0.0	121.7	1.14
6	Health-related works	86.0	0.0	86.0	0.80
7	Education related works	16.1	0.0	16.8	0.16
8	Community Hall. Village council House/ Library or any other community building	242.9	0.0	260.4	2.43
Total		8996.4	697.5	10705.0	100

Source: Tabulated from the Data collected from the Office of the Local Administration Department (2022), Govt. of Mizoram

At the same time, Table 3 showed significantly different expenditure patterns of devolution received during the FC-XV award period, with increased spending on *drinking water* to 36.26% from a negligible 0.4% in the FC-XIV grants, and allocation for *sanitation & waste management* also increased from 2.2% to 13.46%. The two items accounted for nearly 50% of the total expenditure on fund devolved. At the same time, village *internal roads* remained the single largest component of expenditure (45.66%), while a substantial amount of 2.43% was also spent on *community assets* (community hall, VC house, etc.).

The ULB Grants of the FC-XV are divided into two parts: basic grant (untied fund) and tied grant in the ratio of 50:50 in 2020-21, the share of

the tied grant was later revised to 60% starting from 2021-22, and thus the ratio is now 40:60. Tied Grants components are to be used on works related to health and sanitation, drinking water, rainwater harvesting, and Open Defecation Free (ODF) initiatives in the villages. The pattern of expenditure observed in Table 3 is found to resonate with the composition of expenditure mandated by FC-XV. It was reported that the VCs and Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) had been the key stakeholder at the village for the selection of works to be implemented using the tied grant, while the District LAD Office (DLAO) is responsible for monitoring and coordination of the works executed in the villages. Further, the technical departments of the government may also be involved in implementing the tied grants. For example, VCs in Kolasib district and LAD decided to spend the tied grant on drinking water supply and entrusted the state Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) with execution of the project.

On the other hand, the VCs decide on the utilization of the untied components (basic grants) keeping in view the expected amount in the ensuing year. The concerned VCs select and prioritise works in each village, and the same is submitted to the DLAO for further action. It is reported that the works selected by the VCs, in most cases, fall in the category of *internal roads, PCC pavement, masonry steps, retaining walls, side drains, culverts and similar civil works.* Accordingly, as given in Table 3, this category, with the maintenance of burial grounds and community assets together, constituted nearly 50% of the total expenditure.

8. Problems and Challenges in the Finances of the VCs

The VCs are the functionaries of local government in rural areas with executive, judicial and financial powers, and they are the key stakeholders in implementing several government schemes and projects in their respective villages. However, this study observed that their limited power to raise revenue from their own sources leaves them less flexible to function effectively as agents of development delivering infrastructure and services to the rural population. Therefore, they are unable to meet even the monthly

salary of its members from its own sources (Lallianchhunga, 2018). The animal tax, which is only tax revenue collected by the VCs as shown in Table 1, is unexpectedly very low, and hardly crosses ₹10 lakhs during the 12 years presented. This is too meagre considering the number of VCs across the state, as it turned out to be a little more than ₹1000 per village even when the amount collected was the highest. Further, the revenue from the animal tax is not showing an increasing trend over time due to one reason or another, including the outbreak of animal diseases, changing lifestyles, collection inefficiency, etc. The VCs are now in a situation where even a small fraction of their remuneration could not be met from their own revenue. Consequently, they had to rely heavily on fund transfers from the state government for the establishment expenses and development works. Meanwhile, they are entrusted with the agency role for the development projects and schemes implemented by the state government in their villages. This scenario has led to fiscal inefficiency and reduced their role as mere implementers of government programmes (Reddy, Sreedevi, & Mohapatra, 2020).

The VC (Amendment) Act 2014 empowered the VCs to collect property tax within their respective jurisdiction on such items and at such rates as may be determined by the state government from time to time. However, this study observed that property tax has not been collected in all the villages. The Village Council's power to collect property tax within its jurisdiction has not yet materialized at the village level (Lallianchhunga, 2018). Neither did the government make rules on the modality of its collection, nor did the VCs, as individuals or groups have shown efforts to collect the property tax within their own jurisdictions. Moreover, several VC members contacted on phone during this study were not well-versed in the pros and cons of levying property tax in the villages. Thus, it is unlikely that the VCs will come up with an effective strategy on their own to collect property tax. So, it is the government that should spearhead the introduction of levying property tax in the villages by making appropriate rules while also creating awareness and capacity among the VC members and the rural community

on property tax. It may be worthwhile to mention here that some states, like West Bengal, prescribe the rate ceiling and legal basis of property tax in the Panchayat Act, and the gram panchayats do have discretion in the administration of property tax and in setting the rates of certain non-tax fees and charges (Bahl, Sethi, & Sally, 2010).

While the VCs are authorized to realize registration fees for any litigation within their jurisdiction, they are not legally empowered to collect user charges and collection of fees for the services provided. But in practice, they are collecting nominal fees ranging from ₹10 to ₹100 for the issue of Residential Certificates, No Objection Certificates to persons seeking Land Settlement Certificate (LSC) within their areas, recommendation for the issue of Inner Line Permit (ILP), etc. The only important non-tax revenue at the village panchayat level is the water charge (Rao & Rao, 2008). The VCs collect water charges in many villages at the behest of VWSC from the households getting drinking water from public water points or connections. The revenue from the water user charge is used for the maintenance of the irrigation line and remuneration of the water distribution staff appointed by them. The flow of income and expenditure is regular and substantial, and it would have been the VCs' most important non-tax revenue source had it been accounted for properly. Further, the VC, being the administrative entity in their area, are expected to lay down proper regulations on establishing shops, tea stalls, restaurants, hotels, etc., in their areas. But regulations of such kind were not implemented in most villages, nor did the existing State Law empower the VCs to take the initiative on it. There is scope for mobilizing revenue from the issue of licenses to such business entities in the village if proper guidelines on the matter are in place.

As they are empowered to have a Village Council Fund, any collection authorized by Law, other than district revenue and taxes, made in the village is paid into the Fund. A separate account is operated for this purpose. All the VCs are given a cash/account book by the government in which the financial resources and expenditures of the VC are to be appropriately recorded, and these cash books may be checked at any time, and failure to maintain a cash book may lead to the dissolution of the VC (Lalsangliani, 2009). However,

the field observation showed that most of the VCs did not maintain Account Book properly and failed to enter all the internal receipts and expenditures properly. Only the proceeds of animal tax is properly recorded as it is to be deposited to the Consolidated Fund through district LAD office, and they are liable to be audited by the Local Fund Auditors. This is generally due to their limited knowledge of the accounting procedure and lack of continuity in bookkeeping due to a change in the person dealing with it after every election.

The VCs are also acting as an implementing agency of schemes/ programmes like MGNREGS, Food Security Act, state flagship, etc. It is practised in many villages that after getting the permission of the beneficiaries of these schemes (especially MGNREGS), the VCs collect a certain amount by deducting it from its distribution to the beneficiaries. The amount pooled from the beneficiaries, at their will, is utilized for the welfare of the village, e.g. maintenance of public infrastructure, roads, agriculture link roads, etc. However, the fund mobilized from such sources are not properly recorded in the village council's book of accounts. The purpose and objects to raising funds from the beneficiaries of government schemes may be justified in the villages as the beneficiaries themselves do not oppose it, but the amount collected and its utilization must be recorded in black and white to ensure accountability on the part of the VC members.

Devolutions of funds from the state and central governments are basically meant for the creation of assets in the village for the development of the people. In addition, the state government also provided the VCs with grants for the creation of capital assets under the state programmes (like NEDP, SEDP, MLA Fund, etc.) from time to time. In fact, a huge amount of money has been spent on asset creation in the villages. However, when it comes to the spot verification of the assets created under central and state devolutions and other development grants from the state, no record could be seen with the concerned VCs on the funding sources, implementing agency, provisions for maintenance, etc., in many cases. Nor did they maintain a proper Asset Register recording all the assets created through the state and central fund devolutions, except for works undertaken under MGNREGS.

Consequently, the lack of records on the assets created under central and state devolution of funds in a proper Asset Register is likely to have negative implications for the assessment of the requirement for further intervention in the future, and it will also hamper the estimation of depreciation on the capital assets created.

The lack of adequate data on the revenue and expenditures of the village councils and no clear mechanism from the higher administrative layers (district & state) to coordinate the data management system is a problem. The Finance Commission Cell of the State Finance Department has been maintaining some data pertaining to local finance, but they are generally macro data obtained from state budget documents and reports of the concerned departments, and no detailed data implicating the financial positions of the VCs is collected. This is a major handicap in analyzing panchayat revenues (Rao & Rao, 2008), making forecasting future requirements difficult. The problem of data management is not only in Mizoram but also in other parts of the country. Neither the local body, nor state directorate on panchayats or municipalities, nor local fund audit, nor accountant general of the state, nor central statistical organization, nor ministry of panchayati raj, nor ministry of urban development, nor planning commission, have consistent fiscal data on local bodies (Alok, 2008).

9. Conclusion

Given the limited tax revenue collection of around 0.5% of the requirement, the financial condition of the village councils in Mizoram is determined by the flow of fund devolution from the state and central government, which shows fluctuations with the coming of new finance commissions at the centre and the state. There was a drastic decline in central fund devolution during the FC-XIV period as this finance commission did not accord grants to the rural local bodies in the areas excluded from Part IX & IXA of the Constitution, but provided one-time *excluded area grants*. But the shortfall in central devolution was covered by the significant increase in state fund devolution, which jumped multiple folds thanks to the implementation of the 1st MFC recommendations. With the 1st MFC period ending, state devolution

experienced a sharp decline, while the central devolution experienced a drastic increase with the onset of the FC-XV award era in 2020-21. As a result, the total revenue receipt of the RLB shot up to ₹9644.63 lakhs in 2020-21 from ₹2632.46 lakhs in 2019-20, reshaping the dimensions of fiscal relations between the RLBs and upper government.

The main items on which fund devolution to the VCs were spent were construction of internal roads which accounted for nearly 80% and 92.6% of the state devolution during 1st MFC and central government devolution during the FC-XIV respectively. There was substantial change in the expenditure patterns of the fund devolution to the VC with the onset of FC-XV with drinking water and sanitation gaining importance and acccounting for around 50% of the total expenditrue.

With respect to the mobilisation of revenue by the VCs from their own sources, this study observed that a limited amount was collected from animal tax, the only tax revenue of the VCs, which does not show buoyancy to economic growth, and stagnated within a short range during the last 12 years. This is unjustifiably low keeping in view the animal population of 3.8 lakh animals (pigs, cattle, Mithun, horse, dogs, sheep, and buffalos) and 20.5 lakh poultry in the state as recorded by the Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Government of Mizoram during 2019-20. Going by this figure it can be fairly presumed that a large number of animals are not covered in the process of animal tax assessment. Further, though they are empowered to collect property tax within their village area, no VC was found collecting it, and the awareness among the VC members was very low on the modality of assessment and collection of property tax. It may be necessary that the state government facilitate the introduction of property tax in the village to enhance mobilisation of more revenues from own sources.

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A Study of Entrepreneurial Intention in the Matrilineal Society of Meghalaya

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to examine the effect of socio-economic and demographic variables such as gender, education, age, and socio-economic status (SES) on the entrepreneurial intention of college and university students in Meghalaya, India within the context of a kinship system. The empirical investigation was predicated on the requirement of taking into consideration socio-economic and demographic factors as relevant factors. The respondents comprised of 929 students from various colleges and institutions throughout Meghalaya. Findings from this study show that, apart from the level of education, the rest of the demographic variables such as SES, gender and age have an influence on the entrepreneurial intention of the students.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial intention, Youth, Kinship system, Matrilineal society.*

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is regarded as a critical component of long-term economic growth at all levels, including the individual, the enterprise, the regional, the national, and the international levels of organisation. Literature says that a big part of economic growth in developed countries is due to entrepreneurs with high expectations who take advantage of government investments in knowledge production and regulatory freedom (Valliere & Peterson, 2009). So entrepreneurship is an activity that has the potential to

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contribute significantly to the development of the Indian economy (Dutta & Debnath, 2011). It requires that unemployment and underemployment issues must be addressed, as well as ensuring that everyone receives an equitable share of income and wealth (Singha & Singha, 2011). It can lead to a decline in the country's unemployment rate (Thurik et al., 2007; Maric et al., 2010; Salami, 2011; Ghorbania & Partoniab, 2014; Van Praag and Versloot, 2007). Since 1991, the Indian government, through numerous initiatives, has tried to promote and nurture entrepreneurship both at the state and national level. According to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (2015), "Given the changed landscape in the country, entrepreneurship opportunities have emerged as an important source of meeting the aspirations of the youth."

However, there needs to be an environment where people are encouraged and persuaded to start their own businesses and where young people are encouraged to try out new ideas and be creative. Additionally, factors that influence youth to take up entrepreneurship as a career choice also need to be investigated and studied. In this regard, there is still a lack of consensus regarding the factors that influence an individual's decision to launch a start-up. Recent years have seen a surge in interest in cognitive techniques.

Entrepreneurship, according to Gartner (1989), is the formation of new organizations. He argues that studies of entrepreneurship, whether they focus on the psychological characteristics of entrepreneurs, sociological explanations of entrepreneurial cultures, or economic and demographic explanations of entrepreneurial locations, begin with the establishment of new organizations. However, entrepreneurship cannot be fully understood without including entrepreneurs – individuals who offer entrepreneurship its meaning and form.

Literature Review

The Research in Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship research focuses mostly on understanding entrepreneurs and developing methods for identifying potential entrepreneurs (Carsrud &

Brännback, 2014). There has been a shift from studying entrepreneurship at the firm level to exploring the nuances of entrepreneurship at the individual level. The studying of entrepreneurship from a psychological standpoint is at the personal level. Several studies have found that individual-level motivations are the most accurate predictors of entrepreneurship (Clarysse et al., 2011). However, according to Sarasvathy (2008), current studies of entrepreneurship tend to focus more on the entrepreneurial performance of the venture without giving much importance to the entrepreneur's performance.

As a result of the constant emergence of new questions and topics that pique researchers' interest and alter the research agenda in entrepreneurship, the field of entrepreneurship research has become highly fragmented (Lohrke & Landström, 2010). In recent years, researches have been encouraged to study entrepreneurship from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach that emphasizes research that helps understand entrepreneurial processes and the entrepreneurial field (Hormiga & Rohlfer, 2016). If entrepreneurship is to assert itself as a respected and well-developed voice in the management discourse, it must acquire the capacity to investigate intriguing and significant questions based on a strong foundation of entrepreneurial theory (Busenitz et al., 2003).

Entrepreneurship research is inextricably linked to entrepreneurial policy and practice (Lohrke & Landström, 2010). The study of entrepreneurship has produced a number of interesting and pertinent perspectives (ranging from economic to psychological to sociological to anthropological to opportunity-based to resource-based), all of which are supported by research findings from the field of empirical research (Simpeh, 2011). The role of theory in the research process is two-fold: it serves to guide the design and/or analysis of empirical studies, and it serves to interpret the results of empirical research or other empirical observations. Theories that guide the design should logically be used to interpret the results of the research as well. (Davidsson, 2004).

Scholars have proposed several theories to study the subject of entrepreneurship. The sources of these theories include, among others, economics, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and management (Simpeh, 2011). In the psychological approach, the focus is on the personal characteristics of entrepreneurs, such as entrepreneurial orientation (Rauch et al., 2009), entrepreneurial competence (Schmitt-Rodermund, 2004), entrepreneurial cognition (Mitchell et al., 2007), entrepreneurial behaviour (Gartner & Carter, 2005; Kautonen et al., 2013) and entrepreneurial intention (Krueger & Carsrud, 1993; Krueger et al., 2000).

There is an increasing demand for research and evaluation of how behaviour is initiated, directed, sustained, and terminated, necessitating a more process-oriented approach. Additionally, cognitive characteristics of entrepreneurs have been examined in relation to entrepreneurial behaviour in this regard. However, the field of entrepreneurial cognition has only recently gained momentum, and little is known about the relationship between cognition and entrepreneurial intention (Mirjana et al., 2018).

Despite the numerous studies and findings in entrepreneurship research, it has not yet been determined how perceptions of entrepreneurial opportunities and entrepreneurial intention are related (Vuorio, 2018). And measuring entrepreneurial intention necessitates the incorporation of psychological and behavioural insights (Ferreira et al., 2012). While considerable research has been conducted on Entrepreneurial Intention, it is still considered to be in its infancy; much remains to be discovered (Israr & Hashim, 2015).

Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)

EI is regarded as a fundamental construct in the study of behaviour (Schjoedt, 2018). For individuals considering starting a new business, intention is a critical step in the entrepreneurial process (Israr & Hashim, 2015). Thus, it plays a pivotal role in recognizing the mechanism involved in the creation of a new business company (Katz & Gartner, 1988).

According to Krueger et al. (2000), the decision of an individual to become an entrepreneur is voluntary and deliberate. As a result, entrepreneurship can be thought of as a long-term process (Gartner et al., 1994)rather than singular. The locus of entrepreneurial activity often resides not in one person, but in many. Limitation of entrepreneurs to those individuals who might have some direct strategic influence on the development of a venture should likely consider including: individuals that share equity ownership in the venture; individuals that share debt ownership in the venture; individuals that share decision-making roles in the venture; individuals that serve in leadership and subordinate roles in the venture; spouses, family, close friends, advisors; and critical suppliers and buyers. Entrepreneurship occurs over time. While such a statement may seem obvious, researchers still tend to ignore its implications. First, there is an implication of process/ change/evolution in entrepreneurial situations. For example, if aspects of an entrepreneurial phenomenon are likely to change over time (e.g., an entrepreneur's thinking, the nature of the opportunity, characteristics of the competitive environment. In this sense, EI is a necessary step in the evolving and, at times, lengthy process of venture creation (Lee & Wong, 2004). The desire to start a business would then be a pre-requisite and determinant factor in engaging in entrepreneurial behaviours (Kolvereid, 1996a).

Shaping an individual's intention to be an entrepreneur is the first step in the development of a new entrepreneurial opportunity. Creating a new company consists of conscious practices such that the person fosters the primary concept of a business, creates a business plan in a safe environment, and executes a business programme with realistic actions. (Krueger et al., 2000). Considering that entrepreneurial goals were a predictor of following planned behaviour (Bagozzi et al., 1989), it was critical to comprehend and investigate entrepreneurs' intents in order to predict subsequent planned behaviour.

Demographic Variables and Entrepreneurial Intention (EI)

The majority of available research on EI is dominated by contributions from psychology and sociology and focuses on the unique personality characteristics of entrepreneurs (Indarti & Kristiansen, 2003). Some studies, however, have emerged that support the argument that demographic characteristics such as age and gender, as well as personal backgrounds such as education, all influence EI. For example, Mazzarol et al. (1999) and Kolvereid (1996b) found that males had significantly higher EI than females and were also considerably more likely to be business founders. Previous studies conducted by Gartner (1989) and Robinson et al. (1991) have identified relationships between certain traits or demographic characteristics of the individual and the entrepreneurial behaviours. Age has been found to be a critical factor in entrepreneurship (Lévesque & Minniti, 2011). Age and gender have a significant direct influence on EI and/or behaviour (Kolvereid & Isaksen, 2006). According to a study by Sinha (1996), successful entrepreneurs were typically younger, technically educated, and came from a family with a business background. People's business decisions and operations are influenced by their previous business experiences.

Some studies show that demographic variables, which are not considered in the Theory of Planned Behaviour, have a significant impact on EI and behaviour (Kolvereid & Isaksen, 2006; Robinson et al., 1991). Also, the result of a study by Karim (2013) proves that demographic variables are significant for the study of EI and behaviour analysis. Furthermore, when attitude is controlled for, the influence of demographic variables on intention and behaviour remains highly significant. Shepherd and DeTienne (2005) believe that prior knowledge gained through work experience or education, as well as the identification of a greater number of more innovative entrepreneurial opportunities, are linked together. However, existing behavioural theories presuppose that no direct relationship exists between demographic variables and entrepreneurial behaviour (Ajzen, 2011).

Research Gap

Numerous studies on entrepreneurial intention among students have been undertaken around the world with considerable success. In Southeast Asian nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia, a great deal of research was conducted, with the majority of it taking place in Indonesia. A scant amount of study has been performed to examine the entrepreneurial intention of students in India (Pandit et al., 2018). In addition, investigations conducted in India have given the North Eastern region and Meghalaya in particular little or no consideration, particularly in the backdrop of a unique kinship system that prevails in the state.

Objectives of the study

The principal purpose of this study is to investigate and understand what the youth in Meghalaya think about the prospects of choosing entrepreneurship as another lucrative and promising career. The present study also wants to see these issues through the prism of the kinship system in the shape of a patriarchal and matrilineal society. Keeping that in mind, the goal of this study is to see if socio-economic status (SES), gender, age, and level of education are predictors of entrepreneurial intention within the context of the kinship system.

Hypothesis of Study

A null hypothesis was developed and put to the test in order to determine whether or not the socio-economic and demographic factors have an impact on the entrepreneurial intention of the youth in Meghalaya.

H_o: There is no significant effect of SES, Gender, Age and Education on Entrepreneurial Intention.

Research Methodology

The research design is empirical in nature, and the study was conducted in two stages: first, pilot testing and validation, and then the main study. An exploratory research design was used in this study to gain insight into the

likelihood that Meghalaya's youth will consider entrepreneurship as a long-term career option.

Out of Meghalaya's eleven districts, the current study focuses on three: East Khasi Hills, West Jaintia Hills, and West Garo Hills. The headquarters of the aforementioned three districts, Shillong, Jowai, and Tura, were also chosen for the study, as they are the state's primary commercial and economic centres and have a high concentration of academic centres and educational institutions.

This study is carried out to empirically analyse and investigate into the entrepreneurial intention of the youth studying in Meghalaya. For this purpose youth has been defined as a person between 15 and 29 years of age (Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, 2014). A sample of respondents of under-graduate as well as post-graduate students studying in their final semester and final year, who were selected from various colleges and universities located in districts of East Khasi Hills, West Jaintia Hills and West Garo Hills. Respondents were briefed about the objective of the study and were summarily asked to fill a self-administered questionnaire which was purposely designed for collecting data required for testing the proposed theoretical framework.

It is pertinent to mention that research ethics were strictly observed while data collection, and data were collected through informed prior consent of all respondents. The study was carried between February 2018 and May 2018. To mitigate the risk of a low response rate, 1,500 questionnaires were distributed, resulting in a sample size of 1,227. This corresponded to an 81.8 per cent response rate. Out of the 1,227 received responses, 298 questionnaires were discarded due to incomplete responses and missing data in various sections. Hence, the remaining 929 responses yielding 61.9 per cent response rate were used for further data analysis of this study.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents a profile and character analysis of the respondents, followed by a discussion of the findings. Additionally, the primary data has been classified, tabulated, and presented in the form of a graph. A more detailed analysis based on the objectives and hypotheses is also presented.

Table 1: Distribution of the respondents in terms of the Age Group and Gender

Male		Gender		Total
		Female		
Age Group	18-20	95	95	190
	21-23	307	323	630
	24-26	59	43	102
	27-29	4	3	7
Total		465	464	929

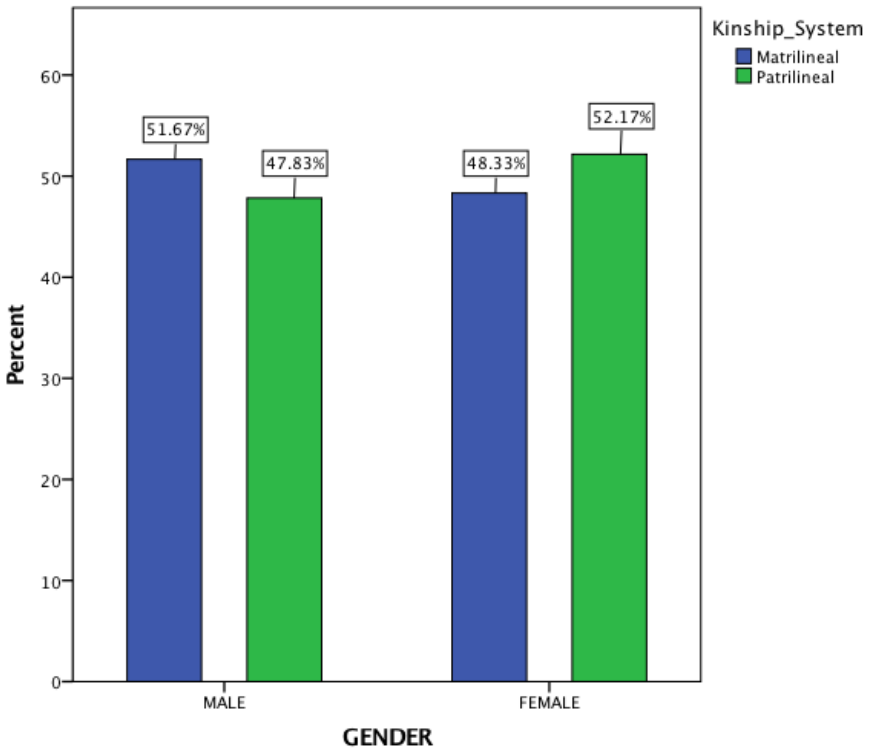
Source: Primary data

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents in terms of the Kinship System and Gender

	Kinship System		Total
	Matrilineal	Patrilineal	
Male	278	187	465
Female	260	204	464
Total	538	391	929

Source: Primary Data

Figure 1: Kinship system vs Gender



As evident from figure 1, the majority of the respondents belonged to the matrilineal form of society. Furthermore, amongst the respondents who belonged to the matrilineal society, 51.67 percent (n=278) were males and the remaining 48.33 percent (n=260) were females.

Demographic and SES variables and EI: The Hypothesized Model

Besides education and work experience, family income has been found to be a significant factor in determining entrepreneurial intent in previous research. Obtaining the necessary funds from the various sources of funding is necessary in order to start one's own entrepreneurial venture. A considerable amount of capital is required to start a new venture, and hence an individual's career choice is heavily influenced by their family's income. Starting an entrepreneurial venture may be less difficult for someone who

comes from a wealthy family than for someone who comes from a poor one (Kothari, 2011). Experiences, along with knowledge and skills, are also cognitive elements that influence the formation of business venture (Shane et al., 2003)H. (2000.

Figure 2: Hypothesized Model

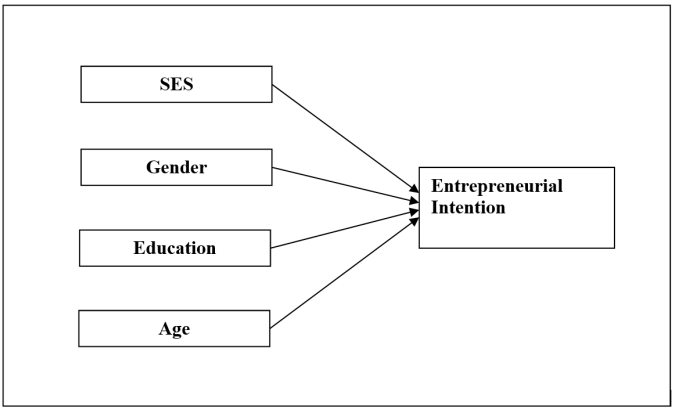


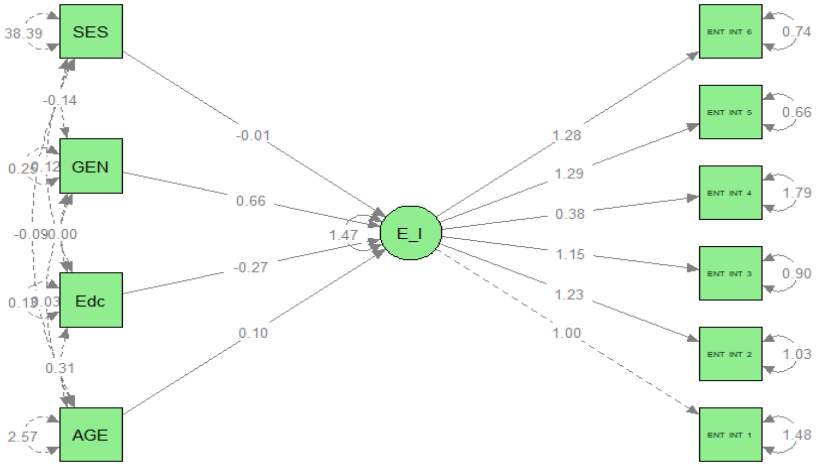
Table 3: Fit Statistics of the model

Sl No.	Fit Index	Estimated Value
1	Chi-Square/degrees of freedom (CMIN/df)	5.35
2	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.068
3	Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.966
4	Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)	0.954
5	Standardized Root Mean Square Residual(SRMSR)	0.021

Source: Primary Data

Table 3 shows that the RMSEA, CFI, TLI, and SRMSR indices satisfy the acceptable threshold level. This indicates that the construct model has sufficient sample size and demonstrates that the model has a good fit to prove the validity of the model.

Figure 3: Path Analysis of the model



The effect of SES (Path Coefficient = -0.01), Gender (Path Coefficient = 0.66), Education (Path Coefficient = -0.27), and Age (Path Coefficient = 0.10) on EI can be seen in Figure 3. It explains that the covariance between SES and Gender is -0.14, the covariance between SES and Education is 0.12, the covariance between SES and Age is -0.090, Gender and Education is 0.00, Gender and Age is 0.03, and Education and Age is 0.31. The residual variance of EI is 1.47.

H_o: There is no Significant Effect of SES, Gender, Age and Education on Entrepreneurial Intention.

Table 4: Model Regression Analysis

	Estimate	**Std. Error**	**t-value**	**p-value**
Intercept	2.197049	0.810983	2.709	0.00687 **
Gender	0.687842	0.089089	7.721	< 0.01
Age	0.096694	0.033165	2.916	0.00364 **
Education	0.271067	0.147801	1.834	0.06698
SES	-0.014534	0.007194	-2.020	0.04362 *

* 5% level of significance, ** 1% level of significance

Source: Primary Data

Table 5: Residuals Statistics

Min	1Q	Median	3Q	Max
-3.9976	-0.8813	0.2400	1.0890	2.4664
Residual standard error: 1.354 on 924 degrees of freedom				
Multiple R-squared: 0.07743		**Adjusted R-squared:** 0.07343		
F-statistic: 19.39 on 4 and 924 DF		**p-value:** 2.488e-15		

Source: Primary Data

The above table 4 shows the coefficients (slopes) for the regression of gender (0.688), age (0.097), education (0.271) and SES (-0.015) on EI. It has been observed that the p-value of education is greater than 0.05, so education does not have a significant effect on EI, whereas the p-values of gender, age, and SES are less than 0.05, thereby making them factors having a significant effect on EI.

Figure 4: Refined Path Model

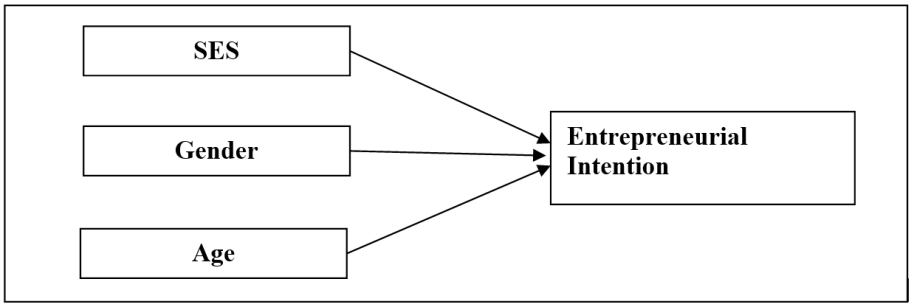


Figure 4 shows the refined model depicting the effect of Gender, Age and SES on EI.

The finding of this study is in confirmation with other studies that demographic factors play a role in influencing EI of students (Ayodele, 2013; Israr & Saleem, 2018; Nguyen, 2018; Ponmani et al., 2014; Samuel et al., 2013; Sasu & Sasu, 2015).

Conclusion

The decision to pursue a career in entrepreneurship may be considered voluntary and deliberate. Therefore, it is reasonable to investigate the

decision-making process that led to that result. In this study, an effort was made to empirically investigate the EI of Meghalaya's youth and to examine the many elements that can be used to predict the youth's intention to pursue an entrepreneurial career.

The study's findings indicate that not all of the researched elements have a direct effect on the entrepreneurial intent of young people. Other researches have shown the contrary to be true, but this study demonstrates that, apart from SES, gender, and age, education level has no significant effect on EI.

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Corrigendum:

In our Winter Issue, Volume XVIII, Winter 2021, we deeply regret that in Dharmendra Baruah's article " Folklore, Ethnobotany and the Construction of the Ethnic Self: Reading Arupa Patangia Kalita's *The Cursed Fields of Golden Rice"* his affiliation was not mentioned which should be as:

*The author is Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tezpur College, Tezpur, Assam.