

# Man and Society

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# Man and Society

## A Journal of North-East Studies

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## Editorial

One of the important requirements for formulation of effective development policy for a region is the availability of critical evidence-based research. It has been a continuous endeavor on the part of ICSSR family to promote such researches in terms of its various activities that include sponsorship and organisation of seminars, symposiums, workshops, conferences, FDPs, research methodology courses, development dialogues and research projects. Social science theory, social science research and particularly its dimension of contribution to actual development practice expands through dialogues and contestations. Our journal ‘ Man and Society-A Journal of North East Studies’ over the past few decades has emerged as an important platform to give space to the findings of some such select important academic exercises. In line with the NEP 2020’s stipulation of promotion of more of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, we have always tried to include articles from different branches of social sciences and humanities with a focus on benchmarking this spirit in their problem formulations, methodology specifications and analysis aspects. The current issue of our journal includes seven articles contributed by a blend of young as well as experienced social scientists. These articles have examined and analyzed the issues of health, education, connectivity, displacement, culture, entrepreneurship and institutions and have tried to contextualize them with the development discourse and development imperative of the region. At a time, when this part of the region of our country is experiencing largescale ? across the board development activities, calibrating these exercises to promote the all-critical imperative of sustainable development is a daunting task. It is against this background; our journal provides humble insights for creating the required institutional arrangement for such an envisaged calibration. I am assured, academicians, policy makers, development practitioners, community leaders and researchers will find this volume very relevant.

I also take this opportunity to thank our copy editor Ms. K.I. Lyngdoh and the concerned office staff Mr. Romauldo M. Pasi and Mr. Temberly R. Kharbani for meticulously 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 seriousness.



Bhagirathi Panda

# **Willingness to participate in Contributory Health Protection Scheme: A Study among Rural Households in Assam**

Bhaswati Adhikary\*

&

Debabrata Das\*\*

## **Abstract:**

Majority of the Indian rural population still lacks adequate financial protection against healthcare costs. Although health insurance schemes have the potential to improve the situation, the distribution of private insurance schemes is regressive, and it is not possible to introduce numerous fully-government funded policies due to fiscal constraints. Hence, the study proposes the concept of contributory health financing schemes to address the prevailing gap. The study attempted to estimate rural households' willingness to engage in such plans. The study is based on a survey of 1080 households covering three rural districts of Assam. To estimate the willingness of rural households to participate in a contributory health scheme, the contingent valuation method was used. Descriptive statistics, binary regressions, and correlation tests were also used to analyze the data. A clear trend in willingness to participate in a contributory health insurance (CHI) scheme is observed with wide variation across demographics. Households with experience of medical treatment are more likely to enroll in CHI policies. Surprisingly, the households that are familiar with the concept of health insurance are reluctant to appreciate the idea of CHI, and the majority still lacks proper knowledge about the benefits of health insurance schemes. The households' annual income level moderately influences the premium

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willing to pay for a safety net.

**Keywords:** Contributory Health Insurance Scheme, Willingness to pay, Financial Protection, Health Policy, Healthcare Costs.

### **Introduction:**

Almost every year, around 100 million people around the world have been pushed into extreme poverty by the high out-of-pocket (OOP) health expenses, and India solely accounted for half of this estimated population (World Bank, 2017). Poverty leads to ill-health, and ill-health further maintains poverty; thus, the cycle goes on intertwining ill-health and poverty (Wagstaff, 2002). So, for a developing country like India, the issue of high OOP health expenses will not only thwart the development of its population but also the overall economic development of the country as well. To remove this hindrance, India must find ways to shield its people from such financial hardships.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “financial protection is at the core of the universal health coverage.” and “financial protection is achieved when direct payments made to obtain health services do not expose people to financial hardship and do not threaten living standards”. A well-functioning health system must protect the people from the financial repercussions of ill health (WHO, 2010). India stepped in the journey towards achieving UHC in the year 2010 with the 12th five-year plan.

Despite several attempts since the inception of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), affordability is still a severe issue for the majority of the population, especially at the tertiary level (United Nations India, 2015). According to the latest National Health Accounts estimates, the amount paid by the people of India for health care is almost twice the amount spent by the state and central government (National Health Systems Resource Centre,

2019). The data reveals that households' OOP expenses are responsible for 58.7 per cent of the total health spending, while government health expenditure stood at merely 32.4 per cent. On the other hand, the current financial situation of India is also not at all satisfactory as less than one-third of the households have at least one member enrolled under some health insurance or health scheme (International Institute for Population Sciences and ICF, 2017). So, most of the population still lack adequate financial protection, and it is a matter of concern in recent times.

### **Literature Review:**

Studies suggest that a health system can provide better protection against unforeseen health risks with the revenue collected through different types of prepayments like compulsory/voluntary insurance premiums, health taxes, etc. (Saksena et al, 2014; Moreno-Serra et al, 2011). Among the several revenue sources, insurance premiums or taxes are more efficient and progressive than OOP spending. Evidence from available literature proves the potential of health insurance schemes on several fronts. The studies have claimed that health insurance can increase access and reduce catastrophic OOP expenses (Escobar et al, 2011). From the systematic review of sixty-eight full-length research articles, Erlangga et al, (2019) reported that with increased insurance coverage access to healthcare, protection against financial risks, as well as health conditions have improved in low-and-middle-income countries (LMICs). Based on a household survey in Vietnam, Nguyen, et al. (2012) claimed that the insurance reform has been able to reduce the households' vulnerability to high treatment costs by reducing both direct and indirect costs. The nationally representative cross-sectional study has also identified a positive financial protection effect from the social health insurance schemes of China (Chen, et al., 2017). Over the years, the Indian government also has been promoting health insurance as a key to improve financial security against healthcare risks. Several publicly

financed health schemes to provide financial assistance have been launched at the state, as well as at the national level through the public-private partnership (PPP) model. But the assessment reports of these schemes on the front of providing financial security healthcare costs have provided diverse outcomes (Acharya, et al., 2012). Significantly these government-funded policies are pro-poor focused. Apart from the publicly funded health insurance schemes, several other health insurance schemes are operating under General Insurance Corporations (GIC), Life Insurance Corporations (LIC), and other private insurance providers. Mathiyazhagan (2018) has mentioned that the distribution of these schemes are regressive as they are often biased towards the salaried, wealthy people and often urban-centric. As a result, a large segment of the country's population residing in rural areas has remained deprived of the benefits of these health insurance policies. So, to improve the financial security scenario in India, the population coverage frame will have to be extended to the broader segment of the society. To achieve this, new policies, customised for maximum population coverage, will be required.

There are several antecedents to developing new health insurance schemes and one of them is the information on target populations' capacity to pay for the premiums. Except for the universal health insurance schemes funded through tax funds, a certain amount of premium has to be paid for all other contributory schemes. Hence, designing a scheme that no one from the target population can afford will be completely absurd. Studies have reported low-income households initially being reluctant to "pay" for services they might not use in the future (Brown & Churchill, 2000), while on the other hand studies have proven that the rise in risk aversion nature can lead to individuals buying substantial insurance coverage for themselves (Koç, 2004). Due to such differences among the populations, academicians have often recommended accessing and utilizing data on willingness-to-pay (WTP) for health insurance policies while designing new schemes (Arhin-



Tenkorang, 2001). Hence, in this study, an attempt has been made to get preliminary assessments on households' WTP pay for a contributory health insurance policy.

### **The Issue:**

The high burden of healthcare costs has been an issue for India for decades. Over the last few decades, evidence suggests that demographic changes and epidemiological transition among the Indian population affect the country's health spending levels (Mohanty et al, 2016; Barik & Arokiasamy, 2016). India has witnessed a substantial rise in the OOP health spendings and a significant increase in the proportion of households experiencing catastrophic health expenditures (CHE), and the CHE incidence is more common in the rural areas (Pandey et al, 2017; Saksena et al, 2010). Studies also have discovered wide variations in the magnitude of OOP payments and CHE across the states of India at various levels of epidemiological transitions (Pandey et al, 2010). Studies have shown that variation in CHE is substantially higher at the state level than that at the district or regional levels (Mohanty et al, 2018). But compared to the immense financial risk for healthcare, the current protection coverage, with wide variation across the states, is not adequate for India. These variations are clear indications of inter-state inequality in financial risk levels and financial security against healthcare. With such variations, one standard solution for the entire country might not be the best fit; instead, a state-specific approach might be more rewarding and efficient for addressing these issues regarding the healthcare system (Debroy & Kumar, 2015). Assam has witnessed extensive variations in terms of OOP health spendings and financial catastrophe over the decades. Despite several interventions, with the slowest progress among all the states and UTs, Assam still is included in the group worst-performing states as per the SDG India Index report (NITI Aayog, 2021). The report further reveals that in the field of health (SDG 3), Assam has the lowest score of 59 among

all states. Hence, in light of the poor health scenario prevailing in Assam, we have designed our study in the rural settings of Assam, where the majority of the state's population resides.

### **Objective:**

The study attempts

- i) To ascertain the willingness to participate in contributory health insurance schemes among rural households of Assam and determine the influencing factors
- ii) To identify the amount of contribution families are willing to pay and choice of coverage they expect from these schemes

### **Methodology:**

#### 1. Study Area Selection

According to the CRISIL Inclusix Scores (CRISIL, 2018), out of the five regions of India, financial inclusion is the lowest for the North-Eastern region. The zone is still far behind in three fronts, i.e., branch penetration, deposit penetration, and insurance penetration. The state-wise distribution of the health insurance business from the IRDAI annual report (2020) has shown that the health insurance population coverage for Assam has been continually at the lower end since financial year 2014-15. Again the National Family and Health Survey - 4 (NFHS 4) reveals that out of the eight states of the NE region, Assam has one of the lowest numbers of households with health insurance scheme enrolment in the rural areas of the state (International Institute for Population Sciences and ICF, 2017). Hence, the study has focused on the rural population of Assam.

### **Sampling Procedure and Sample Size**

The rural households are the sampling unit for the study and a four-stage

non-probabilistic sampling method has been used to select these households. In the first stage, an index is computed for the districts from relevant secondary data sets (i.e., Aggregate households healthcare expenditure data from the Assam Human Development Report-2014 and the number of rural households among the rural population with at least one member enrolled under any health scheme or health insurance data from NFHS-4). Based on these index values, the districts have been ranked and grouped into three categories, following the method proposed by Ram and Shekhar (2006). Districts Chirang and Dima Hasao are not considered further for sampling due to the lack of information. Finally, one district from each of the three groups is selected (i.e., Morigaon, Nalbari, and Darrang). The following table (Refer to Table 1) has the details of the remaining three stages of the sampling process. In the end, a sample of 1080 households is selected for the survey.

**Table 1: Detailed Household Sampling Plan for the Study**

	<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Morigaon</i>	<i>Nalbari</i>	<i>Darrang</i>
Stage II: Community Development (CD) Block Sampling First Stage Sampling Unit (FSSU)	The CD blocks with a rural population of 95 per cent or above were selected.	5 Nos. (out of 7)	4 Nos. (out of 7)	6 Nos. (out of 7)
Stage III: Village Sampling Second Stage Sampling Unit (SSSU)	10 per cent of the villages from each of the selected blocks were randomly selected.	32 Nos. (16+11+2+0+3)	27 Nos. (3+3+12+9)	49 Nos. (1+18+9+6+7+8)
Stage IV: Household Sampling End-Stage Sampling Unit (ESSU)	10 numbers of households were selected randomly from each of the villages.	320	270	490
Total Number of Households Selected		1080 .		

Source: Field Data

## Data Collection and Tools for Analysis

A structured interview schedule was used to collect data from the head of the households or any member familiar with the households' finances. The interview schedule was developed following the contingent valuation (CV) method<sup>1</sup> from the Stated Preference (SP) approach for estimating the willingness of rural families to participate in a contributory health scheme. If the households expressed their willingness for enrolment, they were requested to quote the maximum amount they would be willing to pay in a year and the different healthcare services they expect these policies to cover. Apart from this, the interview schedule also had questions about the household demographics, health conditions of the family members, healthcare-seeking pattern, healthcare costs and financing patterns, and their perception of these health expenses. The data collected through the survey were summarised using descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics (binary logistic regression and correlation tests) were used to identify the existing relationship between different variables.

## Analysis and Findings:

The survey covered households from different socio-economic settings. The largest share of houses is of medium family size (3-4 members). Approximately 15.9 per cent of representative households' have large families (7 or more members), while 31.7 per cent of households have five to six members. The single-member houses and families with only two members are pretty low in numbers. Out of the three types of dwelling patterns in rural parts of the state, i.e., *Pucca*, *Semi-pucca*, and *Kucha*, *Kucha* houses are the highest in the count (52.5 per cent). Irrespective of the types, almost every family owned their residences. The count of Hindu families is greater (59.4 per cent) than the number of Muslim families (40.6 per cent). The social categorisation shows that the majority (59.8 per cent) are from the General (forward) category, while OBC, SC, and ST social

groups among the households constitute 25.8 per cent, 4.7 per cent, and 9.6 per cent, respectively. The interviewed households are almost evenly distributed across five income groups (Refer to Table 2).

**Table 2: Socio-Economic Demographics of the Sample Households**

<i>Demographics</i>		<i>No of Responses</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Religion	Hindu	641	59.4
	Muslim	439	40.6
Social Group <sup>2</sup>	General	646	59.8
	OBC	279	25.8
	SC	51	4.7
	ST	104	9.6
	Pucca	315	29.2
Type of Household <sup>3</sup>	Semi-pucca	198	18.3
	Kucha	567	52.5
	Own	1078	99.9
Household Ownership	Rented	1	0.1
Family Size	Single/ 1 member	14	1.3
	2 members	51	4.7
	3-4 members	501	46.4
	5-6 members	342	31.7
	7 or members	172	15.9
Annual Income	Up to Rs. 60000	224	20.7
	Rs. 60001–Rs. 90000	215	19.9
	Rs. 90001-Rs.129600	209	19.4
	Rs.129601- Rs.231000	217	20.1
	Rs. 231001 and more	215	19.9

Source: Field Data

**Willingness to participate in CHI schemes and its determining factors:**

Out of the 1080 rural households interviewed for the study, 74.6 per cent (806 houses) are willing to get enrolled under a contributory health financing scheme. The distribution of these 806 houses, compliant to the ideas of a contributory health scheme is almost similar across the first four income groups. Among the highest-earning families, compliance is relatively low (Refer to Table 3).

**Table 3: Distribution of the Households willing to participate in a contributory scheme across the Income groups**

<i>Households Willing to Participate</i>	<i>Household Income Groups</i>					<i>Total</i>
	<i>Up to Rs. 60000</i>	<i>Rs. 60001– Rs. 90000</i>	<i>Rs. 90001– Rs.129600</i>	<i>Rs.129601– Rs.231000</i>	<i>Rs. 231001 and more</i>	
Count	165	175	160	174	132	806
Percentage	20.5	21.7	19.9	21.6	16.4	100

Source: Field Data

Several variables can persuade a household's decision on whether to participate in a contributory scheme. Based on the systematic review of twenty-one articles from ten countries, Nosratnejad et al, (2016) have reported that there are five categories of variables that influence a household's willingness to pay (WTP) for any health insurance policy. These five groups are demographic determinants, socioeconomic determinants, health service-related determinants, determinants associated with perceived needs, and insurance-related variables. Several other studies from across the world also observed that variables influencing the WTP for health insurance policies often fall into either of these categories (Al-Hanawi et al, 2018; Jofre-Bonet & Kamara, 2018; Entele & Emodi, 2016; Gidey et al, 2019). These studies have focused on different types of health insurance policies in different contexts; hence the determinants are similar but not identical. So, we carried out ten binary logistic regressions (BLR) with five sets of variables to find out what are the different variables that influence a family's decision to engage with a contributory health scheme in the rural settings of Assam. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test results confirmed that each of these derived logit models is a good fit for the data.

### **Household Demographics**

The demographic variables considered for the logit models are the geographic location of the household (residing district), income group of the

households, family size, religion, and the social group of the houses. With these five household demographic variables, we carried out three BLRs.

**Table 4: Logit model (1) on households’ WTP with respect to their geographic location**

<i>Variable</i>		<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp (B)</i>
<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
District	Residing district of the HH (Ref. Cat: Darrang)			40.163	2	.000	
district(1)	Nalbari	-.316	.186	2.895	1	.089	.729
district(2)	Morigaon	-1.021	.164	38.648	1	.000	.360

Source: Field Data

The odds ratio (OR) reveals that compared to the households from the Darrang district, families from Morigaon are less willing to participate in such schemes. The willingness level is less for the Morigaon district houses (OR = 0.360), compared to that from the Darrang district houses.

**Table 5: Logit model (2) on households’ WTP with respect to their annual income and family size**

<i>Variable</i>			<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
1	HH_size_grp	HH family size (Ref. Cat: 7 or more members)			11.259	4	.024	
	HH_size_grp(1)	Single/ 1 member	.714	.693	1.062	1	.303	2.042
	HH_size_grp(2)	2 members	.272	.374	.528	1	.467	1.312
	HH_size_grp(3)	3-4 members	.659	.212	9.678	1	.002	1.933
	HH_size_grp(4)	5-6 members	.269	.208	1.683	1	.194	1.309

2	Inc_A_Grp	Income group of the households (Ref. Cat.: Rs 231001 or more p.a.)			19.287	4	.001	
	Inc_A_Grp(1)	Rs 60000 or less p.a.	.350	.226	2.397	1	.122	1.419
	Inc_A_Grp(2)	Rs 60001-Rs 90000 p.a.	.790	.238	11.043	1	.001	2.204
	Inc_A_Grp(3)	Rs 90001-Rs 129600 p.a.	.515	.226	5.186	1	.023	1.673
	Inc_A_Grp(4)	Rs 129601-Rs 231000 p.a.	.859	.224	14.736	1	.000	2.361

Source: Field Data

The second logit model (Refer to Table 5) shows that both households' income group and family size are statistically significant, at the 95 per cent confidence interval, in determining a household's WTP for a contributory insurance policy. The OR values reveal that compared to large families (7 or more members), medium-size families with 3-4 members 1.933 times more willing to participate in such schemes. On the other hand, compared to the highest-earning families, households from the remaining three income groups (excluding the lowest-earning houses) are more likely to comply with the concept of contributory healthcare scheme, and the odds varied randomly across these three groups. The odds are highest for the high earning families (OR = 2.361) followed by the second-lowest income group houses (OR = 2.204), and least for the moderate earners (OR = 1.673). The lowest-earning income is non-significant in this context.



**Table 6: Logit model (3) on households' WTP with respect to their religion and social group**

<i>Variable</i>			<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
1	religion(1)	Hindu families	.624	.200	9.730	1	.002	1.866
2	caste	The social group of the HH (Ref. Cat.: ST)			11.057	3	.011	
	caste(1)	General	.783	.270	8.396	1	.004	2.187
	caste(2)	OBC	.751	.257	8.541	1	.003	2.119
	caste(3)	SC	.348	.378	.848	1	.357	1.416

Source: Field Data

According to the third logit model (Refer to Table 6), the household's religion and social group are statistically significant in determining their WTP. The odds of a Hindu family willing to register under a contributory scheme is almost twice the odds for a Muslim family (OR = 1.866). The households belonging to the general and OBC categories are more willing than the ST households. The odds are twice for both of the social group (OR = 2.187, 2.119).

### **Healthcare treatment pattern**

In the second set of variables, we have considered the households' healthcare-seeking pattern from the previous year. It has been found that the type of provider visited for OP consultations has statistically significant impacts on households' decisions to participate in a contributory scheme. The logit

model (4) (Refer to Table 7) showed that if the household has witnessed any OP visit within the recall period (30 days), they are likely to express their WTP for contributory health policy. The odds of a household agreeing to pay for the scheme are almost similar, irrespective of the type of provider, public or private (OR = 1.362, 1.479).

**Table 7: Logit model (4) on households' WTP with respect to the type of provider for OP visits**

<i>Variable</i>			<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
1	OP_provider_G(1)	Household has visited a public facility for OP consultation	.309	.155	3.956	1	.047	1.362
2	OP_provider_P(1)	Household has visited a private facility for OP consultation	.391	.175	4.987	1	.026	1.479

Source: Field Data

According to the study, private healthcare providers also play quite a distinct role in determining WTP. The logit model (5) suggests that the number of IP and OP treatments received from private facilities is statistically significant for determining the household's WTP. The odds ratios indicated that as the number of IP treatments availed from a private facility in a year goes up the chances of a family's WTP for a contributory scheme decline by 0.692 times. On the other hand, the increase in the number of OP visits to a private facility in a month raises the odds for WTP by 1.278 times. In brief, household healthcare treatment patterns in private facilities can be taken as a strong predictor for their WTP for any contributory health scheme.

**Table 8: Logit model (5) on households' WTP with respect to count of treatments from different providers**

<i>Variable</i>			<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
1	IP_G	IP treatments in public facility (count)	.058	.101	.331	1	.565	1.060
2	IP_P	IP treatments in private facility (count)	-.368	.120	9.487	1	.002	.692
3	IP_M	IP treatments in both public and private facility (count)	-.182	.180	1.028	1	.311	.833
4	OP_G	OP treatments in public facility (count)	.147	.089	2.718	1	.099	1.158
5	OP_P	OP treatments in private facility (count)	.245	.113	4.706	1	.030	1.278
6	OP_M	OP treatments in both public and private facility (count)	-.345	.244	1.995	1	.158	.708

Source: Field Data

### Household healthcare financing decisions

The households' earnings might not be enough for every household to cover their medical bills. Hence, it is often noticed that different households adopt different financing measures to pay their medical bills. The study has identified seven financing alternatives prominently adopted in rural settings, and they are household income, family savings, selling off assets, borrowing from relatives/friends, a loan from moneylenders, and micro-credit from SHG/

MFI. Although a share of the households has health insurance registrations, the families that have benefitted from health insurance policies are very few in numbers. According to the logit model (Refer to Table 9), out of these alternatives, households that have relied on micro-credits to pay for healthcare are more willing to pay for a contributory health scheme. The chances of agreeing to participate in a CHI scheme doubles for the families that had availed micro-credits in the past for healthcare purposes (OR = 2.607).

**Table 9: Logit model (6) on households’ WTP with respect to count of treatments from different providers**

<i>Variable</i>			<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
1	fin_a(1)	Used household income	.943	.516	3.342	1	.068	2.567
2	fin_b(1)	Used household savings	.121	.222	.300	1	.584	1.129
3	fin_c(1)	Reimbursement received from health insurance policies.	.910	.631	2.082	1	.149	2.485
4	fin_d(1)	Sold off household assets	-.253	.172	2.156	1	.142	.777
5	fin_e(1)	Borrowed from relatives and friends	.206	.151	1.857	1	.173	1.228
6	fin_f(1)	Borrowed from moneylender	.208	.219	.904	1	.342	1.231
7	fin_h(1)	Availed micro-credit from SHG/ MFI	.958	.159	36.397	1	.000	2.607

Source: Field Data

**Insurance-related information**

The knowledge about the concept of health insurance and past experiences with health insurance policies are expected to have a significant influence on a household’s future decisions regarding any such new policies. But in our study, we have found that the current enrolment status of the households is non-significant in determining their WTP for any new health insurance policy. There is no significant difference in households’ willingness to participate in a CHI between the families with health insurance enrolments and families without any such enrolments. However, on the other hand, the families who are previously aware of the concept of health insurance are less likely to agree to the idea of a CHI. According to the odds ratio, the WTP for a CHI policy is 0.595 times less for the households that are familiar with the concept of health insurance.

**Table 10: Logit model (7) on households’ WTP with respect to awareness and enrolment status**

<i>Variable</i>			<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Sl. No</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
1	Ins_awareness(1)	Household is aware of the concept of Health Insurance	-.519	.176	8.699	1	.003	.595
2	Ins_Enrol(1)	Household is already enrolled in a Health Insurance policy	.213	.178	1.428	1	.232	1.237

Source: Field Data

**Healthcare costs and its consequences from the household’s perspective**

Households’ annual cost of healthcare and the probable impact of these costs are perceived differently by different houses. The logit models unveiled that rural households’ perceptions can directly influence their WTP for a contributory policy. The families who don’t believe that health care expenses are affordable are more willing to participate in a CHI scheme (Refer to Table 11). The odds of these households agreeing to a CHI policy is almost twice the odds for houses whose health expenses are deemed reasonable (OR = 1.863).

**Table 11: Logit model (8) on households’ WTP with respect to the affordability of healthcare costs**

<i>Variable</i>		<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
exp_atti3_regrp	Opinion on “Health care expenses are affordable” (Ref: Agree)			12.675	2	.002	
exp_atti3_regrp(1)	Disagree	.622	.176	12.562	1	.000	1.863
exp_atti3_regrp(2)	Neutral	.457	.192	5.653	1	.017	1.579

Source: Field Data

Similarly, the households whose annual income is not sufficient to cover their health expenses are more willing to get enrolled in a CHI plan. In comparison to the families with satisfactory earnings, the WTP almost doubles for the families who believe their income is insufficient (OR = 1.810).

**Table 12: Logit model (9) on households’ WTP with respect to the sufficiency of household income**

<i>Variable</i>		<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
exp_atti4_regrp	Opinion on “Household income is sufficient to cover health care costs” (Ref: Agree)			12.137	2	.002	
exp_atti4_regrp(1)	Disagree	.593	.173	11.778	1	.001	1.810
exp_atti4_regrp(2)	Neutral	.300	.199	2.276	1	.131	1.350

Source: Field Data

According to the logit model (10), if a household has not incurred an excessive amount of financial debts because of healthcare treatments, they are less willing to engage in a CHI plan (Refer to Table 13). For families whose financial debt level has not been affected by healthcare expenses, the WTP reduces by approximately 50 per cent (OR =0.565).

**Table 13: Logit model (10) on households’ WTP with respect to increase in financial debt**

<i>Variable</i>		<i>B</i>	<i>S.E.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Exp(B)</i>
<i>Name</i>	<i>Description</i>						
exp_atti6_regrp	Opinion on “Health care expenses have increased the financial debt of the family” (Ref: Agree)			16.230	2	.000	

exp_atti6_ regrp(1)	Disagree	-.571	.159	12.905	1	.000	.565
exp_atti6_ regrp(2)	Neutral	.018	.191	.008	1	.927	1.018

Source: Field Data

### Extent of Willingness to pay for a CHI and Expected Coverage

The households who were willing to pay for a CHI also quoted the amount they could afford to pay for such schemes. On average, a family from rural settings is willing to pay Rs. 2556 in a year, with a high standard deviation of Rs. 2387. Although the WTP amount ranges from as low as Rs 60 to Rs. 24000, with a median value of Rs. 2000, we have observed that the distribution of these premium shares is positively skewed, and the most frequently premium amount (mode) is Rs. 1200 per year. The Pearson correlation coefficient confirmed that the amount of premium rural households willing to pay for a CHI scheme shares a positive and moderate linear association with the household's annual income ( $r = 0.637$ ) and a weak positive relationship with the size of the family ( $r = 0.355$ ). The amount of premium, that households are willing to pay, increases with the rise in annual income as well as for the increase in family size but not in equal proportion. Additionally, we have identified that the majority of these 806 households wanted that such plans should cover the costs of medications (93.67 per cent). A significantly large proportion of households have also emphasised that IP treatment costs (43.8 per cent), as well as costs of diagnostic tests (44.67 per cent), should be included under these schemes.

**Table 14: Frequency Distribution of expected service coverage**

<i>Expected Coverage</i>	<i>IP Cost</i>	<i>OP Consultation Cost</i>	<i>Cost of Medicines</i>	<i>Cost of Diagnostics Tests</i>	<i>Transportation Costs</i>
Count	353	35	755	360	29
Per cent	43.8	4.34	93.67	44.67	3.6

Source: Field Data



## **Key Findings:**

Considering the significance of financial protection against healthcare risks, the World Health Report (2010) has incorporated it in the UHC cube as one of the three types of essential coverage needed for making healthcare universally accessible and affordable. Despite several attempts, India is still lagging far behind in this front of UHC. Hence, this study has tried to explore the prospects of a contributory health insurance scheme to fill the void of the country's current health system. The findings have unveiled several insights regarding the willingness of the rural society for CHI schemes from several viewpoints.

### 2. Role of Demographics:

Approximately, three-fourth of the sample expressed their willingness to participate in a CHI scheme. The study has identified significant variation in willingness level across the state; the households from Morigaon districts are most reluctant to this concept. Compared to the large joint families, medium-sized families are more inclined to engage with a CHI policy. On the other hand, households from every income group are highly willing to pay for a CHI policy, except for the lowest-earning families. The limited earnings of these households are often not enough to make their ends meet; thus, an additional contribution to a health policy might not be very tempting for such families. Considering the issue of affordability, the government has already implemented several pro-poor health protection schemes like Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana and many more, at both the national and state levels. So, despite the affordability issue, they at least have some protection, unlike the rest of the income groups. The households' WTP for CHI policies differed from one another on the grounds of social and religious

beliefs as well. Hindu families are relatively more inclined to the concept of CHIs than Muslim families, and similarly, general, OBC class households also seemed more willing.

### 3. Influence of Treatment Pattern:

Different types of treatments have different financial impacts on families. IP cases are rare, but the cost of treatment is expensive. OP cases are frequent and relatively cheaper, but often get prolonged due to routine check-ups. OP visits usually entail high costs of medications and costly diagnostic tests at times. Reports have also shown that, for India, OP care is responsible for 84.84 per cent of total household OOP expenses, while IP care expenses stand for 31.96 per cent only (National Health Systems Resource Centre, 2016). The cost of treatments increases manifolds when attended by a private facility. Experience with such medical events aids in realizing the need for financial protections for the households; thus, families that have previously encountered such cases are more prone to enrolling in CHI policy, although their expectations from these schemes might vary.

### 4. Impact of Rural households' Coping Strategies:

In the rural setting, micro-credits from SHG/MFI are the most prominent source of financing the various short-term needs of the families. According to the study, rural households often relied on such micro-credits to pay medical bills as well. For houses with multiple micro-credits, odds of over-indebtedness are high, and it makes the families financially more vulnerable. In such cases, rural households are more interested in the idea of CHI policies. Surprisingly, previous experience and awareness about health insurance policies have adversely affected the

suggested CHI scheme. While the current enrollment status of the households is entirely irrelevant in the context of WTP for a CHI plan, surprisingly, the families that are familiar with the concept of health insurance are found to be reluctant about the idea of CHI. It is an indication that the existing health insurance policies might have failed to deliver as per anticipation, and there is the rural population still lacks proper knowledge about the different beneficial aspects of health insurance schemes.

5. Significance of Rural Perceptions of Healthcare Costs and Its Insurance:

The incidence of high OOP health expenses often influences households' perceptions about healthcare cost and their short and long-term impacts on the family. Whenever healthcare becomes unaffordable, with desperate attempts to cope with these high expenses many families often end up with huge debts. In situations like these, the need for financial protection is mostly felt by the families. The amounts that the households are willing to pay for a safety net against healthcare risks are highly dispersed. The WTP amount is found to be influenced by the households' annual income level but in moderate proportions. The lack of awareness and wrong perceptions about the health insurance policies could be one of the prime causes of such controlled WTP. Although most of the established schemes principally emphasised providing financial assistance for IP treatments, it is noteworthy that the rural households felt the need for protection mostly against the medication costs. As per the study, the rural households placed the costs of diagnostic tests and IP costs in the second and third positions in the preferred service coverage list. The World Health Statistics Report (WHO, 2019) has validated

that out-of-pocket spending on medicine can be a significant source for such financial hardship for all households, and in the case of India, the cost of medications holds the largest share in the total health expenses of houses (National Health Systems Resource Centre, 2016). So, the need for protection against medicinal necessities being the first priority for rural families is highly relevant at current times. Financial protection against healthcare costs is the need of the hour.

### **Conclusion:**

In the absence of a definite guideline for extending financial protection from healthcare risks, a contributory health scheme might be a way to achieve better healthcare results in the rural settings of India. Since a significant share of households is willing to pay for it as per their capability, the government can put the idea of CHI to test to confirm the feasibility and effectiveness of the concept. But several influencing factors must be taken into account while implementing any CHI scheme in the future. Instead of following the conventional design of health insurance policies, the service coverage plan should harmonise with the population's needs. The focus should be on maximizing the service coverage of these insurance policies. In light of the variations in willingness across the different demographics, creating adequate awareness and correcting perceptions about health insurance policies will also play a crucial role in improving the acceptability of such schemes in rural settings. A CHI scheme might fill in the gap of the current health system for financial protection, but in light of the very confined level of WTP in terms of the contribution, the government will have to subsidise the premium amounts. For ensuring maximum population coverage, the government can even explore the integration of community development organisations and NGOs as delivery channels into the health insurance model. Microfinance is a popular source of financing in rural areas, and MFIs

already have a strong distribution network in these regions. In such settings, micro health insurance models embedded with microfinance policies can also be an alternative for extending coverage for the rural population.

**Notes:**

1. We presented the respondents with a hypothetical situation about a contributory health insurance product. We requested the respondents to consider the feasibility of the product in the actual market recorded and confirm whether they would want to get enrolled under these schemes. We recorded the responses in the dichotomous format (yes or no).
2. Indian population is divided into four broad categories in official statistics: Scheduled Caste (SC), scheduled Tribe (ST), Other Backward Class (OBC), and General Category (comprising of the 'upper' castes).
3. A pucca house is one, which has walls and roof made of the following material: Wall material: Burnt bricks, stones (packed with lime or cement), cement concrete, timber, ekra etc. A semi-pucca house is a house that has fixed walls made up of pucca material but roof is made up of the material other than those used for pucca house. When the walls and/or roof of the houses are made of material other than those mentioned above, such as unburnt bricks, bamboos, mud, grass, reeds, thatch, loosely packed stones, etc. then they are treated as kucha house.

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# **Empowering Tribal Education: Insights from Eklavya Model Residential Schools in Sixth Scheduled States of India**

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&

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## **Abstract**

This study explores the multifaceted impact of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) on tribal education in India. It delves into the challenges faced by Scheduled Tribes in accessing quality education and investigates how EMRS addresses these issues. The research emphasizes the role of EMRS in preserving cultural heritage, fostering a positive teacher-student relationship, and promoting holistic development through co-curricular activities. Additionally, the study analyzes students' awareness of community leaders, providing insights into the preservation of cultural knowledge. Furthermore, it examines the teacher-student relationship through key questions and underscores its pivotal role in academic and personal growth. The paper concludes by examining career aspirations among EMRS students, highlighting gender disparities and societal influences. Overall, the findings contribute to understanding the effectiveness of EMRS in empowering tribal communities through education, cultural preservation, and holistic development.

**Keywords:** Education, North East India, Cultural Heritage, Co-curricular Activities, Career Aspirations

## **INTRODUCTION**

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Education serves as a significant investment in individuals, enhancing their human capital and augmenting their skills, thereby increasing the overall productive capacity of the workforce (Schultz, 1961). It functions as a market signal, identifying the potentiality of workers (Spence, 1973), and extends beyond monetary returns, offering non-monetary benefits to individuals and society at large (Moncer, 1958). Unequal access to education has been linked to negative impacts on economic efficiency and social consistency (Ozturk, 2001).

In the context of India, the issue of equity in education is particularly pronounced among disadvantaged groups, such as the Scheduled Tribes, constituting 8.6% of the total population. Census 2011 reports a concerning literacy rate among tribes at 58.9%, significantly lower than the national average of 72.99% (Register General of India, 2011). Recognizing this educational disparity, the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) were established in 1997-98, aimed at providing quality upper primary, secondary, and senior secondary education to Scheduled Tribe students in remote areas (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, 2020).

The significance of EMRS is underscored by the government's commitment to establishing such schools in every block with more than 50% ST population by 2022, providing a parallel to Navodaya Vidyalayas with a focus on preserving local art, culture, and imparting training in sports and skill development. EMRS prioritizes students' wholesome development beyond academics, accommodating students from grade VI through XII with a capacity of 480 students per school. However, challenges persist in tribal habitations due to isolation, and the administration's efforts to impart education face hurdles, given teachers' reluctance to work in these locations (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.).

The separate Ministry of Tribal Affairs, created in 1999, underscores the unique challenges and needs of Scheduled Tribes. The introduction of

EMRS, a novel experimental scheme, aligns with the constitutional intent expressed in Article 46, aiming to promote the educational and economic interests of Scheduled Tribes and protect them from social injustice and exploitation. Periodic assessments of EMRS are crucial to understand its goals, achievements, and potential course corrections. In context to this background, this study specifically focuses on EMRS Khumulwng and EMRS Birchandrangar of Tripura and EMRS Serchhip and EMRS Lunglei of Mizoram, seeking to comprehend the impact of these schools on tribal students and their unique educational needs within their local habitats.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study employed a comprehensive research approach encompassing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to fulfill its objectives. The rationale for employing both strategies lies in their complementary nature, as each method has the potential to enhance the understanding derived from the other. Consequently, the ensuing dataset and research findings are a fusion of statistical analyses and subjective interpretations. The primary focus of the investigation revolves around evaluating the governance and management structure of EMRS, with specific attention directed towards scrutinizing the academic curriculum, extracurricular activities, and the capabilities of EMRS teachers in delivering tribal-centric education. Furthermore, the study aims to identify gaps and needs in in-service and pre-service training, assess the academic performance of tribal students over the last three years, and explore the broader impact of educational opportunities provided by EMRS.

The primary objective of this research is to ascertain the influence of educational provisions within EMRS on the quality of services rendered, the proficiency of learners and educators, and the overall school and classroom environment. Additionally, the study endeavors to scrutinize teaching-learning processes, evaluation procedures, children's learning outcomes,

and their subsequent career advancement. This investigation aligns with the original objectives of establishing EMRS as an educational intervention, specifically tailored for tribal children. The field study was conducted in two states in India, namely Tripura and Mizoram, both falling under the sixth schedule. These states were selected due to their high concentration of tribal populations and a significant number of operational EMRS, with Tripura and Mizoram having 05 and 02 functional EMRSs, respectively. (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.)

Data for the study was meticulously gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data encompassed reports, newspapers, journals, documents, and guidelines pertinent to the functioning of EMRS. Primary data, on the other hand, was acquired through intensive fieldwork. The research employed various tools, including a School Information Schedule, Hostel Information Schedule, Interview Schedules as well as a Focus Group Discussion Schedule involving parents and community members. Additionally, three Achievement Tests were administered for class VIII, X and XII.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was executed to select districts and, subsequently, EMRSs. Two districts were chosen per state, with one having the highest literacy rate and the other with the lowest literacy rate among the Scheduled Tribes according to the 2011 census. Thus, a total of four EMRSs were selected as the sample for this study. To assess the educational attainment of students, the research team designed achievement tests, and the sample sizes are presented in Table-1, categorizing participants based on their roles and states.

**Table-1: Sample Size**

State	Student		Principal	Teacher	Hostel superint- endents	Non- teaching staffs	Education Admin- istrator	Total
	Boys	Girls						

Tripura	179	231	2	6	2	2	2	424
Mizoram	105	71	2	6	2	2	2	190
<b>Total</b>	284	302	4	12	4	4	4	614

In addition to achievement tests, interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, hostel superintendents, non-teaching staff, community members, and educational administrators to gather perceptions and feedback regarding the implementation and impact of the school program.

### **Educational Challenges among Scheduled Tribes: A Comprehensive Review**

According to Dani (1979), a close association exists between poverty and lack of education, with the social and geographical isolation of tribal communities being pivotal factors responsible for the sluggish progress of education among them (Dani, 1979). Sen (2000) contends that while income is a prominent determinant for a life without deprivation, it is not the sole influencer on the life one can lead. Economic deprivation is identified as a causative factor for school dropout among Scheduled Tribes children (Sen, 2000).

Biswas and Krishnan (2017) reported that in Hooghly district (2013-14), 78.09% of tribal students enrolled in elementary levels, but only 60.03% completed secondary education. Notably, the tribal literacy rate in Hooghly district (61.9%) is lower than the state literacy rate for tribes (77.08%), attributed to the prevalent poverty. Tripathi (1981) found fluctuations in the enrolment rates of scheduled castes and tribes, highlighting a decline in the latter during certain periods (Biswas & Krishnan, 2017).

Masavi (1976) identified a 65% wastage rate at the primary level, emphasizing socioeconomic conditions, parental ignorance, ill-equipped teachers, language barriers, and inappropriate curricula as major contributors.

Haseena and Mohammed (2014) analyzed tribal student dropout in Kerala, citing factors such as extreme poverty, deprivation, low empowerment levels, and a deteriorating traditional knowledge system (Masavi, 1976).

A study by Pratchi Trust (2018) revealed that despite available facilities for Scheduled Tribes learners, accessibility remains a challenge (Rana, 2018). Bairathi (1992) emphasized the dismal state of schools in tribal settlements, citing poor management, teacher shortages, and inadequate infrastructure. Further this study argued that increased literacy among tribes correlates with educational development, asserting the importance of understanding rights and privileges for integration (Bairathi, 1992).

Biswal (1991) found gender disparities in tribal education in Orissa, with fewer girls enrolled and non-tribal, less qualified teachers (Biswal, 1991). Ekka's (1990) study on tribal education in Orissa highlighted the need for educational interventions tailored to various tribal habitations (Ekka, 1990). Geetha & Revathi (2012) called for a fresh approach to tribal education and development policy, considering quantity, quality, and cultural nuances (Geetha & Revathi, 2012). Challenges persist in reaching the benefits of development programs to tribal populations due to staff shortages, funding issues, and administrative complexities (Patnaik, 2005; Sahoo, 2011). It is crucial for the state to align development activities with tribal needs, culture, and livelihoods, ensuring comprehensive support for sustainable change.

## **Discussion**

### **Preserving Cultural Heritage Awareness Among Students**

In our rapidly evolving world marked by globalization and modernization, maintaining a connection with one's roots, culture, and community becomes paramount. Understanding the historical and cultural leaders who have significantly influenced a community plays a pivotal role in fostering a robust sense of identity and pride, especially among the younger generation.



Nevertheless, recent studies reveal a disconcerting lack of awareness among students concerning the names and contributions of their community leaders. This knowledge gap highlights the potential erosion of cultural understanding, necessitating urgent attention for the betterment of society as a whole.

This study aimed to assess the level of awareness among students regarding their community leaders or eminent figures who have left a lasting impact on their cultural heritage. Conducting a comprehensive survey across various educational institutions provided a glimmer of hope as field data uncovered variations in awareness levels across different states. Notably, Tripura exhibited the highest awareness levels (81.49%), while Mizoram showed relatively lower levels (73.30%). Gender-wise distribution indicated a minor disparity, with boys generally having slightly higher awareness levels than girls across all states. Although the overall awareness rate appears promising, room for improvement exists, with approximately 20% of students still unaware of their community leaders or significant figures. Enhancing awareness is crucial for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and community values. The field data suggests a positive trend in preserving cultural knowledge, yet further research is essential to comprehend influencing factors and address any regional or gender disparities. Efforts should be made to increase awareness levels among students, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of their cultural heritage.

### **Teacher-Student Relationship: A Cornerstone of Academic Learning**

The teacher-student relationship stands as an undeniable cornerstone of academic learning at the school level, recognized throughout history for its role in facilitating effective and meaningful learning experiences. This bond between educators and learners significantly influences students' educational journeys, impacting both academic performance and personal growth.

Positive and supportive relationships between teachers and students create a conducive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and motivated to actively engage in their studies. Teachers who demonstrate care and interest in their students' well-being cultivate a safe space where learners are more willing to take intellectual risks, share ideas, and participate actively in classroom discussions. This engagement enhances the learning process, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding of the subjects they study.

Effective communication is a vital aspect of fostering a strong teacher-student relationship. When students feel comfortable approaching their teachers, they are more likely to seek help when needed, clarify doubts, and express thoughts and concerns. This communication bridges the gap between the teacher's knowledge and the student's understanding, resulting in better comprehension and retention of information.

Trust forms the foundation of the teacher-student relationship. When students trust their teachers, they are more inclined to embrace challenges and push their intellectual boundaries. This trust empowers students to navigate academic obstacles, developing a growth mindset crucial for their long-term learning and personal development. A notable benefit of a strong teacher-student relationship is the personalization of teaching methods. Teachers who know their students well can identify individual learning styles, strengths, and weaknesses, tailoring instructional approaches to suit diverse needs. This personalization promotes greater engagement and participation, ultimately leading to improved academic outcomes. Beyond academics, the teacher-student relationship significantly influences students' social and emotional development. A caring and supportive teacher helps students develop self-confidence, emotional intelligence, and resilience. When students feel emotionally secure in their learning environment, they are more likely to explore their potential, take on leadership roles, and collaborate effectively with peers. The positive teacher-student relationship extends to the entire

classroom, creating a harmonious atmosphere among students. As teachers model respectful and compassionate behavior, students are encouraged to treat each other with kindness and understanding, fostering cooperation, teamwork, and a sense of community. Furthermore, the teacher-student relationship serves as a role model for students, impacting their character development and shaping their future interactions with authority figures and peers. Positive connections with teachers influence students to internalize the values demonstrated by these educators, leaving a lasting impact on their ethical choices and social interactions. In essence, the teacher-student relationship goes beyond merely imparting knowledge; it is a transformative force that empowers students to thrive academically and personally.

### **Understanding the Teacher-Student Relationship: Insights from Key Questions**

This study seeks to comprehend the teacher-student relationship through three key questions that delve into the level of familiarity and personal connection between students and their teachers, as well as the overall sense of recognition and belonging within the school community:

- Do you know the names of all your teachers?
- Do all the teachers in your school know your name?
- Does the principal of your school know your name?

Analyzing the data by state reveals Mizoram as the standout, with the highest percentage of students who know the names of all their teachers (98.30%), followed closely by Tripura (94.58%). These figures indicate a significant majority of students in these states are well acquainted with the names of all their teachers. However, when comparing the data by gender, boys generally have a slightly higher percentage of students who know the names of all their teachers compared to girls. Specifically, 99.07% of boys know the names of all their teachers, while 96.35% of girls have this level of

familiarity. This suggests that, on average, boys have a marginally stronger connection with their teachers in terms of name recognition.

### **Fostering Familiarity: Number of Teachers Aware of Students' Names**

The level of familiarity between teachers and students is a pivotal factor in shaping the teacher-student relationship and the overall classroom environment. Mutual recognition, where students know the names of their teachers and vice versa, serves as a significant indicator of a positive educational dynamic. Teachers who make a concerted effort to remember the names of the majority of their students often demonstrate a deeper and more intimate connection with their learners, contributing to a conducive and supportive learning environment.

Knowing students' names goes beyond a mere formality; it signifies a genuine interest in understanding each student as an individual. This personalization enables teachers to better grasp the unique learning needs, strengths, and weaknesses of each student, allowing for tailored support, recognition of achievements, and timely assistance when challenges arise. Addressing students by their names creates a sense of belonging and inclusion within the classroom, enhancing their self-esteem and motivation to actively engage in the learning process. Reciprocally, students knowing their teachers' names indicates a respectful and engaged learning environment. It reflects students' interest in establishing a connection with their educators beyond the instructor's role. Such positive interactions foster open lines of communication, where students feel at ease expressing thoughts, asking questions, and seeking help when needed. This enhanced teacher-student communication sets the stage for effective learning experiences and a shared commitment to academic success. While recognizing the majority of students' names is a positive indicator, it is essential to acknowledge the challenges in larger classes or diverse educational settings, where a teacher may find it challenging to remember every name immediately. Nevertheless,

the effort invested in knowing and using students' names remains a crucial aspect of building a thriving teacher-student relationship.

Mutual familiarity between teachers and students, grounded in knowing each other's names, significantly contributes to shaping the teaching-learning environment. It fosters a sense of community, facilitates personalized learning, and establishes open channels of communication. A close teacher-student relationship built on mutual name recognition can play a pivotal role in creating a positive and enriching educational journey for all involved. On a comparative note, Mizoram (65.34%) and Tripura (70.49%) exhibit relatively lower percentages of teachers knowing their students' names compared to other states. While these figures are still above 60%, suggesting a commendable effort, there exist opportunities to further enhance teacher-student engagement in these states.

### **Holistic Development Through Co-Curricular Activities in EMRS**

EMRS, a commendable initiative by the Government of India, strives to provide quality education to tribal communities nationwide. Beyond bridging educational gaps, EMRS emphasizes the holistic development of tribal students. While academic excellence remains a priority, the schools recognize the significance of co-curricular activities in shaping students' personalities, fostering creativity, and uncovering hidden potentials. Co-curricular activities, seamlessly integrated into the formal academic curriculum, play a pivotal role in providing a well-rounded education. EMRS acknowledges their importance in enhancing students' overall personality, creativity, and talents. Through diverse programs encompassing sports, arts, music, dance, drama, debates, quizzes, and community service, students not only gain practical experience and knowledge but also develop essential life skills such as teamwork, leadership, time management, and problem-solving. The commitment to co-curricular activities at EMRS creates a healthy and inclusive learning environment, encouraging students

from diverse backgrounds to collaborate. This approach instills discipline, dedication, and commitment as students balance academic responsibilities with co-curricular pursuits. Additionally, these activities positively impact students' mental and emotional well-being, serving as stress-relievers and fostering a positive attitude towards learning. By making co-curricular activities an integral part of the curriculum, EMRS aims to nurture well-rounded individuals. The emphasis on such activities ensures tribal students have ample opportunities to explore their interests, develop their passions, and build self-confidence. This, in turn, contributes to their overall growth and equips them to face future challenges with enthusiasm and resilience.

### **Empowering Through Awareness: Weaving, Agriculture, and Horticulture**

EMRS's focus on co-curricular activities extends to essential life skills such as weaving, agriculture, and horticulture. Analyzing field data reveals varying awareness levels across states and genders. In states like Mizoram and Tripura, awareness percentages for weaving, agriculture, and horticulture are relatively low at 9.66% and 8.80%, respectively. Recognizing these life skills' cultural and economic importance, EMRS empowers students with knowledge in these areas. Beyond classroom settings, this practical learning prepares students for life beyond school. As EMRS continues to enhance co-curricular activities, it plays a crucial role in fostering awareness, preserving cultural heritage, and equipping students with valuable skills for personal and professional growth.

### **Sports: A Cornerstone of Student Growth**

Participating in sports is integral to students' growth and development. Beyond physical fitness, sports offer numerous benefits, including stress reduction, improved mental well-being, and the development of vital life skills. EMRS recognizes the importance of sports in fostering well-rounded and holistic education. Engaging in sports promotes physical health, reducing

the risk of health issues and fostering a healthy lifestyle. Furthermore, it instills crucial life skills like teamwork, cooperation, communication, discipline, perseverance, and resilience. Leadership skills are also honed as students take on roles within sports teams, contributing to confident and responsible individuals. Participating in sports provides students with a platform to showcase their talents, fostering a sense of camaraderie and school spirit. Field data reveals high percentages of student participation in traditional games and other sports, ranging from approximately 66.82% for Tripura to 70.45% for Mizoram. This data also highlights gender inclusivity in sports, breaking traditional stereotypes and promoting equal opportunities for all students. The field data underscores the reliability of information sourced from on-the-ground research. It portrays a positive scenario of student participation in sports, emphasizing the need for continuous efforts to ensure equal access to sports opportunities. Overall, EMRS's commitment to co-curricular activities and sports significantly contributes to students' physical health, mental well-being, and overall personal growth.

### **Nurturing Aspirations: The Role of EMRS in Shaping Career Goals**

Formulating a clear aim in life is a pivotal aspect of a student's journey, acting as a guiding force in determining their future aspirations and steering their educational and career trajectory. This aim is a culmination of various influences, including personal interests, familial and societal impact, exposure to diverse experiences, and the quality of education received. In this context, EMRS emerge as crucial players, providing an environment conducive to the development and cultivation of students' life goals. Education, viewed as a transformative journey extending beyond academics, forms the core philosophy of EMRS. These residential schools, designed to provide quality education to tribal communities in India, aim to empower students with enhanced opportunities for growth and success. Beyond academic excellence, EMRS underscores the importance of holistic development through co-curricular activities, sports, and extracurricular

pursuits, all contributing to the comprehensive development of students. EMRS creates an environment fostering exploration and discovery of students' interests and passions. Exposure to diverse experiences and activities provides insights into various career paths, while interactions with teachers, mentors, and role models at EMRS inspire and motivate students to shape their aspirations and set achievable goals. Moreover, EMRS ensures access to quality education and resources, equipping students with the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue their chosen paths effectively. With well-trained teachers and a supportive learning environment, students gain the confidence needed to pursue their dreams and ambitions. In remote and underprivileged areas, EMRS acts as a beacon of hope, broadening students' horizons beyond immediate surroundings. By nurturing talents and fostering a sense of purpose, EMRS enables students to overcome socio-economic barriers and transcend limitations. Additionally, EMRS promotes cultural identity and pride among students by incorporating traditional knowledge, arts, and crafts into the curriculum. This celebration of rich cultural heritage empowers students to explore career paths contributing to the preservation and promotion of their unique cultural identity.

### **Career Aspirations Among EMRS Students: Insights from Field Data**

Analyzing the field data reveals notable trends in the career aspirations of EMRS students. A significant proportion of both girls and boys aspire to become doctors, with percentages of 57.35% and 58.25%, respectively. This suggests a pronounced inclination towards the medical profession among surveyed students, underscoring the societal importance placed on healthcare and the role of medical practitioners. Engineering emerges as another popular career choice, with 3.51% of girls and 5.42% of boys expressing interest in the field. The data indicates a substantial number of students aiming for careers in technical and technological domains, highlighting the prestige associated with engineering professions. Conversely, aspirations to join the civil services are relatively low among both girls (0.83%) and



boys (0.62%). While civil services offer opportunities for public service and governance, the data suggests a modest inclination among students to pursue administrative careers. A noteworthy finding is the higher percentage of girls aspiring to become teachers compared to boys (5.91% vs. 3.94%). This suggests a potential inclination towards the teaching profession among girls, reflecting their interest in contributing to the education sector. The data also reveals a slightly higher interest among boys in joining the police force (3.82% vs. 2.56%). Similarly, more boys express interest in careers in entertainment and social work. A significant portion of students (both girls and boys) remains undecided about their future careers, with percentages of 3.19% and 2.46%, respectively. This indicates that a substantial number of students are still exploring various options and taking time to determine their career paths.

The data underscores the significance of gender differences in career aspirations, influenced by cultural and societal factors. For example, the higher percentage of girls aspiring to become doctors may reflect societal emphasis on healthcare and nurturing roles for women. On the other hand, boys' greater interest in engineering and police careers might be influenced by cultural norms surrounding technical expertise and security-related roles.

## **Conclusion**

The study conducted at EMRS in Tripura and Mizoram has provided valuable insights into critical aspects of students' academic, cultural, and personal development. The preservation of cultural heritage awareness among students emerged as a vital concern in the rapidly evolving global landscape. While the study showcased promising overall awareness levels, especially in Tripura, it also revealed a concerning knowledge gap among a significant percentage of students regarding their community leaders and cultural figures. Efforts to enhance awareness, particularly in Mizoram, and further research to comprehend influencing factors are essential for

fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage among students.

The teacher-student relationship was highlighted as a cornerstone of academic learning, influencing students' educational journeys and personal growth. The positive impact of supportive teacher-student relationships on academic performance, personal development, and social interactions was evident. The study's insights into the teacher-student relationship, assessed through key questions, shed light on the need for continued efforts to enhance teacher-student engagement, with a particular focus on name recognition.

The discussion extended to the holistic development of students through co-curricular activities, including sports, weaving, agriculture, and horticulture. EMRS's commitment to providing a well-rounded education was evident in its emphasis on these activities, contributing to students' physical health, mental well-being, and overall personal growth. The study emphasized the need for increased awareness in these essential life skills, especially in Mizoram and Tripura.

Furthermore, the study explored career aspirations among EMRS students, revealing significant trends and gender differences. The data underscored the societal influence on career choices, with a notable inclination towards the medical profession and engineering. The findings highlight the need for continued career guidance and exploration opportunities to help students make informed decisions aligned with their interests and aspirations.

In essence, EMRS plays a crucial role in shaping the future of tribal students by providing quality education, preserving cultural identity, fostering positive teacher-student relationships, and promoting holistic development through diverse co-curricular activities. The study's outcomes provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to further enhance the effectiveness of such initiatives in ensuring the well-

rounded growth and success of tribal students in India.

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# Neoliberal Space and Border Connectivity in India's Northeast

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## Abstract

India's North Eastern Region shares critical border space with China, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh, and arguably expresses the potential to play a pioneering role in strengthening India's border connectivity. In this connection, the Act East Policy in 2014 has made significant contributions to the infrastructural perception of the region by developing effective cross-border linkages. Building cross-border linkages is a neoliberal economic imperative. This economic imagination that is characterized by competition, productivity, profit, free enterprise, individualism, market determinism and social progress has not been confined to the city space. It also covers the border space where the scope for cross-border integration for shared economic growth is quite expansive. Connectivity, therefore, becomes an urgent material framework that unfolds the neoliberal economic determinants to find secure ground. Therefore, this paper explores the potentials of Stilwell Road, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport (KMTT) Corridor, and Moreh-Tamu Corridor in securing the geopolitical, geo-economic, and geo-cultural dividends keeping in view the embedded constraints therein.

**Keywords:** NER Border Space, Connectivity, Stilwell Road, Kaladan Multi-Modal Transport Corridor, Moreh-Tamu Corridor, Geopolitics

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## **Introduction**

In a neo-liberal and globalized economic space, connectivity plays a very crucial role. The country that has expressed its efficiency in developing a connectivity network with its neighbourhood and beyond for the trade contact and exchange of culture acquires a diplomatic advantage. This advantage not only facilitates a reciprocity mechanism to develop a shared economic and cultural interaction and advancement but also presents geopolitical and geostrategic dividends. In this connection, the role of India in capitalizing on the geostrategic significance and geo-economic potential of the North Eastern Region (NER) through the development of connectivity apparatus is vital and urgent. The geopolitical churn that China unleashes in the Indo-Pacific and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) expansionism and trade diversification in the region demands the entry of a competitor to stabilize the trade dynamics of the region (Scobell 2020; Heydarian 2020). India holds the potential to take the position of an effective competitor. To play that role, it needs to foreground its northeastern region in policy formulation and explore the connectivity framework to build an impactful diplomatic stature.

The Northeast regions' geographical isolationism and land-locked status have been growth negative. Therefore, critical connectivity through the development of infrastructure embodies the potential to accelerate growth in the region. The region is indubitably endowed with rich natural resources and biodiversity. Its hydrocarbon reserves, herbal, horticultural, handicraft, and ayurvedic products, bamboo, cane, food delicacies, spices, fish, tea, cardamom, kiwi, ginger, turmeric, banana, orange, etc., and petroleum products, minerals, and metals are the non-industrial resources. And if the industry is added, the region can make a difference in East and Southeast Asia. It has a huge potential to attract growth and investment. It requires connectivity infrastructure to unfold its untapped potential both to itself and its neighbourhood. The northeastern region shares a fairly extensive border

with Bhutan, Bangladesh, China, and Myanmar (MDONER 2008; Rana and Uberoi 2012) and bears the scope to expand itself down south to the Indo-Pacific.

In this direction, efforts have been made in terms of the Look East Policy (LEP), which was officially announced in 1992 by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. The prime objective of the policy was ‘developing political contacts, increasing economic integration and forging security cooperation with countries of Southeast Asia’ (Haokip 2011). In 2003, the LEP emphasized vigorously the development of the hard connectivity infrastructure such as port, road, and rail linkages to fulfil India’s neo-liberal aspiration of political, economic, and security partnership. This policy formulation secured special importance for the NER (Jaffrelot 2003; Sikri 2009; Naidu 2004; Haokip 2015; Barua and Das 2008; Srikanth 2018; Panda 2018).

With the pronouncement of India’s Act East Policy (AEP) in 2014, the NER received special attention in terms of the allocation of connectivity-related infrastructural projects to position it as a gateway to Southeast Asia (Ziipao 2018 and 2022; Libing 2019; Sajjanhar 2016; Saint-Mézard 2016; Mishra 2018). The policy presented a robust commitment to developing and revitalizing ‘the infrastructure of the region in transport, highways, communication, power and waterways’ (Kesavan 2020). This paper, thus, explores India’s connectivity diplomacy through the discussion of the three trans-national corridors – Stilwell Road as a trans-border road corridor, the Kaladan multi-modal transit transport corridor and the Moreh-Tamu corridor. These projects give India the much-needed connectivity infrastructure through the NER to extend its economic, cultural, and trade cooperation with Southeast Asia. In the process, the NER frees itself from topographical isolationism. However, there are no doubts about the challenges these projects meet alongside the prospects they present to India and the NER from the perspective of border connectivity. The paper,

therefore, attempts a comprehensive study of the stated corridors and the prospects and challenges they embody.

Connectivity infrastructures are growth drivers. They give a country diplomatic leverage to establish its leadership. India's trade, economic and cultural penetration into East and Southeast Asia and its leadership role in the region largely depend on revitalizing the infrastructural torpidity of the NER. The complete dependencies on the narrow Siliguri corridor as the only land link to the NER needs to be eased by finding and developing other alternatives of connectivity securing stable and workable relations with its very significant eastern neighbours such as Bangladesh, China, and Myanmar. In this connection, Stilwell Road acquires tremendous importance. On the question of connecting India's NER with Myanmar and China and further down to Southeast Asia and expanding India's trade scope, the critical connectivity role by road that the Stilwell Road plays cannot be ignored. This road began functional during the Second World War; and currently, certain parts of the road in Myanmar need to be repaired to develop it into a connectivity-based infrastructural asset. The road bears tremendous connectivity potential in the emergence of a critical geo-economic corridor. Therefore, India's AEP recognizes the connectivity depth that the Stilwell Road presents not only for India's NER but also for Myanmar, China, and other Southeast Asian countries. This road embodies significant scope to generate convergence of regional and transnational trade, technology, and security interests towards building a formidable east and southeast Asia. And, the success of this proposed framework holds for the NER the possibility of exceptional changes and challenges. However, the argument built in favour of the Stilwell Road and the potential it inheres for definitive success generates a compelling interest in the specifics of the said road.



## **Stilwell Road**

The geo-strategic importance of the Stilwell Road (Deka 2019; Bordalai 2021; Zhou 2013; Pattnaik 2016) may have been lost in the post-Cold War neo-liberal world order, but from the regional geo-economic point of view, the Road occupies special importance. However, the original name of the Stilwell Road was Ledo Road; and it was named after the Second World War American General Joseph Warren Stilwell. He took up this road connectivity project in December 1942; and the road was built to facilitate communication and reinforcement links for the Allied forces in Kunming, Yunnan province of China, and to combat Japanese aggression in the region. By 1944 the road became a major connecting route to transport troops, weapons, and other essentials to the Kuomintang Army of China to curb the Japanese expansionist zeal. The road connects India's NER with China's Kunming City embodying critical geo-strategic and geo-economic importance. Though in the beginning the economic merit of the road was least imagined, the market liberalism and globalization of the 1990s shattering the shackles of statist economic conservatism gave the road newer meaning and enhanced its connectivity-related diplomatic importance. The road covers a crucial 1726 kilometres connecting three very important countries in the region - India, Myanmar, and China. The Indian segment (61 km) includes Ledo in Assam and Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh; and similarly, the Myanmar part (1033 km) covers Shindbwiyang, Bhamo, and Myitkyina in Kachin. And, in China (632 km) the road passes through Wanting, Lungling, Paoshan, Yungpin, Ynnanyi, Tsuyung, and Kunming (Changlang District Administration 2022).

The connectivity potentiality of this road is realized both by India and China. Therefore, Beijing took a special interest in revitalizing this road, primarily the Myanmar segment. The Yunnan Construction Engineering Group of China and Myanmar's Yuzana Group collaborated in 2010 with the Myanmar government's permission to reconstruct the Stilwell Road

from Myitkyina in Kachin State, Myanmar to Pangsau Pass, Arunachal Pradesh covering almost 312 kilometres (Gupta 2011). Myanmar's choice to engage the Chinese in the project gives China geo-economic leverage in the region but the former gets the monetary support for the reconstruction work and more importantly to handle the insurgency-infested Kachin. The road passes through Kachin and the military junta alone cannot control the militancy-related obstructions and interferences. China has reconstructed its share of the road in Chinese territory, and India too has done its part in its territory. The Myanmar part, though longer and difficult, needs effective completion to reopen it for vigorous bilateral and multilateral trade between India, China, and Myanmar. Operationalizing this road can be cost-effective as the transportation cost involved in making goods transfer would be significantly reduced. Knowing the market potential both India and China present, the road is going to act as a true catalyst to bring overwhelming growth to the region. The trade exercise would not be essentially confined to these countries which share the road, the road is capable of expanding trade to the ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific.

The road, if reopened, is going to bring the NER the opportunities to express its economic and cultural potential. Connecting it with South-East Asia (SEA) through Stilwell Road is to give the NER the flair and freedom to demonstrate its will to act and will to connect. Taking goods from the NER to the SEA following the conventional way takes a circuitous route and is time-consuming and costly. The SEA's geographical and cultural proximity to the NER generates demand for the products from the latter. The conventional model of goods transport from NER involves the movement through the narrow Siliguri corridor to the Kolkata port by road or railroad covering a distance of 1,600 km. From the Kolkata port, the goods are transshipped to SEA and China through the Strait of Malacca. The entire exercise takes around seven days for the shipment to arrive at the SEA destinations. The laborious process involved increases the cost of

the product and, therefore, loses the saleability factor in comparison to the Chinese ones. With the opening of Stilwell Road, the products from the NER will reach the SEA with tremendous ease; and the consignments are likely to reach the desired destination in two days. This is the connectivity potential the road embodies and gives India diplomatic leverage in the connectivity sector in its southeastern neighbourhood. However, India's presence in the region through the effective use of the road would diversify the trade space against China's monopoly. Further, the Road, if reopened, can act as an effective enabler in expanding transnational connectivity to Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Vietnam, etc., facilitating free trade and transnational cooperation:

If the Myanmar segment (of the Stilwell Road) is completed, then the Ledo-Nampong corridor could be connected to Muse, Lashio, Mandalay, and Yangon (Myanmar) through Asian Highway (AH14); Ruili, Wanding, and Kunming (China) through AH3 and Bangkok (Thailand); Kuala Lumpur (Malaysia) and Singapore (Singapore) through Asian Highway 2(AH2) and further to Phnom Penh (Cambodia) and Hochi Minh city (Vietnam) of greater Mekong sub-region through Asian Highways 1(AH1). (Pattnaik 2021)

The connectivity potential that the road offers is going to enrich NER for extensive trade cooperation and socio-cultural exchange. Knowing the persistence of growth negative trajectory in the NER owing to its land-locked condition, and the emerging aspiration in the region for visibility and economic wellbeing, the connectivity potential of the road towards the formation of a trade corridor occupies special importance. India is moving in this direction through its AEP structuralism to capitalize on the potential of the road in developing trade zones which would give the NER necessary centerstage. The limited cross-border trade through informal channels (Aung 2019) that happens between Nampong (Arunachal Pradesh) and Pangsau Market (Myanmar) on very specific days on the 10<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup>

of every month on the Myanmar side and every Friday on the Indian side is indicative of the existence of the informal cross-border trade. With the Stilwell Road in operation, major economic and trade collaboration and cooperation are going to take place. The economic imperatives are going to ease the geopolitical rigidity that exists in the region. Beijing's economic hegemony through its BRI in the ASEAN and its trade monopoly in the region may create impediments for India to register its presence. But, the geo-cultural, geo-strategic, and geo-economic leverage that India holds in the ASEAN and its democratic political culture is going to work in its favour, giving it the necessary impetus to move in conducting effective trade in the region through the NER. The Stilwell Road may act as a real game-changer boosting growth in the region through trade commitment and cooperation and making the NER of India the new hub of the economic and cultural interface.

### **Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMTT) Corridor**

Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMTT) project (Naskar 2018; De 2018; Fernando and Jha 2021) was signed by India and Myanmar in 2008. Under the AEP, the KMTT received central importance. India-Myanmar bilateral relations under President Aung San Suu Kyi's effective leadership until she was removed from power under a coup by the military junta in 2021 have seen remarkable developments and have set a benchmark of high-level diplomacy. With the deposition of Suu Kyi, the project has acquired a slithering pace; and the revised deadline for its completion was 2023. There is a cloud of uncertainty shrouding the project as the geopolitical symptoms in Myanmar, the military and militancy-related impediments and the China factor contribute to the delay in operationalizing the corridor. However, apart from these determinants causing slowness to the project, the geoeconomics leverages the corridor embodies can never be refuted. From the northeastern perspective, the corridor is going to free the region from maritime isolationism and industrial backwardness.

In the Kaladan multimodal corridor (Chaudhury 2018; Yumnam 2019; Thomas 2018), the Kaladan River plays a very critical role. The river originates from the Chin state of Myanmar and follows the winding course through the southern parts of Mizoram before it meets the Bay of Bengal. It connects Myanmar's Sittwe port to Paletwa through inland water transport covering a distance of 158 km. From Paletwa in Myanmar to Lawngtlai in Mizoram, India, the distance is around 210 km and is covered by road. The consignment coming from Kolkata port to Sittwe port covers the sea route approx. 539 km. Through Kaladan River, it reaches the land at Paletwa and from there by road Lawngtlai, Mizoram is just a matter of 210 km travel. This corridor, if operationalized soon, is going to transform the NER dramatically. Connectivity has always been the index of transformation; and to apply it to the NER, the growth-deficit region is going to make strides in trade, transportation, production, and export. To achieve this end, US\$ 484 is spent to expand the Inland Water Transport (IWT) terminal at Sittwe, the navigational channel from Sittwe to Paletwa, construction of a highway transshipment terminal at Paletwa to receive the consignment and transfer them by road to Lawngtlai. The project seems to be nearing completion except for the road on the Myanmar side of the border which has not seen the desired progress. The emergence of political turmoil in Myanmar with the military junta taking the lead in governing the country, the presence of the militant group, the Arakan Army in the region, and the inhospitable topography present bottlenecks to the successful completion of the project.

On the question of regional and sub-regional integration by instrumentalizing the KMTT corridor, it can be inarguably said that the corridor has the potential to build greater connectivity with ASEAN, Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC). If NER introduces its brand and ensures the durability factor in its production sector, it may pose a serious challenge to the cheap and poor-quality products Beijing

floats in the SEA markets. If NER becomes the production hub, the KMTT corridor is going to play a major role in connecting it with Southeast Asian countries. In that likely scenario, the transshipment of goods needs to reach Sittwe port and from there through the sea route and by road to the SEA. The distance is approx. between the capitals of the northeastern states is as follows: Guwahati-Sittwe (1201.7 km), Itanagar-Sittwe (1284.9 km), Kohima-Sittwe (1150.6 km) and Imphal-Sittwe (1011.3 km), Shillong-Sittwe (982.8km), Aizawl-Sittwe (611 km), and Agartala-Sittwe (955.5 km) (Pattnaik 2021). The distance given is substantively lesser than following the traditional route of sending goods from the NER through the Siliguri corridor to the Kolkata port to send them to various locations in ASEAN. With the operationalisation of the Sittwe-Lawngtlai multi-modal channel, the organic and industrial products may conveniently reach the consumption-driven economies such as Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, and so on.

Cultural commonality through Buddhism with dietary similarity, and roaring demand for organic, horticultural, ayurvedic, handicraft, bamboo shoots, tea, spices, and so on, the NER has a very significant role to play at least in the food and medicine sector. Moreover, a direct link between Sittwe and Laem Chabang (Thailand), Sihanoukville (Cambodia), Port of Klang (Malaysia), Port of Singapore (Singapore), Port of Tanjung Priok (Indonesia), Hai Phong (Vietnam), etc., may be built to tranship goods from the NER. This corridor, therefore, embodies the prospects of conducting cross-border collaborations and multilateral and bilateral cooperation to strengthen India's diplomatic stature in the region. The NER's isolationism owing to various geopolitical factors and regional and cross-border conflicts at work in the aftermath of India's Independence is going to be reversed on account of the compulsions of economic integration that the globalisation and neo-liberal order have generated. The idea of executing the KMMT corridor

is a step forward in that direction to untap the unexplored possibilities of the NER. At this crucial juncture, what is expected from the NER is to develop an entrepreneurial culture and institutional restructuring to suit growth dynamics. The political stability that has been noticed in the NER for over a decade is symptomatic of differences in mindset, approach, and attitude. This is indicative of the growth appetite that the region presents. The KMMT corridor is inarguably a major step to capitalise on that difference.

It may all sound very encouraging as the narrative built in favour of the corridor appears promising. However, it is not without some serious hurdles. To be specific, China is going to present a strong challenge to India's cross-border outlook and trade expansionism by building hard infrastructures in its neighbouring nations. Beijing is building a 1700 km China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) to expand wider and more comprehensive connectivity linkages with Myanmar's Mandalay, Yangon, and Kyaukphyu regions to secure a strong strategic presence there. Knowing Beijing's chronic anti-India posture, it may go to any possible length to curb India's interest as India holds the potential to emerge as an impact-making competitor. Beijing's Myanmar project is to reach the blue water of the Bay of Bengal to showcase its marine might there using Myanmar and Bangladesh. Myanmar's camaraderie with China to secure BRI investment and other financial assistance may lead it closer to the debt trap as Sri Lanka, Maldives, Pakistan, Laos, Djibouti, Nigeria, Tajikistan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, etc. have experienced the same. Moreover, Beijing's alleged abetment of insurgent groups such as the Arakan Army (AA), Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDAA), Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), and United WA State Army (UWSA) in Myanmar supplying weapons and money may prove growth and cooperation deterrent for India. India's aspiration of a friendly and developed neighbourhood and the ethos of 'enlightened national interest' with mutual cooperation and shared growth may receive a

serious challenge from this geopolitical development in the neighbourhood. Myanmar is an important partner for India; looking at the complicated political development there with the deposition of a democratically elected leader Suu Kyi and the occupation of power by the Tamadaw-Armed forces and China's alleged support (Gupta 2020) for this are going to yield ramifications for India. Therefore, this corridor, however, crucial as it may appear from the Indian point of view and the SEA as well, is fraught with serious problems. India has to fight against these odds and impediments to secure prominence for the NER and beyond.

### **Moreh-Tamu Corridor**

Moreh-Tamu Economic Corridor (Shahriar 2022; Ghosal and Mitra 2019; Singh 2015; Das 2016; Sharma 2011) is yet another corridor having enormous geo-economic and geo-strategic importance. The trade and economic prospects that it embodies can inject staggering growth into the NER. Moreh is situated in the Tengnoupal district of Manipur; it is critically located very close to the Myanmar border. Tamu, on the other hand, is a strategic location in the Sagaing Region of Myanmar from the point of view of India-Myanmar road connectivity and cross-border trade. The distance between the two important locations is just 3.7 km. It was in 2018, that the land route from Moreh to Tamu was opened for the cross-border movement of people. This initiative presents phenomenal opportunities for the NER to open itself to East Asia and South-East Asia. The Moreh-Tamu land bridge connects the NER directly with Asian highways securing wider connectivity – Moreh-Singapore (3760 km) - Moreh-Mandalay (480.4 km), Mandalay-Bangkok (1332.5 km), Bangkok-Kuala Lumpur (1471.7 km), Kuala Lumpur-Singapore (478.4). All these places are effectively connected through Asian Highway 02. The opportunity that Asian Highway 02 (AH02) presents to India and its NER can efficiently be made use of to achieve a greater connectivity network in the ASEAN. More importantly, the AH 02 also covers the NER; and the Moreh-Tamu corridor connectivity gives the



NER much-needed impetus to project its capacity in taking a leadership role in the ASEAN in terms of ‘trade, transport, investment, banking, education, tourism, technology and allied services’ (Pattnaik 2021).

Apart from the Moreh-Singapore (3760 km) connectivity corridor, the Moreh-Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) corridor (2750.4 km) may also be explored to acquire more magnitude in connectivity architecture in South East Asia. In this direction, vital road linkages may be done and include Moreh-Mandalay (480.4 km), Mandalay-Bangkok (1332.5 km), Bangkok-Phnom Penh (707.6 km), and Phnom Penh-Ho Chi Minh City (229.9 km). From there down south, countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia may be connected by sea route. Moreh-Ho Chi Minh City corridor (2750.4 km) is essentially connected through the Asian Highway 01. The feasibility of this connectivity-related network-building is not far-fetched but rather very much viable. This viability is well-indicated through the opening of the land route that connects Moreh with Tamu. It requires strong commitment, cooperation, and bilateral and multilateral agreements and the re-defining of the intent and competence to build confidence among the South Asian Nations in establishing this connectivity. And, AEP is active in this direction and has gained considerable prominence in its policy structuralism to build robust and enduring connectivity with the ASEAN through its NER.

### **Prospects**

The prospects that the above corridors promise are very stimulating. The linkages the corridors develop via the NER with Southeast Asia are going to transform the economic and infrastructural perception of the NER. Making the NER a production hub and an export centre will give a fillip to the NER economy and infrastructure and connectivity expansion. This would lead to the creation of several growth zones following the South China Growth Triangle model which categorises the skill-based economy (Hong Kong and Taiwan) with non-skilled ones (Guangdong and Fujian) by

giving equal attention to all sectors to accelerate comprehensive growth. Replicating these workable models will transform the growth perception of the NER from a consumption-based to a production-oriented one. In this connection, there is a greater need for upgrading production and export capacities in congruence with competing China before integrating fully with the economies of East and Southeast Asia. To achieve this end, a strong structural and infrastructural transformation is urgently required, and a pro-growth perception needs to be developed.

An effective and advanced entrepreneurial culture alongside the indigenous and existing ones is to be promoted in keeping with the emerging demands the opening of the corridors may require. The proxy-based entrepreneurial mindset requires revision. First and foremost, the region-specific resources such as herbal, horticultural handloom, petrochemicals, hydrocarbon, rubber, bamboo, citrus fruits, tea, etc., and their processing and packaging and their tradeability factors are to be augmented. To boost entrepreneurial culture, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are to be developed to encourage both local and across-the-border entrepreneurs. A culture of private-public collaboration needs to be promoted to upgrade the quality and exportability of locally-grown products. The NER embodies the enormous potential for the production of non-chemical and organic items but it lacks the processing infrastructure. Establishing the processing industry will upgrade the quality of the native products, increase their market value and generate demand for them. For instance, the Moso Monopodial bamboo that India imports from China and Vietnam is not largely preferred by Indian manufacturers and local industries (Kashyap and Mishra 2021). The Sympodial bamboo variant (clump and cluster-based), which is thicker and shorter and also cheaper, is found in the northeast, and there is a growing demand for it in the Indian market but, it has poor marketing and is not properly made available in the market.

Bamboo is one such natural commodity copiously available in the NER (Loushambam et al 2017). The economic potential of bamboo as an edible product and material for various manufacturing-related products is incredible. The soil in the NER is typically fertile for bamboo cultivation. The use of bamboo can be a solution to the increasing use of plastics and the ecological hazard it embodies. Bamboo can present itself as a successful alternative to plastic copiously used in e-commerce. The dramatic rise of e-commerce with the introduction of 4G technology has presented a packaging culture. The use of plastic in the packaging industry for the reasons of safety, durability, and leakage-free has proven to be environmentally hazardous. Therefore, bamboo as a significant alternative can replace the rising use of plastic by introducing organic to the plastic-based packaging culture. The drive to go organic is no more a local phenomenon. It has acquired global importance. The NER can be a very significant exporter of bamboo and bamboo products to the SEA and beyond. The rising importance of bamboo products empowers the NER to conduct bamboo diplomacy and bamboo tourism. If the bamboo economy is successfully exploited, the NER may establish itself as India's growth engine. To realise this dream, it is important to commercialise bamboo cultivation. The reclassification of bamboo as grass not a tree in 2017 clears the legal barriers to accelerate bamboo cultivation. There is no legal fetter that impedes the commercial cultivation of bamboo in the NER. The promotion of commercial bamboo cultivation and industry for processing and manufacturing bamboo products is to be massively taken up. This would engage the youth in the NER, give them respite from unemployment-related problems and open business opportunities for them. Since bamboo is a natural product, there is no scope for wastage. Cross-industry linkages must be made to utilise the waste. Bamboo charcoals are used in making cosmetics and pharmaceutical items. The bamboo particles and strands with the application of adhesive can be compressed into engineered bamboo for the manufacturing of furniture. The cross-industry linkages are very important and reduce wastage and cost

giving impetus for high profit.

The bamboo shoots are a delicacy not only in the Northeast but also in East and Southeast Asia. Most importantly, the variants of bamboo shoots found in the NER are sweet and of better quality. The bamboo shoots in the NER are largely consumed locally and not exported. The absence of processing and packaging machinery reduces its export potential. The NER must establish tissue culture laboratories as found in South Korea to achieve the desired level of fermentation towards augmenting its trading and exporting potential. In addition to this, the creation of bamboo parks can be the most attractive hotspot for bamboo tourism.

Apart from bamboo tourism and other related tourism areas such as tea tourism, cross-border tourism, especially, cultural tourism through the effective development of Buddhist cultural circuits in the NER bears the potential to attract a large number of people from the SEA regions. The people-to-people communication is the most vital aspect for effective economic exchange to take place. India being the most important cultural centre for Buddhism, it's quite likely that lots of people from the SEA would be attracted to visit India. If the economy is integrated with culture the effect is likely to be a very enduring one. Tourism will not only bring a boom to the hospitality industry but also develop related business areas. The connectivity framework that has been undertaken is going to energise the NER with a new spirit of integration, cooperation and communication.

The connectivity diplomacy also aims at making the NER an education hub giving impetus to research in various areas such as anthropology geology, ecology, agriculture, mountaineering, South Asia Studies, South East Asian Studies, East Asian Studies, Buddhism studies, folk studies and so on. The promotion of academic and cultural exchange programmes among the universities in the NER and the SEA is likely to transform the region with very enriching scholarly activities. The idea of making the

NER a knowledge corridor by developing connectivity and by revitalising significantly the existing educational institutions in the region with required resources can be a very exciting move giving the region the attention that it deserves. The presence of several state and central universities and institutes, National Institutes of Technology (NIT), Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), Indian Institutes of Information Technology (IIIT), Indian Institutes of Management (IIM) and so on in the NER is of vital importance to proceed in that direction.

Health is another domain that possesses the potential to attract people from the SEA to the Northeastern region. This may lead to the development of stronger economic and trade ties with the SEA countries. Health diplomacy embodies soft power potential to give India the geopolitical and geostrategic dividend in the Indo-Pacific through the development of deeper ties with the SEA. In the health sector, the northeastern region has of late achieved a certain level of visibility. But the health infrastructure and the hygiene aspect related to it must be made robust not only to cater to the health needs of the region but also to a greater extent the similar needs of the SEA regions. At present, the top hospitals in the NER are Guwahati Neurological Research Centre (GNRC), Guwahati, Narayana Super Speciality Hospital, Guwahati, Apollo Hospitals, Guwahati, All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Guwahati, Regional Ayurveda Research Institute, Guwahati, North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health & Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), Shillong, Tomo Riba Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (TRIHMS), Naharlagun, Arunachal Pradesh, Ramakrishna Mission Hospital, Itanagar, STNM Hospital, Gangtok, etc. Every capital city of the northeastern states has a main hospital that dispenses health facilities to people and facilitates the smooth function of other tributary hospitals attached to it. Overall, the health infrastructure in the NER is not that encouraging and seriously lacks cutting-edge and the state of the art smart facilities. However, this deficiency

has been properly assessed, and efforts are rightly made in this direction to upgrade the existing health apparatus. With the COVID-19 Pandemic, the health infrastructure in the NER experienced a dramatic change. The Govt. of India understands the urgency and immediacy of quick funnelling of resources for the construction of 7 cancer centres in Assam. Recently the Prime Minister of India inaugurated the same project to open cancer centres in different districts in Assam which include Sivasagar, Dhubri, Tinsukia, Goalpara, Golaghat, Nagaon, and Nalbari. This endeavour explains the possible formation of a health corridor in the NER catering to the health needs of the region and beyond. If health infrastructure in the NER is given due attention, the NER may emerge as a health corridor that offers affordable health facilities to its people and the people from the SEA. With the connectivity channels by road and water made open, the potential of the NER will catch the attention of the SEA and India will possibly achieve its geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic objectives. The NER will act as a growth driver and transform the perceived negationism and stereotypes associated with it.

### **Constraints**

Given the prospects that the NER has for its growth with the development of connectivity facilities and the recalibration of the existing policy framework for the region, there are serious constraints that the region presents. Some of the constraints are growth negative, industry unfriendly, and apparently protectionist.

To begin with, what appears to be a major deterrent that presumably restricts the development and introduction of industry and people-to-people exchange is the Inner-line regulation that still exists today in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Mizoram (Lalmalsawmi 2019). The Inner-line regulations were imposed in 1873 by the British in the North-East Frontiers. The very continuation of this regulation even today as a

piece of colonial legal antique has proven to be counterproductive in so far as industrial development is concerned. This colonial legal imperative served the colonial intentionality, but it is accepted by the people in the region as a legal milestone in tribal protectionism even though there are legal provisions in the Indian Constitution for the protection of the tribal rights, and their legal rights over land, and prevention against the non-natives to buy their property. The continued enforcement of this regulation brings enough obscurity to business-related activities leading to the formation of crony capitalism, the formation of tribal elites and the absence of accountability for any financial deal done and resources used. On the contrary, some of the northeastern states, and most importantly Assam and Sikkim have expressed their openness to industry and development and have received development packages for building infrastructure. The Sikkim model is pivotal here. It has opened itself to industry, competition, healthy work culture, and employment generation alongside protecting the rights of the indigenous people.

Apart from the issue of Inner-line permits, the insurgencies along the border areas are quite critical. The turbulences that emerge from those areas hinder cross-border trade and economic cooperation. Since the corridors are built to facilitate cross-border economic integration and interaction, it is imperative to make the border areas business-friendly and peaceful. The inter-state borders and borders with Myanmar happen to be serious tension zones (Ambarkhane and Gathia 2022). Therefore, engaging in effective diplomacy with various stakeholders may reduce significantly the cases of insurgency in the region. Most importantly, the largely neglected border communities are to be given the opportunities to participate in cross-border economic initiatives. Unless their cooperation and participation are sought, the vulnerability of the region under the weight of insurgency will increase and limit, as a corollary, the expansion of effective economic engagement. Moreover, the opening of the NER to the SEA also inheres to the danger of

uncontrollable flooding of Chinese goods into the Indian market (Saxena 2012). These cheap goods and their perceived popularity may pressurise the local industries to manufacture similar products compromising the durability standards and bearing severe loss for the sake of posing competition.

Apart from insurgency-related problems along the border areas, the possible increase in illicit trade in drug and human trafficking and narcotics (Thomas 2016) may pose serious challenges to India's economic aspirations. Proper security infrastructure and inter-state cooperation and support from the stakeholders in the region must be built to check the expansion of these unlawful trades. This may involve a huge investment of revenue, which may have been used for other developmental or entrepreneurial activities.

The concerns that the demographers express are the most serious factors that need urgent attention. The opening of the Stilwell Road may accelerate the influx of migrants (Das 2010) from the neighbouring countries, primarily from Myanmar knowing the political instability it undergoes. The problem of Rohingyas being driven out of Myanmar is still a problem for India, and Stilwell Road, if made fully functional, may exacerbate the migrant issue which may disturb the demography of the NER. The northeastern states are still grappling with migrant issues, and if more such cases are added, it may trigger social unrest harming peace in the region.

At a time when the issues of climate change, global warming and environmental degradation force countries to adopt the policy of environmental protectionism, the question arises in the context of the NER as to how much industry and machine it can accommodate. The fragile ecology of the region is less likely to bear the weight of industry and related infrastructures (Gergan 2019; Rahman 2020). Landslides, earthquakes, torrential rain, and other geo-specific disasters are normal phenomena in the Northeast. Introducing industry into an industry-unfriendly ecosystem is likely to offer contrary results. Deep mining for the inner metal and



mineral deposits, clearing of the forests, dam, road, railroad, bridge, tunnel construction and conversion of the agrarian lands into residential areas and unscientific real-estate incursions are some of the activities which are going to be taken up to bring development into the NER. But, what needs to be, most importantly, looked after is sustainable development and ecological safety. Sometimes the overdose of development may turn out to be counterproductive, counterintuitive, and unsustainable.

The NER as an export hub, marketing networks, food processing units, cleaning, grading and packing, cool storage facility, and credit availability is not very encouraging, massive structural overhaul is required to upgrade the market infrastructure to be able to offer a presentable export profile. The fiscal protocol involving money, banking, credit, recovery, etc., is not very motivating. In the absence of these provisions, effective business activities will not take place. To add to this, corruption is a serious challenge that demoralises the development imagination. There is also seemingly a deficit in building people-to-people connections to spread awareness regarding the economic importance of the infrastructure projects undertaken in their areas. Only infrastructure will not determine growth unless there is people's will and interest involved. Moreover, brand North-east and patent building of the produces from the region are to be taken up to instil inspiration and prestige among the people to become more positively productive.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the limitations that the NER presents with the development of connectivity corridors such as Stilwell Road, Kaladan multimodal project, and Moreh-Tamu project do not necessarily outweigh the prospects. Building strong diplomatic and security infrastructures, and soft power mechanisms involving every stakeholder and giving them economic benefits will gradually minimise the risk of insurgency and other related impediments. China is no doubt a major factor in so far as the geopolitical,

ego-economic, and geo-strategic imagination of the region is concerned. It may not appreciate the steady rise of India and its geopolitical determinism in the region. China's trade monopoly and its hegemonic and incursive proclivities in the region and BRI-related geo-economic leviathan and the embedded debt trap have forced certain countries in the region to recalibrate their foreign policy. In the event of that, India with its geographic proximity to the SEA and its formidable democratic potential is going to be a major choice to commit to any secure and lasting trade cooperation. This factor is indubitably a major concern for China's geopolitical and geo-economic interests. It may tactfully use Myanmar and Bangladesh to impede India's inroads into the region. Myanmar, being the critical geographical area through which India's connectivity infrastructures are deeply linked, has moved closer to China. The military rule in Myanmar and the rise of various insurgent groups are likely to inflict slowness on India's connectivity and other related infrastructure projects. However, the clarity of perception and developmental determinism India has shown through its AEP ought not to feel intimidated by China's growing clout in its neighbourhood. India ought to resort to effective soft power instruments and its topographic leverage to choke China to offer ways for its entry into the SEA. In so far as the NER is concerned, with the success of the connectivity programme, as undertaken, the region is going to shake off the riddles of obscurity and emerge with force and vigour to take up any challenge to prove its importance. Most prominently, environment-friendly development and sustainable growth are to be given top priority to register the successful rise of the NER.

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# **“A Place on the Map is also a Place in History” : Mapping Displacement in Women’s Poetry from India’s Northeast**

Suranjana Choudhury\*

## **Abstract:**

A major feature of contemporary world is its engagement with various tropes of displacement. India’s Northeast region has been especially prone to mass displacement because of its varied geographical and socio-political factors. How do writings by and about women in India’s Northeast map a history of discursive and gendered displacement? Literature from the Northeastern region, in many different ways, offer a rich repository of diverse voices interpreting and reimagining ways through which we can examine and explore multiple nuances of displacement and its affective resonances. Nabina Das, Nabanita Kanungo and a few other women writers have used displacement as an important theme in their poems. Drawing upon insights on displacement and relocation studies, this paper examines how their poems offer complex engagements with perennially displaced lives and fragmented experiences.

**Keywords:** Displacement, Women, Poetry, Northeast, Home

## **Displacement and its diverse discourses:**

Displacement as a conceptual category and lived experience elicits interesting frameworks of critical examination and theoretical assessment. While examining the concept of displacement, Homi Bhabha defines it, among many other definitions, as “the fragmented and schizophrenic decentring of the self” (Bhabha, 2005, p. 310) which essentially signifies displacement’s syncretic and hybrid nature and its constant deferral. It is not easy to arrive at a singular understanding of displacement and its consequences. Displacement,

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we understand, is not experienced in precisely the same manner across time and space and does not unfold in a homogeneous fashion. Our global history and politics over the last few decades, in different ways, have been one of displacement and aspects associated with it. Questions such as, how does displacement alter one's being, or how does it induce one's becoming have been crucial in investigating the changing politics of identity and varied representation of home and the world in literary and cultural discourses. As Simone Weil, the author of *The Need for Roots* had rightly asserted that to be rooted is perhaps the most primary and the least recognised need of the human soul (Weil, 2002, p.40) Continuous occurrences of violations of human rights, armed strife, internal conflicts, climate change etc have caused a significant proportion of mass displacement since the beginning of the last century. It is useful to remember that the idea of displacement, which constitutes a measure of elasticity, is often used to track the impact of natural disaster, wars or state terrorism. In addition, displacement as an experiential entity is most often linked with the notion of coercion and intimidation. Discussing this vital aspect of displacement, Delaney in his analysis contends:

“In an age that commonly celebrates hypermobility as the embodied emblem of freedom, displacement focuses on mobility as coerced, as against the will or wishes of subjects. Displacement can be seen as a mode of de-subjectification insofar as the bodies of the displaced are seen as objects operated on by outside hostile forces.” (Delaney, 2004, p.848)

Another aspect of displacement that one needs to address is that displacement as a lived experience cannot be just viewed as a technical problem requiring interventions of donor governments and aid agencies to take care of food, shelter, medical care etc. The implications of displacement go much beyond that: it could be seen as an existential problem “posed by the destruction of not only their homes but also of the world they once knew, including many

of their social relationships, their attachments to places, and the structures and practices they used to create meaning.” (Dunn, 2018, p.3) For this very reason, the displaced people are often stuck in a lengthening state of liminality. A critical concern here is that when uprooting and relocation happen, how are they enacted materially and symbolically and in relation to each other. Within the broader field of migration studies, displacement discourse is seen to occupy a primary space informing major issues related to national belonging, citizenship, and insider-outsider positionalities. Very often processes of displacement and emplacement play critical roles in the definition of citizenship and formation of mechanisms structured to regulate state borders. Therefore, locating the context of displacement is important in doing meaningful analysis of narratives of the displaced. Robert Muggah, in this context, aptly observes, how one is labelled in relation to one’s displacement circumstance matters and remarks that labels are “instruments of power because they assign differences in beneficiary rights.” (Muggah, 2008, p.15) Furthermore, it is important to examine the modes through which identities are constructed in displacement narratives, focussing specially on the interconnectedness between rhetorical strategies and individual lives. (Powell, 2015)

### **Resonances in women’s poetry from Northeast India:**

Within the wider spectrum of displacement discourses, women as the displaced subject evoke complex questions and critical debates. The urge to narrate experiences of uprooting and dislocation with an emphasis on viewing it as a significant and troubling aspect of their identity has remained strong among many women writers. When examining dislocation, are marginality and exclusion invariably intensified if the displaced subject is female? According to UNCHR 2018 report, an unprecedented 68.5 million people round the world have been ‘forcibly displaced’ from their home, out of which nearly 25.4 million are refugees and within that a little less than half are females. In their introductory essay to the edited volume “Women

and Migration: Responses in Art and History”, the editors while deliberating on the notion of migration and movement of women in the global scenario rightly point out:

“Women have been part of global and historical movements of peoples to escape war, to avoid persecution, for work, for security; we have been uprooted, stolen, trafficked, enslaved. We have moved rationally, for an education, job, healthcare. We have been pushed off our land by climate change.” (Willis et al., 2019, p. 9)

Women’s experiences illustrate the complexities of being displaced in connection with their diverse identities and how these subjectivities have layered and plural dimensions of social relations. It is useful to remember that most of the differences in terms of gender identity can be related to men’s and women’s different involvement in public and private domains. Circumstances abound whereby women are compelled to move under duress – war, persecution and banishment, poverty etc. A post-dislocation perspective constitutive of women’s experience provides avenues for addressing issues such as home, belonging, plurality, othering and many similar lenses through which human subjectivity can be examined adequately.

To address the specificities involved in understanding women’s experience of displacement in India’s Northeast, it is important to locate the contextual realities of this region. While commenting on the plurality of perceptions inscribed within our understanding of Northeast India, Wouters and Tanka Subba assert that the “peoples of Northeast India simultaneously live in multiple worlds that are distinct yet often closely interconnected and at times overlapping.” (Wouters & Subba, 2023, p. 2) A similar strand of view is emphasized by Bengt G Karlsson who records how Northeast India has in different possible ways become a social fact, a reality not only in terms of state cartography and modes of governing, but also something that

“informs people’s actions, aspirations and sense of belonging.” (Karlsson, 2018, p. 4) It is useful to remember that northeast India as a region marked by numerous political enigmas produces multiple notions of identity, social histories and cultural encounters. As a geopolitical space that includes people belonging to diverse ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic groups, India’s Northeast has witnessed various patterns of displacement and relocation and interesting layers of historical formations. With a view to reinforcing this particular characteristic of Northeast India, Babyrani Yumnam argues that even after decades of colonial rule, Northeast region continues to be contested zone where questions of ethnic identities, national belongingness, and alienation are actively played out. (Yumnam, 2016)

While scholars, anthropologists, linguists, historians and political scientists have their own means and mechanisms for evolving their perspectives on it, the study of people’s culture and literary discourses offer a potent space for closely engaging with displacement narratives and concomitant explorations. Margaret Zama in her exploration of literary voices from India’s northeast talks about how the emerging literature from the Northeast space, “having undergone historical and political trauma of untold suffering and marginalization, registers various voices that need to be heard and understood in the context of India’s multicultural mosaic.” (Zama, 2013, p. xi) Literary narratives, in more ways than one, offer alternative worlds that extend beyond what has happened and what in all likelihood might happen in the future. Keeping in mind Littler’s postulation that literature provides a sensitive understanding of the unthought and the not yet known, it can be rightly asserted that this creative and imaginative capacity in texts and discourses alerts us to the possibility of contouring the emotional lives affected by the vagaries of dislocation. (Littler 2016 p. 307) Creative productions by offering discursive interventions into existing sphere of scholarship on politics and history of displacement go onto frequently question totalising discourses and attempt to memorialize

in unique manner indices of trauma, conflict and displacement. A diverse tapestry of occurrences of dislocation and migration is perceptible in the creative narrations that map the imaginative cartography produced by the experience of displacement. As noted, literature and the arts evoke awareness and compel us noting difficult events and circumstances such as the predicament of “clandestine migrants, of trafficked girls and of dispossessed indigenous peoples through striking but nuanced portrayals.” (Brownlie, 2022, p.8)

Narratives by and about women in India’s Northeast map the history and politics of gendered displacement in various ways and manners. Experiences of displacement and connected tropes have an important bearing in defining women’s position and related concerns in the Northeast. Multiple histories of displacement processes in the Northeast region and the conflicting positions of varied communities inform our understanding of displacement dynamics vis-a-vis gender relations in a larger context. Furthermore, it must be asserted that a significant section of the entire mass of the displaced people constitutes women who have been forcibly displaced and who are under constant threat and pressure from various power structures. In scholarship too, there has been an over-emphasis on male experience neglecting thereby women’s situational ties. As discussed by Caren Kaplan in her analysis of women’s position vis-à-vis politics of mobility and dislocation, it is significant to attend to questions of gender among other varied dimensions to facilitate an elaborate and more complex “materialism that addresses the powers and the limits of hegemonic formations.” (Kaplan, 1996, p.154). Focusing on poetry written by women poets from India’s Northeast will be useful in providing numerous insights into the various indices of dislocation and homelessness as experienced by women.

In a recently edited anthology titled *Homeward: towards a poetics of space* on the theme of home perceived and experienced by women writers from Northeast India, the editor Haripriya Soibam rightly claims that the

nature of what it means to belong is not just a sentiment. It is mapped by geopolitical facts and changing laws- and the law is a shapeshifting creature. (Soibam, 2022, p.1) Female authors writing from the Northeast are often required to negotiate the network of oppositional constructions of female subjectivity which define and shape the contour of their lives. Women poets like Nabina Das, Nabanita Kanungo, Esther Syiem et al have meaningfully recorded the spectrum of pain, trauma and concurrent changes induced by different forms of displacement in India's Northeast. These writers have infused in their creative spaces how aspects such as gender, power and belonging are raised through the written accounts of displacement and changing identity. Through some of these poems, it is relevant to foreground the ways in which displacement experiences are mediated, reflecting on many occasions, personal itineraries of uprooting. An analysis of their poetic expressions would reveal the ways in which the experience of displacement and its aftermath can be gravely impactful for the displaced, individual or community.

Partition of 1947 is an important vantage point to be recorded in this context. The case of India's Northeast reiterates the dimension of heterogeneity of partition history. Because of a lack of adequate scholarship in this area, not much is known to the rest. Many of these creative writers being second or third generation recipients of displacement experience have proceeded to negotiate with a past that has been defined through occurrences of dislocations and disruptions. These narratives are evocative of the personal and the political contexts in which these stories take place. In Nabanita Kanungo's poems engaging with the themes of displacement and belonging, one finds an accumulation of meaning around the changes represented by the process of displacement rather than dislocation simply being the cause and effect of changes. Within imaginary and fictional corpus of her poem one discerns a profound and edifying desire to exert a possibility of transformation that will script an end to episodes of horror and

fury, division and displacement of people as encountered in 1947. Through her poetic expressions, Kanungo speaks truthfully to their compelling circumstances of dislocation, to the complex choices they have had to make, to their hopes and aspirations. In her poem “Cyril’s Award”, we are offered a glimpse to the intergenerational indicators of loss and vulnerability often experienced by post partition bearers of dislocation. Veena Das’s use of the metaphor of poisonous knowledge in her analysis of violence in the realm of the everyday and the ordinary can be deployed here to indicate the different levels of marginalisation, subjugation or the “various forms of indirect violence created through the irony of refuge.” (Gera Roy, 2022, p.50) As Kanungo notes in the poem:

I am a twenty-seven-year-old refugee yesterday  
stunted beneath blaming anyone else  
and my cheeks are still bloody  
with the costly pinch of your charity (Kanungo, 2014, p.13)

By questioning the arbitrary nature of border constructions and its ramifications on human lives, Kanungo as a member of this experiential terrain asserts what Van Schendel notes in a different context in positing how “the state’s pursuit of territoriality - its strategy to exert complete authority and control social life in its territory” (Schendel, 2005, p.3) produces various borders and the notion of insider-outsider hierarchy. In another poem titled “Refugee Colony”, Kanungo uses the visual of neighbourhood, here Refugee colony of Shillong, to speak about the matrix of loss and anguish as inevitable corollaries of displacement. In this poem the sense of partition as a compelling rupture has an abiding presence. There is a detection of perennial sense of melancholy and perturbation which in turn arrests the symptoms of an existence imprisoned in historical developments that resist the fortuity of any complete understanding. Discussing a similar theme of the absurdity and melancholy of the dislocation of partition years, Tarun



K. Saint comments in the context of analysis of *The Weary Generations*, “It is as if an alternative vision that might have enabled the transcendence of boundaries cannot be quite realised, leading to the persistent sense of melancholy.” (Saint, 2010, p.144) In this historical episode are embedded innumerable stories of betrayal and agony, stories of resilience and repair. Here in the poem when she says, “where history lives in denial of itself / confused with lost land/ignored like a mad woman’s song” (Kanungo, 2014, p. 42), the anthropology of torment and marginality is given an evocative utterance through an expression like “a mad woman’s song”. Here the elegiac is intermixed with anger in depicting the changing contours of loss and belonging from a gendered perspective. Referring to the social and cultural constructed madness as a tool, Kanungo brings attention to gendered stereotypes being used to convey the poignancy that stems from a precarious existence.

Nabina Das, another poet from India’s Northeast, engages continually with themes related to displacement trauma and memories thereby illuminating our understanding of displaced subjectivity. Edward Said’s view in his *Reflections on Exile* that the age in which we live is essentially an age of the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration (Said, 2000) deeply resonates with Das’s poems about the multiple constructions of displaced identity. Das questions the violence embedded in the drawing of territorial boundaries which in turn precipitates constant destruction of the rhythm of everyday life. In the course of her poetic oeuvre, Nabina invokes sartorial images to convey the brutality of partition induced displacement and to signify that partition is not “exclusively a historical event, but also a collective violence that suggests its status as a historical, and not merely personal, trauma.” (Roy & Bhatia, 2008, p.83). Anjali Gera Roy discusses a similar issue when she tells how the body, its coverings and its demeanour, metaphors of the social, incarnates both the history of Partition and the story of struggle constructing a particular aesthetic that redefines the refugee self

and sociality. (Gera Roy, 2022, p.173). Das's acute note of disappointment and disillusionment with political goals is foregrounded in her poetry as she contends with the experience of those who continue to unwittingly grapple with the incredible changes brought about by their circumstances. As she expresses in one of her poems "Anima dreams a home":

I, Anima, will sing the song of razing the prisons to the ground. We'll raze the high walls and the concrete dungeons, all detention camps. They will never hold dew drops. Once broken, they'll become dough on the moist soil. (Das, 2022)

In her personal essay "Maps, shapes, and women breaking (out of) homes: A memoir", Nabina talks about her familial history of dislocation and also how dislocation and concomitant notion of refugeehood was perceived differently across generations, referring to this transformation as an ongoing mechanism. She contends, "The examination of the "self" is connected to political realities and history, thus putting the idea of belonging or that of displacement in a flux, and must be grounded in an ongoing re-evaluation..." (Das, 2022, p.182) This narrative as a richly textured and intensive commentary on the dialectic of dislocation and resettlement at the interstices of the individual and the collective provides a reconfiguration of the debates on identity, place and memory. Deftly interweaving personal memory and historical contingencies, Das's reflections highlight the psychological effects of a constant contention with an unsettled past and its bearing on a ruptured present.

The intricacies of displacement and belonging are notable and to a considerable extent will remain so because of the mediated nature of poetic narratives discussed in this context. It is to be noted here that most often the multigenerational perspectives on displacement trajectories and idioms of loss and longing provide a nuanced assessment of this crucial subject. These narratives in fact offer insightful imaginative gendered accounts of how the

experience of displacement has brought forth the affective and emotional dimensions of identity discourses and also pave the way for production of new forms of identity and subjectivity.

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### **Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> See Rich, Adrienne, "Notes towards a politics of location", in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, 212.

# Changing Roles of the Maternal Uncle and Father in Khasi Matrilineal Society: An Inter-Generational Qualitative Study of Masculinity

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&

Glenn C Kharkongor\*\*

## Abstract:

In most cultures, the alpha male represents the patriarchal ideal of masculinity. Traditional male roles in Khasi matrilineal society have been shaped by cultural concepts like *khatarbor*, literally 12 strengths. This study reviewed the evolving Khasi social system and its effect on masculinity from the viewpoint of adult males, and sought to determine if there were any inter-generational differences between the two age groups: >45 years (n=40), and 20-45 years (n=70) representing the older and younger generations. Focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were conducted.

The older generation still believes in the traditional role of men, seeking respect through meeting their social and political responsibilities to their clan and to society, while domestic responsibilities are to be mostly fulfilled by the mother and her clan. According to them, the importance of men has now diminished, for example, the administrative and custodial role of the maternal uncle no longer exists with the breakdown of the clan structure and the rise of nuclear families. The younger generation of men seem to have accepted the new social formation and their broader role in the nuclear family, believing that fathers should share domestic responsibilities and show caring, love, and devotion.

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The decline of the clan structure and the rise of nuclear families seemed to be viewed negatively by the older generation of men, who regret the reduction of male prestige, which has resulted in role conflict and low self-esteem, and which may have contributed to societal problems such as wife desertion, alcoholism and substance abuse.

**Keywords:** Matriliney, Masculinity, Maternal Uncle, Khasi

### **Introduction:**

According to Schneider and Gough (1962), a matrilineal system is a system in which inheritance, succession, and affiliation to social groups are derived from one's mother and her clan, rather than from the father. The major matrilineal principle is lineage, succession, and inheritance. Matriliney still exists in some modern societies (Das, 2001).

Some of the societies that follow the matrilineal system are France's Akan, West Africa's Ashanti, the Tuaregs of the Sahara, the Serer of Senegal, the Gambia and Mauritania, the Choctaw, Gitksan, Haida, Hopi Cherokee, Lenape, Iroquois, Navajo, and Tlingit of North America, the Mosuo of China, the Basques of Spain, the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, the Bunts of Karnataka, and the Nairs of Kerala in south India. The Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo tribes of Meghalaya in Northeast India are matrilineal (Hagelberg, 2002).

According to the 2011 Census, the population of the state of Meghalaya is 29,64,007, with around 86 percent being tribal and 70 percent following Christianity (Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India Delhi, 2011). There are 1,382,278 Khasis in the state.

Matriliney in the Khasi tribe is the practice of deriving the lineage of offspring from the mother. All the mother's sisters are also referred to as *mei*, mother, and the identity and clan name of all the children are derived from the mother's clan (Chacko, 1998). The matrilineal system, also seen

among the Khasis, is one in which the man locates to his wife's home after marriage.

The mother passes on the clan's name through her children. The Khasi word *kpoh*, literally *womb*, derives from *ka Īawbei* (the ancestral clan mother). This defines a *kpoh* as a group of matrilineal relatives who are descended from the same clan mother or 'womb' (Gurdon, 1914). The *kur* or clan is the most important social unit in Khasi society.

The household unit of a *khatduh*, (youngest daughter), her husband, and their children is known as an *ïing* (natal family). It includes her parents and her spouse. The other sisters usually live nearby in their own houses with their husbands and children. The authority of the *kñi* (maternal uncle) is not as dominant in such families as it is in his natal *ïing* (Chacko, 1998).

The ancestral property passes through the mother to the youngest daughter. However, she is only a custodian. The youngest daughter is neither the 'owner' in the sense that she cannot sell the family land she inherited, according to Khasi custom (Tanka, 2008). Though most of the wealth is inherited by her, traditionally, the youngest daughter had the financial responsibility of looking after the welfare of all the *ïing* members and of ensuring the religious rites at ceremonial occasions (Chacko, 1998; Das, 2001).

*Ka ïing* (family) in the matrilineal system is the lowest level of the clan. *Ka kpoh* may include two or more families. In the matrilineal system, family authority is passed down from the mother's brother (*kñi*) to the sister's eldest son, while property is inherited or passed down from the mother to the youngest daughter. A Khasi man, whether married or single, will always be a member of the same family and will always affiliate himself with the clan to which he was born into. A woman if she is not the youngest or an heiress, will move out after marriage and remain a member of her mother's family. Men and women each have their own roles and responsibilities

within the Khasi family (Lyngdoh & Nongkynrih, 2015).

The matrilineal system is a gender-balanced, democratic, and usually peaceful social configuration that minimises warfare and domination (Abendroth, 2003). However, with colonialism, Christianity, modernization, globalization, and Westernization, Khasi society has evolved and its cultural practices have lost their strongholds, and like other matrilineal societies, is on the verge of adaptation to other cultures (Passah, 1998).

Mawrie (1983), explains the origins of family, clan, religion, and culture. The author provides vital insights into the formations of family, with a discussion on *kñi* (maternal uncle) and *kpa* (father). In terms of the maternal uncle responsibility, he is accountable for his clan members from birth to death (Mawrie, 1983). In a Khasi household, the father is referred to as *u thawlang*, meaning one who makes together. Even after his death, he is regarded as *u thawlang* by the family, and rituals are performed to him.

In the Khasi matrilineal system the prominent role, authority, and power resides with the maternal uncle, and the maternal uncle makes the final decision in family issues (War, 1992). As a result, there was minimal risk of a family being split up or abandoned. He is the one who instructs and teaches his nephews and nieces so that the family might thrive. The mother's brother cannot possibly disown his sister and her children because they are of the same clan and flesh and blood ( Lyngdoh & Nongkynrih, 2015).

The maternal uncle is always with his sister and her children, except for a few hours at night when he stays with his wife at her house (Lyngdoh, 1998). In his sister's family, the maternal uncle has a decisive, authoritative position and prestige; he is the centre of his nephews, nieces, and sister. In his wife's home, he merely performs his responsibilities as husband and father. All decisions at his in-law's home are made after consulting with his wife's maternal uncle (Snaitang, 1998).



In the traditional practice, during the day, the father is away from his wife and children. Only at night does he spend time with his wife, and not always with his children (Lyngdoh,1998;Nongkinrih,2002). He is known as *u thawlang* (procreator), as well as *u ba buh ka longshynrang longkynthei* (one who determines the sex of children) (Nongrum,1989). Das Gupta (1989), is of the belief that the Khasi male does not have the same standing in the household as his wife. He is thought of as a begetter (*shongkha*).

In this paper we will explore the changing roles of the maternal uncle and father in Khasi matrilineal society and how men are perceived by the society.

## Methods

This study adopted a qualitative research design and was conducted in the East Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya. It included both rural and urban populations. Information was collected on cultural traditions with a specific focus on the matrilineal system, the maternal uncle, the father and Khasi men in general.

A purposive sampling was used. Participants were selected based on their geographical location and their knowledge and practices of traditional social customs. In the selected villages, the majority of the population still adheres to the indigenous faith or '*ka niam Khasi*' These villages possessed active traditional institutions such as the *seng kynthei* (women's group), *seng samla* the (youth group), and the *dorbar* (village council), as well as a population of at least 50 homes. The participants from the urban area were Christians, had more education, modernization, Westernization, mixed marriages, and non-tribal cultures. Authors and academics with expertise and experience in Khasi culture, customs, and matriliney were considered expert informants.

The sample size in this study was 110 participants. Twelve focus group discussions and 10 in-depth interviews were conducted and saturation was

reached. A topic guide and a semi-structured schedule were developed for the purpose of data collection. Focus group discussions were held with two groups: younger adults aged 20 to 45 years and older adults aged 46 years and above. In-depth interviews with writers and academicians were also held.

The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) granted approval prior to the data collection. A permission form and a briefing letter were sent to each research participant and during data collection, both verbal and written consent were acquired.

## Results

Using thematic analysis, the findings were placed in the following categories:

- Khasi men in society
- Khasi men as maternal uncle
- Khasi men as fathers
- Younger and older generations' perceptions and attitudes of the duties and responsibilities of Khasi men
- Old role vs new role described by participants of 45 years and above

### a. Khasi men in society

A participant stated that Khasi men in history are greatly esteemed by the clan or the family. When we think about Khasi males, the first thing that comes to mind is a provider (hunter), '*u khlawait*', a warrior, fearless and powerful, and a defender of the land, '*ka ri um snam*'. Because of men, the Khasi empire expanded, and land became highly important. In the past, Khasi males would cohabit with non-Khasi women from other regions, marry them, and use the *tang kur thymmai* ceremony, through which they would become Khasi. These women would become *ka Iawblei*, clan mother, and through these ancestress, new clans were formed (older adult, 51 years,

in-depth interview).

*'Even in the governance of land and society, it is only the males who could perform these roles. This in itself shows that women respected men and would support them and the women's views would always be considered during any dorbar meetings'* (older adult, 55 years, in-depth interview).

A participant in an interview mentioned that, *'In the past we have what is called 'ka iing khyraw' where all the unmarried men would come and get themselves trained in almost all areas in warfare, folk culture, singing and dancing, values system and so on. These have made Khasi men to be very disciplined and well respected'* (older adult, 52 years, in-depth interview).

Das Gupta (1989), is of the belief that the Khasi male does not have the same standing in the household as his wife. He is thought of as a begetter, *shongkha*. If he marries the youngest daughter, his rank and position are low in her family. Khasi men's roles are generally those of control over women and children. Men have leadership and power within the matrilineal descent group (Lyngdoh & Nongkynrih, 2015).

#### **b. Khasi men as maternal uncle**

*As a maternal uncle, he is greatly respected by the clan, sister, nephew, and niece. He controls property, watches after the welfare of the family and his sister, and is a disciplinarian to his nephews and niece. He is always regarded as just and a man of integrity* (older adult, 55 years, in-depth interview).

The traditional functions of the maternal uncle are especially important to families that practice *Niam Khasi*, indigenous faith as mentioned by the older adult in an interview.

The maternal uncle is a vital member of the family, and he is required to look after his sisters, nephews, and nieces. He is actively involved in

choices about land, marriage, ceremonies, and family welfare. However, many participants believe that the Khasi family structure is transitioning from a joint family system to nuclear families, which has altered family relations in practically every way. *'A Khasi man plays two major roles, as a maternal uncle to his clan (kur) and a father in his family (iing khun)* Participant also stated, *'that roles of the maternal uncle are changing or transferred to the fathers in nuclear family'* (older adult, 55 years, in-depth interview).

The family dynamics has changed as the maternal uncle's role is weakening in the Khasi family. *'In the process of marriage, the maternal uncle's role (which is important and significant) is no more, his role is taken over by the father and church, the maternal uncle is only informed'* (young adult, 42 years, focus group discussion).

### **c. Khasi men as fathers**

*In the present, it is the father who has taken on the duty of social, economic, and administrative decisions, and there is virtually nothing in the family that does not require the father's consent for almost every circumstance* (older adult, 46 years, in-depth interview). A participant in a focus group discussion also stated that, *'the father is the one who provides (kamai ia ka hok)'* (young adult, 40 years, focus group discussion).

*'As a father in the family almost all consent is taken from the father, in any difficult situation it is the father who investigates the matter, the need of the family is also looked by the father, he plays his own roles in the family. It is in his fulfilment of the roles he gets the status of being a masculine man'* (older adult, 70 years, in-depth interview).

### **d. Younger and older generations' perceptions and attitudes of the duties and responsibilities of Khasi men**

The young participants stated that, *'the one who oversee, control and is protector of the kingdom 'synshar khadar' administration rights'* still runs by the khasi men in the society (older adult, 53years, in-depth interview).

*'As a father in the family almost all consent is taken from the father; any difficult situation it is the father who looks into the matter, the need of the family is also looked by the father, he plays his own roles in the family. It is in his fulfilment of the roles he gets the status of being a masculine man'* (older generation, 70 years, in-depth interview).

*'A term for the man marrying the youngest is usually called 'dieng shaiñdoh' 'tyng-ier', 'piece of wood where meat is chopped and minced, chopping board, person who forbears ill –treatment', 'platform suspended just above the hearth where firewood is kept' and 'ka hok ka khatduh ka dei jong u pyrsa khatduh' which means the responsible one to always support the youngest daughter in her fulfilling her responsibility, the right of the youngest daughter is the right of the man marrying her and the man must help her 'validate her role in the family', 'Pynkhamti ia ka bor ka khatduh' (young adult, 30 years, focus group discussion).*

#### **e. Khasi men's roles as described by the younger group**

The younger participants described the current roles of Khasi men:

*'He is the bread earner; he uses his talents faithfully and a provider to his family (kamai ia ka hok)'* (young adult, 35 years, focus group discussion).

*Ka ktien ka thylliej jong u rangbah ka long hi kaba kyntang, u rangbah u lah ban pynsgewthuh ia kiwei'* (young adult, 22 years, focus group discussion). Which means that the words of the Khasi man are considered sacred and final in all aspects and that a Khasi man has the skill to make others understand. *'Ha ka synshar khadar ha shnong ka thaw dei biet ka*

*bynta u shynrang*' (young adult, 24 years, focus group discussion). Which means in the political arena in communities and administration it is the responsibility of men.

Love, care and affection as a father and the bread earner of the family '*kamai ia ka hok*' '*U thawlang*' the one who determine the sexes (procreator) '*He has the responsibility to strive and struggle and to provide for the family*' (younger adult, 42 years, focus group discussion).

Even the social sanction where the maternal uncle plays an important role is distorted with change coming to the system from various external or internal forces that are natural; the maternal uncle is only informed of important events he no longer plays the role because it is not relevant anymore in the current context, and while the current economy lies with the family (nuclear) and not the clan, we have emerged from that economy system with the breakdown of the joint family.

In the present, the father is required to be responsible for the family and his children, and there is a rise of the "*kpa*" ship. The family upbringing has placed the duties of responsibility on Khasi men.

**f. Old role vs new role described by the older participants and above**

The older participants described the changing roles of Khasi men:

*'Men must establish their manhood by completing their duties as fathers and husbands. Khasi men's masculinity is determined by the type of parent they have. This issue of altering a man's lineage has nothing to do with masculinity, but rather with the economy of land and inheritance. Khasi males must learn to be self-sufficient and not rely on their mothers or clans; they must struggle to develop their own identity in the present. The perception of being less manly is a fallacy; it is an excuse; a Khasi man is as good and as bad as any*

*other male in the world; he must work to establish his world view, sense of duty to self and society (self-respect), and they will be able to balance extremely well. We are unable to persuade men that they must strive; very few men have truly struggled; others are always reliant on the mother, clan, and the institution of the youngest daughter'* (older adult, 69 years, in- depth interview).

Looking into the present context a participant stated that, '*Khasi men are now very confused because they are unable to adapt to the changes in the economy and social context that have occurred in the last 200 years; it has nothing to do with religion, being a Khasi, politics, or the constitution, but it is primarily due to the two factors in economic and social development that the roles of Khasi men cannot really be defined in the present context'* (older adult, 69 years, in- depth interview).

In an interview a participant stated that, '*the present status of Khasi man has lost his primary roles that he is supposed to play as in the past, looking at discipline of Khasi men it has declined. The 'iing khyraw' has disintegrated, the warrior image of a Khasi man who is strong physically and mentally, self-control, self-discipline etc like u Tirot Singh (a famous Khasi warrior and freedom fighter) could hardly be found in the present. The role of the maternal uncle has diminished as the Khasi society is changing; there is also the gender bias in favour of the female, especially in inheritance, education, maintenance which develops his inferiority complex over time'* (older adult, 51 years, in-depth interview).

A participant mentioned that, '*with time and evolution the culture has evolved and the matrilineal practices has changed, especially in terms of marriage, inheritance and lineage, he further states that because of the changes that are evident now, the old system is not relevant anymore in the present, many aspects of the system we do not follow them anymore voluntary, the breakdown of the joint family into nuclear families have*

*limited the maternal uncle's role to perform his duties and responsibility. The father is an important image to the children now, we are all evolving now as a tribe we are bi-cultural and with this we are slowly adapting to the mainstream culture'* (older adult, 63 years, in- depth interview).

*'Khasi men now are very confused because they are not able to adapt themselves to the changes in the economy and social context that has taken place in the last 200 years, it has nothing to do with religion, being a Khasi, politics, constitution but basically of the two factors in economic and social development that the roles of Khasi men could not really be defined in the present context'* (69 years, M, married, IDI).

However, *'In the present it is the father who has taken up the responsibility, men in the social, economic, administration, there is nothing in the family without the father's consent almost in every situation, the father is the one who can provide love, care and affection for his family 'u ba lah ba ia'* (older adult, 46 years, in-depth interview). *'The masculinity of men lies with men he has to prove his masculinity by performing his roles as a father'* (older adult, 65 years, focus group interview). *'In the present it is the father who has taken up the responsibility, men in the social, economic, administration, there is nothing in the family without the father's consent almost in every situation, the father is the one who can provide love, care, and affection for his family 'u ba lah ba ia'* (older adult, 46 years, in-depth interview).

## **Discussion**

Since the 1990s, there have been numerous significant and abrupt changes in Khasi society's traditions and practices, particularly in the institution of the youngest daughter, marriage, the function of the *kñi*, the establishment of nuclear families, the *kur*'s economy, and the people's social life. The breakdown of the family system, women's and men's autonomy, the maternal uncle vs. the father, and other conflicting situations such as those



between nuclear families and matrilineal descent groups, natal and conjugal loyalties, property ownership and authority, and conflict between a man's children and his sister's children. Education, urbanization, and the transition from a subsistence economy to a market economy have all contributed to the gradual extinction of the matrilineal system (Passah, 1998).

Mawrie (1983), explains the origins of family, clan, religion, and culture. The author provides vital insights into the origins of family in a section on Khasi institutions of uncle and father, but the discussion on ideas of *kñi* (pronunciation) and *kpa* is quite skeletal. In terms of the *kni*'s responsibility, it is simply said that he is accountable for his clan members from birth to death (Mawrie, 1983). In a Khasi household, the father is referred to as *u thawlang*, meaning one who creates together. Even after his death, he is regarded as *u thawlang* by the family, and propitiation is performed to him (Gurdon, 1914).

According to participants during interviews stated that, '*change in the Khasi matriliney started from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the coming of the new culture i.e. Christianity, so automatically many also adopted the new culture which is totally different to the Khasi culture, there is no similarity, this is where our cultural practices has started to change and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the foreign culture of Westernization and modernization have contributed towards change*' (older adult, 55 years, in-depth interview). '*The Khasi society is at the transitional change, we cannot live or survive in isolation and the society is adapting to the things that would help to sustain itself*' (older adult, 52 years, in- depth interview).

Consequently a participant says that, the society is an organic being, it will adapt to the changes by itself, it is part of the evolution, if restriction is brought in the form of new laws example The Lineage Act 1997, Meghalaya Compulsory Registration of Marriages Act 2012, there will be hindrance and confusion for change, because these new laws are not relevant and not

practical, he further notes that, the ancestral property '*kur*' economy has lost the significance to families who are Christian, it is not relevant to Christian families because the youngest daughter does not performed the rights and duties especially pertaining to the '*niam khasi*' the indigenous faith (older generation, 55 years, in-depth interview).

Reviewing the work of these researchers, it seems clear that the Khasi matriliney has changed significantly in its practices, with the main reason being the breakdown of the family system and the emergence of the nuclear family as an important family system; socialization among clan members has also been affected; and the institution of the youngest daughter has also changed, where its significance is mostly understood to those who still uphold and practice the indigenous faith. The maternal uncle has also lost his position as a *kni*, and the institutional assurance that the clan, the maternal uncle and the youngest daughter normally offer has been compromised.

## **Conclusion**

The father's minimal position in the Khasi matrilineal system must be expanded from a biological function to one that emphasizes connection and emotional support during childhood, according to the participants (younger, older). The encouraging component of fatherhood is recognized throughout cultures; the father figure may or may not be the biological father. Children may be entrusted to the mother's brother or to elder male family members such as the grandpa Richardson (1995).

However, as the maternal uncle role has declined and the social institutional stability (the clan and the youngest daughter institution) of the Khasi has also eroded. The father is now accountable for the family and his children, and there is a rise of the '*kpa*' ship in the present.

The role of Khasi men appears to be changing, now it is the father who shares family responsibilities and cares for his family, and this characterizes

the present masculinity of Khasi men, as the Khasi term indicates, '*u ba lah ba a, u ba kamai ia ka hok*' The traditional role of the maternal uncle has now been assumed by the father. Men's significant contributions to family life include assuming economic responsibility for children's development, creating a caring and loving relationship with children, and supporting gender equality in the home.

Thus, family males might effectively replace the traditional Khasi idea of a father. Men's main contributions to family life come from taking on the financial burden of the children's growth, encouraging a kind and loving connection with children, and advancing gender equality in the home. Therefore, if any of these responsibilities are missing, it will be difficult for kids to grow holistically. In addition, men's lives may be improved and developed when these roles are fulfilled.

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## Glossary

<i>Īawbei</i>	The primeval ancestress of the clan
<i>Īawbei tymmen</i>	Old ancestress
<i>Īawbei khynraw</i>	Young ancestress
<i>Īing, Ka</i>	The family
<i>Kñi</i>	Maternal uncle
<i>Kur, Ka</i>	The clan
<i>Kpoh, Ka</i>	The lineage
<i>Ka bat ia ka niam</i>	One who keeps the religion
<i>Khatduh, Ka</i>	Youngest daughter
<i>Dieng shaiñdoh</i>	Piece of wood where meat is chopped and minced, chopping board, person who for bears ill-treatment
<i>Kpa</i>	Father
<i>Mei</i>	Mother
<i>Thawlang</i>	The primordial ancestor of the clan or sub-clan
<i>Seng kynthei</i>	Women's group
<i>Seng samla</i>	Youth group

*Dorbar*

Village council

*U khlawait*

Warrior

# Impact of Institutions on the Growth of Enterprises: A Study of Papumpare District of Arunachal Pradesh

Khoda Oniya\*

## Abstract

The study aims to understand the impact of institutions (formal and informal) on the growth of enterprises in the Papumpare district of Arunachal Pradesh. It takes growth of sales turnover as the proxy for growth of enterprises. Using sales turnover growth of enterprises as a dependent variable and institutions as an independent variable, the study covers 222 entrepreneurs from manufacturing, trading, hotel and restaurant, construction and other services. Analysing the data using Pearson product moment correlation along with stepwise linear regression, the study revealed that the existing arrangements of formal institutions negatively impacts sales turnover in entrepreneurship, with the rule of law, regulatory quality, and access to finance playing key roles. Similarly, the existing ecosystem of informal institutions, particularly cultural norms and values, significantly and negatively influence sales outcomes. These findings underline the importance of calibrating formal institutional arrangements and reforming the informal institutional setting to meet the requirements of the native entrepreneurs in the tribal state of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Keywords:** Formal Institutions, Informal Institutions, Entrepreneurship, Sales Turnover Growth

## I. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is one of the key drivers of economic growth and development and is an important factor in the growth process of any economy. It helps bring innovation and other positive changes to society, opening employment opportunities and introducing new products to the economy.

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In India, the governments both at the centre and the states placed a number of emphases on promoting entrepreneurship through different schemes and policies. While there are a number of possible factors influencing the growth of entrepreneurship of a particular country or state, recent literature shows that institutions, both formal and informal, is one of the essential factors affecting entrepreneurship. This article investigates such connection by examining the influence of institutions on the sales turnover of enterprises in the Papumpare District of Arunachal Pradesh, India.

The remaining sections of the article are divided into sections as follows. Section II reviews literature on entrepreneurship and economic growth, as well as the role of institutions in the sales turnover of enterprises. Section III discusses the research gap in the literature and the significance of the study. Section IV profiles the study area. Section V elaborates on the data and method of analysis. Section VI provides the results of the analysis. Section VII summarises major findings and discusses the result, and Section VIII finally provides concluding observations and policy implications of the study.

## **II. Review of Literature**

### ***Entrepreneurship and Economic Growth in India***

Entrepreneurship is a crucial and dynamic component of an economy, playing a central role in driving innovation, economic growth, and job creation. It includes locating, producing, and seizing chances to launch and expand new companies or endeavours. It is a dynamic force that drives economic progress. The creation and growth of firms through innovation, risk-taking, and resource management are rooted in entrepreneurship (Doran et al., 2018). Entrepreneurship and regulatory aspects of institutions are found to have a bidirectional relationship, which aids in stimulating economic growth (Khalilov & Yi, 2021). Fundamentally, entrepreneurship is about identifying opportunities and pursuing to catalyse change and



advance society. Entrepreneurs, who frequently create ground-breaking innovations, negotiate the unpredictable world of markets to turn ideas into real goods, services, or businesses. A willingness to accept measured risks, whether in the form of monetary investments, market entrance plans, or developing cutting-edge new technologies, defines the path. It cuts across industries, from banking and technology to social entrepreneurs solving urgent societal problems.

Successful entrepreneurship is characterised by the creation of jobs as startups, and small enterprises grow to become important sources of employment and economic activity. Governments frequently implement laws and programmes to foster and assist new businesses because they understand the critical role that entrepreneurship plays in economic growth (Li et al., 2020). Studies indicate that early-stage and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship are essential contributors to economic growth in the sample of European nations. Additionally, research indicates that whilst necessity-driven entrepreneurship would be more potent in innovation-driven nations, opportunity-driven entrepreneurship would be more significant in transitional economies (Stoica et al., 2020).

India's economy has benefited from the expansion and development of entrepreneurship in recent years. India has a diversified startup setting that includes a large number of companies in a range of industries, from renewable energy and healthcare to technology and e-commerce. With programmes like 'Make in India' and 'Startup India', the government hopes to make things easier for business owners by offering subsidies and encouraging creativity. Referred to as the "Silicon Valley of India", cities such as Bangalore have become significant centres for technological companies, drawing in funding from both foreign and domestic sources.

Entrepreneurship is not limited to the technology industry; social entrepreneurship, which tackles problems like environmental sustainability,

healthcare, and education, is becoming more and more popular. Still, there are obstacles to overcome, such as financial availability, red tape, and the requirement for more infrastructure development. Despite these challenges, the persistence and creativity of Indian business owners drive the growth of businesses, the creation of jobs, and the overall economic advancement of the country (Ghani et al., 2017). The worldwide achievements of Indian entrepreneurs demonstrate the potential and vibrancy of the country's entrepreneurial scene and point to a bright future for both innovation and economic growth.

One of the significant contributions of entrepreneurship is that it results in technological breakthroughs. Entrepreneurs are leading the way in embracing and using new technology, which acts as a drive for industries to move forward and change the market environment. The constant quest for cost-effectiveness, efficiency, and enhanced consumer experiences drives the adoption of cutting-edge technology across several industries. The interdependent connection among entrepreneurship, market prospects, and technical breakthroughs highlights its pivotal function in moulding the trajectory of industries, promoting economic vibrancy, and catering to the dynamic needs of an international trade environment (Ishachi, 2016).

### ***Role of Institutions on Sales Turnover of Enterprise***

Institutions are the rules of the game in a society, or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction (North, 1990). Formal institutions are well-established, codified social structures that include political, legal, and regulatory frameworks intended to control behaviour and maintain social order. Clear regulations and power of enforcement mechanisms define these institutions. Written laws, regulatory agencies, governmental entities, and legal systems are a few examples of formal institutions. They provide an organised framework for social relationships, business, and governance, making them the foundation of

a well-functioning society. In order to uphold law and order, safeguard property rights, carry out contracts, and settle disputes, formal institutions are essential. Clear and precise formal institutions contribute to the stability and predictability of a society. This, in turn, fosters an environment conducive to both personal and economic advancement. The degree of public trust in the legal and regulatory systems, as well as their application and enforcement, are significant factors that determine how successful formal institutions are, such as clear objectives and mandate, the rule of law and legal framework, stability, public trust and credibility. Government regulations directly impact the growth of entrepreneurship. More significantly, there is a positive moderating effect between the development of entrepreneurship and business startups caused by government regulations for entrepreneurship (Li et al., 2020).

Understanding informal institutions is necessary for understanding the larger institutional context that shapes the behaviour of people and institutions within a specific community. Although they may sometimes contradict official regulations, they can also serve to strengthen formal institutions by providing additional levels of regulation. Informal institutions are understood as socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004). Informal institutions develop naturally from cultural traditions, social norms, and shared understandings, in contrast to formal institutions, which are codified and legally sanctioned. These organisations set expectations, direct behaviour and decision-making in a variety of life domains. Social hierarchies, informal networks, cultural norms, family traditions and practices (Ge et al., 2019) are a few examples of informal institutions. These organisations significantly promote social cohesiveness and are frequently woven throughout a culture. Gaining an understanding of informal institutions is essential to understanding the subtleties of social dynamics, establishing trust, and society's operation.

The way that formal and informal institutions interact affects the institutional environment as a whole, which in turn affects how people and organisations function within a particular cultural setting. The intricate interplay between formal and informal institutions has a substantial influence on sales turnover and, in turn, determines the business environment for entrepreneurs (Urbano et al., 2019). Government policies, norms, and legal frameworks represent formal institutions that play a crucial role in establishing the regulations that companies are obligated to adhere to. Upholding official regulations is crucial for preserving legal standing, averting fines, and fostering stakeholder confidence. For business owners, the sales process is directly impacted by compliance with tax laws, industry-specific rules, and contract enforcement procedures. Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in economic contributions, yet the extent and nature of entrepreneurial activities significantly differ between developed and developing nations. Chowdhury, Audretsch and Belitski (2019) explored how formal and informal institutional factors influence the quality and quantity of entrepreneurship in distinct country categories. The study emphasises the significant role institutions play in sustaining both the quality and quantity of entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, it unveils that the impact of institutions is not uniform; instead, a dynamic relationship exists between institutions and economic growth.

Formal institutions provide a stable and predictable environment that positively influences company operations. This setting enhances investors' confidence and facilitates consistent growth in sales turnover. Studies have revealed that access to finance, rule of law and regulatory bodies significantly contribute to business performance (Roxas et al., 2013). Studies conducted on the Philippines' tourism sector revealed that components of the institutional environment, in isolation, exert only a modest influence on the performance of tourism firms. The study revealed that the government plays a crucial role in ensuring that the formal institutional environment

fosters entrepreneurship, which in turn improves the performance of the tourism sector (Roxas & Chadee, 2013).

Sales turnover is an essential financial statistic to assess the success and financial stability of an enterprise. Growing turnover often indicates effective sales tactics, while declining turnover might force business owners to reassess and modify their plans. Forecasting and financial planning both depend on sales turnover. Entrepreneurs are able to predict changes in the market and modify their company strategy by having a thorough understanding of the patterns and trends in sales turnover. Studies have revealed that at the starting stage of startup, the founders' participation at conferences, their educational background, the new products the startups have launched, their professional connections, the source of funding, and the support from incubators, accelerators, supporting organisations and collaboration with national or international are positively associated with the annual sales turnover of startups in Gujarat, India (Jyoti & Singh, 2020).

The influence of informal institutions, such as social standards, cultural norms, and informal networks, additionally impacts sales turnover. Entrepreneurs must comprehend the cultural environment in which their firm works since it influences customer behaviour, market dynamics, and business relationships. As a key element of many informal organisations, trust is essential in shaping customer choices and fostering repeat business. Informal networks can provide access to new markets and economic prospects since they are based on shared ideals and personal relationships. Through relationship-building and community involvement, entrepreneurs may enhance sales turnover and acquire a competitive edge by skillfully navigating and using these informal institutions. A study conducted on the role of formal and informal institutions in the development of small tourism businesses revealed that the interplay between formal and informal institutions is influenced by various organisations, particularly those responsible for implementation at the forefront. The way that locals interact

affects how they can access resources and the tourist industry, which in turn affects how they start and run small tourism enterprises. Informal institutions are essential for locals to live in a favourable environment (Lui et al., 2017).

The interaction between formal and informal institutions is especially noticeable in fields where transactions based on relationships are every day. The legal frameworks of formal institutions are enhanced by trust, which is frequently promoted through Informal networks. Entrepreneurs may, however, rely more heavily on informal channels for resolving conflicts and fostering relationships in settings with weak formal institutions, which may have an effect on overall sales turnover. Formal institutions directly influence the worldwide strategy of companies venturing into foreign markets. The likelihood of entering the market through wholly-owned subsidiaries increases with the number of formal institutions. The institutional environment of a nation consists of more than just its formal institutions. Studies indicate that nations with weak formal institutions tend to have more informal institutions. Thus, businesses should be mindful of informal institutions, mainly when growing into developing nations (Beyer & Fening, 2012). Studies have revealed that the profitability of Small and midsize businesses and large enterprises is significantly impacted differently by informal and formal institutions. This indicates that while small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) experience more significant advantages from the quality of formal institutions compared to large firms, larger enterprises derive more substantial benefits from social trust than their SME counterparts. It also demonstrates that formal institutions and trust have a substituting influence on corporate profitability, with a more significant effect on larger enterprises (Kafouros et al., 2022).

### **III. Research Gap and Significance of the Study**

There is limited research in understanding how entrepreneurs strategically

respond to institutional challenges and opportunities to impact sales turnover. Examining the tactics entrepreneurs deploy to navigate formal regulations and exploit informal networks for enhanced sales performance can offer valuable insights. This involves gaining an understanding of the proactive measures entrepreneurs take in response to institutional changes, aiming to either sustain or enhance their sales turnover. Numerous studies concentrate on large corporations, neglecting the distinct challenges encountered by micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. These businesses frequently operate in environments with limited resources and encounter unique institutional pressures. Conducting research that explicitly delves into how institutions impact the sales turnover of micro, small and medium businesses can provide targeted insights for this sector of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The present study draws its significance from its aim to fill a critical research gap concerning the complex dynamics that influence business performance in a unique regional context. Arunachal Pradesh makes a strong case for researching how institutions affect the sales turnover of entrepreneurial endeavours because of its distinctive socioeconomic environment and diverse cultural tapestry. The study provides elaborate insights into the Papumpare District's institutional structures. Gaining an understanding of the legal frameworks, regulatory environments, and government policies that entrepreneurs encounter is essential to understanding the opportunities and challenges that come with conducting business in this particular area. The study makes an essential contribution to academic knowledge and offers practical implications for policymakers and business leaders who aim to promote an environment that is favourable for entrepreneurship by illuminating the complexities of formal institutions. The study also addresses the influence of Informal institutions on entrepreneurial activity, including social networks and cultural norms. The exploration of these Informal institutions by the study deepens the comprehension of how entrepreneurs

function within the distinct social environment of Papumpare District. This is important because it can guide business plans for entrepreneurs looking to start and grow in areas where Informal institutions are vital. The study attempts to investigate the interactions and possible conflicts between formal and informal institutions.

#### **IV. Profile of the Study Area**

The district of Papumpare is located in the Northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh. The area is distinguished by its varied topography, rich cultural legacy, and distinct socioeconomic dynamics. The district is primarily home to a variety of indigenous communities, all of which contribute to Arunachal Pradesh's rich cultural fabric. In Papumpare, traditional farming methods are practised by communities, making agriculture a significant economic activity. Furthermore, the area has gradually seen a shift in favour of handicrafts, small-scale enterprises, and tourism-related activities. The combination of established methods and new ventures from entrepreneurs shapes the economic setting. Papumpare is faced with a number of obstacles that affect entrepreneurship, such as the need for skill development, connectivity problems, and infrastructure constraints. Nevertheless, these difficulties also offer chances for creative solutions and expansion. The state capital of Itanagar, which is close to the district, provides access to resources and possible markets. The North Eastern States of India are regarded as industrially backward regions. However, these states, in particular Arunachal Pradesh, have a high potential for entrepreneurial growth. The state is innate, with climatic conditions highly favourable for large-scale production and taking up different kinds of entrepreneurial activities (Sharma, 2014).

#### **V. Data and Method of Analysis**

The study is correlational research leading to regression analysis to find the influence of institutions on the growth of sales turnover of entrepreneurship



in the Papumpare district of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Data source and Sampling Method:** The study is based on both secondary and primary data sources. Secondary data was used to select 111 registered working enterprises in the area of study from the 4<sup>th</sup> all-India census of MSMEs. Furthermore, to match the registered **units**, equal numbers of unregistered enterprises, i.e., 111, were selected through convenience sampling. The sample for the study consists of 222 entrepreneurs from manufacturing, trading, hotel and restaurant, construction and other services. In order to obtain data for this study, a questionnaire was designed to conduct interviews with selected samples of entrepreneurs in order to examine entrepreneurs' opinions on institutional factors that affect the growth of their enterprises.

**Variables of Interest and Measurement:** The study follows North's (1990) framework by segregating the Institutions into formal and informal. The dependent variable in this study is the growth of sales turnover in entrepreneurship, and the independent variable is institutions. Formal institutions include the rule of law, regulatory quality, and access to finance, while informal Institutions comprise culture, norms and values, family, and religion. Questions related to these institutions were framed and scored with a 5-point Likert scale scoring, where 1 indicated strongly disagree, and 5 indicated strongly agree. After scoring each statement, the scores were added with respect to each institution. The study employed predictive statistics as both independent variable and dependent variable data are continuous. The predictive statistics included Pearson Product moment correlation to find the relationship between Sales turnover growth and Institutions. Further, stepwise linear regression was used to find the percentage of variance caused by institutions on Enterprise's sales turnover.

## **VI. Results of the Analysis**

This section presents the result of the data analysis, highlighting different

aspects of the influence of institutions on sales turnover of enterprises, which are given in five different tables as follows.

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Formal and Informal Institutions with Sales Turnover Growth and Employee Growth**

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Pearson Correlation (R)	Significance (p-value)
Sales Turnover	Rule of Law	-.612	.001
	Regulatory Quality	-.565	.001
	Access to Finance	-.626	.001
	<b>Formal Institutions</b>	<b>-.632</b>	<b>.001</b>
	Culture, norms and values	-.455	.001
	Family	-.408	.001
	Religion	-.367	.001
	<b>Informal Institutions</b>	<b>-.451</b>	<b>.001</b>

Both Formal institutions and informal institutions had a negative significant relationship, which the R-value indicates along with a significant p-value of <.001 among institutions. In other words, an increase in the scores of institutions led to a significant decrease in the Sales turnover growth of enterprises.

**Table 2 : Results of Regression of Formal Institutions on Sales Turnover Growth**

Model	Variables Entered	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	B
1	Formal Institutions	.632	.400	.397	146.442**	-.035**

p-value . ≤05 is indicated with \* while p-value . ≤01 is indicated with \*\*

The stepwise linear regression revealed an adjusted R square of .397, indicating a 39.7% of variance in Sales turnover due to formal institutions.

Further, the regression ANOVA showed a significant F-value confirming that scores of formal institutions were a true predictor of sales turnover. The unstandardised coefficient B value was -.035, with a significant p-value of <.01.

**Table 3: Results of Stepwise Multiple Regressions of Components of Formal Institutions on Sales Turnover Growth**

Model	Variables Entered	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	B
1	Access to Finance	.626	.392	.390	142.073**	-.127**(M1) -.078**(M2)
2	Rule of Law	.646	.417	.411	78.221**	-.036**(M2)

p-value . ≤05 is indicated with \* while p-value . ≤01 is indicated with \*\*

When all the components of formal institutions were regressed against Sales turnover, only Access to Finance and the Rule of law entered the equation with a combined adjusted R square of .411, indicating a 41.1% variance in Sales turnover. Further, the regression ANOVA showed a significant F-value confirming that both Access to Finance and Rule of Law were true predictors of sales turnover. The unstandardised coefficient B value was -.078 for Access to Finance while -.036 for Rule of Law with a significant p value of <.01.

**Table 4: Results of Regressions of Informal institutions on Sales Turnover Growth**

Model	Variables Entered	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	B
1	Informal Institutions	.451	.204	.200	56.305**	-.033**

p-value . ≤05 is indicated with \* while p-value . ≤01 is indicated with \*\*

The stepwise linear regression revealed an adjusted R square of .200,

indicating a 20% variance in Sales turnover due to informal institutions. Further, the regression ANOVA showed a significant F-value confirming that scores of informal institutions were a true predictor of sales turnover. The unstandardised coefficient B value was -.033, with a significant p-value of <.01.

**Table 5: Results of stepwise multiple regressions of components of Informal institutions on Sales turnover growth**

Model	Variables Entered	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F-value	B
1	Culture, norms and values	.455	.207	.204	57.549**	-.080**

p-value . ≤05 is indicated with \* while p-value . ≤01 is indicated with \*\*

When all the components of informal institutions were regressed against Sales turnover, only culture, norms, and values entered the equation with an adjusted R square of .204, indicating a 20.4% variance in Sales turnover due to culture, norms and values. Further, the regression ANOVA showed a significant F-value confirming that scores of the square of .204, indicating a 20.4% variance in sales turnover, were true predictors of sales turnover. The unstandardised coefficient B value was -.080, with a significant p-value of <.01.

## VII. Major Findings and Discussion of Result

Through the analysis, as presented in the previous section, the study has certain key findings, which are enumerated and discussed as follows.

Formal Institutions had a significant negative relationship with Sales turnover. Many studies have established a positive relationship between the rule of law and sales turnover and the business performance of a company. However, in the context of Arunachal Pradesh, we find a 39.7% influence of overall scores of formal institutions on sales turnover with a significant B value of -.035, indicating a negative impact of formal institutions on the sales

turnover of enterprises. This could be due to the stringent and cumbersome formal regulations imposed on the businesses, which leads to compliance challenges and operational inefficiencies. This could impede the agility of entrepreneurial ventures, negatively impacting their sales turnover. The costs associated with adhering to formal institutional requirements, including fees for licensing, dealing with regulatory paperwork, and engaging in legal consultations, can be significant. For smaller enterprises, particularly startups, these elevated expenses may divert resources that could otherwise be allocated to sales initiatives and the overall development of the business.

The rule of law, regulatory quality, and access to finance showed a significant negative influence on sales turnover. However, on stepwise linear regression, Access to finance and Rule of law emerged as true predictors of Sales growth with a combined contribution of 41.1% and Significant B value of  $-.078$  (Access to finance) and  $-.036$  (Rule of law), indicating a negative impact on Sales turnover of entrepreneurship. Strict laws and thoughtful regulations are necessary for a stable business environment. However, companies, particularly startups, may find it challenging to comply if these rules become hard to handle and maintain. The rule of law may imply that obstacles to the law or ambiguities in the legal system could cause disruptions to the way businesses operate. For instance, drawn-out legal proceedings or a dearth of efficient dispute resolution procedures can impede businesses' ability to operate efficiently, which can affect sales turnover.

Informal Institutions had a significant negative relationship with Sales turnover. We find a 20.0% influence of overall scores of Informal institutions on sales turnover with a significant B value of  $-.033$ , indicating the negative impact of Informal institutions on Sales turnover of enterprise. Informal institutions might have a different level of legitimacy and trust than formal ones since they heavily rely on social relationships and norms. Informal institutions frequently function without formal agreements and contracts.

The lack of legally enforceable agreements may create concerns in business dealings and influence partners' or customers' willingness to enter into deals that might raise sales turnover. Access to vital resources like capital, knowledge, and skilled labour is not as high in informal institutions as it is in formal ones.

Culture, norms, values, family, and religion showed a significant negative influence on sales turnover. However, on stepwise linear regression, only Culture norms and values emerged as a true predictor of Sales growth with a contribution of 20.4% and a Significant B value of  $-.080$ , indicating the negative impact of Informal institutions on Sales turnover of enterprise. Cultural norms and values, frequently profoundly embedded in conventional business practices, may place a higher priority on consistency and stability than on actively increasing sales. Companies that are impacted by these cultural norms might employ conservative sales approaches, putting more of an emphasis on upholding current connections than on achieving rapid sales growth. Decision-making in family-run businesses may be influenced more by personal factors than just corporate goals. This familial influence may often result in conservative methods, which have an adverse effect on overall sales turnover due to the prioritisation of family harmony and values over sales strategies. Religious principles may sometimes restrict certain business practices or market engagements. Enterprises functioning within the constraints of religious doctrines might encounter constraints in their marketing approaches or range of products, which could impact their capacity to contend and enhance sales in a variety of markets.

### **VIII. Concluding Observation and Policy Implications**

The current study aims to understand institutions, such as formal and informal, and their impact on the sales turnover of enterprises, specifically in the context of the Papumpare district of Arunachal Pradesh. Formal institutions furnish the required framework for entrepreneurship to flourish, fostering

an atmosphere in which startups can prosper. Likewise, formal institutions support the consistency and dependability of business transactions in the context of sales turnover. The study's findings highlight the complex connection between institutional characteristics and entrepreneurial success. Both formal and informal institutions can significantly influence the sales turnover of ventures. These findings highlight the significance of navigating the complexities of institutional environments for sustained entrepreneurial growth, and entrepreneurs and policymakers should take note of them.

The findings of the study have implications on how entrepreneurial activities are conducted in Arunachal Pradesh. Targeted interventions are required in light of the detrimental effects of formal institutions, especially in areas like access to financing, rule of law, and regulatory quality. Certain key policy measures may be suggested based on the findings of the study.

**Reforms in Policy:** To create an ecosystem that is more favourable for entrepreneurs, policymakers may concentrate on strengthening and calibrating the legal and regulatory frameworks to suit to the requirements of the small and medium tribal entrepreneurs. Regulations that are uniform, simple, hassle free, easy to confirm and well-defined can reduce uncertainty and improve the business environment. It can be helpful to take steps to improve micro, small and medium-sized businesses' access to financing. Entrepreneurs can expand their businesses by creating strong financial support systems and removing administrative obstacles to funding.

**Building Capacity:** Programmes for entrepreneurial education and training ought to be created with the goal of giving business owners the information and abilities they need to successfully negotiate challenging regulatory environments. This can enable them to take proactive measures to meet compliance requirements and legal challenges. Programmes for financial literacy can help entrepreneurs get a better understanding of the financial system and facilitate more effective funding access. Consequently, there

may be a positive effect on sales turnover.

***Sensitivity to Culture:*** Entrepreneurs should think about including cultural sensitivity in their business strategies since they are aware of the impact that cultural norms and values have on sales turnover. This could entail modifying product offerings and marketing strategies to conform to cultural norms in the area. Initiatives that encourage diversity and cultural inclusivity in the entrepreneurial environment can receive support from governmental and industry organisations.

***Stakeholder Collaboration:*** An environment that is more supportive can be created through cooperative efforts amongst financial institutions, governmental agencies, and business owners. This could entail developing channels for communication, systems for providing feedback, and streamlined procedures for handling problems. Using public-private partnerships to address systemic issues can be very beneficial. Innovative solutions to remove obstacles to entrepreneurial success can be developed by bringing together various stakeholders.

***Constant Monitoring and Evaluation:*** It's critical to regularly evaluate the success of interventions and policy changes. Policymakers can address any unforeseen challenges and refine strategies based on real-world outcomes with the support of ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Creating channels for feedback that let business owners share their lessons learned and obstacles can help create more flexible and responsive policies.

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# Developmental Challenges in Northeast India: A Mizoram Context

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## **Abstract:**

This article is meant to study the role of state and non-state actors that contributed for the governance and developmental process in the Northeast India in general and Mizoram in particular. Discouraging a few responses of the governmental agencies, the article has focused on nongovernmental players that were engaged in the developmental process. In contrast to the role that non-state actors like the civil society played in the mainland India, their participation in the North East India is remarkable. Examining a few known concepts and practices in the theory and practice of development, the article tries to contextualize the background related to the development of North East India. It suggests for addressing genuine issues of ethnic identity within the existing democratic arrangement if long-term peace and development is to ensured.

**Keywords:** State, Civil Society, Governance, Development, Northeast India, Mizoram

**Introduction:** Generally, the state and governments are key agents in enabling the developmental processes in any democratic state. The role of government is mainly decided by its organizational and functional progression. And, its role has been interrogated owing to government fiasco in promoting the priority areas. For, the old-style approach to state and government has been based on the ground that the government was exclusively accountable for framing and executing public policies. Its governmental institutions have been assigned with the task of governing and managing the public affairs. While governance becomes crucial in

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ensuring sustainable development, developing deeper understanding of several policies settle down good governance in explicit regional settings.

Prior to Indian independence, the colonial state developed a vague view on the connection between state and society. For, its response was found to be vacillating between a posture of non-interference in the societal affairs of an unaccustomed society and a opposite one of active reformism. Yet, it hardly interceded discernibly in the casteist and tribal-ethnic constructions. However, the post-Independent state did not preserve such an attitude of detachment. It was committed to social reform as the Constitution announced various programs of social engineering and delegated these to the state. Thus, the government undertook several legislations in favor of positive discrimination for the advantage of downgraded communities in the education and job sectors. In fact, it led to the advance of an extremely interventionist state<sup>1</sup> (Kohli, 1997).

By the way, some of these challenges arise from the ethnic issues, religious concerns, regional political systems and communitarian ideals that influenced the development process in the Northeast India (NEI) and remained inconspicuous when globalization process affected it constantly. And, the non-state actors like the church, groups and the civil society organizations (CSOs) and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during the course of developmental processes were crucial. But, state, regimes, political parties and CSOs hardly gauged the popular hopes and failed to interpose them accordingly. Thus, the development process had been obtainable to capture the socio-political changes that were discernible at different levels in the NEI region. Subsequent to the establishment of local states, some of the NEI humanities like Mizoram have observed harmony and peace being reinstated substantially. Yet, vital issues of governance and development still remain unresolved.

## **Theoretical Issues**

**Governance:** Even though the concept of governance<sup>2</sup> was drawn in the times of French regimes in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the term ‘governance’ has been used as an alternate concept, in lieu of ‘public administration’ till recently. Both these terms are interchangeably mentioned to understand a system of coordination and execution of the policymaking so as to bring in tangible changes in the administrative activities. In the present-day context, Hye<sup>3</sup> defined this notion as, ‘governance is institutionalization of rule of law including coercive measures required to apply laws for protection of lives and property and developmental activities for promotion of common welfare are the foundation and superstructure of government, while impulsive activities of people acting out of their free will buttress both when they are allowed to flourish’.

Also, Roseau<sup>4</sup> (1992) made a more precise reference to some NGOs in the governance process. He observed that ‘governance was a more encompassing sight than government. It holds governmental institutions, but it also subsumes casual, non-governmental instruments whereby those persons and organizations within its purview move ahead, satisfy their needs and realize their wants. Governance is accordingly a system of instructions that is as dependent on inter-subjective connotations as on properly sanctioned constitution, and it is probable to perceive of governance without government, of governing instruments in a range of activity, which work effectually even though they are not gifted with formal authority’. Thus, governance is not just about a few administration structures or their functions, rather it is concerned with the quality of their working. Incidentally, concept of governance assumed value since early 1990s when it had been considered pivotal to creating an environment that nurtured sustainable development. Since governance is associated with well-organized and effective administration it became an indispensable component in promoting reasonable development. Also, it involves certain non-state players like the market forces and civil society in handling the

socio-economic and developmental activities at different stages.

**State and Government:** Through enlarged social organization and political contestation, there emerged a ‘consociational state’ (Lijphart, 1989)<sup>5</sup> that weakened a stable polity whereby it was faced with the governance predicament. Obviously, the developmental state has failed to curtail obvious economic and social disparities and also to check inter-community fights in the country. Atul Kohli<sup>6</sup> felt that, ‘a democratic developing country is well-governed if its government can simultaneously sustain legitimacy, promote socio-economic development and maintain order without coercion. The rising incapacity in India to accomplish these tasks is what has been theorized as a manifestation of a crisis of governability’. Thus, there continued a feeling that over the last few years, India’s institutional capacity to deal with struggle and initiate solutions has declined.

In the meantime, commenting on the varying functions of government, Kettl observed a different view. According to Kettl (2001)<sup>7</sup>, ‘government refers to the structure and function of public institutions. Governance is the means through which the government gets its job done. Traditionally, government itself achieved most service delivery. Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, government depend more on non-governmental partners to do its work, through different processes that depend on less authority for control’. In other words, the prevailing notion implies greater sharing by people in the governmental affairs so as to support the quality and efficacy of policy-making. Evidently, there is a growing appreciation that the state had assumed vast powers, and thus to check its misuse, efficiency needs to be brought into its governance structures and procedures. Consequently, private sector, market economy and civil society have been associated with the concept of governance.

Observed in this contextual, governance is largely understood as a government action that was beyond the scope of upholding law and order



in the society. In addition to policing, there are numerous other functions with which the governments are concerned with. Additionally, the market forces and CSOs/NGOs at home and outside had been considered as decisive part of the governance procedure. Thus, one can recognize as to why certain global agencies<sup>8</sup> offered conditional loans/grants to the Third World countries like India in the last few decades. It is only after satisfying the major condition of confirming 'good governance' that their financial services were stretched to these countries. Also, governance is perceived as multi-dimensional process that seeks out sharing of various stakeholders in the globalization period.

As per the maxim of good governance, 'maximum governance is possible with minimum government', globalization agencies were spreading the classical liberal notion of 'state as a necessary evil'. For instance, the corporate media has assumed the responsibility of advancing privatization of public sector units whereby 'minimal state' would emerge on the political horizon. And, instead of governance, the new public management has been expected to play the 'managerial role' so that the market race could be stimulated. When such new economic institutions entered the dominion of 'governance', socio-political and cultural responsibilities of the state could be easily unrestricted. In consequence, critics pointed out that the state and government hardly created an environment for sustainable development in the Third World countries.

**Developmental Issues:** Of late, governance process has gained a transformative viewpoint due to the altering notion of 'development' or 'sustainable development'. Acquiring an all-inclusive connotation, the concept of sustainable development is not just about progress in Gross National Product (GNP) or growth in national income, per capita or otherwise, as was observed earlier. It is no longer decided by economic growth, but qualifying development in all spheres of human life, political, social, environmental and cultural. The first Human Development Report<sup>9</sup>

(HDI) included three distinct components viz., longevity, education and income per head as indicators of Human Development Index (HDI). Thus, sustainable development is looked upon as a process of creating an appropriate environment for people to lead long, healthy and resourceful lives.

In the emergent sustainable development, the governance process needs to be effective and efficient. This leads one to consider the crucial piece of governance that could be good governance. While governance deals with the cooperative partnership among different shareholders, which is essential for policy formulation and implementation, good governance attempts to make these activities not just efficient but also more accountable and open to the public needs. Through the good governance, an all-inclusive relationship between the government and the governed can be established in the Indian context. Evolving a citizen-centric government through citizen charters, right to information and decentralization of powers and functions through the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments are a few cases in point.

Apparently, Indian society is multi-cultural and thus different aspects of governance attract one's attention. Contrary to the traditional approach of constitutional establishments that largely impacted the operational undercurrents of governance, whole range of social and political institutions seemed to be playing key character in shaping the discourses of governance and development at different levels. Particularly, governance at the state level had become multidimensional as range of players, both state and non-state, were actively engaged in the process. Since its multiple implications effect the public policies, study of political and developmental processes is significant. Thus, the prevalent governance processes enable one to understand various developmental challenges in the NEI.

### **Northeast India**

**Typical Setting:** As a hilly-terrain, Northeast India is a basin of rich natural

possessions and a prominent link of assorted people and cultures. This region is also the most human resourceful area with rising literacy levels in some states. Unlike the mainland India, the NEI has an added demographic gain, due to low density. To be specific, it inhabits 7.8% of the country's total land space but has a populace of about 3.8 crore, which is 3.73% of the nationwide population. This is also an unexploited and evolving market, which could be of interest to large national and international investors<sup>10</sup>. An interesting display of political process in this ethnic-dominated region is its partition of states into seven political and administrative units, widely labelled as 'seven sisters'<sup>11</sup>. There are changes and diversities on the basis of ethnicity, race, religion, language/dialect, and topographies from 'within' and 'without' the area. Notwithstanding these transformations, most of these states have nurtured a sense of unity against the strategies projected by central government.

Incidentally, each local community seems to have its world-view and have tried to be free from other communities. At times, the local public urged for political autonomy (within or outside the constitutional framework), which led to formation of several insurgent groups and thereby observed insurgence and counter insurgency<sup>12</sup>. In response, the state agencies resorted to forcible means. Obviously, the local communities grieved major adversities for decades on end. The people residing in diverse regional settings had continuously entertained certain unalienable historical, socio-ethnic, cultural and topographical identities. Clearly, there has been quick advance of ethnic-based political parties and pressure groups in this NEI region, which made the operation of developmental process very challenging as each group endorsed for the politicization of respective identities.

Post-colonial India had continuously tried to ensure integration and acclimatization of the local excluded societies with the others. Thoughtful efforts were made towards assimilation by some regimes, yet the NEI communities remained excluded from the mainland. The marginal people

were disadvantaged of rights to democratic governance and economic growth. In consequence, an inadequate advancement in socio-economic transformation and thus feeling of diffidence and under development is manifest nowadays. There prevailed a grave disappointment due to the deteriorating socio-economic situations and unemployment among their educated sections. Obviously, emerging developmental awareness among them has upset the political process. Thus, the region witnessed an increase in tensions and movements along political lines.

**Ethnic Apprehensions:** Primarily, many political parties in the region were set up as pressure groups as a voice of their ethnic concerns to protest against the discrimination and misuse of traditional Chiefs<sup>13</sup> or their foreign masters. Later on, these pressure groups were changed into regional parties in some states. While some of these local parties were established prior to Indian Independence, the others were formed thereafter. These parties had strong cultural roots that were emerging as potential substitutions to the age-old national parties like the Indian National Congress. In fact, rise of regional parties is a country-wide phenomenon that damaged the importance of national parties over the years.

Actually, there was a need for the pronouncement of their respective ethnic ambitions. Over the years, their strong desire for political self-rule and self-regulating presence had led to the development of regional parties. It is supposed that since the national parties had miscarried the local needs and ambitions of different ethnic communities, regional political parties have been preferred desperately. Thus, ethnic measurement has been the most significant component of political process in NEI, as almost all regional parties and groups stand for protection of their ethnic characteristics. Subsequently, the regional political process has since got mixed up with socio-ethnic considerations, altered view of state politics has been prevalent. Contrary to common governance forms in mainland India, there exists a discrete design in the NEI. The phenomena of cultural, communitarian and

local specificities have far reaching significances on the administrative and developmental process.

Contrary to certain misconstructions that the regional parties in the NEI were narrow-minded and secessionist, the parties became quite real to the issues of national importance. And thus, these parties were attributed with a fact that they ‘provided political stability, efficient government and continuity’, as was claimed by L S Gassah<sup>14</sup>. Further he detected that, ‘whatever may be their initial attitudes to win elections, it is wrong to say that they offended national sentiment’. In other words, the NEI regional parties played an accountable character in safeguarding the local ethnic concerns in most of these states.

Northeast India has continuously been faced with host of difficulties in the context of peace, governance and progress. Additionally, bad governance has been problematic in some of the NEI states. Also, the region is caught in a malicious cycle of economic backwardness, aggressiveness and the resultant violence that retarded economic development. Thus, it is not abnormal to find the regional people developing a sense of estrangement from India and feeling deserted. These groups are likely to be treated with tolerance and of course tangled in the execution of Act East Policy (AEP), for instance. Therefore, special provisions for self-governance and local-rule for the NEI have been provided and sustained, through the Sixth Schedule, NEC (North Eastern Council) and the MDONER (Ministry of Development of Northeastern Region). These are some basic measures, aimed at setting the regional-national partnership, which could be stimulated in the years forward.

Also, religious establishments of church and the CSOs/NGOs, which are quite dominant in the NEI, have also started a few developmental enterprises. To be more specific, the part that Christianity plays is very positive and inspiring in this region, as these spiritual communities lead

a more otherworldly and communitarian life in the states like Mizoram. Fellow-feeling among them is explicit and remarkable. These communities have assumed certain social and moral ideals in themselves. They appear to have developed a methodical life style in the villages. Thus, community creativities have always been valuable in its overall development.

### **Mizoram Context**

It is appropriate to study a case of Mizo society that was distraught on account of prejudice done to it by separating their homeland and stated 'excluded' area during the British rule<sup>15</sup>. Even after the freedom, the exclusivist strategy was shadowed by the then Assam government when the Mizos were exposed to socio-economic adversity. However, when the Mizo National Famine Front was shaped to raise the difficulties of Mizo society, concerned régimes in Assam and outside failed to respond positively and there prevailed an atmosphere of instability in the Lushai Hills (district) that ultimately became a provincial state in 1987.

**Communitarian Society:** Like the other peoples in the NEI, Mizo humanity<sup>16</sup> has been obvious by its socio-ethnic, economic and geographical locations that are rare and diverse, thus their inferences are also of distinct nature. Their social relations are seemingly communitarian that could be emulated by others outside the region. Since being mostly tribal-oriented ethnic groups and communities, they are comfortable with their old-style social institutions. Their private ties are strong and self-regarding. Since passionately involved to their land of living, their housing locations and inhabitations are of unusual nature. Viewed in perspective, these communities were developed in such a way that their traditional and cultural values are preserved.

Obviously, Mizo life-styles, traditions, sentiments and local specificities have been kept in view when developmental processes were embarked upon. Thus, all attempts at motivating civil society to engage in such

eventualities have been effective. Apparently, the civil society groups and variety of ethnic and tribal publics have been involved in the developmental strategies. Further, certain CSOs like those of the women, youth and student organizations in the region were involved in various developmental activities. This sort of social attachment also brings about widespread awareness about developmental challenges in the state.

Another aspect of governance in Mizoram that always influenced election outcome seems to be that of CSOs/NGOs and their social charities in the political and electoral processes. Even though there are few other NGOs which start several initiatives of social and religious nature, the role of Young Mizo Association (YMA), the major civil society organization in the state and well-connected to the people in the state has been significant. Even though, some non-Mizos seem to be discreet with the domination of YMA sometimes, majority of the Mizos is on the rolls of the organization. Its active association with communities and people in the day to day affairs of socio-economic and political nature is significant. The organization has played a leading role in ensuring political socialization and thereby stimulated political participation in the state. This kind of role that the NGOs played in the governance and development process seems to an evolving challenge in Mizoram.

**Political Development:** Under the leadership of Laldenga on October 22, 1961, the Mizo National Front (MNF) elevated the demand of political freedom and liberation for the Mizos who were existing in diverse parts of Indian subcontinent. In fact, the idea of liberation of Mizos who existed in the former Lushai Hills, Chittagong Hills, Tripura, Cachar district of Assam, Manipur and Chin Hills of Myanmar was perceived long before Indian Independence<sup>17</sup>. Along with the objective of preservation of Christian religion that registered around 87% of local population, the MNF promised to uplift and develop the Mizos in all respects once it attained independence. Mostly involved in the socio-cultural and communitarian activities that character-

ized the ethnic and religious benefits of the major tribes in the state, the MNF organized the Mizo community at the political level.

Expectedly, Mizo society has been implausible in achieving peaceful elections. The state observed the largest ballot percentage of 82% in the country. Due to the role of Mizoram People's Forum (MPF), an NGO established in 2006, that functioned the role of voluntary regulator, the Presbyterian-oriented CSOs that executed electoral improvements even in the isolated parts of Mizoram in the 2008 elections for the first time. Since the political parties were under the religious pressure of fulfilling the Election Commission's norms and regulations, the part played by the MPF became convenient in the recent elections. Due to its dynamic role, political parties felt pleased in conducting joint electoral campaigns that were more peaceable and less expensive. Also, both the ruling and opposition parties were drawing the verbal support of religious groups and leaders, yet, many Church denominations<sup>18</sup> maintained unemotional position in the last elections. Perhaps, this type of statewide crusade of the MPF could not be active in any other state elsewhere in the country, and so it could be measured as a constructive challenge in the state and elsewhere.

**Populist Policies:** However, the governance and developmental process has been so transformed that the populist public policies had undermined the ethnic and religious considerations to some extent in recent times. As in some others states in India, the Mizoram too witnessed populist trends in the context of socio-economic development. For example, at one level, the politics of populist policies has been noticed in the last polls. Despite religious appeals that significantly influenced the electorate, the Congress had been benefitted in some Assembly elections on account of its star scheme of the New Land Use Policy (NLUP)<sup>19</sup>. Promised in the wake of 2008 elections, the NLUP got funded by the Congress-led UPA Union government liberally. Notwithstanding discontentment of its prejudiced implementation, such populist schemes had certainly given a crucial advantage to the governing



party in the elections, as was claimed by the last Congress Chief Minister soon after the election results were announced<sup>20</sup>. Yet, the MNF could defeat it in the 2018 elections on the basis of similar populist policies. In other words, the politics of development that was how the critics described, has also posed the developmental challenge to the governance process in the state.

## **Conclusion**

The Northeastern states have got definite makeup communally and culturally, which look like and is perceived in the Oriental nations in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although, the NEI communities are economically backward, culturally and spiritually these are ahead of others. More explicitly, ethnic apprehensions along with those of their tribal and communitarian outlooks were raised as part of identity movements for separate statehood as well as for further political autonomy in some of these areas. It is in this context, efficient governance assumes importance.

Remarkably, the majority Indian terminology of national integration, assimilation and security sensitivities has been understood obviously in the context of localized standpoint. So, ethnicity-related tribal, religious, communitarian and language fears of the NEI deserve precedence if long-term peace is to be grasped in the region. For, the last two decades of globalization and governance presented plenty occasions for the region at different stages to pledge several developmental initiatives. Both these developments have had a bearing of substantial nature of state and governance.

In the Mizoram context that is largely demonstrative of the NEI, policy implications of the national leadership or its very mentality towards the local communities are far reaching as one observes divergent scenario in recent decades. While the emerging encounters in the context of governance and developmental processes have been marked by cultural concerns, religious notions, regional anxieties, their developmental implications are

quite distressing. It is time the state appreciates the need of revisiting these discernments and respond accordingly through democratic public policies so that the development process in Mizoram and elsewhere in the NEI is directed along operative lines.

**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Kohli, Atul 1997. 'Crisis of Governability', in Sudipta Kaviraj (ed), Politics in India, OUP, Delhi.
- <sup>2</sup>The concept was used by Hartland Cleveland for the first time in 1972.
- <sup>3</sup> Hye HA., 2000. Governance: South Asian Perspectives, Oxford University Press.
- <sup>4</sup> Rosenau, James N, 1992. 'Order and Change in World politics', in James N. Rosenau and Ernest Otto Czempel (eds), Governance without Government: Order and Change in World politics, Cambridge University Press, London.
- <sup>5</sup> Lijphart, Arend, 1989. 'Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration', Popular Prakashan, Bombay.
- <sup>6</sup> Kohli, Atul 1991, 'Democracy and Discontent: India's growing Crisis of Governability', Cambridge university, London.
- <sup>7</sup> Kettl, Donald F. 2002, 'The Transformation of Governance: Public Administration in Twenty First Century America', JHU Press, USA.
- <sup>8</sup> For instance, some of these agencies included: the OECD, UNDP, UNESCO besides the IMF and World Bank
- <sup>9</sup> UNDP Human Development Report, 1990. 'Making New Technologies work for Human Development', Oxford university, New York.
- <sup>10</sup> Bhorali, D., 1988 'Economic Development of the North-Eastern Region', Spectrum Publications, Guwahati.
- <sup>11</sup> The seven states include: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Following the merger of Sikkim in the Indian union, Sikkim has also been considered as eighth state in the NEI.
- <sup>12</sup> According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), the number of insurgent outfits in NER is 109 in 2006. However, according to Home ministry estimate in 2011, there are 79 insurgent groups/splinter factions in the NER.
- <sup>13</sup> As part of the age-old Chieftain system that dominates the community life in the villages of Mizoram, the Chiefs as headmen and control the total land in the village areas. The Chiefs allot piece of land for the people for cultivation on a temporary basis.
- <sup>14</sup> Gassah LS (ed). 1992 'Regional Political Parties in North East India', Omsons publications, Guwahati.

<sup>15</sup> Rao, V.Venkat, Thansanga and Hazarika, Niru, 1987. A Century of government and Politics in North-East India, Vol.III, Mizoram, S.Chand and Co., New Delhi.

<sup>16</sup> Sangkima, 1992. Mizos: Society and social Change (1890-1947), Spectrum Publications, Delhi.

<sup>17</sup> Mizo Union was established in 1946 when the Lusei tribes (Mizos) were living in the Hills (the British regime).

<sup>18</sup> Besides the major Church organization like the Presbyterian, the Baptist, the Salvation Army, the United Pentecostal, and the Seventh Day Adventist are others that seemed to be actively engaged in the state.

<sup>19</sup> Nunthara, C., 1994. Mizoram: Society and Polity, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi.

<sup>20</sup> Mizoram Post, December 10, 2013.

