

Sustainable Development and Welfare Policies among Marginalised Mizo

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ABSTRACT

The process of development pursued by the mankind since the Industrial Revolution, has no doubt aided in upgrading human living condition in terms of economic growth, but sadly enough, from the biological point of view caused unprecedented damage to the environment, manifested by increasing natural calamities. It was not until the year 1972, when the Stockholm Conference unleashed the extent of devastation with the discovery of rapidly depleting protective earth cover of ozone layer resulting in global warming. The main culprit being the lethal gases emitted from mobile and immobile sources of pollution, the Earth Summit of 1992 introduced the concept of Sustainable - Development as the only way forward to save natural sources for the future generations as well. In this context the native or the aboriginal groups spread across the world, has been playing a vital role in preserving and protecting the Earth through traditional methods of nature - conservation. The present paper is attempt to unearth various endeavours of a marginalised community from the North- Eastern part of India , namely the Mizo people, in the direction of Sustainable Development , along with the implementation of some of the moral socio - economic policies aimed at consolidating welfare administration in the state.

Key Words : Marginalised, Sustainable development, Welfare, Consolidating, Directive - Principles

INTRODUCTION

The world has witnessed phenomenal changes throughout the history of human existence, from the Westphalian spirit of relation among nations to the contemporary post global era of intensified connectivity among global citizens. The impact however, has seen many communities being swapped by the dominant socio- cultural groups, by way of Social Darwinism. The majority of such groups have been the aboriginals, also known as the First People, constituting an estimated population of 370 million with 8.6 percent of the world.(<https://www.iwgia.org> ; U.N. Report).

These groups are also included among the marginalised, who, despite being pushed

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away by the majority, have remained committed to their distinct ethno - cultural roots, following their traditional practices based on simple-environment friendly, community welfare oriented life style with rich knowledge system. Such groups like the Oceanic people from the Pacific, Maories of New Zealand, Red Indians of the Americas, the Nagas and Mizos of the Indian subcontinent, to name a few, remind the rest of the world of certain value- laden practices quintessential for harmonious coexistence under the current situation.

The north-eastern region of the Indian subcontinent has been home to numerous ethno-cultural groups that migrated from parts of China and the present Myanmar, at a certain point of history. Situated on the border the region is connected with the mainland by a narrow corridor of about 80 km , sharing only 4 percent of land while 96 per cent of the border is joined with the neighbouring countries : Bangladesh, Bhutan, China and Myanmar (Hazarika, 2008, p. 9).

The state of Mizoram occupies the southernmost part of the region, having a long international boundary, prone to unabated cross- border activities, hampering socio - political stability in the area. In view of the multi - ethnic socio - cultural fabric of the state, the Constitution of India incorporated certain special provisions to protect and maintain the distinctive identity and values of the tribal habitat. Mizoram was thus placed under the VIth Schedule of the Constitution bestowing upon the people of the area, the privilege to continue with the traditional system of administration. Considering the diverse ethno - cultural milieu, tribalism and the marginalised social content within the state, the Republic of India had no better option for improving the socio - economic conditions of the underprivileged community.

The task of integrating people, having lived in isolation since inception, more so during the colonial rule under the policy of ' protective isolation ' followed by the declaration of 'Excluded Area', was a challenging one, for a nation in the making, since independence of India.

On their part, the community living under the threat of being outnumbered by the outsiders, suffered from the sense of alienation even on the issue of merger with the nation as a whole. However with changing times and growing aspiration, the local inhabitants understood the benefits behind the policy of their mainstreaming. Besides, a special organisation was formed by an act of the Parliament in 1972, North Eastern Council, amended in the year 2001, to function as a Planning Body for the entire north-eastern region towards balanced development. To top it, DONER, was launched in the same year to boost socio - economic development of the region (Lalneizohvi, 2009, p3).

The region having been neglected socio - economically during the colonial administration, was in extremely backward condition when India attained independence from the British. Yet, with forward policy based on special provisions for inclusion of the long - excluded groups largely inhabiting the area, the leaders of the nation came out with best possible remedy for rapid progress of the inhabitants.

However, in implementing various policies related to growth and Development of the mountainous state of Mizoram, Government had to remain cautious and sensitive taking into consideration the rich traditions and practices reflecting indigenous dynamism of the local gentry.

Thus, the system of forest- culture based on cultivation of medicinal plants, or the

traditional bio- diversity patches and village green belts, that had long nurtured the nature or ecosystem, had to be retained at any cost. Indeed, the aboriginals all over the world have been hailed as the guardians and protectors of mother - nature, sharing an intense intimacy with the latter, also widely recognized by the Earth Summit, 1992.

Endeavours in Sustainable Development:

Thwarted by difficult living conditions of remoteness and challenges of transport and communication, the marginalised community of Mizos did not step back in consolidating their collective effort towards innovative energy saving and ecologically rejuvenating mode of life.

While adopting the modern methods of recycling and waste incineration, the tribal people strongly believe in the art of sustainability through traditional practices like that of maintaining the 'sacred - grove', an area carefully allocated towards conserving food grains to meet the requirements of each locality in times of emergency (Sengupta, 2002, p. 233).

The concept referred to as 'Ngawpui' in local Mizo language, a reservoir of natural vegetation, is demarcated in every locality of the state, declared as undisturbed or beyond reach of the residents, though meant for sustaining livelihood of the village, hence an area of veneration or reverence (Arun Kumar, 2012).

The practice not only caters to the requirements of local population, but also augments self-sufficiency, community bonding, simultaneously aiding the process of ecological security by way of creating dense green forest cover. Mizoram possesses 92% of forest cover, one of the highest recorded (Lianzela in Prasad and Agrawal, 2003, p 82). Unfortunately, due to rapid urbanisation and impact of global - warming, the state which had been blessed with boundless natural resources, is confronting depletion and scarcity. Nonetheless, innovative drives of organic farming and floriculture have been on the rise alongside the multiplying endeavours of the underprivileged population afforestation culture, a customary practice or passion among the locals. In this context it is imperative to mention the stand taken by the Young Mizo Association, a proactive voluntary organisation, in plantation and afforestation move through the state involving the citizens too (YMA Profile, p7).

Whereas Sustainable Development as a term attained popularity with the Rio Summit in 1992, in practice, the methodology had already been in use among the native cultures. The United Nations in its General Assembly, used the term to mean development that meets the requirement of present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs. A holistic philosophy, it is based on human - ecology equilibrium as the focus of 'development' (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org>).

Forests and lands have been one of the precious possessions of the native groups, since times immemorial, having been the only source of livelihood and object of veneration with which they have shared intimacy and emotional attachment. Hence the management of forests occupy a significant place in the lives Mizo people. Forest area of the entire state has been divided into two categories, first, those covered with bamboo, dense trees and vegetation, second, forests producing commercial materials like team, timber and such utility products. Besides, under the sixth schedule, the Constitution bestowed the right to conserve natural resources through special Forest Protection Acts / legislation.

The Environment and Forest Department of the state swears by its objective of achieving “high quality forests with rich biodiversity for maintaining ecological balance and ... meeting the forest - based needs of the local people” (Citizens’ Charter, 2012-13).

In pursuit of the goals, the Ministry has undertaken two types of services, namely tangible and intangible services. The former involves arranging forest products of economic value at reasonable rates, gainful employment of local population for implementation of schemes for forest enrichment and protection, spreading awareness about agroforestry, ecotourism and medicinal plants, through local participation. Products like timber, fuel wood and fodder fall under this. The latter or intangible services include pollution control schemes, improving the quality of soil, fertilizers, seeds and promoting climate stability through enhancement of natural environment (ibid. pp. 11, 17).

It is imperative here to include the issue of Jhum cultivation, a standard practice of the slash and burn technique whereby the same land is not cultivated consecutively, but left fallow for some time, for rejuvenation. The practice has proved hazardous in aggravating wildfire and needs to be discontinued, as it has meant huge loss not only of livelihood, but also forest wealth. The Ministry needs to step up the joint - management programmes involving strict vigilance by local people and civil society groups.

Also equally important would be to bring in alternative ways of better utilisation of forest resources like cash cropping , bee- keeping ,agro -forestry , cultivation of fruits, tea , coffee and spices, as Mizoram has a favourable climate. This would not only generate employment but also enhance the process of income generation through increased production.

Although the state has been initiating steps to expand the forest cover through scientific management of forests, like, ‘Green Mizoram’, the National Afforestation Program’ and ‘ Intensification of Forest Management, all under schemes of Green India Mission, as per the 13th Finance Commission Grants (Statistical Handbook, p. 171). However, the proper exercise in the direction of sustainable development as per definition by the United Nations, would entail the adoption of a number of objectives like:

Crop diversification / harvesting of cash crops (broom grass, bamboo, sericulture, fruits); workshops encouraging participation of local people in skill development, motivation and entrepreneurship; improved vigilance to check misappropriating of funds, greater involvement of non- state actors; campaigns and programs on waste - incineration, renewable energy, and other modern techniques of sustainable growth.

Next to forest, it is land, which has remained close to such communities, having poured their heart and soul into cultivation for ages. Primarily agrarian, the community is characterised by its commitment to unique agrarian culture and life - style. The egalitarian social structure with agriculture having been the common and single occupation, various festivals related to crop sowing, harvesting and community gatherings, all revealing the special bonding with ‘ land’

Mizoram, being a non - industrial state due to geographical sensitivity, has been largely dependent on the land resources for sustenance and growth. One of the popular projects launched with the purpose of overall upgradation of land- use method alongside living condition of the poor, was the innovative New Land - Use Policy, implemented in 1984. The idea was to limit the practice of jhum, creating multiple ways of using land more productively.

Implemented on a small - scale during 1985- 92, the project aimed at better techniques of using land in such a way so as to enhance small , middle entrepreneurship not only in agriculture but in other areas as well, with a view to expanding the forest cover too. It was a joint effort between the Union and the State Government aided by an Apex Board with the Chief Minister as the chair and the NLUP Implementing Board.

The primary objective of the policy was to stabilise the economy of the state, improve the environment, and reform the land - use system and aid the process of holistic advancement. Infact it was a package with inclusive and alternative mechanism, for replacing the hazardous techniques like 'jhum'.

Not only did it generate employment among the needy but also encouraged growth of petty trade and small scale industries, empowering the local people below the poverty line.

As far as the response to the new policy is concerned, production of food items showed an upward trend with 19.02 %

Increase, subsequently there was a downward trend in humming with 10.36% decline annually, as per record of NLUP in the Progress Report of 2012.

In addition alternative activities of livelihood like dairy farming, cultivation of oil Palm and fisheries and meat production had been boosted significantly. Oil Palm cultivation and milk production went up by 15.60 % and 22% since 2010, fish farmers got a hike from 75 % to 150% annually (NLUP Progress Report 2012).

Some discrepancies did appear in the form of indiscriminate distribution of funds as alleged by certain sections of local inhabitants , nevertheless , the policy was a well-intended one boosting entrepreneurship, generating employment with a fair degree of inclusive element involved , towards holistic pattern of growth and Development of the tribal community.

Indeed the fruits yielded through the policy largely encouraged the Planning Commission towards releasing further Grant of Rd 370 crore for 2012- 2013 layout for a holistic socio - economic development under the NLUP (Biju Kumar, 2014).

The records of NLUP for the year 2013 enlisted about 120, 000 families that did not have sufficient income, as beneficiaries of the policy (NLUP Booklet, Mizoram).

One of the major steps taken under the scheme , has been land - planning on the basis of mapping out land, through Remote Sensing Application, using satellites, chalking out a fairly well- balanced strategy towards sustainable livelihood coupled with restoration of the forest cover, the NLUP provisions envisaged the following land - use trend :

- a) 60% of total rural land to have dense forest;
- b) 10 % as catchment area forest;
- c) 10% as reserve forest for community use;
- d) 5% for habitation/ roads;

e) 15% of the entire area meant for NLUP land based activities. Government at the centre can revive the issue of land use through its innovative 'start- up India', 'make in India' and such other programs, as the area is not appropriate for industrialisation. The state has enormous potential to grow alongside vast natural resources and human work force that needs to be tapped towards consolidation of sustainable growth.

Even if not a huge success, the NLUP, did contribute to the economic growth rate in terms of productive activities, enhancing land use mechanism within the state, leaving enough

scope for launching similar projects with further improvements.

In keeping with the principles of Sustainable Development, Mizoram has also taken steps towards maintaining sustainable habitat. Better urban planning based on cost-effective energy-efficient technology has been in progress through sophisticated waste and water management systems, increasing use of renewable energy, solar panels for heating, solar street lights, solar power plant grids, all of these not only arrest carbon emission in the atmosphere but also make life convenient, augmenting sustainable progress in the long run.

Needless to highlight the special role played by Mizo women in enhancing the process. Besides being extraordinarily laborious, women of the society have displayed enormous entrepreneurship in running petty to big business, evident from their presence in various market areas of the state. Recording 47% of total work force in entire north-eastern region, Mizo women have contributed enormously in the socio-economic growth of the state. (Lalnehzovi, 2009, p75). Despite their subordinate status within the strong patriarchal structure, women have always remained the frontrunners in every aspect of life, indoor or outdoor.

The foremost contribution of this underprivileged section of a tribal community has been in reviving the handloom-spinning-weaving industry, a rich heritage which was almost dying due to pressures of global culture. Not only did the future generation refuse to pursue the profession with wider options thrown open by the postmodern era, but the demand for the local attire also went down at the international level. Time too posed a hurdle in acquiring the skill necessary for weaving intricate traditional patterns. However, the determination to save the art and heritage from withering away revived the spirit of some of the women to take the lead in reinforcing the industry afresh.

The handloom sector apart from creating employment opportunities, bears an eco-friendly character, safeguards the tribal heritage, art and culture in addition to fetching enormous revenue for the economic upgradation of the state at large. Besides, the industry improved the standard of living of poor families by helping girls and ladies to support with an extra income to meet their daily needs.

Floriculture and organic farming have largely drawn the attention of people all over the world in the postmodern era.

Increasing consciousness regarding health in the contemporary situation, has brought to the fore, demand for organic food products. Due to favourable climatic condition, ginger and turmeric have been growing in plenty besides a variety of fruits, coffee and spices. The state produces and exports ginger in different parts of the world, largely due to organic component and process of cultivation. The growing popularity and demand for turmeric and ginger, for their essentially organic content has inspired many local people indulge in organic farming for earning better livelihood. Not only is organic farming lucrative in terms of market value, but also favourable in upgrading land-use mechanism, beside generating employment and boosting entrepreneurship.

The other item of huge demand in the commercial sector, has been that of cut flowers meant for adorning various events. Part of the post-modern culture demonstrates increasing public functions, celebration, gatherings, meetings and conferences, which need to be graced and properly decorated to enhance events. Blessed with a conducive climate Mizoram has proved heaven in the art of floriculture of late.

Exotic varieties of Anthurium, Bird of Paradise, Gladiolus, Carnations and Orchids and many more, have created a worldwide market for the state. Beginning with just 24 women, the distribution of seeds shot up to 400.

Women, by year 2007, when Mizoram ranked as the second largest supplier of Anthurium. The company initiating the novel venture has been the Zopar Export Pvt. Ltd. (Nixon, in Lalneihzovi, p. 84).

The state has thus taken major strides in the direction of development without destruction, enhancing the process of recycling, reusing and regenerating the ecosystem by balancing the traditional methods with modern technology.

Turning words into action- Implementing the Directive Principles of State Policy:

The spirit of community bonding prevalent among most tribal clusters, even in an era characterised by individualistic trends, sets them apart in terms of social - cohesion. One of the chief causes behind the strife- torn present times has been without any doubt, the lack of tolerance among human beings, engendered by growing heterogeneity, lack of fellow feeling and self-centred orientation rendered by high-tech life - style changes.

However, the winds of change throughout the history of mankind could not shake the spirit of social cohesion among the native communities. Mizoram despite having encountered modernisation under the influence of Christian missionaries from the west, retains its firmly entrenched tribal culture and philosophy, even till date.

Indeed the communitarian spirit occupies the centre- stage of the tradition or tribal heritage. Not only are the traits evident in the norms and ethics followed by the people, even the traditional institutions and various socio - cultural practices demonstrate the essential spirit of close- knit community bonding among the marginalised Mizos.

The structural pattern of the community has been predominantly patriarchal by nature with the traditional institution of 'chieftain' or the village chief binding the entire village together, as the guardian, protector and saviour of the inhabitants.

Land, forests and other natural resources were commonly owned by all the residents of the village, forging mutual cooperation and solidarity among the members. Society was largely egalitarian, agriculture having been the only occupation bringing the community together. The spirit of welfare formed the bottom line of all socio - cultural celebrations and festivities. Festivals based on crop- sowing and harvesting worked as adhesive in bringing entire community together, celebrating the 'kuts' or harvests with collective jubilation. Hnatlang or volunteering in public welfare services towards the community, has been one of the primary content of the Mizo legacy, with every family offering services by sending a member to contribute labour in activities of common wellbeing (for details read Lalkima, Welfare administration in a Tribal State : a case - study of Mizoram. Also Sangkima, 1992, p. 43).

With such strong welfare- oriented communitarian roots, the state stands out as one of the models, exuberating the enthusiasm of converting dreams into reality.

The tribal state has demonstrated praiseworthy commitment towards promoting good governance by upholding some of the moral- socio - economic guidelines enshrined in Part IV of the Constitution of India. Although non - justiciable by nature, whereby a citizen cannot move the judiciary in case of violation of any of these Directive Principles of State Policy,

nevertheless they have been described as vital in enhancing administrative efficiency.

Mizoram demonstrates the potential of converting the directives or moral obligations into reality through its dedicated endeavours over the past few decades.

As per the provision of Article 43 of the Directive Principle, the state has been able to secure just and humanitarian working condition with a living wage alongside opportunities for indulging in socio - cultural activities, for the workers. Realising the importance of cultural values in enhancing life, the state grants public holidays on the occasion of traditional kuts or agrarian festivals (Arun Kumar *et al.*, 2012).

However, the state needs to explore the condition of workers from the neighbouring countries, who have been working for longer hours and lower wages compared to their urban and local counterparts (based on survey by the author, of outskirts of Aizawl. Nov 18, 2015. By and large, the promotion and Development of cottage industries envisaged by the provision under the same Article has attained fair degree of success, with private entrepreneurs indulging in cluster - handloom enterprises, particularly in semi urban areas or small towns including Thenzawl, Zemabawk, Zuangtui and surrounding areas of the Capital city of Aizawl. Such areas are inclined towards offering greater employment opportunities to the rural people, particularly women in need of supplementing the family income.

The provisions of Art. 45 — free and compulsory Primary Education for all Children, extensive survey of three Villages of the state, Tanhril, Sakawrtuichhun and Reiek, demonstrate the presence of Primary School in each of the village, equipped with a library, a Church and an office of the civil society organisation (Young Mizo Association) for overall supervision. The provision of mid - day meals prevalent in North India, has been missing.

The mission of Organic Farming associated with Article 48 of the State Policy, finds a special place of immense importance, not merely commercially but also for enhancing healthy life - style.

The popular items under organic farming include Turmeric and Ginger for their medicinal properties, besides fulfilling the criteria of organised agriculture in tune with modern method or technique.

Of late the growing popularity of Floriculture in the state has brought home huge economic gains due to increasing demand in the international market as well. Thanks to the post global culture of public gatherings, meetings, functions and events of celebration, requiring decorations and flower arrangements to Grace and adorn the occasions.

Article 48 (A) finds its application with the civil society activists and voluntary agencies working tirelessly for public welfare like sanitation, afforestation, environmental upgradation drives, forest management and prevention of wild fires. Needless to highlight the role of Young Mizo Association, one of the oldest organisation dedicated to protecting, preserving and promoting community welfare on the basis of safeguarding the rich heritage and values of Mizo legacy.

In keeping with one of the foremost ingredients of Democratic culture, equality and equal opportunity, both the genders find their place as employees whether in agriculture or any other profession, catering to Art. 39 of the Constitution. However, women in Mizo society have outnumbered men in terms of work force.

In the sphere of Public Assistance too, the YMA among other non- state actors, has been

displaying outstanding contribution by providing infrastructural arrangements for weddings in case of the needy. However, in case of deaths, the organisation renders essential services to the bereaved families, including the funeral arrangements. The activity features in Article 41.

Of late, one of the articles laying the foundation of equality through Article 15 (1), proclaiming equality among men and women, has at long last found its place in the socio-economic structure of the community. Mizo women have been bestowed with the right of inheritance through a historic reform of the customary law in the year 2014 (opcit ...). The amendment has established parity on the gender issue, opening up the possibility of treating and respecting female members with the same respect as in the case of men. The change of perception and attitude will not happen overnight with women having occupied a literally subordinate position, without having any right of participation in decision-making even within the family. However, the development has certainly elevated the status of women in Mizo society, remaining an inspiration for others across the globe.

All said and done, a tribal state like Mizoram has set the trend of protecting and promoting the sanctity of ethical instructions necessary for the realisation of the true spirit of democracy. The rich legacy of altruism ingrained in the tribal code of morality could be the inspiration behind turning words into action, for the people of the state.

Professor Lalkima has rightly used the term “welfare administration” for the state of Mizoram, emphasising the objective of public welfare services implicit within the policies governing the state (Social Welfare Administration in a Tribal State: A case study of Mizoram).

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