

## The Tribal Perspectives of Development and the Act East Policy

Job R. Kawlani

Asst. Professor, Sociology Department, North  
East Adventist University (NEAU), Khliehtyrshi, West Jaintia Hills District

### Abstract

The concept of tribal area development has been discussed from pre-independent India. It occupies a very important place even till date as it is a constitutional mandate for the union and state governments under schedule fifth and sixth. In spite of all the efforts given through various policies and schemes under central government's five-year plans, the condition and the level of development in the tribal areas including the Northeast India remains comparatively poor. For long the Northeast became the troubled backward region due to several factors such as, geopolitical situation, cultural differences, and tribal communities with vested interest of communalism. Since the launching of the Look East Policy, there seems to be a significant change of mentality on either side – the mainland and the Northeast on the relationship towards national integration. As the Look East Policy moved to the new chapter with Act East Policy, many North-easterners gained more sense of being Indian with great expectation for their progress and development. Meanwhile, as the majority of the people are still ignorant and relatively backward, much efforts are needed to educate and to develop them so that they too also will grow along with their contemporaries.

This paper focuses on the approaches for tribal development implemented by the central government of India as well as the state government with special reference to the state of Mizoram. As Mizoram state plays a significant role in the implementation of India's Act East Policy, this paper will give brief analysis of the policy keeping in mind that the indigenous people will gain the maximum benefit out of it.

**Keywords:** *Indigenous, Contextual, Development, Northeast India, Mizoram.*

### INTRODUCTION

At the turn of India's independence, political leaders and historians recognised two India, one being a territory under the direct British Administration and the other, under the administration of princely states known as 'Indian India'. Meanwhile, there was a third India which was ignored and remained unrecognised at the time. It was Tribal India, living in forest, hills and even on the plains, but isolated from the mainstream of social life of this country (Verma, 1996, p. 1). India is indeed a nation rich in culture with stratified society and mixed community. People often mention about unity found amidst diversity in Indian society, in fact, this is the beauty of Indian society; but the same is found to be quite

delicate and there is a need to maintain this delicate balance with careful formulation of plans and policies.

The Northeastern region of India is the home for many tribes of the hill people, they are the so-called Tribal

#### Address for correspondence:

Job R. Kawlani, Asst. Professor, Sociology Department,  
North East Adventist University (NEAU), Khliehtyrshi,  
West Jaintia Hills District, Meghalaya -793151.  
E Mail: jobrcolney@gmail.com, ORCID:0000-0002-6073-8571

This is an open access journal, and articles are distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial Share Alike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, tweak, and build upon the work non commercially, as long as appropriate credit is given and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

For reprints contact: [voiceforvoiceless2013@gmail.com](mailto:voiceforvoiceless2013@gmail.com)

Received 15-Jan-2022	Reviewed 29-Feb-2022	Accepted 04-Apr-2022	Published 10-June-2022
-------------------------	-------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------------

Volume No. 3	Issue No. 2	June 2022	ISSN 2586-1852
-----------------	----------------	--------------	-------------------

How to cite this article: Kawlani R. J. 2022 The Tribal Perspectives of Development and The Act East Policy. *The Third Voice Reality & Vision*. Vol No-3, Issue No-2, June; P: 17-24

#### ACCESS THIS ARTICLE ONLINE

##### Quick Response Code:



##### Website:

[thirdvoice.voiceforvoiceless.in](http://thirdvoice.voiceforvoiceless.in)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.7027848  
Article No - TVRV0003

India or the third India. Many of these ethnic groups have origins in Southeast Asia: Myanmar, China, Thailand and Cambodia. According to the 2011 Census of India there were over 45 million people in Northeast India, with over 160 Scheduled Tribes as listed in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, as well as a diverse population of non-tribal people. The Sixth Schedule gives a simplified view, since there are at least 475 ethnic groups speaking almost 400 languages or dialects. The overall population of the tribal in the Northeast region is a little more than 12 million (census2011, 2022).

Not much was known about tribals before the arrival of the British. The British are credited with initiating the task of tribal development. But their motive was not known clearly; their aim was either to keep the tribals isolated from the national mainstream to keep them away from the menace of freedom struggle, or by the same process, to convert them to Christianity (Vaid, 2004, p. 1). Yet they were quite successful in achieving such supposed motives, as the unabridged barriers between the mainland and the Northeast Region was seen even several years after independence. The factors contributing to the barriers or rifts could be the combination of several factors such as, geo-political situation, socio-cultural differences, religious differences, and communalism with regionalism motives; but one cannot deny the impact and the consequences of the British dealings over the tribals in this regard.

The North Eastern Region Vision 2020 states that ‘At Independence, the North Eastern Region was among the most prosperous regions of India. Sixty years on, the Region as a whole, and the States that comprise it, are lagging far behind the rest of the country in most important parameters of growth.’ Rath also mentions about a trade history between the tribals and the Bangladeshis which is evidence that the Northeast tribes were not ignorant in commercial trade with neighbouring communities. He said, “The tribes like the Khasis, Lushais, and Garos in the North-East had done business in East Pakistan for a long time. The partition of Pakistan and formation of Bangladesh instantaneously put an end to their trade” (Rath, 2016, p. 72).

Henceforth, for long the Northeast of India became the troubled backward region. But at the turn of 1990s, the country’s troubled Northeast turn into the main focal point as India started looking toward the south eastern nations of Asia. Since the launching of the Look East Policy, a significant change could be seen on the

mentality of either side – the mainland and the Northeast. As the Look East Policy moved to the new chapter with Act East Policy, many North-easterners gained the sense of belonging towards the central India with great expectation for their progress and development. The perspective of new development was seen when the Prime Minister of India Sri Narendra Modi mentioned in his speech saying “We created the Act East Policy and the North-east is at the heart of it” (Malviya, 2016).

This paper suggests that there is a substantial gap between the ground reality and the making of development policy in the tribal areas that hampered the success of development projects. In this connection, the paper will specifically focus on India’s Act East Policy and its probable impact on the development of the Northeast Region especially the tribal community in the region.

### **The Background: The Concept of Tribal Development:**

Understanding of the terms ‘tribal’ and ‘development’ is somewhat a pre-requisite for analysing tribal perspective of development. The contextual understanding of these terms gives ample meaning in our analysis. According to Piddington, a tribe or tribal is a group of people speaking a common dialect, inhabiting a common territory and displaying a certain homogeneity in their culture. M.M. Verma defined tribe as ‘a group of people speaking a common language, observing uniform rules of social organisation, and working together for common purposes such as, trade, agriculture or warfare. Other typical characteristics include a common name, a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or way of life, and a tradition of common descent’ (Verma, 1996, p. 3). In India, the origin of the term “tribe” is connected with the rise of European colonialism.

It was in 1885, the British in India first used the term “tribe” to enumerate certain social groups in India and it continued till 1931 census. Quite early in the course of their colonial rule in India, British administrators felt the necessity of labelling certain ethnic groups as ‘tribes’ on the basis of an impressionistic characterisation of their physical and socio-cultural isolation from the mainstream of caste bound Indian Society. The Government of India Act 1935 used the term ‘Backward Tribe’ and later the Indian Constitution referred to the term “Scheduled” instead of the term “Backward” (Ghurye, 1963, p. 24).

There is no consensus on the definition of development, as development theory recognises chronological change

in the meaning of development. Some agreed that development is a 'change in the positive or progressive direction', or some may say 'change in the desired direction within stipulated time' (Vaid, 2004, p. 4). The two architects of modern India, Elwin and Nehru, gave their concept on development as 'development' referred to economic growth through industrialization, political and social mobilization, and the capability of the nation to accumulate more global wealth.' Nehru's vision of development was to end poverty, ignorance, disease and inequality of opportunity (Rath, 2016, p. 73).

The Scheduled tribes in India are the people forming the lowest rung of the society and therefore the Constitution has provided for special provisions. Their population as per 2011 census is 10.45 crore, constituting 8.6% of the total population. In the pre and post-colonial era in India the tribal development approach used was the policy of segregation or isolation. The policy of segregation was initiated by the British rulers by virtue of which they isolated the tribals from the general populace of the country. They were rigidly compartmentalized under a different code of administration and separate sets of rules and regulations were fixed for them (Roy, 2013).

There are three popular approaches for the development of tribal people, such as isolation, assimilation, and integration. Those who support modernity as part of a developmental process may also support the assimilation approach. In some instances, people-to-people interaction enhances connectivity which is one of the first and foremost steps in the development process, which is why some development strategists uphold mainstreaming the region through the assimilation approach. It is necessary to distinguish assimilation from integration. Assimilation involves a total loss of cultural identity for the group that is being assimilated. Integration on the other hand implies the association with any other group or body without any inhibition from within and prohibition from above. In the process of Integration, the minority group who will get integrated with the majority group will not lose its cultural identity or any other attributes which are the chief characteristics of that particular group. Every people group and community have their unique way of living that designates their existence which needs to be safeguarded and protected but not hampering the development. In such a case they propose co-existence and cooperation through integration. By looking at the situation and the development strategies laid down by the Central government so far, and from the experiences in the

northeast context, the policy of integration seems to be the most effective approach.

Regarding the tribal welfare and development approach in India, one can name Verrier Elwin and Nehru as architects or pioneers. Elwin was a British-born anthropologist, ethnologist, and tribal activist, who began his career in India as a Christian missionary. He was transformed from a religious man to a 'philanthropologist' after he met Mahatma Gandhi in 1928. He started his work with the untouchables and later focussed on the studies of Tribal people in Central and Northeast India. He took Indian citizenship in 1954. Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India, appointed him Anthropological Adviser to the Government of India and assigned him the task of implementing the tribal welfare programmes, particularly in the North-East (Rath, 2016, p. 66). Elwin's concern was confined to the welfare of the tribes, a segment of the nation. He earlier proposed the approach of isolation and insisted that the tribes should maintain a selective distance from the mainstream socio-political-economic system. It seemed like Elwin later changed his approach from isolationist to integrationist under the influence of Nehru (Rath, 2016, p. 86).

The proper systematic approach to tribal development in India was first laid down by Jawahar Lal Nehru in the form of Tribal Panchsheel, which advocated that the tribals should be allowed to develop according to their own genius, that they should be free to possess and promote their own cultural ethos and objects; that they should be integrated into the national mainstream without the loss of their identity (Vaid, 2004, p. 41). Regarding tribal development, Nehru said, I have no doubt that development and change and so-called progress will come to them, because it is becoming increasingly difficult for any people to live their isolated life cut off from the rest of the world. But let this development and change be natural and be in the nature of self-development with all the help one can give in the process (Rustomji 2001, as cited in Rath, 2016).

### **Policy on Tribal Welfare Through the Five-Year Plans:**

Since the inception of the Five-Year Plans, the government of India adopted several provisions for the development of tribes or tribal in the country. Because of the remoteness of location of most of the Scheduled Tribes (ST) population, the extent to which they can benefit from general development programmes is more limited and the need for special programmes is greater

than Scheduled Castes (SC). The need for special efforts to ensure an adequate flow of benefits to the Scheduled Tribes has been recognised in all Plans beginning with the First Plan. The following are brief summary and analysis of tribal welfare policies through five-year plans as given by Siuli Roy in his doctoral thesis and also from Annual Report of the Planning Commission GOI - *Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) Social Sectors Volume III*.

The First Five Year Plan (1951-1956) aimed at bringing development in the rural and tribal areas with an active participation of the people. An expenditure of Rs1.03 crores was incurred on tribal development. The major achievements of the plan were opening up of schools, sevasrams, free scholarship to tribal children, state assistance to primary schools for enrolment of tribal children, construction of road, settlement and rehabilitation of tribal families, and opening up of primary health-centres in some remote tribal areas.

The Second Five Year Plan (1956-61) set up the Special Multipurpose Tribal Development Blocks (SMPT) in selected tribal areas on an experimental basis. The Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) continued the Tribal Development approach, keeping in view the recommendations of the Elwin Committee, 469 Tribal development Blocks were established. During these plans priorities were given to development of education, communication, agriculture, animal husbandry fishing, cottage industry, programmes for child survival and development and medic care in the tribal areas.

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1969-74) initiated a series of development programmes for a specific target group like small farmers, marginal farmers and agricultural labourers. The Tribal Development Agencies were established on the pattern of the SFDA (Small Farmers Dev Agency) which catered to the need of the individual tribals. During the Fifth Five Year Plan (1974-1979) a comprehensive view of the tribal problem was taken and a new strategy called the Tribal Sub-Plan approach was evolved. The plan also heralded the idea of an integrated Tribal development Plan (ITDP) in which a number of specific projects for the tribals would be given high priority.

The Tribal Sub-Plan Strategy envisages a provision of a minimum amount of 20% of the total plan size of the state to be spent for the development of the tribal areas. The flow of fund has to be from all sectors and all departments of the state government engaged in

development activities. Moreover, the strategy also provided for a separate budget head for the tribal development funds which cannot be diverted or spent for purposes other than tribal development. The Government of India also provided for special Central Assistance to the states to fill up any shortage of fund in any sector of tribal development.

In the Sixth Five Year Plan (1980-1985), the tribal Sub-Plan Strategy were reformulated as to raise 50% population of the tribal communities above the poverty line and help them to earn their livelihood. Investments for the development of the critical infrastructure were made in the tribal areas through the functioning of LAMPS (Large Sized Agricultural Multipurpose Societies). The Seventh Five Year Plan (1985-1989) took initiative in building of physical infrastructure for the tribals. Among the physical infrastructure, emphasis was put on irrigation, soil and water conservation, building cooperatives, land reforms, supplying with drinking water and so on. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-1997) tried to bring welfare to the tribal communities by implementing the Tribal Sub Plan Strategy more intensively so that the tribals reap the benefits of the same. Adequate steps were taken to develop irrigation, horticulture and spread education among the tribals.

The Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) took a holistic vision of the empowerment process and approach both the Government and Non-Governmental Agencies to contribute in the development of the tribals. The Plan adopted a three-point strategy for tribal development, viz. social empowerment, economic empowerment and social justice. During Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007), a National Scheduled Tribes Financial and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) has been set up which acted as an apex institution for financing economically viable projects for Scheduled Tribes and extends financial assistance at concessional rate for income-generating schemes and skill development programmes for Scheduled Tribes. For attaining this end, the Government of India funded about 510 projects of NGOs under the scheme of “Grant-in-aid to Voluntary Organizations” which benefited about 4.63 lakh scheduled tribes. The Government thus tried to boost the morale of the NGOs by providing support so that they can assist in the development of the tribals who are scattered in the far-flung areas.

The Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012) emphasised on the formation of a tribal data bank which will contain the information of three hundred tribal groups with their



different attributes in customs, practices, tradition, faith and language. The land records of the tribals are to be computerized to prevent the alienation of tribal land. The Government approved the National Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy 2007 for building infrastructure in tribal areas, and for achieving this end, money will be spent from the Consolidated Fund of India. The Plan precisely tried to empower the tribals and seek to establish a tribal-centric, tribal-participative and tribal-managed development process.

Among various ongoing and newly adopted programmes, the reformation of Tribal Sub Plan (TSP), which was adopted in the fifth five-year plan, was the highlight in the Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012-2017). The prime object of the Tribal Sub Plan is development of tribal areas. The TSP concept, thus, aims on one hand, at the quantification of investment in the Sub-Plan areas commensurate with its size and on the other, at an all-round development of the tribal communities, in accordance with their needs. Keeping in view the distinct tribal situation, the TSP has set the twin objectives: (i) socioeconomic development of STs; and (ii) protection of tribals against exploitation. Through realisation of these objectives, the ultimate aim of the TSP strategy is to narrow the development gap of the tribals with the rest of the country. For the first time in 2011-12, 25 and 28 Central Ministries and Departments have categorically earmarked funds under SCSP and TSP, respectively (Planning Commission, 2013, p. 245).

From the above summary we can see that the government of India have done tremendous efforts to uplift and develop the tribal communities through its FYPs. Meanwhile, there had been a feeling that for a country as diverse and big as India, centralised planning could not work beyond a point due to its one-size-fits-all approach. Moreover, since the Planning Commission used to be controlled by the Central government, it often ended up as a tool to punish states ruled by the opposition parties when it came to allocating funds. Due to the top-to-bottom approach in centralised planning, it was felt that the states needed to have greater say in planning their expenditure (economictimes, 2017).

The 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission (FFC) in 2013 recommended to abandon the old-fashioned concept of five-year plans that India has been following since 1951, and to adopt the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog to come up with a 15-year vision document in tandem with global trends and economic growth. The FFC favoured giving states more untied

funds along with greater fiscal responsibility in implementing centrally-sponsored schemes (Remya Nair, 2016). NITI Aayog is expected bringing about a greater level of accountability in the system. Earlier, those 12 Five-Year Plans were mostly evaluated long after the plan period had ended. Hence, there was no real accountability.

NITI Aayog has established a Development Monitoring and Evaluation Office which collects data on the performance of various Ministries on a real-time basis. The data are then used at the highest policymaking levels to establish accountability and improve performance. This performance- and outcome-based real-time monitoring and evaluation of government work can have a significant impact on improving the efficiency of governance (Kumar, 2018). Looking at these remarks there can be faster and prompt action in adopting policies and implementing the same in the state level as well. Therefore, the tribal development policies and projects will also be impacted with a positive trend in the future.

### **Look (Act) East Policy and Northeast India:**

While talking about the topic of tribal development, the topic of India's Look (Act) East policy occupy a significant place in the discussion as the policy includes huge prospects for infrastructural development of the Northeast region, the region being the home of many tribal groups. India started having its interest in making a good relationship with South East and South Asia during the late 1980's at the behest of the then Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi. However, there are no high-level contacts between India and ASEAN prior to Narasimha Rao's visit to Singapore in September 1994. The term "Look East Policy" appeared in official records of India for the first time in the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in 1995-96 as India's engagement in ASEAN region with emphasis on economic and institutional relations (Atul Sarma, Saswati Choudhury, 2018). Since then, India has been actively promoting the Look East Policy with the aim of political, security, economic and cultural engagement with East and Southeast Asian countries. Initially started as a strategic economic engagement policy, the scope of the policy has gradually been expanded to include political, strategic and cultural dimensions (Singh, 2019). In order to achieve the goal, The Look East Policy has today developed into a dynamic and action oriented 'Act East Policy'.

The Act East Policy was formally enunciated by Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India at the 12<sup>th</sup>

ASEAN India Summit and the 9<sup>th</sup> East Asia Summit held in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, in November 2014. With this policy in order to intensify their engagement, India and ASEAN have identified priority areas which would contribute towards successful implementation of the 2016-2020 Plan of Action, such as, Political security cooperation, economic cooperation, socio-cultural cooperation, and connectivity (India-ASEAN Relations, August 2018). The articulation of LEP since the early 1990s and its subsequent progress into Act East Policy raised the hope of a new development perspective for the Northeast Region of India by placing it as a gateway to the dynamic East and South East Asian economies (Atul Sarma, Saswati Choudhury, 2018, p. 4).

### Development Through Act East Policy:

One of the major factors for the relatively backwardness of the Northeast region is its geo-political isolation. This leads to several other complications such as poor connectivity, incompetent market facility, socio-cultural separation from mainland which leads to insecurity and narrow mindedness, socio-political isolation and economic discrepancies.

Besides connectivity, the economies of the states of the region are also disparate. Except Assam, all other states are small in population size and thus have a small market, each beset with their own rigidities. The hill economies of the region and their subsistence nature are incompatible with the market driven economy, and the result has been underdeveloped product and labour markets in the region. (Atul Sarma, Saswati Choudhury, 2018, p. 5).

In order to break through the challenges in region's development, the Northeast perspective of the Look (Act) East Policy was developed by the NEC in October 2007 under the aegis of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) and was incorporated within "Vision NER: 2020" with the basic objective "to break the fetters of the geo-political isolation"

Though India's Look (Act) East Policy was initiated solely for the promotion of foreign policy, as actions and implementations began, it was realised that Myanmar plays a very significant role in establishing stronger relationship with the regions, it is because Myanmar is the only Southeast Asian country that has a land border with India. Subsequently, the attempt to link India's landlocked Northeast region with Myanmar became a very important dimension in the policy.

India developed three significant projects for overland connection in order to achieve the policy with its objectives of establishing stronger relationship with the Southeast Asian region. India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, the 1,360-kilometre-long project which will connect Moreh to Mae Sot via Myanmar is expected to boost trade and commerce between ASEAN and India. Rhi-Tiddim road that connects Rihkhawdar (Rih) which is in the Myanmar India border and Tiddim in Chin state not only facilitate development in remote Chin state but also facilitate border trade and commerce between Myanmar and India through Mizoram state. Among the projects under the AEP, the most important one in Mizoram is the *Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMMTTP)* - linking Aizawl with the Sittwe port in Myanmar, that would provide wide-ranging benefits for the state and the entire region at large (Rahim 2018). Apart from these international-link projects, a number of projects for the development of Northeast Region was formulated and being implemented as well so that the region will be prepared to gain most benefits out of the policy.

It was in December 2014, the Prime Minister of India had conducted tours in the Northeast states visiting Assam, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura; and he kind of developed a new term for characterising the region, and it was Natural Economic Zone (NEZ). He said, "In India, the word SEZ (special economic zone) is very popular but after visiting this area for the last three days, I found that it is not only SEZ but it is NEZ. When I say NEZ, I mean 'Natural Economic Zone'" (NDTV, 2022). During this tour the Prime Minister announced that his government has taken a number of initiatives for the progress of the Northeast region, such initiatives included the scholarships for 10,000 northeast students, setting up of six more agriculture colleges (as agriculture is the main economic activity in the region), development of sports universities, upgrading the digital and power connectivity in the region and new railway lines. He also announced the setting up of modern garment manufacturing centres in each Northeastern state, beginning with Nagaland, Assam and Sikkim. The first train from Guwahati to Meghalaya was also a significant development, as it laid the foundation for the first railway line to Mizoram and had been significant in inaugurating the Power plant in Tripura (*Aniruddha Babar 2019*).

At this juncture there seems to be crucial options as well as opportunities for the people of the Northeast as it has the locational advantage and rich resource

endowment including man power available in the region, the Northeast India can play a central part in the Act East Policy instead of being a mere gateway (Atul Sarma, Saswati Choudhury, 2018, p. 10). The ASEAN India Vision Statement (MEA 2012) has agreed on cooperation and promotion of greater people-to-people interaction including exchanges in culture, education, youth, sports and human resource development. Northeast India, which has a shared cultural history with some of the ASEAN countries, such as Thailand, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Myanmar, enjoys comparative advantage in promoting people-to-people contact and forging closer social ties and diplomacy. Keeping all these things in mind, apart from the central government's initiatives the people of Northeast India need to prepare themselves to play a big role in this AEP.

### **Development Prospect for NER with Act East Policy:**

According to Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), the Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of India's trade with the neighbouring countries such as Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, Laos, Bangladesh, Thailand and Vietnam from 2009-10 to 2013-14 was 23 percent. The share of the north east in this trade has been consistently hovering in the range of 1 to 2% only (FICCI 2014), and the share of exports from NER to these countries is also 5 percent only (Atul Sarma, Saswati Choudhury, 2018, p. 7). This clearly indicates that most of the trade between India and eastern neighbours has taken place from mainland India.

In connection to the above statistics, some may suggest that transportation of export-import items through NER needs to be promoted as there is an advantage in transportation cost from NER over from other parts of the country. Meanwhile, one aspect that needs to be considered is the original source of the items being traded and transported. For example, comparing transportation cost between two exit points Moreh in Manipur and Chennai to Mandalay in Myanmar, cost from Moreh will be much cheaper than from Chennai; but in reality, no goods are manufactured and originated in Moreh, most of the goods came from mainland India. Considering the total cost of transportation from the original source of goods, the result of the same comparison may be inverse. This simple scenario tells that to make development and progress in the region, the policymakers in each state in Northeast need to consider the situation carefully and formulate proper plans to let the region not merely be a gateway but take a major part in this endeavour.

The North Eastern Region used to hold the position of national economic eminence till a few decades ago; to regain such position it is crucial to fashion the development process that growth springs from and spreads out to the grassroots; and to ensure that the region plays the arrow-head role it must play in the vanguard of the country's Act East Policy (NEC, 2022). The policy makers have to do thorough studies, consultation with experts and scholars in making and formulating development plans and policies. Apart from the policy with its projects that came from the central government, each and every state have to take proper decision and appropriate steps to integrate the growth and development in the region.

### **CONCLUSION**

There can be some few suggestions to be made in regards to development prospects in the Northeast region especially for the tribal community. As the central government launched a Make in India, a kind of Swadeshi Movement, in 2014, which has a good impact in the economic growth in the country; so also, a similar kind of program can be launched for Northeast region as Make in Northeast India. Establishing a new company and manufacturing brand may be difficult, but for a well-developed existing company in the mainland, with careful and thorough studies, to open an extension or manufacturing unit in the Northeast may not be very difficult. This may reduce poverty in a great extent by solving the unemployment issue for youths. It may also impact the perspectives of many young citizens towards development.

Skills development is one of the areas that needs to emphasize among the tribals in the region. Each of the tribal community have their own skills in handicraft based on their culture and traditional practice. These traditional skills need to be improvised with modern technology. If the central as well as the state government take initiatives with more systematic ways in improving these traditional tribal skills many new cottage, small and micro scale industries may come up which will contribute for the economic development in the region.

In the current situation there are only a handful of manufacturing units in the region. Most of the tribal people focussed more on the immediate income through government assistance than focussing on the sustenance of market based on continuous supply chain through their long-term effort. This could be seen in the mind set and the preparedness of those who engage in trade and

commerce and also among young people who are projecting to take part in business when projects of Act East Policy are finished. The mind set of many northeast young people towards foreign trade and market is to import foreign goods in cheap rates and make profits through reselling in higher prices. Many young people visualise market as a place where they can buy whatever commodities they like; only few are having the mind set of making profits by participating as sellers instead of being buyers. For these reasons giving proper education and awareness is a dire need among the tribal young people.

Most of the Northeast tribal communities have close cultural and ethnic connection to Southeast Asian people. We can make use of this closeness and connection in various ways. We can train many of our young people to enter into service industry and outsource them into various foreign countries in the east.

Another important area that needs special attention and keen observation is those centrally funded development projects. Many centrally sponsored projects in the Northeast region are not properly implemented due to corruption and lack of proper monitoring. If all these projects are well implemented, we could have seen tremendous change and development in various parts of the region.

### Financial Support and Sponsorship:

Nil.

### Conflict of Interest:

There are no conflicts of interest.

### REFERENCE

1. Atul Sarma, Saswati Choudhury. (2018). *Mainstreaming the Northeast in India's Look and Act East Policy*. Singapore: Springer Nature.
2. census2011. (2022). *Scheduled Tribe Population - Census 2011*. Retrieved from Cencus2011.co.in: <https://www.census2011.co.in/scheduled-tribes.php>
3. economictimes. (2017, April 13). *the-end-of-five-year-plans-all-you-need-to-know-about-this-big-policy-change*. Retrieved from [economictimes.indiatimes.com: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/the-end-of-five-year-plans-all-you-need-to-know-about-this-big-policy-change/articleshow/58162236.cms](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/the-end-of-five-year-plans-all-you-need-to-know-about-this-big-policy-change/articleshow/58162236.cms)
4. Ghurye, G. (1963). *The Scheduled Tribes*. Bombay : The Popular Prakashan.
5. Kumar, R. (2018, September 21). *Is NITI Aayog relevant?* Retrieved from thehindu.com: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/is-niti-aayog-relevant/article24998885.ece>
6. Malviya, A. (2016, September 8). *14th-asean-india-summit*. Retrieved from Narendramodi.in: <https://www.narendramodi.in/pm-modi-at-the-14th-asean-india-summit-in-vientiane-laos-522427>
7. NDTV. (2022, April 25). *indias-northeast-is-natural-economic-zone*. Retrieved from [ndtv.com: https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indias-northeast-is-natural-economic-zone-says-pm-modi-706884#](https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/indias-northeast-is-natural-economic-zone-says-pm-modi-706884#)
8. NEC, M. o. (2022, March 17). *Vision 2020*. Retrieved from [necouncil.gov.in: https://necouncil.gov.in/sites/default/files/about-us/Vision\\_2020.pdf](https://necouncil.gov.in/sites/default/files/about-us/Vision_2020.pdf)
9. Planning Commission. (2013). *Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017) Social Sectors Volume III*. New Delhi: SAGE.
10. Rath, G. C. (2016). *Tribal Development in India: The Contemporary Debate*. New Delhi: SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd.
11. Remya Nair, J. S. (2016, May 14). *Niti-Aayog-to-replace-5year-plans-with-15year-vision-document*. Retrieved from [livemint.com: https://www.livemint.com/Politics/6ysYTG3yy9ISo6mzKRhjmK/Niti-Aayog-to-replace-5year-plans-with-15year-vision-docum.html](https://www.livemint.com/Politics/6ysYTG3yy9ISo6mzKRhjmK/Niti-Aayog-to-replace-5year-plans-with-15year-vision-docum.html)
12. Roy, S. (2013). *Empowering the tribals role of Non Governmental Organizations a case study of Orissa. Unpublished doctoral dissertation*. Jadavpur University.
13. Singh, M. A. (2019). *Northeast India and India's Act East Policy*. New Delhi: Routledge.
14. Vaid, N. K. (2004). *Who Cares for Tribal Development*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
15. Verma, M. M. (1996). *Tribal Development in India: Programmes and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.