

II.B.5. A Case Study of Two Communities of Assam Traditionally Habituated to Live with Havoc of Water-related Calamities

Mouchumi Konwar Borgohain

Senior Lecturer, Department of Economics, D.C.B. Girls' College, Jorhat 785 001, Assam

The paper attempts to analyse aspects of sustainability in the context of the state of Assam. It is a region rich in biodiversity, flora and fauna and ecologically suitable for growth of forest based and water-based resources, but the region also witnesses adverse climatic conditions like unprecedented flood and severe drought situations in recent years. The quest for sustainable development in this region in ecological perspective therefore does not arise from the fact that it has already attained a reasonable degree of fossil-fuelled growth (which the region has not attained) that brings corresponding atmospheric pollution but because the region is witnessing increasing degree of ecological changes like fall in the average annual rainfall, loss of biodiversity, increasing intensity of flood and drought situation, depletion of ground-water level, which is not related to exhaustive irrigation or other developmental extraction. The state also lags behind the other regions in many key developmental indicators like per capita income (in Purchasing Power Parity terms), education, health, avenues of wage employment, reproductive health, consumption of electricity, accessibility to transportation etc.

These lead one to probe into some basic issues of the region like the availability of the natural resources and extent of their utilization. Utilization here connotes itself to the utility dimension in the perspective of sustainability of these resources. So it has to be ensured that utilization is made along with long term preservation of these resources so that instead of getting exhausted in the long run, man's efforts lead to the growth of them along with material well-beings of human race. With this conceptualisation of sustainability in developmental process, the paper has proceed to deal with the aspect of water-resources of the state and the level of technology that the state is subjected to in utilisation of these resources. After a brief review of the macro-level inquiry, the paper has proceed to microlevel analysis on the basis of case studies. Here, two indigenous communities of Assam that are habituated to make their livelihood as well as living on water resources will be considered for study. These two communities are the Missing - a scheduled tribe community and the Kaibortas - a scheduled caste community, mainly concentrating on the river-island of Majuli. Ethnically these two communities are from two diverse tracks. Although the process of Sanskritisation made impact in their religious cultures, the intensities differ and they are reflected in their social habits and norms. But in one aspect, there is a common element.* It is that both have traditionally accustomed themselves to live with the havoc of water like flood and the resilience with which they cope with flood and water-bound calamities is worth of noting down.

While determining the indicators of sustainable development in the micro-level inquiry, the paper would incorporate commonly accepted norms like accessibility of better way of life where indices like education, health, availability of wage employment, avenues for incorporating the traditional skills like weaving in economically gainful activities, ecological aspects etc. has been included.