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"Geography of Well-Being of North-East India, Sikkim, Andaman & Nicobar Islands", pp. 151

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The concept of well-being has gained considerable significance in recent times. It has been used by the UN to construct HDI and this has helped to unify cross-cultural understandings of what it means bringing together components, such as, education, health, political empowerment, gender relations, human rights, environment and individual freedom. The notion thus primarily focuses on 'quality of life'. Debates on how to define and measure well-being have been going on in development economics and moral philosophy for quite some time. Forces of globalisation and the resulting displacement have necessitated inclusion of diverse attributes to look at well-being in the present day context. Recent concerns about religious fundamentalism and deteriorating environmental quality have been instrumental in stretching the concept in temporal as well as spatial terms.

The concept of well-being owes its origin to the failure of development to bring qualitative changes and welfare to people by eradicating poverty and reducing income disparities. It was realised that a more comprehensive perspective is needed to achieve the same by focussing on the 'beneficiaries' rather than the 'benefits' *per se*. Moreover, it was also noted that uniform development plan cannot be applied to wide

areas as needs of the people depend on perception arising out of their evaluation of a situation. Non-consideration of local, individual needs results in inappropriate allocation of funds leading either to their underutilisation or even misuse in the absence of people's participation in the planning process. An entirely new set of parameters, therefore, got evolved to reflect on the concept. The book under review by Dr. Hazra needs to be evaluated in this context.

The book is an outcome of a major research project funded by the UGC. The motivation for the study is rooted in the concern of the author for North-East India that has remained 'remote, isolated, neglected and underdeveloped even after 56 year of independence'. Moreover, tribal character of the area and the resulting conflicts have aggravated the above mentioned situation. The author is of the view that no meaningful planning has been attempted for the development of the area and the present work is expected to provide a useful guide to define the course of future planning strategy. Author's attempt to extend her study area to include Sikkim is tolerable, though not desirable, but inclusion of Andaman & Nicobar Islands, simply on the grounds that they are inaccessible and tribal

in character with poor development record, is rather far fetched.

Dr Hazra has realised that her work cannot be properly appreciated without understanding the historical background and geo-political scenario of the area. She has, therefore, devoted one chapter to discuss the same wherein she has also elaborated on the problem of ethnicity and current economic situation. Another chapter of the book discusses physical attributes of the area taking them as 'determinants of human well-being'. This discussion does not, however, precisely reveal the role of such forces in explaining the present status of well-being in the area.

The author has been diligent enough in supplementing the secondary data sources by a series of field works and reconnaissance surveys to get an in-depth understanding of needs of the people, level of their satisfaction, leisure activities, aspiration etc. before taking up compilation of secondary data and their analysis. Some data were also collected from regional and local offices. These efforts appear to have rewarded her in understanding the quality of life and the level of well-being of the people of the area. Unfortunately, the results of such exercises have not been incorporated in the book, which focuses attention primarily on the findings based on the analysis of secondary data at state and district levels. Inclusion of the observations based on field experience would have enabled her to provide ground truth in order to compare her results with the reality.

The author has compiled data pertaining to some 84 variables, called parameters, related to well-being which have been grouped into 11 different categories; the

author prefers to call each of the latter as indicator for reasons best known to her. The author has covered major categories such as education, health, housing, nutrition, security, infrastructure, economic activities and demographic characteristics. Ranking method has been used to identify levels of well-being. The author has claimed credit 'in differentiating positive and negative indicators and taking adequate care while ranking them'. Dr. Hazra is well aware of the limitations of ranking method and hence she has restricted its use to state level in order to get only broad patterns about relative position of different states. For district level analysis the author uses a more sophisticated method of Z-score. She has also gone a step further by using factor analysis to assess the relative contribution of different variables to the level of well-being; this has been done separately for 11 categories as well as for the entire data set. All this analysis is expected to explain spatial variations in the levels. The results of the analysis have been presented in tabular and map form.

Being a product of the UGC research project, the book raises expectations of the readers, especially because of the general lack of detailed information about these areas. Unfortunately, on going through the work, one finds that there are so many inadequacies, which fail to take the reader to roots of the issues. While going through a list of 84 indicators the reader gets an impression that Dr. Hazra has not applied any selection criteria and compiled data on whatever that she has come across. It is not surprising, therefore, that there are many variables that are highly inter-correlated needing some slashing before arriving at the levels of well-being. Even grouping of variables is arbitrary. Main workers and

marginal workers, for example, have been grouped under 'Demographic Characteristics' although there is a separate head 'Employment'. The author has listed two different types of infrastructure, viz. Basic and Economic. How variables such as 'production per unit' or 'small scale industry' fall under the category of economic infrastructure is difficult to comprehend. Some of the variables, such as, consumption of fertilisers or pesticides indicate modernisation of agriculture and, therefore, development, but how far they are effective as indicators of well-being is questionable.

Some of the parameters are in standardized format, but others are not; for example, small scale industry (84) or crime (84). Nowhere is there any indication as to which indicators are treated as positive and which, negative. This makes it difficult to appreciate the rigour of the whole exercise; being a closely guarded secret, the author alone is in a position to comprehend the end product. The results thus become introvert and generate little interest to a reader who has to simply believe in the final results presented by the author. This difficulty is obviated, to some extent, when the author provides maps for some of the individual parameters as Dr. Hazra has done in Chapter 4; but in later chapters, she has restricted the presentations only to the final map and it really becomes difficult to understand what the author has in mind when the shading of a particular areal segment indicates that the level of well-being is 'very good'. Describing the nature of indicators in greater detail and also justifying their choice could have avoided this problem. It must also be borne in mind that quality of work does not necessarily improve with increase in the number of parameters used; a small array

of parameters, handled systematically, is sometimes more effective in conveying the message.

Preparation of maps is not the end in any geographical analysis and author is well aware of the fact that explanation is the most important task a researcher has to perform. The author has, however, used the maps to simply describe the pattern. One does not find any attempt towards explanation; it would have considerably enhanced the utility of the book from the viewpoint of the readers, especially students, who are not familiar with the intricacies of the area. The author expects readers to frame their own explanation to the patterns depicted, but even this becomes impossible in the absence of proper explanation about indicators and methodology.

Dr. Hazra has used correlation matrices to bring out inter-variable relationships but does not provide her interpretation of the results. The same could be said about the factor analysis. The author has simply worked out the factors using the available package (name not mentioned) and described as to which variables get associated with a particular factor. But she has not made any attempt to label the factors that alone would reflect on the processes prevalent in the area. Moreover, being a geographer, Dr. Hazra should have gone one step further and estimated factor scores and mapped them. It would have automatically helped her to get the spatial patterns.

When one starts reading the 'discourse' with great care, he gets simply disappointed as there are no specific policy recommendations which are expected to be outlined after such painstaking research. The author says 'specific stress should be

laid on the land use of Meghalaya and Nagaland'. What exactly does it mean? What aspect of land use needs improvement? In what way? What are the strategies to be adopted? There could have been some interesting discussion, which is missing. The discussion on prioritisation also leads to the same observation.

The literary presentation and cartographic representation leave much to be desired. The former could have been improved by carefully going through the manuscript and also by correcting the proof more meticulously and the latter could have been qualitatively enhanced by following the basic principles of thematic cartography. Most of the maps are in the form of choropleth and the author has restricted to a few shading patterns. In the process, the maps fail to bring out differentiation among the shades. In Fig. 4 on p. 46, one fails to distinguish between the shades 1 & 2 as also 3 & 4 when taken from the top; this is also the case with the map on the following page. Figs. 10 and 11 (p.58 and 61 respectively) portray different types of information, yet the title of the theme is identical; the readers are required to judge from the legend the differences in the themes portrayed.

On the whole, it appears that the stress throughout the book is on application of a set of cartographic or quantitative techniques. But one should remember that they provide only a means to an end and the results need to be properly interpreted. Moreover, it needs to be emphasised that when a non-tribal tries to appreciate well-being of the tribals it could be done only after complementing the secondary data with primary one; actors' interpretation and perception become important and ought to be considered in the design of any development intervention. In a book running into some 150 pages, research component occupies some 90 pages, but the discussion of research results are summarised in just 6 pages, if one excludes pages giving illustrations.

At the end, it must be said that there is very little that one learns about either the North-East or the methodological innovations by the author. A few chapters of the book would provide useful information to undergraduate and, may be, to post-graduate students but it would hardly appeal to the critical eye of university faculty or researchers.

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