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### **Tracking the Transformation for North East India (Exploration for the key levers of change)**

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#### **Abstract**

*Development and transformation in the context of North East India (NEI) is a serious issue. Interested people often used to ask why North East India is lagging behind the rest of the country. For some development thinkers this laggardness of this region is an enigma, for some it is a dream, for somebody it is shelter for self-expression and for the rest it is a milking cow. Irrespective of the views, in the post liberalization regime, it is felt need for the transformation and development of the north eastern region. In this regime, eying toward the transformation of the other part of the country if the N.E look towards the transformation of itself, then many dimensions such as social, political, economic and technological would emerge out. Since today, all transformation is dependent over the eco-technological and level of knowledge; from these standpoints if the transformation dynamics of the North East India (NE) are analyzed then it seems that the region NE is basically under the trap of peripheral-ism from all counterparts. The motion of the transformation is in the tune of static dynamism. But, in the age of rapid transformation if this peripheral-ism and static dynamism in not changed to the core-ism than the matter of transformation of NE would remain as an enigma, or as a shelter for self-expression, as well as a milking cow even in the future days to come.*

*Considering the given backgrounds and its ongoing transformation of the region the present paper attempts to justify the peripheral-ism in the NE India. The major focus of the paper is on the need for a track for the transformations from the deep rooted peripheral-ism to core-ism. Finally an attempt has been made to making track for transformations the urgency of shifts of isms is highlighted.*

***Key words: backwardness, transformation, state dynamism, Peripheral-ism and core-ism, Deep rooted Peripheral-ism, Geographical Peripheral-ism, Economic Peripheral-ism, Cultural Peripheral-ism, Political Peripheral-ism, Need for change, Techno-Economic elites, Levers for change.***

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The North Eastern (NE) region of India with a landmass of 2, 62,500 sq km comprising of eight states namely Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura is a landlocked region with 98 percent i.e. 4500 km of its border being international. Despite being rich in natural resources with the fertile land, rich forest and mineral deposits, development of NE regions has lagged behind the rest of the country due to historical reasons. Traditional economy is still dominating the region. Industrialization in this region even in the most cases is not even in inception stage. The region hardly attracts the private initiative for investment. Economic growth has been taking place during the last decade in a very gentler fashion following the government efforts. Whatever is the reason of the laggardness in respect to growth and development of this region, the motion of the growth is under the trap of deep rooted static dynamism. If the transformation dynamics of the region is analyzed from the perspectives of the globalization and state of socio-cultural, political, economical, personal, technological, dimensions then one can sharply conclude that the globalization is yet to touch the region. On the utterance-globalization in conjugation to the North east region seems like epiphany; and for the folk who are deeply familiar to the word 'globalization and North East' is parallel to an epithet and epileptic fit till today.

**Globalization and NE- Context and Pretext:** To recast over the features of the north eastern region it would be more justifiable if the focus is queued from the concepts of globalization. Since from the first appearance of the term 'globalization' in the year 1962 meaning have been shifting from the jargon to the cliches and appearing as the most interpretable term. But, 'globalization' as defined by Webster 's dictionary as a process that renders various activities aspirations "worldwide in scope or application" - has been underway for a long time. Thousands of years before the root word for this concept – 'globe' - came into use; our ancestors had already spread across the earth. During the passage of time "the exponential growth in the exchange of goods, ideas, institutions and people that we see today is part of a long term historical trend. Over the course of human history, the desire for something better and greater has motivated people to move themselves, their goods, and their ideas around the world". Another connotative queue of globalization is worth considerable i.e. globalization means "Reconnecting the human community." The propagators of the globalization and liberalizations like World Bank, UNCTAD and almost all studies support that in general globalization happen through the Politics, Economy, Persons, Technology and these four are the main wheels of globalization. If the globalization is happening in any place then certainly that will be manifested by either gradual or speedy transformation. The movement of the four wheels would be visible by the growth and development of Technology (especially Information and Communication Technology), Economy and people (Society). Without delving more to the details of the globalization let us bite the nail by contextualizing the manifestations of globalization in the North Eastern Region.

1. Right at the post globalization regime could the North East region take any activities and aspirations having worldwide scope and application? If it is happening at what

- degree considering its geo-population and compared to the other parts of the country India?
2. Can NE citizens claim over the exponential growth in the exchange of indigenous goods, ideas, and institutions with the rest of the world?
  3. At what degree the desire for something better and greater is influencing or motivating people to move themselves, their goods, and their ideas around the world?
  4. Though there are connections among the communities of the region can we claim that these are at all connections as what globalization connotes? Are we reconnecting the human communities? If it is connecting then what degree of ties is it maintain up with the other parts of the country and with other country of the globe?

Another context we can bring forth to retrospect over the globalization and NE region. In the OECD territorial outlook 2001 mentioned that “the main effect of the globalization is to heighten the competition worldwide and increase the number of competitors. But this competition is not limited to enterprises. We must now consider the role that cities and region they are competing with each other to attract the economic activities. Furthermore this competition is becoming international, since competitors are increasingly territories located in other countries”. In the light of the statement if the North Easterners try for storming their brain then also get the answer at what level the North Eastern region is on the move of globalization. The trade bridge with South East Asia has providing total market of 400 million opportunities, is attracting competitions to the region. The flip side against this hoopla can be understood by looking the economic freedom indices of NE states. In all India picture of economic freedom, among the eight states of NE region, Assam could occupy the lowest position holding the rank 20 in both 2004 and 2005 with the 0.222 and 0.218 (*Laveesh Bhandari*) respectively. The other seven states of NE not came in the picture of economic freedom performance. The level of economic freedom in the region itself tells the fact on over degree of hoopla and hype of the efforts for potential for competition and investment, globalization and liberalization of this region. North Easterner should understand that where there is no economic independence is there any meaning to think about the economic liberalization and globalization.

**Mismatch `Ism's in NER- a debate:** To recast to the above retrospective debate another point we can bring forth in support of contextual epithet ‘Globalization and North East India’. In justifying this contextual epithet it is worth mentionable that the region is under the trap of mismatch ‘Ism's even at the era of globalization. In the context of globalization and the North Eastern region it is seen that one of the most serious 'ism' is the prevailing peripheral-ism. Morris Peter (2002) distinguished regions as either core or Periphery by their economic structure and their profile in terms of the international division of labor. The table below set out the extreme of core and peripheral dichotomy.

**Characteristics of pure core and pure periphery**

<b>BASIS OF DISTINCTION</b>	<b>CORE (INDEPENDENT)</b>	<b>PERIPHERY (DEPENDENT ON THE CORE REGION)</b>
Geographical	<b>Coupled to all transport, low absolute and relative contract cost, central part of telecommunication network.</b>	<b>Coupled to a few means transport, high absolute costs and relative contact costs, difficult access to other peripheral areas.</b>
Economic	<b>Finished wares and services produced, complex control systems, importers of labor, adaptable business community, control over capital, contact with other economic agents.</b>	<b>Raw material production, simple Processes one side, vulnerable production, exporter of labor, importer of capital.</b>
Cultural	<b>Produces and spreads the symbol systems, represents expertise control the information and media, rejects the symbol from the periphery as irrelevant and/or important.</b>	<b>Accept other's language, forced to take other model of society, consumes symbols created elsewhere.</b>
Political	<b>Control of strategic resources, concentration of elites, over represented in formal administrative organs, low costs incurred in assembling and putting forward views.</b>	<b>No strategic resources, absence of (national and international) elites, or only agents of the centre, high cost incurred in assembling and putting forward views, therefore few initiative.</b>

Source: Morris Peter, of White House Strategic Group

India as a whole also holds a few characteristics of peripheral-ism and this should not be an outlook for the debate. Citizens of the North East should look this distinction minutely case by case basis, and should realize what isms are bearing by the region. Laggardness to transform, lack of innovations; lack of proportionate active leaders and representation from the region; cultural shift from core to blind imitation; prevailing state of education, higher education and research etc. are witnessing the peripheral-ism which requires a deep concentration. Centripetal and centrifugal forces of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are yet to imagine by the people of the region. Therefore, on the basis of geographical locations human folks of the region use to think peripheral-ism, but in the globalize regime geographical boundary and location should not impose the people to bear peripheral-ism. Till the region bears the high degree of peripheral-

ism in the minds and behaviors, it would not be able to enjoy the taste of independence. This is happening in fact.

Along with peripheral-ism, there is other ism's which are hindering the process of transformations of the region. All North Easterners are bounded by self-restricting boundary defined by the negations (Isms) and used by them for exploitation of cheaper opportunities and pretext; for protecting and defending their self-restricting boundaries and thus feels proud of it by saying we are North Easterners. These are facts and require a deep attention. These boundaries are not used for purpose of development of the region, and communities in the real sense. Basically those isms are caused by the deep rooted peripheral-isms and resultants of these are - increasing terrorism, regionalism, and communism and all other self-defined negations. One can come to debate with an emotive consolation and epiphany that in the modern day's terrorism, regionalism and communism are everywhere, alright! But the nature of the entire prevailing isms is completely mismatching to the present era. Considering the connotations of connection and reconnection of human community through the process of globalization it is seen that in NE, there is an increasing tendency to loosing the connections among the human community-tribes are becoming mini tribes, states are transforming gradually to the mini states, and country feelings are diminishing day by day among the folks of N.E region. In supplement to reconnection of NE a match able quote of *Nitish Chakraborty* (Dec-2005) is worth referring- "the feeling of oneness with the rest of India has yet to strike a chord. Many of them have yet to see the link between their identity and the broader identity of Indian Nation". The isms are impacting over the peripheral-ism and peripheral-isms are increasing this entire mismatch - isms and vice-versa.

**Linking the NE Region:** One decade past, under the short lived Deve Gowda regime (1996-97) a path breaking initiative was taken to remove the infrastructural bottleneck realizing the need for connection and reconnection. Deve Gowda set up a commission (A high level commission of PM on NE), to study and recommended - (i) backlog on basic minimum needs, (ii) infrastructure deficiencies. The commission identified four basic need deficits (*Madhav - 2005*) for the region i.e. infrastructural deficits, resource deficits, and a two way deficit of understanding with the rest of the country and the commission recommended a host of action including reforms of NEC. This was the beginning for the NE region for opening up the new vistas of development. Due to short tenure of Gowda Govt, the next Bajapayee Govt. operationalized the actions initiated by the Minister Gowda. The present prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, has taken number of initiative - such as resurrection of BIMSTEC for paving the way to greater co-operation with South East Asian countries, establishing the road links to South East Asian countries (revival of Asian Highway), and as precursor to it, initiation of Indo Asian Car Rally in Nov 2004 from Guwahati to Indonesia. In order to promote the "North East as investment destination and to showcase the competitive strengths of the region, the Indian chambers of Commerce and the Ministry for development of North Eastern region undertook a major initiative in the form of annual North East

business summit to facilitate showcasing the unique potential as well as interaction between governments of the region” (Najeeb-2005). With these objectives Indian Chambers of Commerce organized the first time the North East Business summit on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> July 2002 in Mumbai; and met seven Chief Ministers of region, interacted with industry leaders, many prominent Union Ministers, Chairman of North East Eastern Council (NEC), large number of govt. top functionaries from the centre and also from the states This summit talked business under one roof and generated corporate interest and over 800 delegates from different industries attended the summit. The 2<sup>nd</sup> summit held in Delhi on 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of Jan 2004 in collaboration with the ministry for development of North Eastern Region. The first summit discussed on sector specific business- information technology, agro and food processing, tourism and energy. The second summit was on the economic opportunities in NE such as Role of external aid, Financial and Fiscal Incentives and Procurement potential, Infrastructure, Energy, Agro-processing, Horticulture, Biotechnology, Health care, Utilization of Bamboo, Tourism and Information technology. It is important to note that, in context of linkages that define a new dimension of trade dynamics of this region. Recently, the trilateral highway, from Moreh in Manipur to Mac Sot in Myanmar has been sanctioned, through which NE can drive to Thailand and onwards to Singapore. Recently, the bilateral trade understanding through the enhanced regional co-operation between North East and neighboring countries have scaled up multilateral funding and investment. With the endowed resource base such as well-developed human resource base, high literacy rate, industrial raw materials such as coal, hydrocarbons, water resources, land and forest resources, and potential for petroleum and higher unexplored bio-repositories, the NE region is expecting to connect and reconnect to ASEAN countries. This expectation is covering comprehensively the potential for development of human, infrastructural, economic, technological and cultural dimensions of the region. But questions arise in the context of Look East Policy- whether the core of this resurgent is originated from the Masses of NE? In support of the question we can refer to five numbers of same questions put up by the *Charles Chasie (Dec-2005)* in his work on North East: Imperative and Dimension of Growth, published in the Yojana, Dec- 2005, but there are doubt, how many North Easterners are receiving its proper spirit. The folk of the NE must understand that North East Gateway is only a gate, through this gate there is every possibility of coming residuals from ASEAN, if the filtration mechanism is adopted by either side of the trade and transaction then all residual will remain in the gate, and the North East and ultimately will be transformed to market for residue of India and Asia.

**Tracks for Transformation:** Looking to state of economic freedom in NE region, it indicates that to match to the era of globalization, NE must concentrate on the reforms on the three broad heads to bring the economic freedom through government as well as mass Participation and commitment. These are-

- (1) **Size of government** – Revenue expenditure, administrative components in state, domestic product, power subsidy, governments share in organized employment, taxes, stamp duties, and disinvestments;

- (2) **Legal Structure and Security of property Rights** – Recovery of stolen property, violent crimes, economic crimes, vacant judiciary posts, completion of investigation by police, completion of trial by court;
- (3) **Regulation of credit, Labor and Business** - minimum wages, man-day lost in strike and lockouts, share of unorganized labor force, number of special economic zones, license fee implementations of industrial entrepreneur's memorandum, power shortage, tendency of cases and person arrested under corruption and related laws.

With an intention to connect and reconnect North Easterners must look to ASEAN and Asian countries with a dogged determination and with a bold approach to benchmark the performance for the region. North Eastern states as a gateway to ASEAN countries have to equip at par with all sorts of globalization move alike the other country counterpart to reap the benefits of the look east policy. The basic logic for warning is that if the gate is not properly protected, then thick wall cannot work. On the other hand gateway, in the gate, gate keeper shows the image many a times. Therefore, the north easterner must have to be ready at the war footing to fight with ensuing floods. To be ready for riposte against the current, North Easterner can look to the strategies adopted for reducing unemployment by the ASEAN countries. For connectivity and knowledge explosion, NE region along with the country India have to minutely observe, and benchmark the rate of digitalization, and information and communication technology (ICT) diffusion of the ASEAN countries. How the India and ASEAN countries are attempting to diffuse the ICT is also a worth considerable episode for the north easterners.

**Conclusion:** Mere looking and linking to ASEAN countries would not be enough to enjoy taste of globalization. Along with connection and reconnection efforts, North Easterner must have to change its all mismatch isms where lays the challenges of change for the folk of the NE region. Shift from the “Peripheral-ism” to the “Core-ism” may demand the real challenges of change and transformation. To enter from periphery to core, NE has to enter through the service, production, technology i.e. basically through the techno- economically and through appropriate blend of east-west- and indigenous knowledge, which requires HRD. In this context, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh highly prioritized the need for HRD relevant to the region, also lamented that north eastern states happens to be a lot of weak points right from lower level of education. He rightly mentioned that “teaching of science and mathematics in many north eastern states happens to be very weak points in education system, as a result is producing students, graduates who do not possess the employable skill’. Therefore, he emphasized in redesigning of the educational map of the region and urged to assume the priority concern by the NEC. Though the statistics shows the higher literacy rate but this literacy could not change anything of the NE. This literacy could not teach to enter to core-ism of the economy, society, and politics. In this age outsourcing anybody can suggest - outsource technical human resource. How long would the NE depend on the outsourced human resource where unemployment is a perennial problem. Anyhow, NE has to replace its mismatch isms such as terrorism, micro regionalism and micro communisms by entrepreneurialism, professionalism, tourism

as expected by the Look East Policy, and to welcome the process of globalization at the right footings North Easterner must have to equip themselves with transformation, have to take the responsibility of transforming the isms from the individual levels to societal level firmly. Otherwise the flood like globalization would cause harm than hopes.

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