

Book Review

Bhattacharjee J.B., 2009: Development Strategies for Barak Valley (Assam), New Delhi: Akansha Publication House, pp. 315, Price: 1050.

The book under view is an attempt to introduce and explain the basics of development strategies for remote area like Barak Valley of Assam. The book has 14 articles which deal with various dimensions and dynamics of the development. The book has emerged from brain storming sessions of a national seminar on Development Strategies for Barak valley: Constraints & Prospects organised by the Institute of Northeast India Studies, Kolkata in collaboration with the Department of Economics, Assam University, Silchar on 29th April 2008.

In the paper entitled "Colonial continuity in history of Barak Valley" Sanjib Deb Laskar gives a clear picture and historical background of the valley from the Dimasa and Coch regimes to the independence. It gives comprehensive information about the regimes and dynasty of various rulers of the valley such as Dimasa, Coch. The eighty years of dimasa rule in Barak valley experienced a new system of administration and dimasa rule was a very important period in its economy and socio-cultural life. The introduction of tea plantation in Cachar during the colonial regime (in the year 1856) is a unique phenomenon in the region. The author deals with silent features of the valley in terms of language, tea plantation and about the inhabitation and customs of the tribals.

In the paper "Constraints of Development of Barak valley", Girban Biswas focuses on traditional paradigms of constraints for development. He is of the view that typology of the valley, then geographical features and isolation, ineffective leadership, internal contradictions within the local society, composite ethnic character, poor infrastructure in terms of power, communication, agriculture, industries are major constraints in the process of development of the valley.

In the paper "Post-colonial Economy of the Barak Valley" Suparna Roy highlights the entire scenario of the land economy of the Barak valley. Land problems and policy including revenue policy is the core issue of the paper by dealing geographical and social settings, pre-colonial land systems such as 'Khel' and agricultural guild collectively managed by the inheritance, colonial land tenure, namely Mirasdari tenure of Stewart's settlement, the grants under the old Assam rule's, the grants under free sample rule, the lease of waste land under the old and new Mirasdari rules, the revenue free tenures such as Baksha and Lakhiraj, post-colonial land reform measures. She describes the major changes, notably evolution of Zamindari in the form of the condition of tenants through legislation and increase in the cultivation, consolidation of holdings and adoption of mechanised cultivation and also gives an account of various land reforms measures adopted by the government of Assam.

In his paper, "Disparities in Economic Development: A District Level Study of Assam with special reference to Barak Valley" Sumanash Dutta gives a comprehensive outlook along with an authentic information regarding disparities in economic development. He critically examines

the issue of regional disparities which has been well researched both theoretically and empirically and demands for a concerted efforts involving all sections of the population to achieve faster economic development. Niranjana Roy, however, explores the economy of Barak Valley for development strategy and points out that the prospect of economic development of the valley depends to a great extent on utilization and exploitation of growth, potential of agriculture in the region.

The status of tea industry as one of the most important factor for economic development in the valley is explored by Alok Sen. He gives comparative figures regarding price, production and product and highlights that the performance of 'Cachar tea' was remarkable by holding a dominant position among the manufacturing region, before independence. But in spite of tremendous potential to progress still the tea industry in the valley is in bad shape. Giving the statistics regarding six tea estates of the valley, the chapter determines the causes for such deterioration of tea industry in Barak valley. The paper also suggests some corrective measures on account of pragmatic development model, based on natural endowment, entrepreneurship, capital investment and infrastructure inadequacy.

In the paper, "Role of Banking in the Development of Agriculture in Barak Valley" Sudipa Rakshit analyses the loopholes and demerits of banking and credit system to the farmer and give impetus to organise awareness program by the banks to motivate, sensitise and convince the farmers for the sake of agriculture development.

Women participation in the economic development process is discussed by Ruma Paul. The role and function of women is still gendered and governed by the patriarchal powers and that is the reason women have not been able to catch up with men in terms of employment, share of wages, time devoted to work in spite of their efficiency, productivity and capability. She provides a clearcut picture of increasing awareness of the people for employment.

Hiranmoy Roy reveals development prospective in terms of social sector refers to education, health and nutrition. He conceptualises two main approaches related to development. The first approach focuses on investment in education, health and nutrition as a means to augment the quality of human capital defined as the 'the stock of skills and productive knowledge embodied in people'. On the other hand, human development approach has been defined by UNDP as the process of enlarging people's choices. The author argues that social sectors may be defined as those providing social security or the protection which the society provides for its member to a series of measures, like the provision of medical care and provision of subsidies for families with children, against the social and economic distress that otherwise would be caused by substantial reduction in earnings returning from sickness, maternity, employment injuries, unemployment in heredity, old age and death. The author also exposes the drawbacks regarding social security and suggests some measures by making sound strategy, suitable policies and programs for different sectors of the society as per their requirement.

Ramanuj Chakravorty discusses about border trade and economy of Barak valley and gives a clear cut picture about an excellent opportunity for re-construction of the economy of the Barak Valley while Jayati Bhattacharjee discusses about the human resources for sustainable development of the Valley which is need of the hour and determines the main indicator for the backwardness of the region. The problem of educated unemployment is solely responsible for promoting militancy and insurgency in other parts of the northeast. The common feeling in the northeast is that in the absence of industry and private sector, the unemployment ratio of educated youth produced by several central universities is increasing. Therefore if the human resource of the valley is being utilised properly then not only many problems can be solved but also the valley can be prosperous. Therefore the valley deserves special attention for its all round development.

The question of sustainability in the development of Barak Valley is examined by Abhik Gupta by giving brief historical, geographical prospective of resources of the valley. He deals in detail with the geographical, ecological perspective and typography of the valley. Deforestation, declamation of natural resources due of lack of proper policy regarding protection and conservation of wild life, to check the devastating flood, tourism etc are some of the perennial factors. However, Bibhash Ranjan Choudhury deals and suggests to find out concrete strategy for the development of the valley in spite of rich resources, manpower etc due to inadequate attention and wrong policies of policy makers.

Tarun Das demands and drafts special attention of the government for the constitution of Barak Economic Development Council for the solution of the existing problems of the valley and also for the development of infrastructure in terms of communication, transport, promotion and revival of tea and cottage industries as well as agriculture sector in the valley.

The interactions that took place during the course of seminar based on a discourse on development strategies for Barak Valley are recorded by Sarbani Bhattacharjee. Many issues and paradigms related to development were discussed as an essence of the book. The book in the appendix part gives sufficient reason for the constitution of economic development council for the valley in the form of memorandum.

The book provides deep insights to the reader of diverse paradigms of the development by giving equal amount of information regarding the valley in terms of historical and geographical perspective. This book may be immensely useful for the students, researcher and policy maker as a valuable document and a treasure of knowledge. Printing and getup of the book is good one. However, the price of the book is little bit high for the students and individual readers. The reviewers expect the book to be useful to all the country men involved in development process in general and northeast in particular.

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