

Revisiting 'Rising India' Narrative

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In the previous issue (Volume 5, No. 3) of this journal, the editorial entitled *India Rising*, written by Dr. Rituparna Bhattacharyya deals with some of the important issues linked to the current state of India's progress. In this issue too, I revisit the 'rising' narrative from an outsider's perspective. Evidently, there remains a large propaganda with respect to India's progress on different fronts. Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi himself is strongly involved in the campaign— *Make in India*— not only within the country but also across the world. The Western world appreciates the efforts so far made by Mr. Modi to take the country forward with confidence, determination and power of governance. Bhattacharyya (2017) questions whether India is really rising. *Make in India* slogan aims at manufacturing products in India and selling them across the globe. The mission of *Make in India* is to mobilise the youth for their 'skill development' and 'creation of jobs'. It wants to create around 100 million jobs over the next decade and intends to increase manufacturing to around 25% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country. Youth within working age are huge in number in India, and it has been predicted that approximately 64 percent of country's total population would come under working age by 2020. Prime Minister Modi declares that the youth of India would be job creators not job seekers in an ecosystem that is currently being nurtured.

India in recent times has successfully executed its first Mangalyaan mission, and then launched indigenous high thrust Geosynchronous Satellite Launch vehicle, and also launched South Asia Satellite or GSAT-9 to ensure better communications among the South Asian nations. In 2016, India created a history in the

world of communication by launching Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS) called NAVIC. All these successes prove the capacity of India to become self-sufficient in the digital economy.

The GDP in the year of 2016 grew at the rate of 7.6 per cent and Gross National Saving of the country was at 30.2 per cent during the same time. World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc. have recognised the progress of India describing it as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) has increased considerably in the country after reforming outdated policies and legislations that often delayed the process of investment coming from outside the country. According to a World Bank flagship report, 2018—India's position of ease of doing business now stands at 100; this is an upward move of 30 places from its previous rank of 130.

Although recently, the GDP growth dwindled to 6.1 per cent, IMF chief Christine Lagarde ascribed that the Indian economy stands on a 'very solid track'. IMF chief attributes this slow growth to prodigious demonetisation drive and introduction of Goods and Services Tax (GST). In the post-demonetisation drive period, the country continues to witness a massive increase in digital payments. For instance, in August 2016, the digital transactions stood at 870 million. This increased to 1380 million in August 2017. Currently, Indian economy is a home to respectively over 800 million and 30 million debit and credit cards.

Notwithstanding, structural reforms and economic policies of the late 1980s paved the way to rapid economic growth. However, India has failed to transform this growth into development that benefits the rural people. A report published by Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) in 2015 adequately proves that *Rising India* is more of 'rhetoric' than evidence-based and may be termed it as a political hype.

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The previous editorial written by Bhattacharyya argues that India could at best be termed as an *emerging economy* instead of *rising* considering evidence relating to its socioeconomic development, especially at the grassroots level. There is no doubt that India's economy is rapidly expanding, but it is important to understand who is enjoying the benefits of the rapidly growing economy of India. The country has been facing enormous challenges to translate the growth of economy into benefits for all including the downtrodden. India has to go a long way to materialise the dream *Rising India!* Many of the articles published in this current issue indirectly reinforce this argument.

Professor Hiranya K. Nath and Siddharth Kumar critically reviewed India's strategic shift in geopolitical and military policy in the recent times in their article titled *India's Look/Act East Policy and the Northeast Region: A Critical Perspective*. Despite the existence of rich natural resources in the Northeast region of India, the region remains backward and socioeconomically not vibrant. Consequently, insurgency has erupted in many parts of the region for decades. The issue of security and socioeconomic development is of utmost importance for all the people dwelling in the region. Therefore, the authors appreciate "India's Look or Act East Policy"—recently formulated and followed, which intends to have regional integration of India's Northeast region with the neighbouring countries in the East, Southeast and South Asia. This integration in this vast North-eastern region along with many other independent countries that are closely attached is expected to produce better results in terms of security and socioeconomic development in the entire region. The authors argue that there are challenges ahead with regard to having integration and enjoying its benefits as improving connectivity with the neighbouring states as well as rest of the country is a matter of firm commitment that must be declared by all concerned. Moreover, a comprehensive and long-term planning needs to be designed and implemented with specific projects that ensure industrial development and basic service provisions like education,

health and tourism for overall development of the people in the Northeast region. The authors' further point out that comprehensive planning should be inclusive of infrastructure building, socio-political stability, ecological balance as well as quality institutions that may genuinely bring about overall improvement in the Northeast region of India.

The special article by Dr. Sukanya Sharma —*The Third Perspective on Shifting Cultivation* focuses on two perspectives through which food sustainability is generally understood. One perspective explains food sustainability as being ensured by technology that causes shifting cultivation, which is comparatively a lower state of culture. The other perspective emphasises culture of indigenous people who are genuinely environmentalist and can naturally cause shifting cultivation in order to bring about food sustainability. However, the author explores a third perspective, which is drawn from the strategy of indigenous people who perhaps understand the ecosystems and interact with them accordingly. Thus, the indigenous people like Garo know as to how to interact with the ecosystems, and use them to ensure food sustainability without harming them. The author argues that the indigenous people are the real stakeholders of ecosystems, and therefore, the planners and policy makers of Northeast India should accept this third perspective through which indigenous people living in the rural communities have adopted a kind of community based natural resource management that actually saves the environment, restores the environmental resources and also manages food sustainability for them.

The fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth are research articles. *Desert Dwellers' Meaning and Existence of Spirituality: A Gendered Case Study of Cholistan, Pakistan*—an article written jointly by Dr. Aisha Shoukot and Dr. Venkat Pulla, presents the findings of an ethnographic study conducted on the life of desert dwellers, who make their life meaningful on the face of all environmental adversities as they are deeply absorbed within the world of spirituality. Both

the authors sketch the spiritual life of the desert dwellers who find solutions to all problems in their daily spirituality. Importantly, according to the authors, spirituality of desert dwellers has brought them resilience in their life, which gives strength to fight adversities, ensuring them with emotional wellbeing. The article shows that spirituality could be a powerful component to make the struggling people resilient, and help them cope with an antagonistic and unfriendly natural environment in which they live and survive. An interesting reading may help the scholars to ponder over some arguments regarding spirituality and resilience.

The article titled *Transformation of Agricultural Land for Urbanisation, Infrastructural Development and Question of Future Food Security: Cases from Parts of Hugli District, West Bengal* contributed by Dr. Giyasuddin Siddique and Nabanita Mukherjee focuses on urban expansion and reduction of agricultural land that pose a grave challenge to future food security in Hugli district of West Bengal. It is a matter of great concern for most of the developing countries as rapid infrastructural development in the fertile land due to the process of urbanisation are causing quick reduction of farmlands which is, on the one hand, detrimental to the environment, and, on the other hand, threatening to future food security. Hugli district of West Bengal, one of the most well-known and flourishing regions in the entire state because of its agricultural productivity, has witnessed rapid growth of urbanisation causing infrastructural development on productive agricultural land since 1991. The authors argue that gradual reduction of fertile agricultural land in Hugli district may endanger sustainable livelihood security of people not only in Hugli region but also in the entire state of West Bengal in the long run. It has been found in the study that the amount of farmlands has decreased and the use of land for non-agricultural purposes has simultaneously increased from 2001 to 2011 in the district of Hugli. The authors further argue that land use change, loss of soil fertility, decrease of productivity and the rise of

population in the region will directly jeopardise future food security of the people. Thus, a modern agricultural system with adequate access to resources, technology, management, investment and markets along with supportive government policies are immediately required to address this problem. Suggestions like supply of nutrients to increase soil fertility, plantation, use of modern genetics for crops and livestock and effective irrigation that cause highly productive and efficient system which may help protect the environment through the sensitive and careful use of natural resources have been put forward. A balanced urbanisation along with the conservation of land and water has been advocated for, which could bring about sustainable food security that would perhaps ensure economic growth as well as continuous food production in the region.

The sixth article titled *Dynamics of Urban Sprawl and Land Use Change in Imphal of Manipur, India* by Joseph Zamchinlian Tunngung and Dr. Subhash Anand analysed the urban sprawl and land use change in Imphal city of Manipur, India over the last 45 years, that is, from 1970 to 2015. Manipur city like any other city in the developing countries has been experiencing rapid growth of population that has mostly resulted from the rural migrants who have been forced to settle themselves in the city because of lack of employment in the rural areas. Moreover, the land near the airport of the city has been considered highly valued in terms of its perceived business opportunity, which in turn, has intensified the use of land over the past decades. This trend of rural-urban migration and the use of land have caused shrinking of precious agricultural land, as the growing population has been instrumental in bringing about land use change in Imphal. Wetland was the first target for human activities and later on after the exhaustion of wetland, the agricultural land in the city came under encroachment for land use. Using GIS techniques, the authors tried to identify as to how landuse/landcover change took place in Imphal over the years. The study finds that transformation of land to built-up areas has

been taking place in the city of Manipur at an alarming rate. Most of the built-up areas have been used for the construction of educational buildings, commercial establishments and residential colonies, causing rapid shrink of agricultural land. The authors suggest that a balanced and inclusive policy for urban development and land use are immediately required for ensuring better future and sustainable development of Imphal.

In their joint article titled *An Inter-District Efficiency Measurement of RCH Programme Using Data Envelopment Analysis in Madhya Pradesh, India* by Kalyan Sundar Som and Professor R. P. Mishra assesses the impact of Reproductive Child Health (RCH) programme in terms of its efficiency in the districts of Madhya Pradesh, and makes recommendations for those districts which still lag behind because of technical inefficiency of the programme. For this, using Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) method, the authors measured and analysed the degree of technical efficiency of the RCH programme confirming its failure in the districts of Madhya Pradesh. According to the findings of the study, RCH programme has been found technically and scale-wise inefficient in more than 64% of the districts of the state, where more resources are used than actually needed. The authors identified huge inefficiency in RCH programme at the district level and recommends steps to be undertaken to control wastage of resources, which would save a large amount of wastage.

The next article by Ayanika Sarkar and Biswaranjan Mistri titled *Home Environment as Strong Determinant in Academic Involvement of Female Students in Dhekia Gram Panchayat of Saltora C.D. Block, Bankura District* shows the influence of home environment on child education, especially on female students' academic involvement. The authors argue that the children accumulate knowledge through frequent interaction with the family members, though the nature of interaction between children and their family members differ from family to family. Learning from the home environment still influences the children when

they start attending a formal institution for education. The authors pointed that along with the influence of institution on children, the impact of home environment on their overall attitude needs to be understood in order to make them actual human resource. Despite different efforts undertaken by government and non-government organisations, active involvement of female students in academic activities in terms of enrolment as well as quality education are still not satisfactory at the national and the state level. In order to accomplish the research objectives, a survey was conducted on female students studying in between class VIII to XII aged between 13 to 18 years in order to understand their home environment and academic involvement. It was found that academic involvement of female students are profoundly dependent on caste and tribal based disparities as well as family type-wise differences in the study area. The study further identifies that certain factors—better economic condition, parents' level of education, fathers' occupation, parents' support for daughters' education, etc. have a positive role in the academic involvement of female students. However, constraints like mothers being exposed to domestic violence, mothers' engagement in different works outside home, engagement of mothers in day-long household chores generally prevent the female students from having proper academic involvement. Nonetheless, certain other factors like number of siblings, parents' support for economic independence, and the mobility of the daughters do not have any significant influence on the academic involvement of female students in the study area. The authors consider home environment as fundamental for the psychosocial well-being of the students, and proposes one-stop family counseling cell for those who are exposed to domestic violence or abuses. Moreover, the study suggested for making provisions of counseling facilities through school to those students who face maladjustment within the family members or are frequently subjected to confront abusive family environment. The authors urge to launch a help cell at Gram Panchayat so that the

adolescent girl students can have an opportunity to talk freely about their problems they experience at their household level.

The penultimate content of this issue is a book review by Dr. Kanchana Lanzet. Dr Lanzet has reviewed the second novel of Arundhati Roy, titled *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* published by Penguin Random House in 2017. Roy is an internationally well-known writer for her extraordinary ability to portray the picture of wretched and besieged life of those who fight injustices, mostly state-imposed ideology that alienates them from the rest and motivates them to fight out. She is literally unconventional and intolerably harsh, ready to whip up the ruling class and the dominant values embedded in the society that causes inhuman situation for the underprivileged, minority and the voiceless. Thus, her writing attracts the readers, forces them ponder over and make them struggle to accept the logics presented there. *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is no different, which shows the struggle of a third sex— who is not only a minority by gender but also stigmatised, teased and laughable for many at her very sight, and also a minority by religion which has in fact caused her confront a tougher fight for survival. Roy unbelievably presents her heroes and heroines as tortured, abused and heartbroken because of so-called social values as well as state-sponsored fascism and brutality in her novel. However, Roy does not let her characters succumb to this extremely hostile situation; rather they are made to raise voice against all odds, create hopes and dreams, love and compassion—and that is how a paradise is being built up. Dr. Lanzet has critically reviewed the novel that produces some relevant arguments, which may force the readers to revisit the novel as such. Both the novel and its review are academically important as they help build perspectives for the readers who can re-examine and reflect on the current society with a critical mind. Nevertheless, there are arguments and counter arguments presented in the novel as well as review sometimes may force the readers to describe them as exaggerated, and at times irrelevant. I think the

review is interesting! The novel— *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* is definitely worth reading, and I feel the price of the novel is reasonable.

The last content as usual is *Publication Watch*, which contains information of some of the latest but free/open access publications.

Further Reading

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