

Tourist Development Dilemmas in Mizoram: A Case of ILR

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Abstract

At the outset, the scheme of tourist promotion that had been conceived and initiated in the state of Mizoram has been quite potential as it benefits the local population more than the tourists that visit from within and without the Northeast India (NEI). Various studies have already indicated the prospects of boosting the state economy through promoting the eco-tourism, for instance. The eco-tourism has got twin objectives to be fulfilled. Not only that the state can have natural ecological balance ensured but also eco-tourist potential be enhanced. In consequence, the economic development of the state and its population could be achieved at one go. While there are numerous ideas being considered for promotion of tourism, certain specific projects can be undertaken at the earliest so that the prospects of eco-tourism could be realized. This article tries to identify the issues and concerns like the ILR that impede the prospects of tourist development in the state. Also, the article is an attempt towards enlightening the tourists at home and abroad about the unexplored prospects of tourism in Mizoram.

Key words: Tourist Development, Inner Line Regulations, Mizoram Economy

Introduction

North East India (NEI) has always been faced with a multitude of problems in the context of peace, governance and development. However, it is only after the formation of separate states, some of the NEI states like the Mizoram have achieved social harmony and political peace to a large extent. Besides, the state of Mizoram has emerged as the most literate one within a decade or so in the NEI. Besides natural resources, educated manpower resources in the region are also

plenty that can be used in various developmental projects. Given its communitarian value system, the state had advanced sufficient social capital that had certainly helped in implementation of these developmental projects.

Unlike the other states in the North East Region, Mizoram offers the most peaceful location that is very conducive for making tourist trips on a regular basis. Besides, the pleasant climatic conditions will be supportive for the visitors from outside the state. Tourism is also an

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essential requirement for Mizoram through which economic resources can be generated by utilizing the gift of nature. In an industrially backward state like Mizoram, tourism has immense potential and prospects. While the local literates can earn better livelihood, the state can generate good revenue. For, the state is on record achieving the optimum literacy rate (91%) in the region. Even the women participation rate (WPR) is 26%, which is more than the national average (Government of Mizoram, 2017). In other words, not only the locale is gorgeous, but the local populace can also be very gregarious towards its prospective tourists.

As Mizoram is an underdeveloped state with having no mineral resources for industrial development, people can pay attention towards tourism, like what the people in Sikkim state did, through which the Mizoram state can generate its own financial resources. Tourism is a good source of revenue as many countries and states gained from its improvement. Besides, when it comes to tourism or tourists, it simply means more interaction and connection with outside world and it certainly requires attraction. By making easy access for foreign tourists, but not for fellow Indians and the other Indian states, tourist development may become a problem as it will create confusion among the plain people.

Tourist Potential

A hilly terrain, lush green forests, hygienic climate, rich natural resources,

as the nature bestowed on the state, provide ample prospects for developing tourism. Having had at least one attractive tourist spot each in each district, Mizoram has got many famous sites, such as, Blue Mountain (*PhawngpuiTlang*) and *MiluPuk* (Skull Cave) in Lawngtlai District, *Pukzing* cave near Marpara in the Mamit district, *Lamsialpuk* near *Farkawn* village in Champhai district, *Phulpui* grave and *Chhingpuii* memorial in Aizawl district, Buddha's image in Mualcheng village in the Lunglei district and *RihDil* inside Myanmar near *Zokhawthar* border sport in Champhai District are among the other historical sites.

Besides, there are also other tourist attraction sites such as, *Palak Lake* which is a natural lake in Saiha District, *Vantawng Water Fall* in Serchhip District, besides traditional Mizo Villages in *Falkawn*, *Hmuifang*, *Reiek* and *Aibawk* near the state capital, Aizawl city. Once these sites are further decorated and good tourist spots are created, many tourists from within the country and abroad can be attracted. Besides, there are a few major rivers in Mizoram, namely, *Chhintuipui* (*Kolodyne*), *Tlawng* (tributary of Barak), *Tuivai* (tributary of Barak), *Tuichang*, which are hilly rivers that flow down the mountains that would always present a water-fall scenario in numerous spots.

And these rivers are very fresh and clean. The *Tlawng* River is one of the longest rivers in the state. *Tlawng* has historical significance to the Mizos as the Ganges to the Hindi-belt people. The

mega Tlawng river project can be made multi-beneficial to the state. The water of these rivers can be used for manufacturing mineral water and large scale mineral water industry could be set up, so that the people would get the chance to taste the fresh and tasty water of Mizoram which is the real gift of nature. In a way, tourist promotion leads to industrial development as the other way round is also possible.

Tourism does not only mean about foreigners or about foreign countries but also about those from the other states in India, as is acceptable when Mizos also visit state like Sikkim and observe how the Sikkim's were promoting tourism. It may be unappealing for the mainlanders to explore the state and visit it too within a time frame as obtaining the legal permit may become an obstacle to boost tourism in Mizoram. Perhaps, their insecurity due to lack of confidence towards the outsiders is a big problem which makes it harder in tackling such tourist developmental scheme for the growth of living standards. Even some people believe that the making of railway from Bairabi to Sairang could become a problem for the Mizos as there will be easy connectivity that would lead to bring heavy population from the outside into the state.

Developmental issues

Historically speaking, the categorization of the Lushai Hills as the 'Excluded Area' in 1935 by the Interim government of India can be attributed for its neglected development *abinitio*. Lately,

fluidity of political situation on the eve of Independence made the local environment for any sort of development still worse. Of course, there existed diverse views amongst the tribal leaders particularly in hill areas of NEI with regard to emerging political organization of the country. Few of them were for joining the Indian Union whereas some contemplated opting for Pakistan. A third view suggested was to be part of a 'Protectorate under British crown' also prevailed. Yet, there was a fourth group that strived for 'free independent sovereign tribal state' status (Kyndiah P.R 1999). All these factors had contributed to place the area under low priority category for infrastructure development in general.

All through history, the NEI has provided an actual meeting ground of many races and tribal communities. Despite the closed international boundaries, these tribal communities continued to preserve more social, cultural, and economic affinities with their counterparts across the borders than with those of mainstream India. A significant part of agriculture production in these hills is still characterized by the practice of '*jhum*', cultivation, with extremely low productivity. Obviously, the region is comparatively poor and backward in terms of both industry and infrastructures, and most of the states including Mizoram rank poorly on India's human development index (Samir Kumar Das, 2007).

Actually, Brig. T.Sailo's ministry made a few systemic plans for building economic infrastructure in the power sectors when Mizoram was a Union Territory. Yet, most of these projects remained unimplemented by the subsequent ministries. Thus, the state is more than 50 MW short of its energy requirement. Obviously, due to absence of power, no major industrial activity was possible in the state. For over decades, the people of the Mizoram state were downhearted with the turbulence of all kinds, and are now looking for their socio-economic development. Despite its high literacy rate, fertile soil system, rich cultural heritage and a good political environment, socio-economic development in Mizoram lagged still behind. Lack of good roads, transportation, electricity, communication, industry, infrastructure and unemployment are heavily rooted which hurdles the developmental process in Mizoram.

Mizoram economy is normally marked by low per capita income, low capital formulation, inadequate infrastructure facilities, geographical isolation, communication bottlenecks, inadequate exploitation of natural resources like mineral resources, hydro power potential, forests, lack of industrial base and investment opportunities. Many villages still suffer from bad road connectivity and some rural areas have hardly had appropriate roads and thus during rainy days motor vehicles had been faced with numerous problems. Besides,

the lack of skilled manpower and trained workers, poor technical knowhow has dogged the economy of Mizoram.

Mizoram state has witnessed many obstacles and constraints for the growth of economic development. Since its geographical location was inaccessible, without having proper transportation from the Mainland India, which made it disadvantageous to connect the outside world. It eventually made her an unexplored locale by the outsiders due to bad road networks. Obviously, there are no proper industries in the state and lack of infrastructure and modern technology added to the critical conditions, which are essential for development of the state.

To establish any industry or companies whether in private or public sectors, the first significant thing is capital, but Mizoram has no sufficient capital to establish these developmental ventures in the state. Mizoram has had no potential of generating capital, without the help of capitalists from the advanced outsiders. Similarly, skilled labour is lacking in the state. As there are no sufficient skilled construction workers in the state, Mizos usually employ the outsider labourers. And, Mizoram has no mineral resources to depend on for boosting economic growth. For, there is no sufficient exploration and productivity for exporting it so as to change the prevailing condition. Above all, problems of connectivity due to regulations of free movements wherein the 'outsiders' need to have permission to enter the state have created the problems

of investment that certainly affect the economic development. In case of no such restriction, the 'outsiders' would have invested more and thereby created more job opportunities to the locals, perhaps.

ILR Complications

The British regime introduced the Inner Line Permit (ILP) in times of non-governance of hilly terrains of the NEI, and that was continued thereafter by the Independent India. Yet, its implementation was witnessed more in violation, rather than the otherwise. States like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram still enforce this practice so as to check the inflow of illegal migrants in their respective states. Incidentally, few communities in couple of other states (Meghalaya, for instance) in the region have also raised such demand in the recent times. Yet, the problem of illegal entry could not be addressed in any way. While lot of hue and cry is being witnessed on account of this politically and administratively associated issue, influx of illegal migrants continues unabated in these states.

Although the Inner Line Regulation (ILR) safeguarded the tribals in many respects it was suffered from many criticisms. Regarding the practice of ILR, this made it controversial among local people itself. From the regional perspective, the ILR works as a protector against assimilation from outsiders and it safeguarded the indigenous tribal identity from exploitation, whereas from the

national perspective, it endangers the process of national integration by encouraging regional sentiments.

Now the time has come for critically viewing the need of Inner Line Permit (ILP) for entry into the states in the NEI as well as the ban on the land ownership rights by the 'outsiders', particularly in the sixth schedule areas. Numerous decades have been passed with the experiences of having complied with the notion of stabilizing the ethnic/tribal identity and culture. As long as objective conditions sway their illegal entry into the NEI, no subjective pronouncements could be effective. As much as these outsiders need the local jobs, the NEI also needs them badly, for want of cheap labour in these states. More than the issue of legality of their entry or jobs, it is their illegal activities that could be targeted and battled out.

As the ILR prevents large scale influx of migration in the state, the local people would enjoy the opportunity to run business and secure employment. Yet, it is doubtful if it boosts economic development or can it grow faster without practicing ILR in the state. Since the ILR blocked free flow of people's movements, economic activities and establishing trade relations with outsiders had become harder. Establishing trade relations with other states and countries is obligatory to boost the local economy. When the outsiders/mainland Indians can establish business in the state with the practice of

ILR, if the ILR does not imply blocking of movements, the state economy can flourish. But as long as it controls their movements, it certainly blocks their free movements which might make it harder to make trade relations and business establishment for the others.

Despite practicing the ILR, it did not block economic activities in the state, as people can come from outside and establish the business in Mizoram. But as long as it blocked free movements of the 'outsiders' it would certainly discourage the potential entrepreneurs and capitalists to do investment and start the business enterprises in the state. Due to its remote location and backwardness, besides small population that undermined the commercial success, there is a need of protecting the interests of outsiders in establishing big business, which is possible if there was no issue of ILR. To improve the state's economy, transportation and connectivity need to be established for opening linkage and interconnection with each other.

Incidentally, in 2003, non-Indian citizens' permit to visit certain parts of India including Mizoram has been removed by the Central government to boost tourism revenues. Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order 1958 practiced for more than 50 years in Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur states has been removed by the Central government to permit free movement of foreign tourists with the exception of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan, Myanmar. The Restricted Area Permit

(RAP) has been provisionally removed in view of boosting tourism industry in these North East states as it discourages the foreign nationals to explore these isolated areas.

Back in 2007, the three opposition parties the Congress, Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP) and Mizo People's Conference (MPC) submitted a Memorandum to the Union Home Ministry on account of their opposition to lifting ILR and RAP as they believed that the government tried to lift it. But the state government had held it was considering relaxation of the ILR/RAP to boost tourism industry in Mizoram since there were big hurdles against tourists from visiting Mizoram. Hence, the RAP had been provisionally removed by the Central government, but the ILR is still in practice in the state which still makes certain obstacles for the fellow Indian citizens.

In any case, any sort of Isolationist policy like the ILR cannot make much change in economic growth as it tied to employment opportunities from the private sector. The result of isolation and less interaction with the outside can be found in the Mizo society's norms and tradition, resistance to change in society. Due to the fear of possible changes to its tradition and culture, social development had suffered. Lack of a work culture, resistance to change and negative attitude towards the external environment are considered as an attitude of scepticism (Anjan Thakur, 1998). In fact, interaction and interconnection with other people

make it easier to acquire new ideas and strategy for the growth of development economy-wise and otherwise.

Of late, different governments had initiated some projects and implemented various policies for its development in terms of socio-economic well-being of its people. Yet, the state's economy is still heavily dependent on the central funding. Of late, the state has been brought on rail map of India since 1991 by connecting Bairabi in northern foot hills of the state with Katakhal railway junction in Cachar plains. Yet, it runs for only 1.5 kilometres within the state boundary. There are now plans to extend the line nearer to the state capital, Aizawl upto Sairang by next year or so. Thanks to an airport at Lengpui in the Mamit district, the Aizawl city has also been having air connectivity to the rest of India since early 1980s. Of course, very few flights are there operating through it. These two modes of transport however facilitate movement of goods and passengers only at a limited scale. Once other modes of transportation are developed and virtual connectivity is established with the omission of ILR, then there is no looking back for the Mizos and the state of Mizoram.

Ultimately, due to emerging healthy political process, more peace and harmony is noticed nowadays in some of the North-eastern states including Mizoram. Due to the homogeneity of the Mizo society, competitive spirit is least not only in economic sphere but also in education. New ideas and environments which help

create overall development were hardly seen as a result of the disconnection from the outside world. Now the time has come for critically viewing the need of Inner Line Permit for entry into the states in the NEI as well as the ban on the land ownership rights by the 'outsiders'.

To conclude it, tourism is a good source of revenue as many states gained from its development. However, when it comes to tourism or tourists, it simply means more interaction and connection with outside world and it requires natural attraction. By making easy access for tourists, Indian or foreign, Mizoram can have edge over the other states in the NEI. But, at times the issue of Inner Line Permit (ILP) appears unattractive for the tourists to explore the state and to boost tourism in Mizoram. Several decades have been passed with the experiences of having complied with the notion of preserving the ethnic/tribal identity and culture, indeed. Yet, it is doubtful if the state comes out of the age-old dilemma of developing tourism in the days to come. It is time for the state and non-state actors to ponder over it and do the needful at the earliest.

Despite many a challenge, travelling in the state of Mizoram, unlike the other tourist spots in the mountainous regions, is painstaking and little hazardous at times, but it has its own rewards. With the development of proper infrastructure and adequate planning the tourist potential can be explored in the state. Further, completion of Kolodyne Hydro-Electric Project-II, Kolodyne Multi Model Transit

Transport Project and the *Namani Tlawng* River Project can also be other smart spots for attracting the tourists into the state. As a state that is both violence-free and pollution-free, Mizoram is the best natural destination for the tourists. Yes, it is a win-win situation for both the local youth and the tourists.

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