

MANAGING SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF SMALLNESS : THE DEVELOPMENTAL STRATEGY FOR THE SMALL INDIAN FRONTIER STATE

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THERE has been a growing appreciation of the significance of the size of countries. Since the Second World War, this is more so because a number of newly decolonized countries (or 'states') are very small. This would be evident from the size of the territory, population and resources of member states of the United Nations Organization. Not only are they underdeveloped in the urban and industrial sense, but their entire quality of life is marked by traditionalism, a particularistic social structure and neglect of exploitation of resources. This state of affairs raises various questions : What sort of autonomy can they have ? How can they provide for their increasing population ? Can they hope to maintain or even improve their standards of living ? What political forms can they develop ? What are the social consequences of smallness ?

Schumacker's small may be beautiful, but it is intriguing. How to define smallness ? Can it be in terms of the area alone ? This makes Singapore small and Bhutan large. Is it population alone ? In that case, Bhutan becomes small and Singapore large. Surely then a higher density of population cannot be indicative of the size of a country. If the criteria of area, population and density are of not much value, could it be smallness or resources ? Has it something to do with the geographical location or the ecological setting of the state ? These are some of the issues one may keep in mind while examining the implications of the smallness. However, it goes without saying, that we know intuitively that Maldivian Islands is a small state and Mexico a bigger one. Similarly, in the Indian context, Maharashtra is a bigger state, and Manipur smaller. But these statements do not take us any nearer the criteria for smallness. For that purpose, it may be rewarding to uncover the various features of smallness, geographic, demographic, political, economic and sociological.

If a small country, with its small population and limited resources, is located in the heart of the ocean, far away from any land mass, or is a land-locked territory in an inaccessible mountain region, its remoteness will be all the more accentuated. In such a situation, diffusion of ideas and technology becomes sluggish. Because of the geographical inaccessibility, communication is adversely affected and, thus, community becomes insular. Size turns out to be an unavoidable compulsion and innovation becomes financially prohibitive. In this way, remoteness perpetuates itself. That apart, in the small developing states the crude death rate is declining, while the birth rate has remained constant. This results in a ever increasing surplus population year after year, straining the already limited resources.

The smallness of countries, as political entities, may have to be measured by the yardstick of statehood. To begin with, do the small states have a feeling of 'nationhood' and 'national' unity? Do they possess an administrative structure capable of carrying out all the tasks of the normal governance effectively? Do they have enough trained manpower to man various specialized positions? Are these states financially viable? Answers to these questions are depressingly negative. Most of the small sovereign states lack nationhood and national unity; they may not have an effective administrative structure; their requirements for trained manpower is far from satisfactory; and most of these units are highly insolvent. Given the above predicament, there are only two alternatives left to them: either to federate or integrate themselves with the neighbouring political units, or accept a relatively prolonged status of clientship, of various types, to the more resourceful states. In a sense, size and autonomy are intimately interlinked. A small state, in the above trying situation, occasionally raises real or imaginary claims and counterclaims on their neighbour's territories. It is also to be kept in mind that a small state is the biggest employer of its citizens because other viable employment generating enterprises are very few.

Small states may not be able to provide scope for diverse economic specializations. In fact, some of them have specialized in the production of particular commodities. For example, Cuba and Mauritius produce sugar and their entire economy is based on their sugar industry. They are so much dependent and tied to the sugar industry that they cannot gainfully introduce other crops as economic alternatives. Their own markets are so small that if sugar is not sold to outside countries, they cannot consume it themselves. At the same time, they require a large number of consumer goods, which they cannot produce. The production of such consumer articles is not economically feasible in the absence of a skilled labour force, non-availability of raw materials, lack

of markets for their consumption and the non-existence of sophisticated standards of industrial and entrepreneurial acumen. Such modern entrepreneurial establishments are capital-intensive, and these small states, because of a propensity to consumerism, rarely accumulate dependable capital for industrial investment.

The very nature of the economy of small states leads to a lower standard of living, which may have some serious social consequences. If the state is not rich in technological skills, it attracts technologically skilled immigrants from abroad. This leads to inter-ethnic conflicts and various complex issues of adjustment. On the other hand, some of its own citizens, who manage to acquire certain specialized expertise, cannot be utilized because of the lack of complex economic and industrial diversification. This situation leads to what is commonly known as the brain drain to the technologically developed countries, from the underdeveloped ones. Thus, these countries are denied the services of their most talented members. Their social world is small; their mental horizon is limited; and their outlook to life and universe is past-oriented and tradition bound. Their society is particularistic and what Reisman termed as tradition-directed (Reisman, D. et al 1958). The particularistic population of the small states face conflicts at various levels, such as between narrow private loyalty and impersonal allegiances, or personal roles of kinship and public role of office. By and large, primordial ties are preferred to class associations and intellectual convictions.

Benedict Burton (Burton, B; 1967 : 45-46) identifies three distinct approaches to the study of small social phenomena. First, the most significant approach to the study of small groups as parts of a larger social set-up is known, among sociologists, as face-to-face groups or primary groups. Various scholars have examined interests, types and associational features of a small segment of a particular society. However, whether the territorial state is small or large, the general features of primary and face-to-face groups remain the same everywhere. Thus, this approach may not be of much help to us.

Secondly, social anthropologists have addressed themselves to small-scale societies or what is known as primitive societies. Such primitive tribal societies as the Birhor of Bihar, are smaller in comparison to the Chinese or the Hindu and may possibly be identified at two levels. While some of the small-scale societies are composed of a series of primary groups, there are others, which have a complex organization of a number of small primary groups in an interlocked large population. Tikopia, Trobriands are examples of the former, and Nuer, Tiv, Tallensi, Naga and Mizo may be identified as the latter.

Thirdly, the village, peasant or folk communities are perceived by anthropologists and sociologists as distinct from large-scale urban-industrial complex societies. Robert Redfield advanced the criteria of relative smallness, homogeneity, self-sufficiency and exclusiveness for folk society against an urban backdrop (Redfield, R. 1955:4). A. L. Kroeber identified folk (or peasant) society as 'part society' (Kroeber, A. L., 1948:284). Taking small-scale societies as the major intellectual concern, Robert Redfield visualized about half a dozen approaches to the study of the 'little community' (Redfield, R. 1955). Extending Redfield and Kroeber's tradition to the Indian Villages, a number of studies were made in the 1950's (Dube, S. C. 1954; Marriott, M. 1954). In course of time, these village studies were analysed in terms of larger Indian social structures.

All the three above approaches may contribute in some respects to the uncovering of the phenomenon or the small state. However, to us, the 'holistic' approach of the sociologists and social anthropologists appears to be the most rewarding. The two disciplines have a tradition of emphasizing the organic or functional relations between parts and wholes rather than an atomistic approach to the study of the culture of a people. This approach argues, that it is useful in some instances to think of societies as constituting social systems, with the implication that in studying the whole in this manner one is paying due regard to both the parts and the relationship, between them. Such an approach is a structural approach and one of its best examples may be found in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, 1952.

Another illustration may be cited from Robert Redfield's *Little Community* (Redfield, R. 1955: 9; 111; 156), which came to be known as a classic model of an empirical and conceptual research. While the particularistic analysis of the tribal bands, families, gangs or small social segments are important, a generalized and an holistic totality of the small state is equally desirable. And only then shall we be able to uncover the uniqueness of the small states. With the above approaches at hand, certain problems are to be tackled: what are the attributes of smallness? With the attributes identified, what are the consequences, of smallness? Do these attributes and consequences, typical of the small states, produce certain types of dilemma unique to these states?

We have a hunch, that in small states intensity of relations should be at a different level from that of the large-scale societies. By that we mean a closer face-to-face relationship may have preponderance. Nearly every social relationship may serve a set of varied interests, necessitating individuals to play a number of roles simultaneously. A number of

relationships may be unique to themselves and relevant only to the societies in question. Accordingly, people have limited choices and few alternatives for a meaningful role performance. In the above situation, it becomes rather difficult to maintain anonymity.

At the macro-level, these societies are weak and vulnerable to outside pressures. As a consequence, in this ascriptive social milieu, status is largely dependent on birth. There is a very small elite group, whose social base is limited. There are little chances for specialization of roles. Personal failure is invariably deemed as evil intentions of 'others' or inauspicious intervention of the non-human supernatural world. In such a situation, people have little control over their destiny and they play no significant role in shaping the course of their future. All these lead to various sets of dilemma : Impartial and objective role vis-a-vis social alliance, such as kinship; personal loyalties and special traditional role, vis-a-vis technological expertise; membership of the group, kin, caste, and sub-tribe, vis-a-vis positions in the state administrative machinery.

We feel this is the opportune time to focus on the national exercise in identifying, analysing and evaluating the exigencies of social change, economic growth and political implications of small (frontier) states in India. The Indian Union consists of 31 political-administrative units (22 States and 9 Union Territories. In our present discussion all the 31 units will be referred as the 'States' irrespective of their being 'states' or 'union territories'). Among these, the first six large-size states contribute to more than fifty per cent of the total area as well as the total population of the Indian Union. On the other hand, fifteen small units (states) together make up only 8.9 per cent of the area and about 5.5 per cent of the Indian population. In case we consider the size of the population along with smallness in territory, we get a list of 17 states which are small. To this, if we associate the extent of these units' dependence on the Central Government's financial support, we shall find that Goa, Pondicherry, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Delhi are to be excluded from the list. In case we examine the cultural distinctiveness of the states, (i.e. presence of at least one-third population belonging to the scheduled tribe/caste), we come across only some states which are small in territory, population, resources, and have particularistic demographic characteristics. Incidentally, these are the states which are geographically in-accessible, because of their location on the Indian frontiers. They may be identified as Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh, Lakshadweep-Minicoy and Amindivi Islands, Mizoram, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim (Table 1).

Table 1

Table showing population, area and ethnicity in the small states :

Unit/ State	Area in Sq. Kms.	Total popu- lation	Density of popu- lation	Percentage of Scheduled Tribes
1	2	3	4	5
1. Andaman & Nicobar Islands	8,293	115,133	14	15.72
2. Arunachal Pradesh	85,573	4,675,117	6	79.02
3. Lakshadweep	32	31,810	994	92.86
4. Manipur	22,356	1,072,753	48	31.18
5. Meghalaya	22,489	1,011,199	45	80.48
6. Mizoram	21,087	332,390	16	94.26
7. Nagaland	16,527	516,449	31	88.61
8. Sikkim	7,299	208,843	29	38.00
9. Tripura	10,477	1,556,342	149	28.95

These states may be classified in two groups : the six states from among the members of the Northeast Council and their neighbour, Sikkim, all located on the distant northeastern international frontiers and in geographically in-accessible mountainous region; and the two island states scattered on the expanse of the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea, posing strategic challenges of their own.

It is instructive to examine the issues related to the development of these states in terms of the (Table 2) : (i) Development potentials : Col. 4 : forests; Col. 6 : area not available for cultivation, thereby indicating that the rest is available for cultivation; (ii) Development achievements : col. 2 : number of towns; col. 5 : cropped areas : cols. 7 & 8 : roads; col. 9 : small-scale industries; (iii) Some consequences of development : cols. 1 & 3 : urban population : cols. 10 & 11 : number of government employees.

Table 2
Indicators of Development in the small states

Sl. No.	Urbanization		Forest	Agriculture		Roads	Small scale industries	Govt. Empl.- yee population	Total		
	Urban population	No. of Towns		Sch. Tribe population by towns	Crop- ped area					Not avail- able for culti- vation	Govt.Emplo- yee/Total population
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Andaman & Nicobar Islands	22.77		na	76.6	(6)	(5)	(7)	(8)	Negli- gible	Govt.Emplo- yee/Total population 38.52	Gazetted/ Non- gazetted 15
2. Arunachal Pradesh	3.70	4	20.00	61.7	2.30%	Negli- gible	5.6	0.02	.004		
3. Lacadive & Minicoy Islands	Nil (4)	None	na	None					Negli- gible		
4. Mizoram	11.36	2	92.71	na	3.93%	25%	6.8	4.05	.1	na	na
5. Nagaland	9.95	3	39.98 (3)	18.8	6.29%	70%	35.7	9.34	.007	19.666	36
6. Meghalaya	14.55	3	60.85 (1)	33.7	8.09%	10%	24.0	6.59	.01	75.99	21
7. Manipur	13.19	8	5.36	26.9	7.32%	less than half	39.0	8.04	.06	46.33	37
8. Tripura	10.45	8	4.80 (2)	60.4	39.96%	Negli- gible	36.2	2.48	.02	74.81	35
9. Sikkim	9.37	7	na								
10. All India	19.91		1.18 (10)	23.30	54.24%	13%	34.4	2.06	0.5		

Notes for Table No. 2 :

1. High because of inclusion of Tura and Jowai.
Shillong has only 41 per cent.

Jowai	=	86.89
Tura	=	54.60
 2. Represent Agartala the State Headquarters;
— In other towns it is negligible.
— In Agartala the concentration is in the Municipal Area (MA), and very negligible is the out-growth (OG).
 3.

Dimapur	=	13.04 per cent	These towns are arranged in order of their decreasing commercial importance. The more the commercial importance lesser the percentage of scheduled tribe population.
Kohima	=	43.64 per cent	
Mokokchung	=	32.00 per cent	
 4. Lakshadwip and Minicoy Island has no town, hence 100 per cent rural population.
 5. Figures relating to area not available for cultivation, i.e. non-agricultural use and barren land, are approximate. Exact figures are not available, as in many states no proper survey has been made. Moreover, these percentages are of the "reporting area", which, in some cases, is less than the total geographical area of the state. The trend indicated by the figures, however, are sufficiently suggestive of the broad pattern, and reliable to a fair degree.
 6. These figures are percentages of the reported area as above.
 7.
 - i) Col. 7 = roads in Km. per 100 sq. km. area.
 - ii) Col. 8 = roads in Km. per 1,100 population.
 - iii) Unsurfaced road length as percentage of total roads is very revealing.

Arunachal Pradesh	=	63.37 per cent
Mizoram	=	43.70 per cent
Nagaland	=	80.75 per cent
Meghalaya	=	87.14 per cent
Manipur	=	85.84 per cent
Tripura	=	72.86 per cent
All India	=	41.77 per cent
- The reason for this high score could not be ascertained, an necessary figures on various types of towns were not available. This, however, needs a deeper probe.
8. The figure for Assam (182.40) is very revealing, when read along with the figures from the other six states compared.
 9. Indicates percentage of urban population of 'Scheduled tribes' to total urban population. This does not exactly compare with figures indicated against the name of each state—as the all-India figure does not include figures from towns but for urban areas. Definitions may differ.

In this context it has to be noted that apart from being located in geographically inaccessible areas, most of these states are of crucial strategic significance, because of their location on international frontiers with China, Bhutan, Burma and Bangladesh. Five of these states, i.e. Arunachal Pradesh, Lakshadweep, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram are predominantly tribal states, while nearly one-third of the population of Manipur, Tripura and Sikkim belong to scheduled tribes. There are also scheduled castes inhabiting these states.

If we consider the consequences of small size on development potential the contour of underdevelopment is clearly exposed. Apart from the various forms of natural resources, such as minerals, hydel-energy, etc., which have not been examined here, two significant potential—forests and agriculture (incidentally both in the primary sector of production)—appear to be bountiful in these states. Nagaland, Manipur and Meghalaya, however, are somewhat deficient in forest resources. But paddy grown in Manipur valley and potato produced in Meghalaya do compensate this loss to a great extent.

It is instructive to note that in Nagaland and Meghalaya there has been no effort to diversify and expand economic activities, even agriculture. As a result, there is large-scale deforestation. This adverse effect of small size-absence of economic diversification and lack of territorial mobility-need special attention. Except Nagaland, all the other states have enough area available for cultivation, if they decide to expand agrarian activities.

With the exception of Tripura, all these states are agriculturally backward. Similarly, the extension of roadways reflects the state of economic development. The figures relating to this, however, (Table 2: col. 7 & 8) appear misleading, as they include roads made primarily for defence purposes on the international frontiers. Undulating topography prevents water and rail transportation. The capitals of many of these states are not connected even by the most primitive air services. The other-indicator used to determine economic development is the existence of small-scale industries. The figures available for this are suggestive of a lower rate of economic development in all the states, except Manipur and Mizoram. These two states have the averages which are above the all-India figure. Small-scale industries too do not correctly reflect the level of actual economic development. These industries are in the 'unorganized sector', left to the traditional domestic units of production, more as a part of the traditional way of life than as economic enterprises.

The consequences of this economic backwardness and low development performance of these states is reflected in the low percentage of urban population. The Andaman Islands are the only exception, where the capital, Port Blair, accounts for 22.77 per cent of the population. This is because there is little potential for populating the other small constituent islands. If one examines the social composition of each town in the different states under review, it may be found that in the capital and commercial towns, members of the local community (tribals) are less in number than the non-locals (non-tribals). Most of the non-local and non-tribal population in these towns are the salaried employees of the State Governments, the Central Government or corporate bodies, or are traders. One of the consequences of this is reflected in the ratio of the total administrative employees to the total population. It is high in these states, because the only easy option open for the 'local' is to find employment in their 'own governments' (administration).

The above study of the economic performance of small states provides the basis for analysing the wider implications of territorial size and the contingent constraints on the overall development potentialities. The uniqueness of size may be understood if we view (i) the given sets of distinguishing features and (ii) the development efforts being made. Among the given sets of distinguishing features, the following may be examined :

- i) **Ecological** : All the nine small states have a distinctive geographical location, which imposes serious constraints on communication with their neighbours in the area, and also with the other parts of the country. The montane and marine terrains necessitate special technological innovations to cope with the topographical specificities of agricultural, industrial and infrastructural developments.
- ii) **Ethnic** : This refers to the cultural insularity prevalent among the small states. These states are the homes of the demographically small tribal groups. Lack of exposure to the larger 'national' context inbreeds various sets of psychological and political apprehensions among them. Ecological inaccessibility perpetuates a type of self-fulfilling prophecy of socio-economic exclusiveness. In this way, we find the ethnic groups taking pains to maintain their specific cultural boundaries within territorial limits of the state.

Some of these communities have their own dialects written in the Roman script, for a century now. However, they have a microcosm of 'literati'. Whatever is being written in their dialects/languages is either sacred literature or romantic verse, both, in a way, distant from

the hard realities of life. Imaginative and creative literature, as a reflection of social experience, is yet to emerge. Accordingly, local literature fails to provide communication and leadership in the dissemination of ideas, knowledge, and other abstract concepts. Thus, even their literature contributes to their ethnic distinctiveness, instead of universalizing their particular genius.

iii) **Economic** : Ecological and ethnic factors determine the economic conditions, experiences of achievements and entrepreneurial capability of the small states in a very specific manner. 'Lack of entrepreneurship' and the absence of 'Industrial culture' has resulted in the invasion by 'non-locals' in trade, commerce and secondary sector activities. Thus, the local community is left with the age-old subsistence economy, based on 'slash-and-burn' type of rotational cultivation or food gathering.

iv) **Political Insularity** : Apart from geographical inaccessibility, social uniqueness and economic underdevelopment, extensive conversion to Christianity has conspicuously moulded their cultural-historical distinctiveness. This cultural complex around Christianity has been able to provide a new identity to a sizeable population of these small states. This 'tribal Christian' identity is being used as a political idiom in relation to Indian national politics.

Development efforts are being made at various levels to cope with the problems of these states. They can be identified as follows : (i) *State Development Programmes* : These are cottage industries, agro-industries, family welfare programmes, etc.; (ii) *Regional Development Programmes* : These include the various coordinational activities undertaken by the agencies such as the Northeast Council for the northeastern states; (iii) *National Development Programmes* : Among them mention may be made of location of heavy industrial units, transport and communication networks, and location of energy generating units; (iv) *Defence Activities* : The presence of the armed personnel on the sensitive frontiers requires a dependable transport and communication system.

The Isolated frontier communities rarely require the above amenities for their immediate benefits. Moreover, the presence of armed personnel, within the neighbourhood of the ethnic groups, distorts the logical local priorities crucial to the life of the community. Many a time, it adversely affects the local consumer economy. Notwithstanding the above, it goes without saying that defence activities provide one of the few significant infrastructural efforts for these otherwise neglected areas.

The analytical framework and a proper identification of the relevant problems of the small Indian frontier states may be considered under the following terms : (i) the implications of the smallness on the development of each of the states in terms of their resources; (ii) the effect of the various consequential characteristics, as evidenced by the overall performance of each state, on the re-inforcement of the factors identified as impediments to development due to smallness; (iii) implications of their size on their neighbouring states in terms of the regional perspective and on the nature of their expectations from the Centre; (iv) implications of their size on the social context, as unique and small isolated marginal people; (v) the problems of manpower planning—especially when, the small states have been 'attractive for in-migration', but have not shown an appreciable extent of 'out-migration'; and (vi) to uncover the facets of the underdevelopment of resources and economic colonization by external exploiters.

To sum up, the analysis of the developmental strategy in small states, whether they are small sovereign states or small Indian administrative units, is fascinating in various ways. They do not appear to have a good enough social base for a stable politico-administrative set-up. That may be one of the reasons for frequent change in the governments in these small states. Their cultural distinctiveness and developmental requirements pose a problem of choice, between a particularistic ethnic-centered political culture and the desired universal economic progress. They are not in a hurry to make this choice and, thus, the preservation of traditions and a desire for modernity remain live issues. Meanwhile, a narrow middle class elite has emerged as wielders of power. Such assertive elite groups have been raising various issues of economic exploitation, ethnic conflict and political dominance by 'outsiders', while they themselves are equal partners in this exploitative unequal and discriminating system.

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