

Chapter 5

Bridging the Divide: An Anthropological Analysis of Development, Economic Inequality, and the Systemic Marginalization of the Koch Rajbongshi Tribe

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ABSTRACT

This chapter provides the framework for critically examining development and economic inequality as cultural marginalization across the globe and in grassroots experiences. Taking the Koch Rajbongshi tribe as a case of systematic oversight, it analyzes the exclusion of indigenous communities by dominant growth paradigms. Using ethnographic accounts, policy reports and theoretical contributions, including (but not limited to) recent work by Sen, Piketty and Fraser, this chapter contends that development needs to articulate social justice, cultural identity and historical recognition alongside its existing GDP-influenced neo-economic character. It compares effective models of literacy-led equity, like those of Kerala and

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Mizoram, with ongoing exclusion because of bureaucratic inertia. Primary insight and real-time development make the case for a recognition and redistribution-based people-centred development model much stronger.

INTRODUCTION

The Economic Gap is among the most critical and persistent global challenges. It sets out the global and regional human condition, the poor and rich, the unequal, the perpetrators and victims, and the excluded. Historically, development projects have been touted as an instrument of poverty alleviation and economic development, but in practice, they often generate unequal effects that favour specific constituencies while marginalizing others. Economic anthropology offers a critical lens on these complications by uncovering how financial systems are culturally and historically patterned and structurally sustained. This anthropological lens enables us to look past aggregate inequality statistics and consider the lived experiences of those affected by development policies and economic reconfiguration. This report by UNDESA (2023) explores the economic and social implications of the ageing of the human population, providing recommendations to create equitable, inclusive societies for people of all ages.

In most cases, development is followed by a tag of modernization, infrastructure development, and lifestyle development. However, anthropological research has consistently argued that development interventions, mainly if top-down or created without the participation of the local community, will only exacerbate social hierarchies. Such interventions can be directed toward the urban elite, foreign corporations, or the politically privileged at the expense of rural inhabitants who possess indigenous knowledge systems or communal access to resources (Ferguson, 1994; Scott, 1998). So, development is a double-edged sword – sure, it might create wealth and progress in the positive realms, but it is also reproducing or exacerbating inequalities in the negative ones.

Since the distant past, anthropologists have been concerned about “how wealth, power, and resources are distributed in society” (Lavenda & Schultz, 2015, p. 27). Subfields and Related Disciplines Building on

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