Consolidating the Dispersed and Marginalized: Village Regrouping Schemes the Puroiks in Arunachal Pradesh.

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Abstract

Development of rural areas and particularly, the marginalized groups has been a pivotal area of priorities at par with nation building, economic growth and social progress among all the nations. However, several decades of planned development have revealed that the progress achieved in tribal areas has fallen short of expectations and its impact remained largely confined to the macro level, yielding limited improvement in the socio-economic conditions of tribal populations. Hence, the paper is an attempt to examine the impacts of the government initiatives on historically marginalized community of Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords:**Marginalization, Puroiks, governmental initiatives, tribal community, sustainability**

The concern for evolving a framework for integrated growth and social justice to bring economic empowerment and social transformation has been the primary reason of special attention. Development of rural areas and particularly, the marginalized groups has been a pivotal area of priorities at par with nation building, economic growth and social progress among the Afro-Asian countries since the attainment of their political independence.[1]With the majority of population in rural areas, government of these newly independent states gave priority to the development and overall upliftment of the poor. Studies examining the relationship between tribal communities and socio-economic development in India during the various Plan periods have emerged as a significant field of academic inquiry. Under British rule, a policy of "tribal isolation" was pursued, whereby tribal regions were administered in a minimal and detached manner, with negligible emphasis on developmental initiatives. Consequently, these areas remained markedly underdeveloped and continued to lag behind well into the post-independence era. Development has been a concern of special attention around the globe since several decades. One of the foremost priorities of the national government in the post-independence period has been to facilitate meaningful socio-economic transformation among tribal communities, with the objective of ensuring their overall welfare and advancement.

However, several decades of planned development have revealed that the progress achieved in tribal areas has fallen short of expectations. Although successive governments have introduced numerous initiatives aimed at improving the living and working conditions of the people, the empirical reality

[1]Modi, K., *Panchayati Raj- Local governance and Rural Development in Tribal society of India*. Serials Publications Pvt.Ltd, New Delhi, 2003.,p.2

indicates that tribal communities, by and large, have not been able to benefit substantially from the socio-economic developments taking place in the country. In view of these considerations, the tribal development strategy adopted in the earlier plan periods was substantially revised at the commencement of the Fifth Five-Year Plan. The revised approach sought to reduce the developmental disparities between tribal and non-tribal regions, enhance the living standards of tribal communities, and promote their broader social and cultural integration into the national mainstream. Although this policy shift resulted in an increased allocation of financial resources for tribal development, its impact remained largely confined to the macro level, yielding limited improvement in the socio-economic conditions of tribal populations. Consequently, significant gaps persisted at the micro level, underscoring the need for more targeted and context-specific interventions to achieve meaningful economic development.[2]Efforts have been undertaken to examine the role of the government, particularly the State Government of Arunachal Pradesh in facilitating the socio-economic upliftment of the Puroik community.

While the broad framework of socio-economic transformations initiatives in the state is designed to benefit all tribal groups in a largely uniform manner, the Puroik community has received special policy attention owing to its historical marginalization and distinct socio-cultural vulnerabilities. Efforts to uplift the Puroik community have been undertaken since the 1970s. Predominantly inhabiting the remote and inaccessible hill regions of East Kameng, the Puroiks have long lived in scattered settlements, often consisting of only one household per village, which has severely limited their access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.Over time, however, increased contact with the neighbouring Nyishi and Miji community resulted in a deeply unequal relationship.[3]Through gradual economic dependency and social control, many Puroiks were reduced to conditions resembling to bonded labour or servitude, lacking land ownership and autonomy.Until recent decades, they remained under the dominance of Nyishi and Miji groups, with little control over their own agricultural land or livelihoods.Extent of exploitation is such that even centrally sponsored schemes like MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Development Employment Guarantee Scheme Act), where coercion of Puroik men to work on behalf of their masters' families is common. Often media reports also show horrifying reality of sale of Puroik children, women forced into marriages and men subjected to forced labour.In such a context, it becomes imperative for the state and its institutional apparatus to intervene with a firm and unequivocal commitment, grounded in both

[2] Behera, M.C. (1994). *Planning & Socio-Economic Development of the Tribals*. CommonwealthPublishers, New Delhi.p.2.
[3] Thakur.A. K(2003), "*Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*", Mittal Publications, New Delhi, p.224.

legal authority and political resolve, to dismantle the entrenched structures of exploitation affecting the Puroik community. The persistence of asymmetrical power relations between the Puroiks and their neighboring tribes often manifested through economic dependency, indebtedness, and social subordination, necessitates not merely passive policy articulation but proactive and sustained enforcement of protective measures.

A robust state response must therefore combine stringent implementation of existing legal frameworks with the introduction of targeted welfare and rehabilitation policies. This includes ensuring the effective enforcement of anti-bonded labour laws, securing land rights, and facilitating access to education, healthcare, and livelihood opportunities. Equally important is the role of administrative vigilance at the local level, where officials must actively monitor and address instances of coercion, exploitation, or informal servitude that may persist under customary practices. Moreover, political will is central to this process. Without a clear and sustained commitment from the leadership, even well-designed policies risk remains ineffective. The state must signal zero tolerance towards exploitative practices, while simultaneously engaging with community leaders and civil society to foster a transition towards more equitable social relations. In this regard, a calibrated approach that combines coercive legal measures with participatory development initiatives can help dismantle exploitative systems while promoting the long-term empowerment and integration of the Puroik community into mainstream socio-economic frameworks. The objective of the intervention is to assess whether the schemes designed for this community are effectively reaching and benefiting the intended recipients at the grassroots level.

THE VILLAGE REGROUPING SCHEMES.

Among the earliest initiatives was the Village Regrouping Scheme, through which dispersed Puroik households, previously interspersed among the settlements of neighboring communities, were consolidated into larger, more cohesive village units. This regrouping process followed the formal emancipation of the Puroik people and the payment of compensation, marking an important step toward improving their socio-economic conditions and facilitating targeted developmental interventions.

These efforts aimed to resettle scattered Puroik families into identifiable villages to facilitate development interventions. Various administrative circles, such as Chayantajo, Khenewa, Bameng, Sawa and Lada, implemented schemes that included land reclamation grants, housing assistance,

distribution of agricultural tools, livestock support, weaving materials, and the construction of basic infrastructure such as porter tracks and primary schools.

Despite these commendable efforts, it is important to acknowledge that since the late 1970s, only a limited number of model villages have been established under the regrouping scheme. These include Sangchu Sullung, Poube Sullung, Rawa Sullung, Yakli Sullung, and Laching Sullung, all of which have experienced sustained developmental progress.[4]

Among the regrouped villages Rawa Sulung under Khenewa Administrative circle is the most populous Puroik village in the district.[5]Nissangjang, situated under Lada Circle (now referred to as Nedo) in Bichom district, comprised five villages: Dongko, Walling, Wagann, Plong, and Sakung. However, it has been documented that residents of Dongko and walling later returned to their original settlements.[6]Nevertheless, while some communities have successfully transitioned into more stable settlement patterns, many others continue to exist under conditions marked by marginalization and limited access to essential services. This disparity highlights the pressing need for a more inclusive and equitable development approach. It calls for renewed institutional commitment and proactive intervention to ensure that the benefits of such schemes effectively reach all intended beneficiaries, thereby mitigating persistent inequalities and fostering broader socio-economic advancement among the Puroik community.

Under the village regrouping schemes under Chayantajo Administrative circle 45 numbers of families were regrouped in Sangchu and Yakli village with Rupees five hundred for reclamation of land in 1978. Another 32 families in 1979 in Laching Village with rupees two thousand five hundred for reclamation of land and construction of OB type house was granted. By 1980, the total household regrouped under the Village regrouping scheme to consolidate the dispersed puroik households reached 460 household. The schemes under the village regrouping also provided for distribution of CGI sheets, cash for settlements and constructions of house, agricultural implements such as spade, axe, coloured yarn, etc, with establishment of Lower Primary School in many regrouped villages.This indicates a significant government effort aim at integrating and stabilising the livelihood of the puroik population during the late 70s and early 80s. From 1981 to 1989, a total of 276 household were resettled in East Kameng and Lower Subansiri district with financial allocation of Rupees 975,000.00 aimed at sedentaristion, economic stabilization and social integrations of the puroik community at the

[4]Prem Taba, 'Emancipation and Identity Formation: The Puroik Experience in Arunachal Pradesh', *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* (IJFMR), Vol 5, Issue 5, September-October 2023, pp-2582-2160.
[5] *Ibid*.p.7.
[6] *Ibid*.p.9.

rate of Rupees four thousand and two thousand five hundred per family based on considerations of geographical challenges and administrative prioritisation. The increasing financial commitment and the consistent raise in per family assistance demonstrates the governments progressive approach towards ensuring stability, livelihood security and integration of the puroiks community into mainstream socio economic framework of the state.

However, it has been observed that these measures were fragmented, underfunded, and often insufficient, with several initiatives failing due to lack of follow-up actions, ecological constraints, or poor adaptation to local realities.The Puroik community has historically led a semi-nomadic existence, with their social position deeply entangled in hierarchical relations with dominant masters. Government-led rehabilitation initiatives have largely failed, primarily due to the entrenched perception of Sulungs as socially inferior. Although formally emancipated and recognized as free citizens, they continue to face economic exploitation and social contempt from their former masters. Moreover, state welfare schemes intended to benefit the Puroiks are frequently undermined—either through direct interference by the masters or through the beneficiaries' fear of reprisal. Consequently, meaningful improvement in the Puroiks' condition requires carefully designed interventions that minimize conflict with entrenched hierarchies while safeguarding the community's autonomy and dignity.[7]

Thus, a Ministerial Committee was constituted in 1990 in the state planning Board with the following members to review the success and access the welfare schemes of the state government towards the upliftment of Puroiks which comprised of following members:

a.	Minister (Planning)	Chairman
b.	Minister (Power)	Member
c.	Minister (AH & Vety)	Member.
d.	Minister (Rehabilitation& Settlement)	Member
e.	Shri Juli Chije	Member from Puroik community.
f.	Secretary (Rehabilitation & Settlement)	Member

The committee undertook field visits and consultations to assess the effectiveness of past schemes. Its findings reaffirmed that the Puroiks remained the most backward and downtrodden tribe in the state, despite official recognition as a distinct community only after 1976. While some progress had been made in discouraging overt domination by neighbouring tribes through local self-governing

[7]Prem Taba, 'Emancipation and Identity Formation: The Puroik Experience in Arunachal Pradesh', *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* (IJFMR), Vol 5, Issue 5, September-October 2023, pp-2582-2160.

institutions, psychological subservience and socio-economic dependency persisted.[8]In recent decades, the relationship between the Puroik community and their former masters has undergone a significant transformation, shaped by a range of historical and administrative factors. One of the key influences in this transition was the implementation of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945, which introduced a formal system of governance and dispute resolution in the region. The induction of official judicial functionaries, such as Political Officers, Kotokis, and Gaon Buras, played a crucial role in maintaining law and order at the village level. These intermediaries not only facilitated communication between the state and local communities but also contributed to the gradual restructuring of traditional power relations. Notably, Kotokis and Gaon Buras continue to hold a pivotal position in adjudicating disputes, particularly those rooted in indigenous customary laws, thereby reflecting a unique synthesis of formal administration and traditional governance practices.[9]These institutional agents have, over time, played a decisive role in curbing and delegitimizing the practice of slavery in Arunachal Pradesh, particularly in relation to the Puroik community. Through the enforcement of administrative regulations, mediation of disputes, and the promotion of legal awareness at the grassroots level, they have contributed to the gradual erosion of coercive and hierarchical labour relations. Their sustained engagement has not only discouraged the continuation of such exploitative practices but has also facilitated a transition towards more regulated and equitable social arrangements within the region.Health services had expanded in coverage, but traditional beliefs still limited their utilisation. Agricultural practices largely remained subsistence-based, with limited adoption of modern methods. The report concluded that discontinuation of earmarked funds during the 1990–91 planning period severely stalled resettlement efforts, further exacerbating the community's vulnerability.[10]

The state-led village regrouping and rehabilitation initiatives were implemented in the Chayantajo and Khenewa administrative circles of Arunachal Pradesh between the mid-1970s and early 1980s. These interventions, marked by renewed administrative focus and intensity, primarily targeted the Puroik communities.Under the village re-grouping programme, the villages of Sangchu, Yakli, and Laching were identified for reorganization. In 1975, re-grouping was initiated at Old Dache village, which was renamed Sangchu regrouping village. Forty-five Puroik families were resettled there, and government assistance followed in subsequent years. From 1978, families received financial support of ₹500 each for land reclamation. In 1979, additional aid was extended, including ₹300 per family for collecting

[8] A.K Thakur, "Slavery *in Arunachal Pradesh*" Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2003.p.225.
[9] Prem Taba, *Media Representation and Accessibility of the Puroiks*, Shree Publishers &Distributors New Delhi, 2025. p.145.
[10]Thakur. 2003, p.226.

house-building materials, ₹900 for the purchase of corrugated iron (CI) sheets, and ₹1,100 for the construction of OB-type residential houses.A similar scheme was undertaken at Laching regrouping village in 1979, benefiting 32 families. During that year, a total sum of ₹80,000 was allocated for land reclamation and the construction of OB-type houses, calculated at ₹2,500 per family.Yakli emerged as another regrouping village under the Chayantajo Administrative Circle. In 1976, 35 families were resettled there and provided ₹2,500 per family for land reclamation and house construction. Approximately four hectares of land were reclaimed in 1976, with an additional acre reclaimed in 1979. Supplementary livelihood interventions were introduced under the Integrated Rural Development Programme; in 1980, three units of sheep were distributed to the Puroik families of Yakli village.[11]Infrastructure development formed another component of the intervention. In 1980, a porter track spanning approximately forty kilometres was constructed between Tungi and Bodo, a Nyishi village, and Yakli regrouping village by the Chayantajo Community Development Block. In addition, agricultural and forest tools, including 200 spades and 10 felling axes, were distributed in 1979 at 50 percent subsidised rate. Weaving support was also provided through the subsidised distribution of coloured yarns.[12]Further planned regrouping and settlement-based development initiatives targeting the Puroik community were implemented in a phased manner across different administrative circles from the mid-1970s onwards. These interventions were aimed at facilitating recentralisation, improving housing conditions, enhancing access to education, and supporting basic livelihood security. Under the Khenewa Administrative Circle, Pordung Puroik Village was reorganised in 1975 with the settlement of 45 families. However, structured developmental assistance was initiated only in 1978, when a total financial allocation of ₹1, 35,000 was sanctioned. This assistance was disbursed at the rate of ₹3,000 per family to support land reclamation and the construction of residential houses. The delay between reorganisation and formal development support highlights the gradual and incremental nature of policy implementation in remote tribal regions. Notably, educational infrastructure preceded economic assistance, with an inter-village Lower Primary School being established at Pordung on 1stDecember 1975, initially enrolling 20 boys. This early emphasis on schooling reflects an administrative priority to integrate education into the resettlement framework.

In 1979, similar regrouping schemes were extended to the villages of Sario and Walung, accommodating 29 and 30 families respectively under Khenewa administrative block. A combined amount of ₹1, 47,500 was sanctioned for these settlements. Financial assistance was structured to

[11] Thakur, 2003, p.227.
[12]*Ibid*, p.228.

include ₹500 per family for land reclamation and ₹2,000 per family for the construction of OB-type residential houses. These provisions were intended to promote permanent settlement by improving housing durability and supporting the transition from dispersed habitation to nucleated village structures. Further regrouping initiatives were undertaken in 1980 at Karamlong Tapin and Reblowpu villages under the same administrative circle, indicating continuity in the implementation of the settlement policy.Parallel interventions were undertaken under the Bameng Administrative Circle. In 1978, regrouping schemes were implemented in three villages, Nissangjang, Lezaleprai, and Poube. In Nissangjang, 25 Puroik families were covered under the scheme, receiving a total allocation of ₹75,000, calculated at ₹3,000 per family. The assistance was disaggregated to address specific settlement needs: ₹500 for land reclamation, ₹1,800 for the procurement of corrugated galvanised iron (CGI) roofing sheets, and ₹700 for the collection of house-building materials. This detailed financial structuring reflects an attempt to align development assistance with practical housing requirements. The regrouping of Poube Village followed in 1980, covering 60 families. Under this scheme, each family was provided ₹2,500, comprising ₹500 for land development and ₹2,000 for housing construction.[13]Taken together, these regrouping and development initiatives illustrate the evolving administrative approach towards the rehabilitation and integration of the Puroik community. While the schemes emphasised physical infrastructure, particularly housing and land development, they also reveal broader objectives of sedentaristion, social integration, and access to basic services such as education. At the same time, the phased implementation and varying levels of financial assistance point to structural constraints and administrative challenges in translating policy intent into sustained socio-economic transformation.Overall, the account highlights an era of administrative intervention aimed at resettlement and modernization of Puroik communities. While material assistance and infrastructure development were provided, the outcomes reveal both the intent of state welfare policies and their limitations, particularly where development initiatives were inadequately aligned with indigenous livelihoods, ecological realities, and social practices.The responsibility for overseeing matters related to the Puroik community was initially vested in the Department of Labour and Employment, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, until these functions were subsequently transferred to the social Justice &Empowerment and Tribal Affairs Department authority and the Puroik Welfare Board. As widely understood, the Puroik community continues to experience conditions that resemble forms of servitude.

[13]Thakur (2003), pp.226-227.

The analysis of budgetary allocations reveals both strengths and limitations. On the one hand, the emphasis long-term vision for community development is demonstrated. On the other hand, the significant gap between projected requirements and actual allocations highlights a persistent challenge in resource mobilization. The effectiveness of policy implementation is also contingent upon factors such as timely fund disbursement, transparency, community participation, and monitoring mechanisms. Without these, even well-intentioned schemes may fail to achieve their desired outcomes. The financial data, when interpreted through a humanistic lens, underscores the importance of aligning policy frameworks with the lived realities of marginalized communities.

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