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Inequalities in the Socio-economic Conditions of People in Kashmir Valley-

A Geographical Analysis

The problem of regional disparities in the levels of social and economic development is a universal phenomenon. Both developed and developing countries have witnessed this problem in the path of their socio-economic advancement but its adverse impact has been felt more in the latter. Interregional inequalities are generally an outcome of numerous factors such as variations in natural and physical endowments, differences in social and attitudinal parameters, institutional structures and, to some extent, discriminatory policies of the State. India is a large federal nation and it is well known that there are widespread disparities in the levels of social and economic development between the different regions of the Indian nation. Balanced regional development has always been an essential component of the Indian development strategy in order to ensure the unity and integrity of the nation. Jammu and Kashmir, the northern most state of the India, is the home of majestic snow capped mountains picturesque rivers and green forests. Although the state is generally hilly, it has been divided into three geo-physical regions, viz Jammu, the Valley of Kashmir and the Ladakh. The valley being the most thickly populated area of the state, the overriding characteristics of the economy of the state of Jammu and Kashmir is its extreme backwardness which is largely the results of peculiar physical feature of the state, a traditional society and a static economy in the years preceding. The state itself has remained much below the economic level attained in the rest of country. Against this backdrop, there is a need to identify the regions or areas which are backward, to find out the extent and nature of backwardness and to look into the dynamics of the regional backwardness over space and time. The present study is an attempt in this direction. The present study is intends to fulfill the following objectives: (1) To make identification of the relatively backward areas within the valley of Kashmir for the time period of 1981 and 2001. (2) To classify the tehsils on the basis of differential levels of development for different time points and to mark inter-regional variations. (3) To analyse the factors responsible for the inequalities in socio-economic development among the teshils. (4) To

suggest appropriate strategies to reduce the regional inequalities for the equitable development. In chapter one an attempt has been made to trace the development in the social structure in Kashmir Valley. Here, two vital components of social infrastructure, education and health have been taken up for a detailed analysis. The analysis presented in education clearly shows the factors which have hindered the progress of some tehsils in the educational sector. Inter- tehsil disparities are very high in the case of health sector where disparities in the case of hospital facilities are quite distinct. The hospital facilities are concentrated mainly in the urban parts and greater accessibility is found in those areas which are on the higher path of development. Out of the six sectors taken up for the analysis in the present study, the third sector, Agriculture holds the prime importance for the socio- economic development of Jammu and Kashmir State. However, there are two sectors i.e. agriculture and industries which have been taken up for a detailed analysis to understand the economic disparities in Kashmir Valley. Keeping the volatility of social infrastructure and amenities for the promotion of development in view, an attempt has been made to study the existing infrastructure and social amenities of the area under study with the set objective to assess their impact on the exploitation of its physical and human resources. A detailed analysis of individual sectors and the composite indices of development discussed so far gives us both micro and macro insights into the different aspects of development within the Kashmir Valley. This in-depth analysis raises three basic questions, namely, why is there an enormous gap between differentially developed tehsils? Why is such a gap increasing? And why is development concentrated only in a few centres? Answers to these questions are sought with the help of an analysis of dimensions of development and typology of backwardness. It is sought that this will highlight the major findings of the present study and also give valuable policy suggestions to all those who are interested in the development process of Kashmir Valley. In the following sections II and III, the important findings drawn from the analysis of intricate issues related to dimensions of development and typology of backwardness have been presented. In section IV different policy suggestions that are open to policy makers have been put forth. In section V, relevant developmental strategies have been suggested to mitigate the regional and sectoral deficiencies. In the penultimate section, different approaches, which can be experimented to achieve greater regional balance, have been suggested.