PREFACE

Pierre Rondier, the prominent French publicist wrote after visiting Siberia “Frightening or amazing, luring or astounding, Siberia exists. People who know nothing about Siberia are ignorant of the planet’s future.”

Siberia has long been a neglected resource-rich region because of a harsh climate. Today’s Russia is banking on Siberia to become its shining star in energy arena. It wants to develop the vast yet economically impoverished region as a world supplier of natural gas, coal, petroleum and next generation renewable energy resources like hydropower with the participation of the global powers. Another related plan is to develop connections to the ‘mainstream’ world by the way of transcontinental railway lines. This way it attempts to bring the market closer to the isolated Siberia. The development of Siberia’s resources could develop as a threat or promise for the entire planet.

Probably the most pressing reason about why Siberia should be the focus of the world, Siberia should be brought in world’s map, not only because of its mineral riches only but its population riches viz. scientific-technological resources. Prof. Evgeny Vodichev, of Siberian Branch of Russian Academy of Sciences (SBRAS), Novosibirsk endorses this view. Till now very few efforts have been made to genuinely know and consider the challenges and limitations and aspirations of the local people. It is these challenges that I have set out to study, attempting to build bridges where currently none exist.

For the development of Siberia’s resources, provision of a quality of life which sustains a vibrant human society is a prerequisite. The challenge of peopling such a region has always flummoxed planners. This inquiry traces the socio-economic development of Siberia and suggests measures adopted to rectify specific endemic human problems in Siberia like insufferable quality of life, labour shortage and migration. It became crucial to view the subject from multidisciplinary angle. Lives of people, cycles of birth and death in any context are affected by complex environmental factors- the economy, history and polity. So I set out with a broader agenda to interrogate and introduce the reader to the specific economic, geo-political and historical issues of the region under study. Each of these feed in to the eco-system of the Siberian demographics.
The comprehensive study is based on expert interviews, census, reports and state documents of both erstwhile Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R) and present day Russia. It has also made use of the write-ups in the international press about the socio-demographic situation in Siberia and the problems arising out of it. It is based on a comprehensive scan of information from various sources such as reports of various conferences and trends in Siberia or studies conducted by various research institutes. However, one of the challenges has been the lack of data and insights on the region in English language. Alan Wood in his book 'Siberia: Problems and prospects for Regional Development', quotes Kirby, "the Russian literature especially on Siberia would fill a large modern library, the non-Russian at most a few shelves."

The thesis is organized in a way that it first discusses the peculiarities of Siberia, giving facts about its importance - resources, physical features and defines the region under the purview of the study.

Chapter 2 traces the socio-economic development of the Siberian region with an historical overview. Siberia was always a resource rich and a great potential region evolved as an economic hub historically over periods

Chapter 3 dwells on economic and strategic importance of Siberia with an international perspective. In the process it lays the background for the discussion of the region's socio-demographic challenges.

Chapter 4 presents an overview of Socio-Demographic Trends in Siberia, with focus on future trends. It analyses critically the soviet socio-demographic policies, traces current leadership's plans for tackling the socio-demographic challenges in the region. This serves as a prelude to Chapter 5, where specific recommendations for tackling major socio-demographic problems identified in the study are evolved.

The region has historically moved from being a mercantilist colony and land of banishment to a region of strategic importance on the world map. Since the 16th century Siberia was the largest among the Russian regions consisting of half of the Russian empire. In the early 1700's, Siberia became a place of exile. It continued to be the last stop for criminals and political prisoners throughout much of the 20th century. Siberia came to epitomize all that was worst about Russia under the communist rule. Subsequently, a period of intensive industrialization followed and Siberia became a
‘communist wonder’. Suddenly dismissed as a ‘cold storage’ post the disintegration of USSR, this region has emerged once again in the limelight. Since the 1990's the region attracted a great deal of attention following a projection of Eurasian’s regional development. “Siberia will assuredly augment Russia’s might,” claimed Mikhail Lomonov, the Russian scientist.

As a student of regional development and planning studies my interest to study the developments in Siberian region solidified at the time I researched the area while pursuing Master of Philosophy at the Center for Soviet and East European Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (Topic: The Impact of the Baikal Amur Railways on Siberian Economic Development). The current leadership of Russia has renewed interest in developing the region. Furthermore, it is imperative to understand Siberia’s significance in the present global scenario, especially post- cold war and more recently post- 9/11.

The work would have not been possible without the admirable support and active cooperation of the university faculty and well wishers. The commitment and zeal for this research work is reflected by the fact that amidst difficult personal situations I was able to pursue my doctorate studies.

I am indebted to my respected supervisor at Jawaharlal Nehru University, Prof. Ajay Patnaik, whose able guidance and intellectual ingenuity helped me in this academic endeavor.

The Centre under the Chairmanship of Prof. Tulsi Ram has been prompt in helping me out at every mention of a possibility.

Prof. Dr. Devendra Kaushik Professor Emeritus, School of International Studies, whom I consider my mentor, was always a great support. Even when he had an eye surgery he was eager to review a couple of drafts.

Dr. K.N Jehangir and his colleagues at Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) have been instrumental in making the field trip to Siberia/Russia successful. I hold them in high esteem.

My family members have been a comfort zone in their own way.

My children, despite their board classes egged me to type initial rough drafts, made me confident on computer and the internet, and got me the print outs.
My daughter had been taking time out, even at midnight, to discuss possible iterations. I thank all the warm friends and outstanding academicians whom I met during my trip to Russia and Siberia.

Prof. Shaumian Tatyana, Prof. Vanina, Prof Alexei D. Vosskeresski, Prof. Vodichev, Prof. Lounev, Prof. Dmitri Streltsov, Prof. Malov, Prof Guzel Strelkova, Denis Ananynev, Olga Kalinina, Ttayana Shpuzik, Marina Popova, Alexey Belyaev, Remizova Tatyana Vladimirovna - have been excellent resources and subject matter experts. I thank Prof. Datishisen for being so courteous and inviting me to Krasnoyarsk.

Beside that the library staff at JNU, British Council Library (BCL), Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA), National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC), Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) Library, Russian Central Library at New Delhi and MGIMO Library, Institute of Oriental Studies and Bibliotheka Lenina in Moscow, Institute of History at SBRAS, NSU (Novosibirsk State University) and Novosibirisk Scientific Library in Novosibirisk deserve special thanks.

Having being privileged in receiving such cooperation and support, I own responsibility for any errors or omissions that might have crept into the work. I will be very happy to receive any suggestions and inputs from the readers.

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