

Tribal Situation In North-East India: Re-Visiting The Development Process Of Post-Colonial Indian State – With Special Reference To Act (Look) East Policy

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Abstract

Multi-ethnicity is the key to understanding the tribal situation in North-East India. Tribes in the region have diverse histories, cultures, languages, religions, social organizations, polities, economies and sizes. This point needs no substantiation. The need of the hour for present social scientists is perhaps to observe the directions towards which tribal societies of the region are orienting themselves. It may be recalled that numerous development initiatives in general and Act (Look) East Policy (AEP) in particular. This had a huge and as yet unacknowledged impact on the region. However, it was brushed aside. Aspirations of tribal communities were highly neglected. This paper presents in-depth analysis of the land-lockedness of the region in its historical perspective. It will find out the implications of post-colonial development process in tribal situation of North East India. Furthermore, it will critically analyse the effect of India's AEP in tribal situation of North East India.

Keywords: Act East Policy, Tribal development, India, post-colonial India).

Introduction

North-East India, popularly known as the north east, refers to the easternmost region of India consisting of the contiguous Seven Sister States (Assam, Nagaland, Meghalaya, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh) and Sikkim. North-East India is linguistically and culturally very distinct from the other states of India. A large number of the inhabitants speak Tibeto-Burman languages and have cultural similarities with South-East Asia.

The North-East is situated in one of the greatest routes of migration of mankind. Down the ages the region receives people of different strains particularly the Indo-Chinese Mongoloids, pouring into India, who added new elements to the country's population and culture complex. It in fact, forms the cusp where South Asia gradually converges with South-East Asia or viceversa and an otherwise vast and culturally contiguous space with the history of almost incessant immigration from both sides was gradually reorganized into a number of heavily territorialized nation-states with theoretically rigid and impenetrable international borders around them. The un-demarcated and un-administered "frontiers" of much of the colonial times were gradually converted into neat and precise territorial borders particularly since the beginning of the 20th century deployed by the nation-states to claim their sovereign power. The region's geographical isolation made it underdeveloped or a "lost" region and in part by various Central Government's persistent dismissal of many of the present conflicts afflicting the region as simple law and order problems calling for equally simple law and order

solutions. It is indeed unfortunate Central Government took over decades to recognize the problem of North-East India. Dr. Verrier Elwin¹ and Pandit J. Nehru² strongly supported a development path of tribal communities. They believed that the people of NEFA (North-East Frontier Agency) cannot be left in age old isolation. They further agreed that destructive practices of inter-tribal war and head hunting and morally repugnant practices of slavery, kidnapping of children, cruel methods of sacrificing animals and opium addiction must come to an end. They wish to see people are well fed, that they are healthy and enjoy a longer span of time, have better living amenities, higher yield in fields, and improved techniques for home industries. They even envisage that these tribal groups could move freely about their own hills and have easy access to the greater India. And at the same time, they want to avoid the dangers of assimilation and detribalization which have degraded tribal communities in other parts of the world. In the process of globalization and rapid development the region is characterized by a large volume of illegal trade, highest incidence of HIV/AIDS, drug abuse, illegal migrants, insurgency and militarization, land alienation, human rights violations, opium addiction, fluid international boundaries and many more. It is not that it would not have happened if Elwin had his way, but most of these phenomena would not attain the epic proportions they have attained today if development process was based on a deeper understanding of tribal values, norms, ethos and aspirations. An act of development the origin of which relies on an unwilling act of sacrifice is no development at all.

The much-talked Act (Look) East Policy was unveiled by the Indian government, as part of India's foreign policy in 1991. However, Modi Government has re-launched it as Act East Policy (AEP) in East Asia Summit of Myanmar in November 2014. But this policy has achieved very little in first two decades. However, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government in India, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi since 2014, made satisfying progress on its Act East Policy. Since its inception, the various successive governments looked east; the North-East India was overlooked. But NDA government made several incentives to be inclusive and made North-East India forerunner in the development agendas of AEP.

The idea envisaged under the AEP was to interact and build relationships with our immediate strategic neighbourhood in the east, namely Myanmar, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. It was believed that building trade relations with South-East Asian Countries would develop the "lost" region, bringing peace and prosperity to the region. However as North-East India opens up with the essence of the AEP; there has been increasing feeling of suspicion especially among the tribal groups whether it will really lead to their development. The fear is that tribal population will be displaced and sacrificed for the sake of a projected development. Is this what we call development? Development is always synonymous with the displacement of the weak and poor. Is this that we should aim for?

Hence, a serious review of development plans, programmes, policies, and priorities is needed before taking certain corrective measures to prevent the tribal societies of the region from falling into an abyss.

Historicizing land-locked North-East India and its underdevelopment:

The daunting challenges of development that Northeast India faces because of its geographical location are always well known. Most of the scholars in the region argued that

¹ Verrier Elwin (29 August 1902 – 22 February 1964) was a self-trained anthropologist, ethnologist and tribal activist, who began his career in India as a Christian missionary. He also served as the Deputy Director of the Anthropological Survey of India upon its formation in 1945. Post-independence he took up Indian citizenship. Prime Minister Nehru appointed him as an adviser on tribal affairs for north-eastern India, and later he was Anthropological Adviser to the Government of NEFA (now Arunachal Pradesh).

² Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru was the first Prime Minister of independent India.

region's backwardness is due to its landlocked condition. The Partition of 1947, as B.G. Verghese puts it, 'caused the extreme isolation of the Northeast.' He describes the region as South Asia's third landlocked 'state' along with Bhutan and Nepal. The loss of connectivity and market access as a result of the Partition, he said, 'set its economy back by at least a quarter century' (Baruah, 2007: p.212).

However, on the east and the north, North-East India's isolation is due to advent of Western dominance over sea routes and over global trade and more particularly due to British imperialism in the region. But North East India was on the Southern trails of the Silk Route³. The historical literature gives ample evidence on the fact that North-East India had trade link with southern China and other adjacent areas. Apart from silk and other goods, the Silk Road also carried ideas, art, and culture. It facilitated the spread of Buddhism across Asia. Furthermore, a piece of trivia from the world of spices bears the traces of North-East India's place in ancient trade routes.

North-East India's place in trade along the southern Silk Road serves as a reminder that the region's recent history as a remote, underdeveloped and trouble hinterland is neither inevitable nor unchangeable. Its marginalization has to be understood only in historical terms as the product of changes brought about by powerful colonial and post-colonial cartography. After independence, the state of diplomatic relations between India and its neighbours turned North-East India into a 'frontier' or 'buffer' region. The condition has not been conducive to the region's economic and political well-being.

Tribal situation in North-east India during colonial and post-independence era:

Indigenous locally based ethnic groups throughout the world as well as in India, have been struggling for their very existence. This struggle is essentially a result of the consequences of a continuous conflicting situation in a particular society where the people are humiliated, alienated and deprived of their rightful claims to both material and cultural resources (Rao, 1998). Indigenous people worldwide remain marginalised groups that suffer social, political and economic deprivation at the hands of more advanced society that wields political and socioeconomic clout through the processes of colonisation, subjugation and economic control. In the process, the indigenous population is normally subjected to systematic denudation of their socioeconomic base, displacement from their traditional land and largescale exploitation of their natural resources that serves to further consolidate the power base of the controlling nation state. The World Bank Study (in Rao, 1998: p.275) mentions:

"Economic Development has often been promoted at the expense of Tribal Institutions. Development strategies often tacitly assumed that there were no viable institutions or practices existing in the tribal culture that could be used to foster development. This has led to the large-scale transfer of national structures and practices to tribal cultures that were little understood".

There is no doubt that the mode of production, social and economic relations of tribe have been altered by both colonial and post-colonial state. The various tribal groups are the most backward fragments of the Indian society insofar as their economy, education, health status, etc, are concerned. It is a well-known fact that prior to the advent of the British there was not much social interaction between the tribal and the mainstream nontribal populations (the degree of this interaction indeed varied from place to place. Assam⁴ represents a case where

³ The Silk Road- it owes its name to the 19th century German geographer, Baron von Richthofen- should not be constructed to mean that it was a single trade route or that it was only silk that was traded along the road. The term refers to a network of trails connected the western region of China through Central Asia to the Mediterranean. Along the way, there were branch of routes leading to other destinations from where the Silk Road ended there were trade networks that carried goods to destinations in the Mediterranean world, Europe and Asia.

⁴ Here, 18th Century Assam is referred to. During this period, Assam connotes for various tribal princely kingdoms. As British annexed the region into its territory, several initiatives and rules were formulated during colonial period to have effective control over the plains of Assam and then extend its control to the surrounding hills. This eventuated in the political reorganization of the region with Assam valley as its core.

tribal-nontribal interaction was quite conspicuous.) In fact, social interactions between them were strongly discouraged. Still, there were relations of trade and commerce, though limited to a small scale, between them. Nevertheless, a reasonable section of the elites of the various tribal groups (the tribal chiefs, etc) were gradually entering the Hindu fold with an aspiration to attain kshatriya⁵ status. The Hindu priestly class played a very significant role not only in igniting this ambition but also in fulfilling the same. The former in turn enjoyed various privileges under the converted chieftains. Many of these chieftains turned into kings with the gradual process of state formation. Following the elite, and also due to the initiatives of the Hindu priestly class, a large section of the common tribal populace gradually entered the Hindu fold through a process of renunciation and enunciation of tribal and Hindu rites, customs and practices respectively. However, the non-Hinduised tribals, and even a good fragment of the Hinduised tribal neophytes to some extent, still largely retained their traditional economy, social customs and practices. Although a significant section of the tribal neophytes took to settled agriculture, many among them continued with their traditional practices of hunting, fishing, food gathering, terrace cultivation, shifting cultivation, animal husbandry, etc. Extensive dependence on and use of forest product and community ownership of land continued to be the important hallmarks of their societies (Sharma, 2006: pp. 34-35).

But, the tribal peasantry of Assam could not withstand the burden of the colonial revenue policy and the latter resulted in widespread poverty, land alienation and displacement of the tribal population of the state and this went on unabated despite protests from them. The plight of the tribal peasantry worsened with the growing number of peasants migrating into Assam from the neighbouring erstwhile East Bengal from the early second decade of the 20th century (Sharma, 2001: p.4793). The British administration encouraged this immigration of peasant, mostly Muslims, hoping to garner more land revenue by settling them in the fallow and wasteland areas of the Brahmaputra valley.

To stop the process of displacement and land alienation among the tribals the provisions for reserved tribal areas were adopted by the then colonial administration. The first such effort could be found in the 'Line System' introduced first in the erstwhile Nagaon district and the Barpeta subdivision of the erstwhile Kamrup district in 1920 (Das 1986: p.30). The line system aimed again ostensibly at protecting the tribal lands from the land hungry migrant peasantry. It made provisions for settlement of the latter in specified manners in the village areas of Assam. But this system collapsed under the aggressive land grabbing initiative of the immigrants.

In India, insurgency among different tribal groups began as a result of the institutionalised violence unleashed by the colonial state in 1855. Blaming the British colonial power Nag (2000: p.255) writes:

"The advent of British rule was marked by a series of unprecedented structural changes attempting to integrate the Northeast's tiny tribal and semi-tribal formations into capital empire. ...Tribal sovereignty was usurped, their exclusivity and insularity demolished, and their ethnic and cultural frontiers redrawn. Warring tribes were integrated under a single administrative or ecclesiastical umbrella, kinfolk was divided between territories, and cultural relations were politicised and normal social conflicts communalised. Traditional intellectuals

The new political unit that came to be known as Assam incorporated the neighbouring hills with new concepts of boundary and territoriality dismantling the traditional sense in which they were understood. Further, postcolonial India State carved out six states from the state of Assam, which later become NorthEast India. North-East India has been known this way since a radical redrawing of the region's political map in the 1960s.

⁵ Kshatriya is one of the four varnas (social orders) in Hinduism. Traditionally, Kshatriya constitute the ruling and military elite of the Vedic-Hindu social system.

were replaced by new middle classes, new discourses introduced, and newer identities imposed”.

But the situation of the tribal groups did not improve in the post-colonial era. National Legislation in independent India tended to act as the strongest instrument of denial of the rightful entitlements of the tribal landholders (Rao, 1998: p.276). Though the Governments in post-colonial India assured the individual tribal claims over the land, they did not specifically uphold the community ownership of the land by the tribes. Criticising the sanctioning and application of new national administrative rules indiscriminately to the tribal territories, Rao (1998: p.276) states that it has in a way given a blanket status for the once owned tribal lands as that of the state's property albeit without taking the tribal transitional specifics into account. This resulted in the loss of the original claim over the resources (Land and Forest) and created a resource crisis for the tribal communities which had a tremendous social impact on the tribes.

Furthermore, post-colonial Indian state has been deeply engaged in violating the spirit of its own tribal land policy. Each and every government in post-independent Assam has been following the practice of acquisition of tribal land in the name of development.

The crisis over the land resources begun to take shape through this legal system and its application resulting in severest economic cultural violence which acted as the causative grounding that effected the tribes to revolt against the oppressive order set in their respective tribal regions all over India. Various tribal movements confirm this reality (Rao 1998: p.276).

The government acquires tribal lands for construction of railway and road transport, setting up of industrial and irrigation complexes, construction of dams, and so on. Studies by the Tribal Research Institute (TRI) of Assam, a government agency, contends that one of the very significant factors leading to tribal displacement in Assam is the installation of the industrial and irrigational complexes in the reserved tribal areas (Bordoloi, 1990: p.63). For instance; The Dhansiri Irrigation Project in the Darrang district, the Jagiroad Paper Mills of the Hindustan Paper Corporation at Morigaon district, the Bokajan Cement Factory of the Cement Corporation of India in the Karbi Anglong district, the Namrup Fertiliser Industry of the Fertiliser Corporation of India in the Dibrugarh district, the Bongaigaon Refinery and Petrochemicals in the Bongaigaon district, etc. Further mega dam projects in north-eastern states posing a great threat to tribal indignity and ecology of the region .Even the new socioeconomic imagination set off by the new policy thinking- commonly termed in official circles as the Look East envisages a space that apparently refuses to be bound by the present geography of the North-east as much as it promises to spread across the international borders to the countries of South-East Asia through such connecting states as Myanmar and Bangladesh will surely influence the tribal situation in North East India. The political scientist like Samir Kumar Das termed this imagined space the extended North-East and argue that once the space is imagined in official circles in this manner, it also sets in motion many new imaginaries drawing generously but not exclusively from the region's recent past history (Das, 2008: p.1).

The imaginary institution of the extended North-East through the policy rethinking called Act-East constantly open itself to alternative possibilities of imagining or reimagining the space, instituting and contesting it in new and hitherto unprecedented ways. In a sense, Act East aims at liberating the region not only from its presently landlocked nature but also from the very way of imagining prescribed by it. Cornelius Castoriadis in his famous “The Imaginary Institution of Society” (Castoriadis,1998) noted the inherently independent nature of the imaginaries in societies that refuse to be bound by the dictates of any of the actors involved in the strategic game of politics.

It was the time after the collapse of Soviet Union, the end of the cold war, the emergence of the US as the sole superpower and the initiation of economic reforms in India that the government of India announced a diplomatic initiative in early 1990's titled "Look-East" under India's foreign policy paradigm. The Act (Look) East Policy portrays a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's position in the rapidly developing global economy. The essential philosophy behind this policy is to forge closer and deeper economic integration with its eastern neighbours. It is rather a late recognition of the strategic and economic importance of the region to India's national interests (Haokip, 2012: pp.1).

Prof S.D.Muni, at the Institute of South Asian Studies has argued that India's Act (Look) East Policy did not begin in 1990s (Muni, 2011: pp.1-2). It has evolved in four different waves of centuries. The first wave of cultural and commercial engagement between India and its extended eastern neighbours lasted until 12/13th century. To this was added by strong strategic dimension by British Empire in India during second wave. The leaders of independent India particularly, Nehru, took the lead in launching the third wave by focusing on East Asia as an important part of India's policy of Asia resurgence. However, the imperatives of the Cold War, intra-Asian conflict and India's weakness on economic and military fronts did not let its Asia policy blossom.

What is identified as India's Act (Look) East Policy since the early 1990s constitutes the fourth wave of India's eastward (re)engagement. Under the strategic thrust of this policy, India has not only reinforced its economic and cultural relations with the countries of ASEAN and East Asia, but also firmed up strategic relations with them through extensive consultations on regional and global security issues and consistent cooperation in defence sectors involving military supplies and naval exercises. India's strategic vision for the East extends to the whole of Asia-Pacific region as India has manifested both its willingness and capability to play a critical role in the emerging strategic dynamics and architecture for this region (Muni, 2011: pp.1-2).

AEP - a critical insight:

AEP and economic imaginaries:

In spite of the various policies, the North East has not been able to develop the basic institutions of free market. Thus, capital investment from outside is often unwelcomed and xenophobic reactions against the cheap and outside labour employed in low paying occupations have contributed to the shooting cost of production. The idea to soften and open the borders in a way will counter the destructive effects of border control regime and organize production and marketing on a large global scale. Borders are seen in the existing policy literature not as boundaries but as gateways to opportunities and of international trade and commerce. The hard political boundaries turned into fluid marketing boundaries.

It is in this context India's Act-East policy becomes very relevant. Border control regime has already become anachronistic. As Sanjib Baruah puts it: ".....India's Act (Look) East Policy- the overtures since the 1990's towards South- East Asian countries- holds promises of historic proportion for transnational region building in the area" (Baruah, 2007: p.222). Though India's North-East and South-East Asia remain politically separate regions but the changing economic realities will make it a composite region. The economic integration of the

North-East and South East Asia enables her to

- 1) Counter act the disadvantages of the partition and liberate North-East from its presently landlocked status.
- 2) To reap the economic advantages that will follow on it's being linked up with the "powerhouse" of the South-East Asian countries.

The share of the North-East in the annual trade with the ASEAN countries is estimated to be 12 percent. For example, on March 23, 2007, the Thai Chamber of Commerce and Board of Trade of Thailand in Association with Indian embassy in Bangkok hosted a meeting on emerging opportunities between India and Thailand with focus on North Eastern region of India. The North-East of India is a storehouse of natural resources and rich amalgamation of diverse people and culture. Apart of the abundance of resources, government India offers subsidies to investors on transport, capital investment, and interest accrued on working capital, excise duty refund and income tax exemption. Thus, the region is held by the Indian officials as "a virtual tax-free zone".

AEP and market imaginaries:

The new imaginary envisages a market that intense to establish direct connection with the eastern neighbours without depending on New Delhi. Indeed, such dependence as has helped it in establishing monopoly over the economies of the region.

In the name of territorial integrity, Assam has been cut off from the rest of the India but various Central Governments have unilaterally imposed monopoly conditions on our trade. The absence of alternative markets has made people helpless. The search for alternative market will be an effective antidote on Center's hegemony over the trade and commerce in the region. Even Jairam Ramesh-Advisor to the finance minister during 1996-98, Deputy Chairman Planning Commission during 1992-94 and to the Prime Minister in 1991-once asked for investing each state in the region or for that matter in India with power of concluding economic treaties with neighbouring countries. But a country that is economically dependent on multinationals will not be able to ensure "economic autonomy" for the region (Das, 2008: p.11). Moreover, the hegemony of the West can be neutralized by way opening the market to the East.

But in the classical functionalist vein, one can see the effects of economic integration and connection. Such as the spatial and historical continuities are likely to facilitate economic integration as much as it is likely to re-establish and strengthen such ties long fractured by Partition and subsequent reorganization of international borders. Many of the indigenous people in the North-East seem to feel excited about the idea of being in contact with their ethnic cousins who have been left outside as result of the reorganizational of international borders.

The economic affluence that is bound to result from this economic integration will liberate the North-East India from its present landlocked state and make it prosper whether in terms of infrastructural development or in terms of generation of employment for the vast unemployed youth. The economic prosperity of the region is likely to bring down the insurgency and violence. By way of being part of a common transnational region, the external linkages and sources of support for the rebel groups and insurgents can be effectively snapped. For example, the joint operations along the border by the Indian and Myanmar forces have been very effective.

As a sequel to it, the economic integration and prosperity in the neighbouring countries will stop pushing the disaffected people towards the external powers whether taking shelter or by asking for military support and make them easy prey to states not too well known for their friendly relations with India. There were reports by S.D. Muni in the monograph of Institute

for Defence and Strategic Studies, Singapore, 2002 that the Chinese listening posts in Myanmar's Indian Ocean islands to monitor developments in India's missile programme. China had also spread its economic and military presence in Myanmar widely and deeply. Pakistan, with the help and support of China, had started supplying military equipments to Myanmar's new military regime. India shuddered at the prospects of Pakistan consolidating its position in Myanmar in view of strong Pakistani links with Bangladesh's security establishment and its propensity to support insurgencies in India's Northeast region. India could not afford to ignore Myanmar anymore in the face of these developments. The urgency for a basic shift in India's Myanmar policy was injected by the deteriorating security situation in North-East India resulting from tribal insurgencies. Some of the insurgent groups were seeking shelter in Myanmar by exploiting ethnic harmonies across the border (Muni,2011: p.11)

But it is very pertinent that one may suspected about present infrastructure of North East India which is not sufficient for establishing trading relation with South East Asian countries.

In this connection a Congress leader from Tripura suggests:

"If we want to build the Northeast as the launching pad for trade into South East Asia, we first have to build infrastructure on our side of the border. You can build a magnificent road connecting Manipur to Mandalay, but if there is no cold storage or basic infrastructure developed on our side of the border, what will you trade? Where will the benefits go?" (quoted in Langer, 2013).

Till today there is disconnection between AEP vision and ground realities. Sanjoy Hazarika (quoted in Langer, 2013), ex-director of the Centre for Northeast Studies and Policy Research at Jamia Millia Islamia suspects about the imaginaries set by AEP for North East India. He feels that there isn't enough potential in the region to establish trade relationship with the South-East Asian Countries. He claims that people of North-East often speaks about their potential and opportunity. But to him potential matters only when one used it. As he mentions that Assam has the highest number of holidays and bandhs⁶. However, such anomies in the state have been overcome by the NDA government. Furthermore, Assam is badly affected by flood for more than three months in a year. So, he suspected about the economic development of the region with all these anomalies. Furthermore, North-East India's main sources of employment are agriculture and the government services. The region is also lack of sufficient skill entrepreneurs and labourers for this international trade. As Hasina Kharbhih, Managing Director of Impulse Social Enterprises puts in his words: *"There are not enough skilled people in the Northeast to be able to meet the demand of the trade that the government is looking at, and while people of the region will become small traders, the companies that will come in will take control of everything."* (quoted in Langer, 2013)

Unfortunately, while fulfilling these new imaginaries there is threat to our biodiversity of the region. With the development in industrial sectors and urban centres will pose a great threat to various species of flora and fauna in the region. The new trade links with the east will lead to the development of international road links and highways will definitely put a threat to our vegetation and it will also lead to huge displacement of both tribals and non-tribals in the region. There is also a possibility that Act-East policy will create a boom in the tourism sector of North east region. However, this boom and other economic extension will definitely open up its gate for Multinational Companies. But it is suspected this unprecedented economic

⁶ A form of political protest where general public is expected or forced to stay in at home and not report to work in the country

growth may threaten the growth of the cottage industries in the region. This phenomenon is already in process in states like Manipur where there is a resistance to India's AEP.

Undoubtedly, AEP may accomplish our dreams but they may pose a great threat in the health grounds. The new international links may carry diseases like AIDS, Swine –flu and various other fatal diseases from South-East Asian countries to the region. The opening of new vistas may also lead to various illegal activities like drug and human trafficking, black marketing, sex trade, etc. Although these practices are already in motion but it is our strong conviction that if this links are well established then the government can put a check in them through strong vigilance which is very poor now. It is also feared that such an economic extension of the region will give pace to the existing insurgency activities in the region.

It seems that this policy is creating enormous expectations in the minds of the people in the region and inculcates in a section of them the belief that the international borders that stand in the middle to separate them from their ethnic cousins are going to wither away in the near future. But there is also remote possibility of forming some newer form of ethnic conflict in the region. The future ethnoscope of the region is expected to be shot with many more ethnic conflicts which will be more intense in nature.

But it is pertinent to think here how one can open the door to the East? Is market connection the only one by which one can establish the historical continuities? Will this market connection really be an economic as well as cultural hub for the people of the region? Whether the new imaginary of North-East will have direct connection with the eastern neighbours without depending on the Central Government? Is it only the economic development will curb the problem of insurgency in the region?

Conclusion

The imaginaries of extended North-East set-in motion by the Act (Look) East Policy—the vision of linking India with her “Civilizational Asian Neighbours” as put by then Minister of External Affairs - refuses to be bound by the vision of the economy alone (Das, 2008: p.7).

The juggernaut of Act East is likely to be contested by variety of imaginaries of an extended North –East already in circulation. Imaginaries after all promise to institute the society by way of shaping our practices. It is important that we recover and emplace them in social science. Only the future can tell us about the outcome of this contest.

In brief, this policy's major thrust is the economic development. But how far this policy will fulfil the needs of curbing the problem of ethnic identity, alienation, illegal migration and insurgency? We have to rethink whether this policy will curb these problems or give pace to them.

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