

# Globalisation & Act East Policy: The Role of Tribal Community

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## ABSTRACT

India's "Look East" policy was envisioned by the Narasimha Rao government in 1991 as a focused foreign policy approach towards South East Asia in particular and East Asia in general. In the present day circumstance, tourism covers rural areas, the health sector, and the environment. There are about 305 communities and over 200 tribes inhabited in India's northeast region. Each community has its distinct customs, cultural legacy and tradition and as such, the region has ample projection to promote modern day tourism. However, policy makers face certain challenges in the North East towards best possible implementation of the Look East policy (hereinafter Act East Policy). This paper throws light on these challenges like lack of infrastructure, crisis of insurgency, the disjuncture between the elites and the social base in the North East regarding the "Look East" policy, and the states' incapacities during the implementation process of this policy. There are ample possibilities for Tribals in North-East India to reap benefits from India's thriving relations with South East Asia as the process of globalisation provides the countries with the opportunities to grapple with cross-market convenience and enabling them lessen their poverty and economic backwardness.

**Keywords:** Look East Policy, Tourism, Foreign Trade, NE India and Southeast Asia, Tribal

## INTRODUCTION

Struggle for land, uniqueness and endurance Does Manipur really need a smart city? Modi's stillness about the proposal in his speech that followed Ibobi's impassioned speech says a lot as it assumes implication against

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the setting of the constant protest from the pretentious tribal community.

The reported projected yardstick for a smart city population is 1 million (10 lakhs), which is more than one-third of the state's total population (approximately 26 lakhs according to 2011 census) and about two times the total population of greater Imphal, the state's capital. Where is this population going to come from and how is this going to impact on the native populations and demographics of Manipur? Whether investors will be really concerned without the standard and with the plan in remote tribal area attached with firm opposition from the community is another question. It is absurd to talk about setting up a smart city in an isolated tribal area and lecture on smart city development as if the smart city is the only human need and the way and the only way to development and growth, and nothing else.

The agreements covered areas as varied as air services and opening of border *haats*. Also discussed were matters of cooperation related to two-sided trade, inclusive energy partnership, tourism, pilgrimage and medical consultation, promotion of educational, cultural and literary exchanges and agricultural cooperation. The overall drive was on what was described in the joint statement as "India-Myanmar border area development". Myanmar has a 1648 km long land border spread over Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh and a maritime boundary in the Bay of Bengal. India's search for a development paradigm of the troubled North Eastern region started revolving around the Look East policy. The Look East policy never failed to make an impression. Though never as accurate and definite as our industrial policy, export-import policy etc., it has come to be interpreted as loosely spelt out development policies associated with our initiatives in South East Asian countries mainly Myanmar. We, on our part, consider ourselves as the biggest would be recipient of this policy. Of course the returns to India of a developed NER should not be understated. Envisage the potential in a north east where development has done away with the need of security personnel, where the huge expenditure on maintenance of law and order has been replaced by drive to develop infrastructure!

Let us look at what our PM said in Yangon in a meeting hosted by Myanmar Federation of Chamber of Commerce & Industry and Myanmar development Resource Institute on 29 May: The people in India's Northeast can now resume something that they have done for centuries - they can buy and sell their own merchandise in the border "haats" (markets). The MoU signed on 28 May provided for the setting up of such a market on

a pilot basis at Pangsau Pass in Arunachal Pradesh, the point where the Stillwell Road from Ledo in Assam enters Myanmar. The two sides also agreed on setting up such markets in other places along the India-Myanmar border. The Prime Minister announced a wrap up of support in response to a request from the Mynamarese government that included India's offer of \$5 million per year for five years for responsibility small development projects such as schools, health centre, roads and bridges, agriculture and agro-processing units in the Naga self-administered zone in Sagaing Division bordering Manipur and Nagaland and the Chin state bordering Mizoram. The border haat notion is welcome because everywhere along the border similar tribal groups inhabit: the Tangsha along Arunachal Pradesh-Myanmar border, the Naga along Nagaland- Myanmar border, the Mizos along Mizoram- Myanmar border, and the Kuki along Manipur -Myanmar border. The border haats will go a long way in capitalizing in the similarity of traditions and culture as in the case of Indo Bangladesh border trade facilitating people to people get in touch with enormously. One of the reasons behind the relative success of Indo Myanmar trade at Moreh has been the expansion of bordering areas. The connectivity across the border in Myanmar in Zokhawthar and Nampong is dismal. A large number of Mynamarese visit the weekly market at Nampong to get basic needs. A similar state of affairs prevails across the border in Mizoram. Chin state is the poorest state in Myanmar. The initiatives taken up by India to take up the developmental programmes such as structure of roads, bridges, schools, health centre etc in the bordering areas across Myanmar will facilitate and convert trade and commerce along the border. The Naga self-administration zone consisting of three townships Leshi, Lahe, and Namyum was carved out of Sagaing Region in 2010. In academic exchange, the honour went to Calcutta University and Dagon University probably due to better connectivity and experience. The PM said, "These efforts will give a boost to the local economies and provide living opportunities. Trade will get bigger and be brought within the ambit of the law."

President Thein Sein declared that his country will not allow its soil to be used for anti-India activities. Such a pledge has been given from time to time and it is not known how seriously the Myanmar authority will pursue this policy. Peace in the north eastern region through development is the underlying plan which combines counter rebellion and economic development drives<sup>1</sup>.

1 E. Bijoykumar Singh

According to Pranab Mukherjee, India's former External Affairs Minister, North East India is on the edge to benefit from India's mounting relations with South East Asia as the course of globalisation has shown how cross-border market right of entry can strengthen tribal community from poverty, economic backwardness and brings in affluence. He argued that "geography is opportunity" and therefore regions in India like the North East have enormous possibilities to develop their geographical contexts and "bring significant benefits to populations residing in those regions in a much more direct and participative manner than before". The idea of "cross-border markets" put forth by Mukherjee in bringing about upliftment of people anguish from poverty, armed conflict, lack of employment opportunities, and insecurity is attractive. Indeed, it is all the more likely that statements such as these from top Indian policy makers indicates that the "Look East" market driven policy has been crafted within the framework of neo-liberalism wherein it is proposed that "human well-being can best be advanced by therapeutic individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within the tribal community."<sup>2</sup>

The LEP presupposes that heightened trade relations and free markets with South East Asia will uplift the North East out of the shackles of insurgency, poverty, and economic backwardness as maximising the reach and occurrence of market economics will result in political, economic, and social liberty. But is it really so? In fact, in one of his speeches to a gathering in the North East, Mukherjee admitted that the "Look East" policy though extremely beneficial to India at large is creating fears amongst the local people of being submerged by the grand Indian vision of "opening up" to South East Asia and flooding a delicate region with the logic of market economics. He stated, "I am aware that many fears that accelerated cooperation could in fact pose serious challenges. These concerns or challenges need to list out; we need to reside on how they may be addressed....there is considerable urgency in this".

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Hindu Daily (2011, September 19) reported that micro democratic institutions such as independent development councils, *gram panchayats* and village councils were strengthened, refreshed and legitimised. They

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2 K. Raja Reddy, ed, India and ASEAN: Foreign Policy Dimensions for the Twenty First Century, New Delhi, Vedam Books, 2005.

turned vibrant and actively functional as local governance modules. This brought all the communities, notably the tribal in particular, into the development stream, bringing about considerable empowerment and a sense of fulfillment.

**Bijoykumar Singh remarked that** President Thein Sein declared that his country will not permit its soil to be used for anti-India activities. Such an assurance has been given from time to time and it is not known how seriously the Myanmar right will pursue this policy. Peace in the north eastern region through development is the underlying strategy which combines counter revolution and economic development drives.

The Imphal Free Press daily newspaper pointed that set up the smart city where it is needed, viable and wanted, not where it isn't. This should be the main assessment and criteria for identification of smart city sites for the success of the ambitious project. If Manipur government really thinks Manipur needs a smart city, let it propose for upgrading of Imphal, the state's capital, to smart city or development of a brand new city as a satellite city in the valley, preferably near Imphal in view of its accessibility, central location, convenience, viability, and for the benefit of all communities of the state. Most importantly, this will prevent, or minimise the impact of forced population transfer or displacement and forced assimilation or integration of the tribal.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- i. To identify the potential areas of opportunities from India's North East to the rest of world concerning tribal communities of Manipur.
- ii. To explore the associated relevancy aspects (say tourism, etc.) of India's Look East Policy with tribal communities of Manipur.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data collection comprises secondary data collection and informal discussions. The data for the study are collected through personal interviews, discussions with different persons concerned and 'The Imphal Free Press & Sangai Express (Manipur English Daily newspaper)' etc.. The type of sample used for the selection of respondents is the multi-stage sampling.

## FINDING OF THE STUDY

Another area of possible trade between Myanmar and North East India, especially comprising tribal community, which has so far not been explored much, is trade in services like healthcare, hospitality and tourism, which through rearward linkage can generate trade in transport, communication and related services. In the imports to Manipur, electrical and electronic goods control over other groups. Within the group, generator sets, inverters and inverter battery are important mechanism. These are mostly disgraceful and of inferior quality Chinese products, typically targeted to backward economic situations marked by power shortage.

It is the fact that our industries are not based on locally available resources. The industries in general are demand based and pattern of demand in the state has shifted towards products from outside this state due to the contact of bring public continuous announcement in the media. The consciousness of the people regarding products from outside the state is much higher than the awareness of products produced in the state. This has several serious implications. The dependence of the state on a raw material available in other states has increased while the local resources are dishonest unutilised and hence wasted. Besides, there is also a huge drain of resources from the state affecting investment unfavorably. The shortage of investment also affects the course of industrialisation and the state is thus trapped in a nasty circle. A highly industrialised Manipur will be an asset for the country. A backward Manipur will be a liability. With a proper analysis of the rising demand pattern in the newly accessed markets and a set of policy incentives for the entrepreneurs, another wave of industrialisation in Manipur can be unleashed.

### **Tourism in the Northeast**

The eight states of North East form part of the eastern Himalayan region which extends from Sikkim eastwards and embraces the Darjeeling hills of West Bengal. The rich natural beauty, tranquility and exotic flora and fauna of the area are bounties of nature given on platter. Rural life, art, culture and legacy in rural locations and in villages, which have core competency in terms of, construct, handloom and textiles should be bring to the lime light. Each tribal community has its distinct customs, cultural heritage and legends and as such, the region has ample prospects to promote modern day tourism. The region also has several fragrant plants, which could be used to develop and promote health tourism in selective locations of the

region. It will provide opportunities for employment, rural development and also encourage mutual co-existence through cultural switch and thereby help in transforming a close society to an open one. Tourism helps in the development of many subsidiary industries and services and has a huge latent to create a good many employment avenues. India's LEP can thus help the region to promote tourism. Cultural tourism and marketing of crafts and textiles can serve as a powerful channel for preserving the ongoing viability of both the tangible and the intangible heritage of the NE. It has been forecasting that by 2020 the region will generate 405 million tourists of the 1561 million tourists. By using Myanmar as a bridge to economically, influence with China and the ASEAN nations India wants to develop northeast.

**Table 1: Month wise domestic & foreign tourist visiting Manipur**

<i>Sl.no.</i>	<i>Year – 2010 – 2011(Month)</i>	<i>Domestic</i>	<i>Foreign</i>
1	August – 2010	9815	X
2	September – 2010	9536	19
3	October – 2010	10253	61
4	November – 2010	10720	78
5	December – 2010	9345	6
6	January – 2011	12536	67
7	February – 2011	11649	46
8	March - 2011	11862	69
Total		1,16,652	431

**Table 2: Month wise domestic & foreign tourist visiting Manipur**

<i>Year – 2011 – 2012</i>		<i>Domestic</i>	<i>Foreign</i>
<i>Sl.no.</i>	<i>Month</i>		
1	April – 2011	8808	41
2	May – 2011	10624	8
3	June – 2011	7990	21
4	July – 2011	8408	10
5	August – 2011	8721	7
6	September – 2011	9367	24
7	October – 2011	10005	12
8	November – 2011	10258	56
9	December – 2011	10957	20
10	January – 2012	9639	8
Total		1,10,270	447

Source: Tourism Department, Government of Manipur.

This was a virgin territory for Indian policymakers. Naturally, the NE hailed this eastward look of New Delhi as the region became the transit point of two-sided trade relations between India and the economically developed ASEAN nations. It was assumed that the policy shift of Delhi would help to discover the economic potentialities of the NE. But for them the strategic significance of the NE was very much a factor for national leadership that brought about a drastic change in the traditional approach. Now 20 years have passed. It is time to review what the Look East Policy delivered for this backward area.

## CONCLUSION

It is supposed that the Indian state has been exploiting North East rich resources without plunging back what is due to it by way of spending more funds for economic development of the region. But the fact remains that this regional roughness is the outcome of the model of development that India has adopted. The capitalist model of development is bound to make unevenness in development. The states in the North East have been absent with very little powers and resources. They have been forced to look to the centre for development funds. The capitalist path of development has not only generated unevenness in development but also shaped pockets of underdevelopment. Moreover there is the problem of feudalism accessible side by side with capitalism in India. Feudalism nourishes primeval loyalties and thereby fuels regional feelings. Within the structure of semi-capitalism and semi-feudalism, the Centre's development plan has failed because of misplaced political patronage and massive corruption. Lopsided sums of money provided by the Centre for schemes of development have been appropriated by regional politicians, bureaucrats and contractors. This has generated a strong feeling against the regional institution and also the Centre. The absence of economic development and discrimination in all spheres means, mechanically, people should see either redesign of constitution or reinvent of their own constitution. That is the cause structure of ongoing political aggression. The reflection is that dominion is the issue and India is the problem. The delighted beauty of India's North-East serves as an attractive tourist spot and its infrastructure is a hub of immense business potential. The term North East is a vague one leading to portray the image of a single state with homogenous attributes, which is vastly different from the actual standing. On the contrary, the North East India largely bears the doctrine of diversity and distinctness. The North East India unfortunately is not free from many evils and is

often thwarted by grisly happenings retarding the pace of development. The Look East Policy is being embarked upon with the assumption that the improving trade ties between India and ASEAN will certainly elevate the North East out of the menace of insurgency, poverty and economic backwardness. There are ample possibilities for North East India to reap benefits from India's thriving relations with South East Asia as the process of globalisation provides the countries with the opportunities to struggle with cross-market convenience and enabling them alleviate their poverty and economic backwardness. Sensitive treatment of tribal societies is also warranted so that in the quest for economic development, they do not lose out their traditional ways of life and destroy the eco-system in the process. How would one get a local farmer whose livelihood is Jhum (subsistence) cultivation or a local coal miner to enjoy the benefits from South East Asian societies with their highly developed manufacturing sector? Entangled into this are fears amongst local tribal populations of being over-shadowed by entrepreneurs and business people from other more developed parts of India. What is also rather interesting is that there appears a convergence between a set of global actors (elite) and the state, who in the name of development and transnational border trade is trying to avoid the separatists movements by eroding ethnically protected, and community owned cultural and natural resources, with the state (both at the national and unit level) actively becoming a party to such propaganda of "liberalisation of the frontiers and limits, beyond the reaches of civil society". According to H. Mate, Vice President, Hill Tribal Council, Moreh, neither the central government nor the state government ever consulted the people of Moreh or the local traders' union while crafting the North East Vision Document. Therefore, the whole talk about grass-root involvement in development is rather rhetorical to him. This is even more astonishing since the border trade is mostly done by local Kuki porters. According to D. Ravichandran, General Secretary, Tamil Sangam, Moreh, the border trade is highly unstable and the 22 items listed as legitimate border trade items does not convene the demands of the people. The "Look East" policy also threatens the lives of small traders in Moreh town as the Asian Highway bypasses Moreh town. He also argued that there are 58 checkpoints between Moreh and Imphal hampering border trade. Therefore, it would be better to have one or two check posts, an idea supported by the 31 Assam Rifles posted in the area. The Union government wants to do a realistic evaluation of the goods to be traded, especially those that are required across the border like locally made textiles and woven tribal items.

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