

**From Look East to Act East: Relevance for Northeast
India in particular context of Nagaland**

Thesis submitted to Nagaland University for award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

I, Mrs. Monalisa Tase declare that the thesis entitled “*From Look East to Act East: Relevance for Northeast India in particular context of Nagaland*”, submitted by me for the award of the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY to the Department of Political Science, Nagaland University is my own work. The thesis has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

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We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation

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Dedicated

To

My Parents

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Monalisa Tase

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEC	: Asian Economic Community
AEM	: ASEAN Economic Minister's
AEP	: Act East Policy
ASEAN	: Association of South East Asian Nations
ASIDE	: Assistance to States for Developing Export Infrastructure and Allied Activities
AIJSCC	: ASEAN-Indian Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee
BBIN	: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal
BBN	: Bangladesh Bhutan Nepal
BBTC	: BIMSTEC Business Travel Card
BCE	: Before the Common Era
BCIM-EC	: Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor
BIMST	: Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand
BIMSTEC	: Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
BIST-EC	: Bangladesh, India Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation
BJP	: Bhartiya Janata Party
BC	: Before Christ

BCIM	: Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar
BCIM-EC	: Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor
BGB	: Border Guards Bangladesh
BG	: Broad Gauge
BOAC	: British Overseas Airways Corporation
BP	: Before Present
BTC	: Border Trade Centres
Cal	: Calibrated years or Calendar years
CE	: Common Era
CPD	: Centre for Policy Dialogue
CPR	: Centre for Policy Research
CPRO	: Chief Public Relations Officer
DoC	: Department of Commerce
EAS	: East Asia Summit
EL	: Exclusion List
ENSO	: El Niño-Southern Oscillation
EU	: European Union
EWEC	: East West Economic Corridor
FPPC	: Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence
FTA	: Free Trade Agreement
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
GMS	: Greater Mekong Sub-region
HSL	: Highly Sensitive List

ICP	: Integrated Check Post
IIFT	: Indian Institute of Foreign Trade
IMTTH	: India Myanmar Thailand Trilateral Highway
IRCON	: Indian Railway Construction Company
ISIS	: Institute of Security and International Studies
ITC	: International Trade Centres
JBC	: Joint Business Commissions
JTC	: Joint Trade Committees
KLM	: Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij (Royal Dutch Airlines)
KMTTP	: Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project
KTC	: Khamniungan Tribal Council
LCSs	: Land Custom Stations
LEP	: Look East Policy
LPAI	: Land Ports Authority of India
PDR Lao	: Lao People's Democratic Republic
MEA	: Ministry of External Affairs
MGC	: Mekong Ganga Cooperation
MoRTH	: Ministry of Road Transports & Highways
MOS	: Minister of State
MSMEs	: Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises
MVA	: Motor Vehicle Agreement

NER	: North East Region
NEFA	: North Eastern Frontier Agencies
NFR	: Northeast Frontier Railway
NDA	: National Democratic Alliance
NDHHC	: Noklak District Handloom & Handicraft Council
NEZCC	: North Eastern Zone Cultural Centre
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization
NH	: National Highway
NSCN (K)	: National Socialists Council of Nagaland (Khaplang)
NSDP	: Net State Domestic Product
NT	: Normal Track
NPWD	: Nagaland Public Works Department
OC EO	: Glass Canal in Vietnam
Pan Am	: Pan American
PBS	: Phosphate Buffered Saline
PDR	: People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR)
PPP	: Public Private Partnership
PRC	: People's Republic of China
PWOK	: Pochury Women Organisation Kohima
SAARC	: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SAGAR	: Security and Growth for All in the Region

SARDP-NE	: Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for North East
SEZ	: Special Economic Zone
SHG's	: Self Help Group's
SL	: Sensitive List
SWOT	: Strength-Weakness-Opportunity-Threat
UNWTO	: United Nations World Tourism Organisation
VDB	: Village Development Board
VG	: Village Guards
WTO	: World Trade Organisation
YASS	: Yunnan Academy of Social Science

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CHAPTER 1

India's Northeast and the Neighbouring Countries: Geographical, Historical, Cultural and Economic Trade Linkage.

1. INTRODUCTION: North East Profile

The Northeast India with a geographical area of 262179 sq. kms. constitutes about 7.9% of the total geographical area of the subcontinent and a population of 4,55,33,982 (as per 2011 census), is known for its rich biological and cultural diversity. The region constitutes 8 states- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. Though the early history of the region is shrouded in ambiguity, its strategic location at the confluence of South, Southeast and East Asia made Northeast India a centre of active population movement and an important path way of communication between the peoples of the mega region.¹

The region shares borders with China in the North, Bangladesh in the Southwest, Bhutan in the northwest and Myanmar in the East. The region is one of the landlocked regions of South Asia. About 4500 km. i.e. 98% of its border is with South Asian countries. No other region of the Indian Union share common border with so many different countries connecting with the heartland through the tenuous 22 km. Siliguri corridor.² Northeast

¹ National Conference Concept Note Towards a New Understanding of Northeast India. January 23-25, 2008, organized by North East India Studies Programme, SSS, JNU, New Delhi in collaboration with IGNCA & sponsored by UPDE (JNU), CAS-CSSS (JNU), ICSSR (Delhi) & NEC (Shillong).

² Globalization and North East India: Challenges and Opportunities: a modified version of the paper presented in the National Seminar on *Globalization and Industrial Revolution Implications for the Development Strategy of the Underdeveloped Region with special reference to Northeast India* organized by the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, NIT, Silchar 27 – 28 October, 2006

region being complete landlocked, positioned at the periphery of national geography, history and culture, far away from the national market centres and surrounded by neighbouring countries of Bhutan, Bangladesh, China and Myanmar, development interest of this region will be better served if she is positioned in a broader canvas of East and South East Asia rather than remaining completely blind folded towards them.³ Thus, it would be desirable to note why Northeast today has become a focus of strategic significance.

1.1.Geographical Profile of the North East

The region is located between 89°46'E to 97°4'E longitudes. It has an area of 2,62,179 sq. km. and a population of 6,07,688 (Census 2011)⁴. By virtue of its location in the transitional zone between East and South Asia, the region characteristically exhibits amalgamation of phenomena, with factors of race, language and religion as prominent instances. This enabled every sub-region in the study area to display distinct socio-cultural and politico-economic leanings and attributes.

The Northeast region of India have almost 70% of land spaces are under hilly terrains roads serve as the principal mode of communication. However, the region accounts for 7.05% of road length of India and a mere 3.00% share in the total surfaced road length in the country⁵. This region is richly endowed with natural and mineral resources and has

³ Gurudas Das & C. Joshua Thomas , (2006), presented a paper on *India's Look East Policy: Implications For The Development of North Eastern Region*, at a Seminar on Peace and Development in the North East. 25 – 26 September 2006 at NEC Auditorium, Shillong: Meghalaya organized by IDSA, NEC & NEHU.

⁴ Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, NIC,2016 (Census 2011). The North East Profile p. 4

⁵ A theme paper on *Issues and challenges to sub-regional cooperation* at a Conference on India' Look East Policy – Challenge for Sub-Regional Co-operation, 7 – 9 October, 2007 Guwahati Organised by Ministry of External Affairs, GoI Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, Delhi, OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

been identified as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots.⁶ The region is also characterized by diverse climate regimes which are highly dependent on the southwest monsoon (June-September). Over 60% of the crop area is under rainfed agriculture, and so in areas highly vulnerable to climate variability and climate change⁷.

Thus, nearly 50% of India's external boundary is within Northeast region. Most of this border region is underdeveloped and peopled by different tribes, many of whom have trans-border tribal affinities. Before partition, many of these border regions had easy trade relations with the neighbouring countries and now because of transnational trade restrictions, there is an inbuilt inhibition for this economic activity⁸

1.2. Historical Profile of the North East

Northeast India faces daunting development challenges because of its landlocked condition⁹. 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" (Verghese, 2001)¹⁰. Northeast India's isolation from its neighbouring countries came about as a result of the

⁶ Charles Reuben Lyngdoh & Merostar Rani (Eds.), (2008), *Introduction, Chapter 1*, p.20, para, 2 in the book *Look East Policy: Impact on North East India*.

⁷ *Climate change vulnerability profiles for North East India* CURRENT SCIENCE, VOL. 101, NO. 3, 10th AUGUST 2011. Ministry of Environment and Forests, GOI, India's Initial National Communication to UNFCCC (NATCOM), New Delhi, 2004; also available. <http://www.natcomindia.org/natcomreport.htm>

⁸ Lt. Gen N.S. Narahari, PVSM (Ed) (2005). *Geo-Politics of the Region* in the book, *Security Threats to North-East India; The Socio-Ethnic Tensions*. Manas Publications N. Delhi (India)

⁹ Sanjib Buruah (Ed) (2004) *Between South and Southeast Asia. Northeast India and the Look east Policy* OKD Guwahati, Assam, India. CENISEAS PAPERS No. 4

¹⁰ B.G.Verghese (2001) "Unfinished Business in the Northeast: Pointers towards restructuring, Reform, Reconciliation and Resurgence," Seventh Kamal Kumari Memorial Lecture. http://www.freeindia-media.com/economy/19_june_economy.htm. as cited in Sanjib Buruah (series Ed.) (2004), p.4

advent of western dominance over sea routes and over global trade¹¹ and more particularly the British conquest of the region and the decision to draw lines between the hills and plains, to put barriers on trade between Bhutan and Assam and to treat Myanmar as a strategic frontier – British India's buffer against French Indo-China and China. While the British colonial rulers built major new transportation infrastructure, aimed primarily at taking tea and other resources out of Assam, the disruption of old trade routes remained colonialism's most enduring negative legacy.

Under the British colonialism Northeast region was severed from its traditional partners, including Burma and other parts of Indo-China, and it was the British who came up with the geographical and political term "Northeast Frontier" to act as a buffer between their Indian dominion and what is now known as Southeast Asia. The region played a particular vital role in the victory of the Allied Forces during World War II, especially in the numerous battle theatres of Indo- China¹². Thus, Northeast was largely isolated from the rest of colonial India and from their traditional Southeast Asian trading partners.

1.3. Political Profile:

At the time of India's independence in 1947, the area that is now called Arunachal Pradesh was known as the North East Frontier Area (NEFA). NEFA was a part of the province of Assam in the colonial era, but at the time of independence while it remained a part of Assam, it was separated from the control of the elected state government¹³. Tribal areas make the bulk of the territory of Northeast India. The Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution makes special provision for the administration of what were then 'the Tribal

¹¹ Jeffrey Sachs, At Symposium on Global Urban Problems in Sanjib Baruah's (Ed) (2004), p.5.

¹² Sriram Ananthanarayanan (Ed), *India's hegemony unmasked: The case of Northeast India*, in Northeast India Diary, Sunday, August 31, 2008.

¹³ Sanjib Baruah, *Durable Disorder Understanding the Politics of Northeast India* (OUP, New Delhi, 2005), p. 36

Areas in Assam'. In the colonial period those tribal areas were mostly protected enclaves, where tribal peoples could supposedly pursue their 'customary practices' including kinship and clan-based rules of land allocation. They were called 'backward tracts', later replaced by the term 'excluded areas' – so called because they were excluded from the operation of laws applicable in the rest of British-controlled India. The administration of these areas was to be temporarily carried out directly from Delhi with the Governor of Assam acting as the agent of the Indian President. In addition, the nineteenth century institution known as the Inner Line restricted the entry of outsiders (Indian citizens as well as foreigners) into what are now the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. The political development of the country had and implication on the economic development of Northeast region which had gone unnoticed in India's foreign policy. For instance, the partition of the country in 1947 blocked the natural sea route through the port city of Chittagong. It land-locked the region and blocked the river transportation route to the sea. This loss of connectivity insulated the economy and affected accessibility to the markets. It had imposed severe constraints on the future growth prospects for the region. Secondly, illegal immigration from the erstwhile East Pakistan had been a perennial problem for the region which led to prolonged mass upsurge and which is still a thorny unresolved issue, thirdly, the war of liberation in East Pakistan in 1971 had led to large inflows of refugees to this region. These problems never received their due attention¹⁴ Thus, the colonial rule significantly altered the political geography of the region. While British annexation brought the region within the economic and political framework of colonialism, it also sealed its people within rigid territorial boundaries hitherto unknown

¹⁴ The Look East Policy and the Northeast: New Challenges for Development. A draft paper prepared by Alokesh Barua, Professor, CITD. SIS. JNU, New Delhi and Santosh Kumar Das. Research Scholar. SSS. JNU, New Delhi for the Conference on India's Look East Policy – Challenges for Sub-regional Cooperation. 8 – 9 October 2007 at Guwahati, Assam organized by the Ministry of External Affairs. GoI, New Delhi, OKDISCD Guwahati and ICRIER. New Delhi

in their history. Besides, with the introduction of colonial policy of exclusion and partial exclusion and inner line regulation substantial parts of the region which traditionally served as nature's 'bridge' between the populations of the mega region became out of bounds for the outside population. However, now with a paradigm shift in India's foreign policy towards Northeast through look east/act east policy one can hope for a positive transformation of the region.

1.4. Economic Profile:

The economy of the region primarily depends on agriculture sector contributing over 40 per cent of the income and employ about 70 per cent of the total working population. Although NSDP share of agriculture sector has declined to about 30 per cent, the number of population dependent upon this sector continued to remain high even in the post globalization period. The decline in the NSDP's share of agriculture sector has been more or less compensated by the increase in the share of service sector. That is, the service sector growth rate during the corresponding period is commendable. Nevertheless, the industrial sector in the region continued to be in pathetic condition. Industrially the region is one of the most backward regions in India. Only Assam, and to some extent Meghalaya, have moved ahead of the rest of the states in terms of industrial development whose industrialization cantered on tea, oil and timber¹⁵.

However, the economic future of the Northeast has to be secured with the realization that today, boundaries are seen not as barriers but as gateways.

¹⁵ N. Bhupendro Singh (2006) Globalisation and Northeast India: Challenges and Opportunities. Presented in the National Seminar on Globalisation and Industrial Relocation: Implications for the Development Strategy of the Underdeveloped Regions with Special Reference to North East India organized by Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, NIT, Silchar, 27-28 October 2006

1.5. Social & Cultural Profile:

Northeast is an abode of diversities in culture, language, ethnicity. The sociological and anthropological concepts, namely caste, class and tribe, generally used to grasp the social reality of the northeastern societies. Each social groups strictly maintains its ethnic and cultural identity. It generates social cleavage among different social groups of the region. These social cleavages give rise to internal as well as external contradictions among social groups¹⁶.

However, diversities of cultures do have its own significance because northeast is also a region of all forms of art in terms of crafts, belief systems, dance, music and festival hold the imprints of their social and political history. Keeping them alive is a magnificent form of paying homage to our ancestors and a form of preserving the rich heritage of northeast. Northeast is also known as a region of biodiversity hotspot, indigenous skills and knowledge. Not all the states have the same social and cultural practices; however, there are practices that runs common in all the northeastern regions, i.e. the people of this region have a sentimental value to their respective traditional attires, for instance 'handlooms' are more than economic symbols they are socio-cultural icons of hard work and sweat, each design and pattern symbolize a state, a tribe, a village, a clan, it also symbolizes an authority where some attires can be worn only by a village headman or an Angh (King)

Northeast is a phenomenally diverse mosaic of cultures which have to be preserved and enriched; this paradigm was perhaps preponderant largely in the 1950s and the '60s. Northeast cultures were seen as exotic, endangered; which needed to be kept in museums

¹⁶ Dr. Virendra Pal Singh, Department of Sociology, Assam University, Silchar, paper presentation on Relevance of Caste, Class and Tribe for the Sociological Understanding of North East India: A Critical Analysis at the National Conference, n.1, p. 14

and protected from the big bad wolf called 'economic development'. And, if one looks at the writings and the dominant discourse in government during those years, it was this that really animated much of our policies towards the Northeast¹⁷

On a broader perspective the social, cultural and economic profile of the region are inextricably intertwined with those of their neighbours (more on linkages), and there is much to be gained by removing trade barriers with the neighbouring countries to enable access to seaports and inland waterways.

Profile of Northeast: State Specific

All the Northeastern states lie along the international borders surrounded by neighbours viz China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh. The unexplored Northeast region is connected to the rest of India via a small narrow corridor commonly known as the Chicken Neck, a narrow stretch of land squeezed between Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Both Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim share three international borders respectively.

- **Assam:** seven districts of Assam share international borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh and are surrounded by six Northeastern States, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura and Meghalaya. Assam has an international border of 262 kms with Bangladesh and 267 kms with Bhutan in the northwest.

Resources: The state is blessed with rich mineral, water, forest, agricultural and human resources of great potential and value, offering immense possibilities of becoming one of the frontline states of India. Assam is rich in mineral resources. Petroleum, natural gas, coal and limestone are the state's principal mineral resources. About 25% of the state land

¹⁷ North East India in a New Asia, By Jairam Ramesh. The author then is a Member of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha., the Upper House of the Indian Parliament. Presented as part of the "Gateway to the East"- a symposium on Northeast India and the Look East Policy, June 2005

area is under forests. Forest in Assam are rich in valuable trees such as Sal, Simalu, Saral, Segun, Agar, Bossum, Bamboo, Cane, Medicinal herbs etc. They also supply fruits, fuel and fodder. These forest resources have helped the growth of forest-based industries such as, plywood and paper industries. The state produces nearly 55% of the total output of tea in the country. Her main agriculture products are rice, wheat, pulses, potatoes and maize, while chief cash crops consist of tea, jute, oil seeds, tobacco and sugar cane. Many of these agriculture products are exported to other parts of India bringing a good deal of revenue to the state. Sericulture made much headway in the state. Silk products such as Muga and Endi of Assam are world famous.

- **Arunachal Pradesh:** also known as the land of rising sun. it is the largest state among the eight northeastern states, and has 10 districts which border Myanmar in the east, China in the north, and Bhutan in the west. The total length of the international border with Myanmar is 520 kms, with China 1126 kms and Bhutan 217 kms.

Resources: Arunachal Pradesh is a store of various minerals. Arunachal Pradesh Mineral Development and Trading Corporation was established in 1991. Graphite, Dolomite, Marble, Limestone, Coal, Lead, Zinc are the mostly found minerals in the state. Gold and Pyrites are also found in some areas of Arunachal. Arunachal is rich in biodiversity. The entire state is covered with hills and forests. Arunachal Pradesh is rich in flora. The state has large number of timber species, various kinds of orchids, medicinal plants, ferns and rhododendrons. Arunachal has about 600 species of orchids, 18 species of Hedychium, 52 species of oaks, 18 species of cane and 45 species of bamboo. Hedychium's, oaks and rhododendron are some important plants in the state. Crops grown here include wheat, rice, maize, pulses, millet, sugarcane, ginger and oil seeds. Arunachal Pradesh is also ideal for horticulture and fruit orchards. Fruits including pineapple, oranges, lemon, litchi,

papaya, banana and peach walnut and almond are grown in the state in scanty. Coal, dolomite, lead, zinc, graphite and marble are the minerals found in the state.

- **Manipur:** 3 districts of its 9 districts border Myanmar in the east. Manipur acts as India act as India's 'Gateway to the East' through Moreh in Manipur and Tamu town in Myanmar, the land route for trade between India and Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries. The length of the international border with Myanmar is 398 kms.

Resources: more than 60 percent of the state area is under forest and important forest products are obtained in Manipur. It is said that the forest of Manipur holds seventy different species of commercially valuable woods including teak. There are also bamboos and canes apart from firewood, which people collect for their daily use. Turpentine, wax, resin, gumfibre, the spicy dalcchini, honey and medicinal herbs are among the other products of Manipur's forests. There is, however, scope for raising the revenue of the state from its rich forests. There are not many minerals in Manipur but it has rich lignite seams in the southern hills. the other known minerals that Manipur possess but to be exploited yet are limestone, copper, chromite, nickel, asbestos and salt.

- **Meghalaya:** It is also popularly known as "The Abode of Clouds". Meghalaya's five districts are bound to the south and the west by Bangladesh covering 443 kilometers in length. The state of Meghalaya is mountainous, with stretches of great scenic valley and a panorama of lush, highland plateaus, and it is geologically rich in valuable minerals including coal, limestone, uranium and sillimanite. The state has about 1,170 kilometers of national highways. It is also a major trade route with Bangladesh.

Resources: Meghalaya is a store house of economic minerals. The major minerals that are presently explored are coal, limestone, clay and sillimanite. These minerals are utilized in several mineral based industries in the country. Besides, coal and limestone are also exported to Bangladesh, earning a good amount of foreign exchange. Meghalaya has a

high prospect of tourism because of the refreshing mountain air, the whispering pines, the exotic flora and fauna, the caves-all give the tourists a tremendous taste of beauty and serenity. Here's nature in all its glory. Limpid lakes, expansive rivers, babbling streams breaking into waterfalls, twisting and turning and disappearing into greenery this is Meghalaya.

- **Mizoram:** meaning “land of the hill people” in local dialect, it is the southernmost landlocked state sharing international borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Seven districts covering the total state area of 11944.31 sq. kilometres border Myanmar. The length of the international borders is 818 kilometres; 502.19 kilometres along the Indo-Myanmar and 316 kilometres along the Indo-Bangladesh front.

Resources: Vegetables, spices, cotton, tea, birds eye chilli, anthurium and rose have immense potential in the State. Mizoram hosts 14% of the Bamboo Cultivation Area in India registering a 99% surplus production – the total quantity being 3237, 689 million. 95% of the citizens in the interior regions of the state are treated by the locally produced medicinal plants. Ethnic Handloom and crafts of Mizoram have a large domestic and overseas market which is being expanded by inviting private and public players.¹⁸

Nagaland: was declared the 16th state of India on 1st December 1963. It is one of the smallest states of India. There are 16 Districts; Chumukedima, Dimapur, Kiphri, Kohima, Longleng, Mokokchung, Mon, Niuland, Noklak, Peren, Phek, Shamator, Tseminyu, Tuensang, Wokha, Zunheboto.¹⁹ Noklak, Kiphri, Mon, and Phek share borders with Myanmar to the east. The length of the international border is 215 kilometres.

¹⁸ ITALIA Italian Trade Commission. India: Profile of the North East 2011.

¹⁹ Official State Portal Government of Nagaland. Department of Information Technology & Communication, 16 February 2023.

Resources: in Agri-sector main crops grown are rice, millet, maize & pulses. Cash crops like sugarcane & potato are grown in some parts. Coffee, cardamom and tea are grown in hilly areas, oil seeds include rapeseeds, mustard seed etc. agro-based, horticulture and floriculture. Many parts of Tuensang, Mon, Mokokchung districts have vast petroleum resources.²⁰ Phek, Mokokchung, Mon, Kipheri are districts rich in limestone, coal, and magnetite deposits.

- **Sikkim:** is the hilly state nestling in the Himalayas range is the least populace state in India and the second smallest after Goa in total area. Sikkim is surrounded by Bhutan on its Southeast, Nepal on its west and China on its northwest. Three districts share international border with China 220 kilometres, 99 kilometres with Nepal and 32 kilometres with Bhutan.

Resources: West Sikkim has substantial reserves of copper and traces of gold. Sikkim is gifted with vast forests resources including a variety of flora and fauna. It is a paradise for nature lovers, trekkers, environmentalists, botanists and conservationists. That state is rich in both mineral resources and forests resources. There are many valleys and rivers flowing through the state. Sikkim is rich in geological resources. The state has established the department of mines and geology to explore the resources, with an objective of developing commercially exploitable mineral resources. Sikkim has various minerals including dolomite, coal, talc, lime stone, mineral water, graphite, thermal springs, building stones and other minerals. The state department mines and geology is responsible for the commercial exploration of various minerals resources. Apart from rice and maize, the state also plants tea and coffee. Tea is exported to other countries like USSR and Germany. Various fruits like orange, guava, banana, mango and spices like ginger, cardamom and

²⁰ Sevendiary.com. discourse Northeast & Travel. India, culture, lifestyle. A portal dedicated to promote the culture, lifestyle and travel destinations of Northeast India

turmeric are produced in the state. The horticulture department of Sikkim provide technical guidance to the farmers for better agriculture in the state. About 450 species of orchids are also found in Sikkim. A flower exhibition held every year in Sikkim to provide a universal platform to the flower growers.²¹

- **Tripura:** is the third smallest Indian state, it has only one major road, the National Highway 44 that connects the state with other seven sisters and the rest of the country. Rail transport was introduced in the state in 2009. The state topography is characterized by hill ranges, valleys and plains. It is the largest international bordering state in the Northeastern region with international border (covering four districts) of 856 kilometres in length, of which 730.5 kilometres is fenced, as of 2012 with Bangladesh. There are several locations that serve as bilateral trading points between India and Bangladesh, including Akhaura near Agartala, Raghna, Svimanpur, Belonia, Khowai and Kilasahar. But service is available between Agartala and Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh. In 2013, the two countries have agreed to establish a 15-kilometer railway link between Agartala and the Akhaura junction of Bangladesh.

Resources: Tripura have two land customs stations which are operational, viz, at Akhaura and Sonamura, out of the eight notified by the Government of India. Official export trade consists of local produce (pineapple, orange, jack fruit, sweet potato, ginger, plywood). Import consists of Hilsa fish and Jamdani sarees.

Neighbouring Countries of North East India

All the eight northeast states lie along the international borders surrounded by five neighbouring countries viz China, Bhutan, Myanmar Nepal and Bangladesh. The

²¹ www.sikkimonline.in/about/profile

unexplored Northeast region is connected to the rest of India via a small narrow corridor commonly known as the Chicken 's Neck, a narrow stretch of land squeezed between Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. Both Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim shares three international borders respectively

The Asian region, which stretches from Myanmar to the Philippines in the east and upto Singapore and Indonesia in the south, is central India's Look East (renamed Act East in 2014) policy and is located in India's Look East (renamed Act East in 2014) policy and is located in New Delhi's very front yard. India shares a land border with Myanmar, an ASEAN member state, and maritime boundaries with two other member states – Indonesia and Thailand.²²

Location of the north eastern India makes it share its border with numerous countries like Bhutan, China and Nepal in the north, Bangladesh in the west and Burma in the east and south.

India's Northeast, called the "Gateway to Southeast Asia", is a landlocked region comprising an area of 263,000 square kilometres. The strategic location of the region is emphasized by the fact that it shares a 4,500 km-long international boundary with its four South Asian neighbours. The region has 10 independent countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malasia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

India's foreign policy initiative i.e. Look East Policy aims at establishing closer economic integration with the Southeast Asian States. Thailand took the lead in forging links between ASEAN and South Asia through constituting a new sub-regional grouping of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand (Bhutan and Nepal joined later)

²² The Tribune, Voice of The People (Feb. 11, 2016), *Asean the Pivot of India's Act East Policy* by Dinesh Kumar.

(BIMST) for purposes of economic cooperation (EC). The grouping that took shape is popularly known as BIMST-EC to interact in the economic arena.²³

**State wise Length of International Border of Northeast Region (International
Border in Kilometres) Look East Policy Vis-à-vis NER**

State	Bangladesh	Bhutan	China	Myanmar	Nepal	Total
Arunachal Pradesh	0	217	1080	520	0	1817
Assam	263	267	0	0	0	530
Manipur	0	0	0	398	0	398
Meghalaya	443	0	0	0	0	443
Mizoram	318	0	0	510	0	828
Nagaland	0	0	0	215	0	215

²³ Wasbir Hussain, India's Northeast. The Super-highway to Southeast Asia? *IPCS ISSUE BRIEF No.104, June 2009*. Wasbir the Director for Development and Peace Studies, Guwahati, Assam.

Sikkim	0	32	220.35	0	97.80	350.15
Tripura	856	0	0	0	0	856
Total	1880	516	1300.35	1643	97.8	

Source: Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, North East India. Page Maintained by the Director of Look East Policy. Updated, March 2017

2. INDIA’S NORTH EAST: LINKAGES WITH NEIBOURING COUNTRIES.

It was being emphasized that India had the advantage of close historical, cultural links with south-East Asia and therefore, it could perform a key role in the fastest growing economic region.²⁴ India shares long traditional, historical, civilizational and cultural ties with the countries of East, South and South East Asia. The region is known to us and thus enables us to reinvent our relationships. India’s North East has traditionally been linked to South East Asia geographically.

The ethnic Ahoms, Burmans, Thais (Thailand), legtians (people of Lao’s) and Viets (Vietnamese) have similar history, and for an outsider it is difficult to distinguish their

²⁴ Man Mohini Kant (Contributor) ASEAN-India Relations during the Cold War – in – Frederic Grare & Amitabh Mattoo (Eds.) (2001) INDIA AND ASEAN; The Politics of India’s Look East Policy. Centre de Sciences Humanes Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Centre for the Study of National Security Policy. MANOHAR: A publication of the French Research Institutes in India, p. 60

facial features. Sanjay Hazarika has rightly observed that “the girls of Imphal in Manipur, who ride cycles and scooters, resemble their Thai and Lao counterparts. They could easily be placed either in Bangkok or Vientiane. The swaying Manipuri dancers are similar to the gentle rhythms of Khmers and Laotians as well as Thais and Indonesians. The distinctive shawls of Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, each colourful strand proclaiming a tribe, a lifestyle and an identity, share commonalities across the borders in Myanmar and Thailand.”²⁵

India has embarked on seeking closer economic and security relations with this region as concomitant to its “Look East”²⁶ India was accepted as the Dialogue Partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 1995, in which nine countries of Southeast Asia, including Myanmar, is represented. Our friendly gestures are reciprocated by the ASEAN, yet the volume of Indo-ASEAN trade and investment flows are much below that of Sino-ASEAN trade and investment. There is much scope to enhance our commercial relations and, in that context, Northeast can play a vital role, subject to the conditions that there is a proper and effective coordination amongst its contiguous neighbours. As BJP government came to power in 2014 under the leadership of Prime Ministership of Modi, Sushma Swaraj the then External Affairs Minister unveiled a shift in India’s foreign policy from “Look East” to “Act East” it is a crucial sign of commitment of the new government to push ahead its policy of “Act East” was displayed by the Foreign

²⁵ Sanjay Hazarika, *Strangers of the Mist: Tales of War and Peace from India’s Northeast* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1995), p. xviii in Ganga Nath and Nani Bath article (2000) India and South East – Asia Reviving Traditional Bonds of Friendship; Chapter 18 p-225 in Nalini Kant Jha (Ed) (2000) India’s Foreign Policy in a Changing World: Essay in Honour of Professor Bimal Prasad. South Asian Publishers N. Delhi

²⁶ Nalini Kant Jha, (Ed.) (2000) *India’s Foreign Policy In A Changing World, Essays in Honour of Professor Bimal Prasad*, Contributors-Ganga Nath Jha Nani Bath. “India and South East-Asia Reviving Traditional Bonds of Friendship.” Chapt. 18. P. 225

Minister's recent meeting with the Indian heads of missions in South East Asian & East Asian countries.

2.1. Geographical Linkages:

Geography is destiny is an accepted axiom in thinking about national security strategy. In large countries such as India, the United States, China and Russia, the execution of foreign policy is inevitably influenced by regional considerations within the nation. Regional parties in India have always tried to influence the contours of foreign policy to the adjoining countries.²⁷

It is necessary at the outset to understand the geographical bonds of India's ties with the Southeast Asia. India has a geographical proximity to Southeast Asia, sharing its maritime boundary with at least three countries – India's second longest border (land and maritime together) is with Myanmar – the closeness of Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal to Southeast Asia than to mainland India and the fact that southern India tip is astride some of the most important sea lanes of communication in the Indian ocean, connecting Southeast Asia (and East Asia) with West Asia and Europe through which nearly 40% of the world trade passes through. However Southeast Asia was hardly a high foreign policy priority to India till recently.²⁸

Geographically, South East starts with Myanmar, and India would have thus to include this country in its relations with all other Asian countries instead of continuing to ignore it diplomatically, so as not alienate its first potential port of entry to Asia. Gradually, the inclusion of Myanmar in India's eastern policy was seen as logical, notably when

²⁷ C. Raja Mohan, A foreign policy for the East, *THE HINDU*, Opinion – Leader Page Articles, Friday, 16/7/2004

²⁸ G.V.C.Naidu "Wither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia" in Strategic Analysis, Vol.28, No.2, Apr – Jun 2004 © IDSA. Revised paper received on April 26,2004 p – 333

Myanmar joined the ASEAN club in July 1997. Therefore, the top connects of South East Asia with the Indian Subcontinent. Myanmar becomes the geographical axis and the *raison d'être* (reason for being) for these new institutions: the BIMSTEC, the Kunming Initiatives (BCIM) and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)²⁹.

2.1.1. Geographical roots with North East India.

A cursory look at the demographic mosaic of northeastern India would show that this region is home to a curious amalgam of crosscutting societies.³⁰ India's Northeast region forms a part of great tropical rainforest that stretches from the foothills of the Himalayas to the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula and the mouth of Mekong River as it flows into the Gulf of Tonkin.³¹ However, today the region generally connotes that part of Asia, where India's seven States – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura – are located. It is spread over 255,000 square kilometres of which only 22 kilometres are contiguous to India, which comprise only two percent territories. This is also known as chicken's neck³² and located across Siliguri in Assam. The rest of the Northeast frontiers are contiguous to Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Bhutan and that comprise 98% of the total length of the borders³³. India's Northeastern states of

²⁹ Renaud Egretreau "India's Entry into Asia – The Burmese Frontier First" Chapter, 5 in Renaud Egretreau (Ed) (2003) *Wooing the Generals: India's New Burma Policy*. Pp 102-103

³⁰ Sreeradha Datta, "Security of India's Northeast: External Linkage" *Strategic Analysis* A monthly journal of IDSA, November 2000 (Vol. xxiv No.8)

³¹ Ibid., Sanjay Hazarika, 1, p. 225

³² A. Lanunungsang Ao (Ed.) 2002, *From Phizo to Muivah: The Naga National Question in North East India*. Mittal Publication New delhi-110059 (India) p. 346

³³ Notes of Development of Commerce in North Eastern Region for Export to Neighbouring Southeast Asian Countries (Guwahati: Federation of Industries of North Eastern Region, 19 January 1997), p. 1

Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram share 1,463 km border on their east with Myanmar³⁴

K.R. Narayan has observed that geographically, Burma is a bridge between China and India, which, with development of modern communications, will become a strategic thoroughfare. He has further stated that Jawaharlal Nehru had an understanding of all this in his mind when he tried to forge ultimate relations with Burma and together with Prime Minister U Nu strove for wider Asia cooperation, including friendship and cooperation with China as a key factor³⁵

On June 16th, 2007 when External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee arrived at the Meghalaya's capital Shillong for interaction on "Look East Policy: Geography and Opportunity," he espouses it repeatedly, saying, "NE can be a trade corridor to SE Asia."³⁶ The 'Look East Policy' changed into the 'Act East Policy' under the present political dispensation led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This dispensation has called for a robust and result-oriented diplomacy to attain India's national interest in its Eastern neighbourhood. The piecemeal approach is supposedly replaced by a proactive one to steer the course with a renewed spirit to secure tangible results in geostrategic as well as geoeconomic terms. Contextualized in India's North-East, the policy has remained a mere rhetoric; yet the recent stride has generated a lot of optimism among the academia, policy-

³⁴ DIALOGUE Quarterly, Vol. 9 No 1 July – September, 2007. Focus: India's Eastern Neighbourhood & 'Look East Policy'. Ed. B.B.Kumar. Astha Bharati Delhi., p. 69

³⁵ K.R.Narayan, "Indifferent to Burmese Struggle," *Sunday Economic Times* (New Delhi), 8 January 1991

³⁶ Pamreiso Shimray, India's Trade Corridor, India's Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee visits Shillong to enlighten the Northeast region on Look East Policy, in *Northeast Window*, Vol. III-issue 22 July 15th 2007

makers and other stakeholders in the region for a relook at the policy with a new paradigm.³⁷

Geographical contiguity is not merely the absence of physical distance. It enables a participative exercise for building a community of prosperity based on goodwill and enterprise. In an era of globalization, inter- connectivity, whether within a region or between regions, has to be comprehensive, covering all dimensions – human, infrastructural, economic, technological and cultural. By building such bridges of understanding and interaction will we increase and widen the circles of prosperity and growth.

Our North-Eastern states are India's gateway to South East Asia. This is true not just in terms of physical connectivity but also in terms of economic outreach and cultural affinities. The development of the North-East and its integration with the larger regional processes is one of the prime determining factors of India's engagement with regional cooperation. This region will benefit from three interacting circles of associations that we are actively engaged in – SAARC, BIMSTEC and ASEAN.

2.2. Historical Linkages:

Historically, all countries of the BIMSTEC were linked with each other for their regular trade through land route and sea. The famous 'silk route' between India and ASEAN countries was the main artery of economic activity of this region, which India, of late, had initiated to revive its past glory to rejuvenate the economic landscape of this region.³⁸.

³⁷ Jayati K. Pattnaik, (2015), Act East through the North East, *Mainstream*, Vol LIII, No 16, April, 2015

³⁸ Swapan K. Bhattacharya and Biswa N. Bhattacharyay. (Ed) (2006). CESifo *Working Paper No. 1725* category 7: Trade Policy May 2006 in *Prospects of Regional Cooperation in Trade*,

India's association with Southeast Asia can be traced back to ancient times. No other country has influenced the region as much as India by way of religion, language, culture and civilization. There is also enormous historical evidence to suggest that there were flourishing economic and cultural relations between India and the countries of Southeast Asia in the Pre-colonial era. While these links were disrupted during the colonial interlude, the freedom struggles in India and many countries of Southeast Asia have led to the rediscovery of each other. Much before India attained independence in August 1947, the leadership envisioned the future importance of Southeast Asia caught the attention of a leading Indian strategic thinker who argued that the "Gulf of Malacca is like the mouth of a crocodile, the Peninsula of Malaya being the upper and the jutting end of Sumatra the lower jaw. The entry to the Gulf can be controlled by the Nicobar's and the narrow end is dominated by the island of Singapore."³⁹

In the colonial period, Indian immigrants went to Southeast Asian countries to work in plantation fields, where they led a miserable life. Some also migrated to set up business in textiles, spice trade and retailing. Indian money lenders did a fine business in textiles, spice trade and retailing. The colonial bureaucracy and army had also sizeable number of Indians. In the British colonies of Malay, Singapore and Myanmar, Indians worked in rubber, coffee and tea plantations. The British brought to Singapore indentured laborers, mainly from southern India for construction work. The cheap and unskilled labor in rice mills and plantations was provided by Indian labour. In the French colony of Indo China, there were Indian textiles merchants and money lenders. Indians also worked for the government as clerks, technicians, teachers and traders. Colonial governments saw

Investment and Financial in Asia: An empirical Analysis on BIMSTEC Countries and Japan.
www.ssrn.com/ www.CESif-group.de

³⁹ Ibid, G.V.C.Naidu, 5, p. 333

Indians as advancing the interest of colonial masters. Although they have contributed to economic life of Southeast Asia, Indians faced (and continue to face) many difficulties with the citizenship rights and ethnic.

Contemporary India-Southeast Asian relations – Free from ideological rhetoric and the bogey of the cold war, India moved closer towards Southeast Asian countries. The collapse of Soviet Union and India's economy woes resulting from centralized planning forced the leadership to think anew. It liberalized its economy and decided to keep in tune with the globalization process. The 'tiger economy' of the Asia – Pacific Rim was taken into consideration. India adopted two-pronged strategy to have closer contact with Southeast Asia. It made diplomatic moves to have close interaction with a multilateral ASEAN as well as endeavoured to have close bilateral ties with the countries of Southeast Asia. India's Cambodia, and India's economic reforms changed the scenario. At the fourth ASEAN Summit in Singapore in January 1992, member countries of ASEAN decided to make India sectoral dialogue partner as far as tourism, commerce, science and technology were concerned. The ASEAN-Indian Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (AIJSCC) was established to look into these matters. This period resulted in many high-level visits.⁴⁰

Indian nationalist leaders convened the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in March 1947 primarily to express solidarity with the freedom struggles all across Southeast Asia. Equally important was the Special Conference on Indonesia that was held in January 1949 which was attended by 15 nations and expressed support to the Sukarno-led armed struggle, especially in Indonesia and Vietnam, provided major inputs in shaping the

⁴⁰ Patit Paban Mishra "India- Southeast Asian Relations:" An overview in *Teaching Southeast Asia*, An Internet Journal of Pedagogy. Volume 1, No.1, Winter 2001, p. 3

nascent Indian foreign policy in the late 1940's.⁴¹ Interestingly, the Indian military trained the armed forces of Indonesia after it became independent and Indonesia was the only country outside the Commonwealth with which the Indian Navy held joined exercises. India's non-aligned policy had considerable appeal in Southeast Asia even as the cold war rivalry began having an impact on the region. Due recognition was accorded to India's stature as a regional power when it was made the Chairman of the International Control Commission that was set up under the 1954 Geneva Accord on Vietnam. The Afro-Asian conference (also called the Bandung Conference) in April 1955 was co-sponsored by India and was a major turning point. But the India's interest in Southeast Asia dwindled with the wars that India had to fight with China in 1962 and with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971⁴². The war with China diluted Nehru's vision of an alternative framework of reference in world politics – the non-aligned movement. That policy with minor changes now and then, continued for the next two decades till the end of the cold-war. Security concerns over-rode foreign policy.

While India was trying to come to terms with reality in South Asia and elsewhere, Southeast Asia was also undergoing radical changes. The founding of ASEAN consisting of anti-communist regimes and the intensification of US involvement in Indo-China led to polarization within Southeast Asia. In the aftermath of the oil shocks in the early 1970's India's main concern was to secure uninterrupted oil supplies. Flush with petrodollars, the

⁴¹ Mohammed Ayoob, (Ed) (1990) *India and Southeast Asia: A Study of Indian Perceptions and Policies*. 1990. Routledge; London – pp. 7-8

⁴² India was solely disappointed when North Vietnam came out in support of China during the 1962 war, and more so when Sukarno offered to open another front and take over the Andaman & Nicobar Islands located close to Indonesia in the Bay of Bengal during the 1965 war with Pakistan. Malaysia was one of the very countries that not only condemned the Chinese attack but also offered its help to India. Malaysia was one of the very countries that not only condemned the Chinese attack but also offered its help to India.

economic opportunities in the West-Asian region also drew India away from Southeast Asia.

It was amidst these developments, that the expansion of the Indian Navy came under focus because of perceptions that India along with the Soviet Union and Vietnam might make concerted moves to check the growing Chinese influence in Southeast Asia, particularly after the Soviets gained a foothold in the Cam Ranh Bay naval base in Vietnam⁴³. This coincided with India's acquisition of certain high profile naval ships and systems. Although the first reaction came as far back as mid-1986 when Indonesia protested against reported Indian moves to build a new naval base in the Andaman and Great Nicobar Islands,⁴⁴ criticism of the Indian Navy reached its peak in the late 1980's and 1990's

Northeast Indians think of Southeast Asian countries as their neighbours. But in a maritime sense the East coast of India – Orissa, Andhra or Tamil Nadu – is also next door to Southeast Asia. Indeed, historically mainland India's ties with Southeast Asia have been more maritime-oriented than continental. The Indian Ocean Region has seen maritime commercial ties for millennia. The west coast of India "around 600 A.D. the Saka kings of Gujarat set sail and reached the west coast of Java" (Baru, 2000: 12).⁴⁵

As it has been in the past, even in modern times it is cheaper and less troublesome from India to trade with Southeast Asia by sea rather than by land. The land route not only goes through a difficult terrain, there is a perception that the route is full of danger. It may be tempting therefore for India to build relationships with Southeast Asia that are primarily

⁴³ The expansion of the Indian Navy in the 1980's with the Soviet help and the reactions that it elicited especially from Southeast Asia have been dealt with in detail in G.V.C. Naidu, *Indian Navy and Southeast Asia*. 2002. Sage; New Delhi

⁴⁴ *Far eastern Economic Review*. May 16, 1996

⁴⁵ Baru, Sanjaya (2000) "The Problem" *Seminar* (New Delhi) No. 487 (Issue on Looking East) March: 12-17.

maritime rather than continentally oriented. It is not accidental that the world's only superpower, the United States, is both a continental and a maritime power. It is because of the dual orientation that it succeeded the maritime British and gained superiority over the continental Russian's and German's (Wang, 2000: 111).⁴⁶ The eventual success of India's Look East/Act East Policy will depend on India's ability to embrace both a maritime and a continental thrust.

Sixty-Five years ago, the then Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces, Mountbatten, also recognized the importance of North East. It was his South East Asia Command which built the famous Ledo road to Kunming in China Stillwell Road for supervising the two oil pipe lines respectively from Kolkata and Chittagong via Tinsukia and also for troop movements. Its construction was overseen by Mountbatten quarrelsome Deputy, Stillwell, but a magnanimous Mountbatten named the road after Stillwell⁴⁷

Every aspect of India's ethos, I.K.Gujral said, reflects the 'footprints of South East Asia'. But 'the forces of history and circumstances' had interrupted this relationship. Colonialism and the Cold War, he said 'drew artificial boundaries between us' (Gujral 1996)⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Wang, Gung Wu (2000) *The Chinese Overseas: From Earth-bound China to the Quest for autonomy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

⁴⁷ The Earl mounbatten Of Burma. "Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia. 1943-45". The English Book Store. New Delhi. 1960. Also see H. N. Das. "India-China Trade through the Stillwell Road: Dialogue. Vol. 6 No. 1. July-September, 2004. Astha Bharatt. Delhi. 2004

⁴⁸ Sanjib Baruah, 13, p. 222, paragraph 4

2.3. Cultural Linkages:

Close cultural interaction of India with Southeast Asia passed through many vicissitudes⁴⁹. India and each member state of ASEAN have had business and cultural links for more than five millennia and ancient monuments scattered throughout the region bear testimony to this joint rich heritage.

Northeast India also shares similar cultural and genealogical background with the peoples in Myanmar. The ethnic Burmans are generally associated with Tibeto-Burman linguistic family and so has been case with ethnic Ahoms. Kachins situated near Chinese frontiers have Tibeto Burman lineage. Again, Mon inhabitants or Nagas of Nagaland have ethnic connection and social interactions with their counterparts in Myanmar. There are as many as 600 Naga villages in Myanmar, bordering Nagaland. It also stated that the people living across the border were socially, and ethnically alike to various tribes in Nagaland.⁵⁰

Again, Chins situated in Western part of Myanmar and Mizo's in the Northeast are bound by ethnic connections. Shans spread into Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand and Northeast have ethnic bonds. Khamtis and Singpo of Arunachal Pradesh are seeking Shan identity: They are inter-linking with Kachins also. All of them are Buddhist and have similarities of customs and traditions. In short, it can be stated that various ethnic groups of Myanmar have their counterparts in the Northeast. They indeed have transnational connections and strong sense of ethnic identity. It was this reason that in 1990, Indo – Burma Revolutionary Front comprising the National Socialist Council of Nagaland, the United Liberation Front of Assam and the United Liberation Front of Myanmar had been formed.⁵¹ Its objective

⁴⁹ Patit Paban Mishap (2001), 34, p. 1

⁵² *Times of India* (New Delhi), 7 December 1992.

⁵¹ *Sunday Economic Times* (New Delhi), 8 January 1991.

was to unite the tribes of Mongoloid origin on either side of the border and to carve out an independent state of their own.

The territories from India Northeast to Vietnam facilitated the migration from China to Southeast Asia. There were continuous movements of the people from Yunnan to Southeast Asia. However, the mountain ranges neither allowed similar connections to the people of the sub-continent towards Southeast Asia, nor there were any compulsions as the Chinese faced.

Shans immigrated first and settled down in Northern Burma in the fertile valleys of the Salween, Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers. The Shans called themselves Tai Yaay, which means “big Tai” as opposed to Tai Navy that is “Little Tai” in Thailand and Laos.⁵² This distinction probably refers to a period when the Shans established their state in upper Burma and Thais and Laotians were yet to migrate to their Southeast Asian homelands.

The new migrants from southern China came to an area under the impact of Indian civilization. Shans, Thais and Lao people retained the essence of their indigenous culture but at the same time adopted themselves beautifully to the areas that had come. They took the help of Buddhism, Hinduism or Animism to prove their distinctive culture. They expanded their territories at the cost of their Khmer empire and paid regular tributes to the Han rulers to strengthen their security postures.

In the post-independence era different groups are trying to locate their missing links to promote the feeling of their nationalism. The ethnic Chinese have established their network successfully and ethnic Malays have tried to discover their commonalities in Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei and the Philippines. The Thai people are trying to establish

⁵² Shan and Tai Yaay refer to the same geographical and cultural areas. For details see, Stephen Sparks, “On the Shan Borderlands in Mac Hong Son”, NIA Snytt, Nordic Newsletter of Asian Strides, no.4, December 1995, p.1

their missing links with the Shans and the Lao people. Again, the Ahoms too are trying to discover their linkages with their people on the other side of the frontier. However, we have to understand this aspect of ethnicity in Indian context.

The magnificent murals on the palace and temple walls of Angkor Wat in Cambodia depict scenes from the Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata; the images of dignitaries and warriors from the Majapahit empire in old Indonesia are of people whose forefathers came from the subcontinent; the pagodas and temples at Ayuthaya in Thailand, at Pagan in Myanmar, at Luang Prabang in Laos, at Hoi An in Vietnam or at Borobodur in Indonesia reflect the spread of Buddhism from the Himalayan foothills in India. Islamic preachers from western part of India spread religious and cultural values of Islam in Singapore and Malaysia which helped the process of formation of the Sultanate of Temasek, the forerunners of modern Malaysia and Singapore.⁵³

The reality of the Indian presence in Asian cultures is undeniable. Recent scholarship in the field of Asian cultural studies has laid much stress on the essential oneness of the substratum that defines what may be termed as an Asian identity. Buddhism and Hinduism, having originated in India, travelled beyond the frontiers of the people of Asia, Trade, political ambitions and religious pursuit led to a dissemination of Indian 'ideas' and 'forms' across Asia. In each area of Indian influence, the assimilation of Indian traditions with indigenous practices led to the development of a new idiom of expression with a distinctive localized identity.⁵⁴

⁵³ Reinforcing Look East Policy "An article by Minister of State for External Affairs Mr. E. Ahamed" 17/01/2006 Interviews Ministry of External Affairs New Delhi

⁵⁴ Anupa Pande and Parul Pandey Dhar (Ed.) (2004), *Cultural Interface of India with Asia: Religion, Art and Architecture*, New Delhi, *D.K. Printworld*, xxiii, 412 p., plates, ISBN 81246-0262-X

The consensus is that the process of Indian cultural expansion in Southeast Asia was accomplished by peaceful means and it was nonpolitical in character. There is first the *Kshatriya* (warrior class) theory, which presupposes that Indian Cultural expansion was due to the seminal influence of the Indian warriors and conquerors, who migrated in large numbers to Southeast Asia. The *Vaisya* (merchant class) theory postulates that Indian cultural penetration began with traders, who intermarried with local women and impressed the indigenous population with their goods and culture. The third theory, commonly known as *Brahmana* (priestly class) theory accorded primacy to local initiatives: indigenous port patricians and rulers enlisted the service of Brahmans to buttress their political authority through Hindu ceremonies and rituals. Rather than being the result of a single, most likely the whole process of Indian culture expansion was the outcome of endeavours of warriors, traders and priests along with the indigenous initiative. Most probably all four groups of people were involved in the process.

One of the significant factors in the spread of Indian cultural influence in Southeast Asia is geographical proximity between the regions. The fabulous wealth of Southeast Asia was an attraction for the Indians. The type of names given to different regions of Southeast Asia is recognition of this desire for economic gain. The Ramayana, Pali Nidesa and other workers refer to Suvarnabhumi (land of gold); Narikeladvipa (island of camphor), and yavodvipa (island of barley). In respect of kingdom of Pan Pan (located on the east coast of Malay Peninsula), it has been said that the numerous Brahmans of that kingdom came from India in search of wealth. Inscriptions at least to the arrival of Indian Brahmans to Cambodia and settling there after marrying in royal families. The missionary activities of Buddhists also resulted in large number of Indians settling in the region.

The most extensive cultural contact between India and Southeast Asia came in later centuries. However, initial contact between India and Southeast Asia, dates back to

prehistoric times. There was racial and linguistic affinity between certain groups of people of eastern India with Southeast Asians. Archaeological excavations are also a testimony of the interaction between the two regions. In the Korat Plateau of Thailand, glass and stone beads have been found, which is an indicator of trade contact with India. Ban Chiang in Thailand had yielded bimetallic (made of two metals) spearheads belonging to first millennium BCE (Before the Common Era). The same types of artifacts have been reported from places like Mahurijhari in Madhya Pradesh, Gilmanuk in Bali, Prajekan in Java (Java is a home to roughly half of Indonesia's population) and Dongson in Vietnam. The Buni complex in Java had yielded Indian rouletted ware of the first and second centuries CE (Common Era). Sembrian in Bali is another site, whose finds include shreds of pottery of types found at Arikadmedu (Archaeological site in Southern India), an important Indo-Roman trading center. An Indian type of gold foil funerary eye cover had been recovered from the site of Gilmanuk (Bali Indonesia). In Vietnam, there was an entrepot from the second century onwards, beads, intaglios (a design engraved into a hard material) and seals with Sanskrit inscriptions. There was racial and linguistic affinity between certain groups of people of eastern India with Southeast Asians. Archaeological excavations are also a testimony of the interaction between the two regions.⁵⁵ Kalinga coast, another important coast from where the ships went Irrawaddy valley of Myanmar after crossing the Bay of Bengal. From the valley, the traders went to the upper Yangtse basin through Salween (flows within Southwest China and Eastern Myanmar) and Mekong rivers (world twelfth-longest river and the seventh-longest in Asia).⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Java island Indonesia. Also known as: Djawa, Jawa. Written and fact checked by the Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. August 28, 2023

⁵⁶ Lewis Owen, Jeffrey W. Jacobs, Gilbert F. White. (2023) MRC Mekong River, Southeast Asia. Encyclopaedia Britannica.

In the whole gamut of Indo-Southeast Asian relations, both Indians and Southeast Asian played an active role. Apart from movement of people, racial and linguistic affinity, there were also trading relations. Along with traders, Brahmans (priests) from India came to Southeast Asia, who acquainted the local elite with Indian rituals, scriptures and literature. They became counsellors in the affairs of the courts and provided political support to the rulers by giving them a sort of investiture (a ceremony at which honours or rank are formally conferred on a person) and genealogical list, which legitimized the position of rulers. The people of Southeast Asia accepted certain elements of Indian culture like Sanskrit language, the Hindu –Buddhist cults etc. In art and architecture, concepts were Indian, but indigenous genius was at work. The spice and pepper trade to the Mediterranean by Gujarati traders resulted in establishment of Muslim settlements in Southeast Asia. From Gujarat and Coromandel Coast, where contact with Southeast Asia was there from earlier times, the traders visited the region and helped in spreading Islam. As Indian Muslims brought the religion, Islam in Southeast Asia was not like the orthodox Islam of Arabia. A new religion and cultural force were emerging in archipelago. Indian and Arab traders have established themselves in scattered pockets. It was mainly the Indian traders from Gujarat, Malabar, Tamil Nadu and Bengal, who brought a liberal brand of Islam. Indians Muslims before coming of the Portuguese dominated the trade in Indian Ocean and there was a connection between Indian and Indonesia in the maritime trade of the region. International ports like Malacca and Aceh had large settlements of Indian traders.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Swapan K. Bhattacharya and Biswa N. Bhattacharyay - Prospects and Challenges of Regional Cooperation and Integration in Trade, Investment and Finance in Asia: An Empirical Analysis on BIMSTEC Countries and Japan 2, Cesifo Working Paper No. 1725. Category 7: Trade Policy, May, 2006

Traditions believe that Emperor Ashoka sent two Buddhist monks, Sona and Uttara, to Suvarnabhumi, the golden land of Myanmar. They went as messengers of peace, friendship and goodwill. They brought our countries together, religiously and culturally. Indeed, the legacy of Buddhism has bequeathed to us a common heritage. In its multiple dimensions it has imparted to our interaction an enduring quality. Culture, civilization and education accompanied the spread of Buddhism and introduced a unique richness to ties between our two peoples.⁵⁸

3. CONCLUSIONS:

Northeast India's isolation from its neighbourhood has much older roots: that which came about as a result of the advent of western dominance over sea-routes and over global trade and more particularly the British conquest of the region and the decisions to draw lines between the hills and plains to put barriers of trade between Bhutan and Assam and to treat Myanmar as a strategic frontier – British India's buffer against French Indo- China and China. While the British colonial rulers built a major new transportation infrastructure, aimed primarily by taking tea and other resources out of Assam, the disruption of old trade routes remained colonialism's most enduring negative legacy (Sanjib Baruah)⁵⁹.

However Northeastern region has a shared cultural history with South East Asi-Tai-Ahoms are an offshoot of the Tai people who are called Shan in Myanmar, Thai in Thailand, Lao in Laos, Dai and Zhuang in China and Tay-Thai in Vietnam (Baruah: 2007).

⁵⁸ Speech by Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam. "Indian President host dinner in honour of Senior general Than Shwe and wife Daw Kyaing of Myanmar at Rashtrapati Bhavan", *The New Light of Myanmar* Vol.XII, No.198, Sunday, 31 October, 2004, 3rd Wanning of ThadingYut 1366 ME., Estb. 1914

⁵⁹ Sanjib Baruah (2004), "Between South and South East Asia: North East India and The Look East Policy". Omeo Kumar Das Institute of Social Change and Development. Guwahati. 2004.

Besides the Ahoms, the Khasis of Meghalaya are also with South East Asian ties they had pioneered rice farming in Vietnam's Red River Delta before losing to the Vietnamese, after which they crossed over to Myanmar and into Yunnan province of China before moving to India. A similar cultural affinity is to be found in people's movement in eastern India with countries of Bangladesh and Nepal⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Background note of the Conference on India's Look East Policy-Challenges for Subregional Cooperation 7 -9 October 2007, Guwahati. p. 3-4

CHAPTER: 2

From Look East to Act East: A Perspective

1. INTRODUCTION:

The Narendra Modi led government which came into power in 2014 has accorded high priority to India's Look East Policy. During his opening statement at the 12th ASEAN Summit, he underscored the importance of the 10 - Nation ASEAN bloc in a new era of economic development, trade, investment and industrialization. He made known to the world that India is not merely 'Looking East' but is now 'Acting East' as well, thus, revising the title to 'India's Act East Policy'. This phase was also characterized by an expanded definition of 'East' extending from Australia to China. There has been a consensus in India cutting across the political spectrum in support of the revision of the 'Look East Policy'. This enthusiasm and intensity in momentum of various actors in the economy is marking another shift in this foreign policy, of 'Thinking East' too.⁶¹

The world economy has seen a rapid movement towards globalization of economic activity since the mid 1980's. One feature of the increasing global economic integration is the completion of the Uruguay Round of multilateral negotiations and the emergence of the WTO. Alongside that, however, regional and bilateral free trade agreements have emerged as important factors shaping global patterns of production, investment and trade. These trends pose a tremendous challenge for the economic policy makers in developing countries like India.⁶² The "Look East" policy was envisioned by the Narasimhan Rao

⁶¹ Dr. Vidya Yeravdekar and Dr. Rajani R. Gupta, in the Conference Proceedings on the title *India's Look East – Act East Policy: A Bridge to the Asian Neighbourhood* at Symbiosis International University (2014)

⁶² K.C. Pant Message (Nov. 3, 2003), RIS A Think – Tank of Developing Countries. RIS (Research and Information System) Annual Report 2002/03.

government in 1991 in order to outline a focused foreign policy approach towards Southeast Asia, a region of high economic prosperity at that time. Moving away from years of inward-looking policies, it has become a significant force in the global political and economic policy⁶³. This chapter focuses on the evolution of India's Look East Policy, and then within the context of the larger transformation of Asia's economic and security architecture after the Cold War and the policy shift into the second phase with India's primary focus towards Northeast India.

Probably, India never felt more isolated in its neighbourhood since independence than during the late 1980's at the regional and global level.⁶⁴ It is important to note few significant changes that were made to adjust the foreign policy orientation to suit the changed circumstances. Apart from re-tuning the non-alignment-centered policy, serious attempts were made to blend foreign policy priorities with security concerns. Second, in order to give a greater economic orientation to the foreign policy, a separate cell, called the Economic Division, was created, headed by a senior bureaucrat in the Ministry of External Affairs. Third, special efforts were initiated aimed at assuaging the concerns of the smaller neighbours in South Asia.⁶⁵ Finally, the Look East Policy aimed at greater economic alignment with, the political role in, the dynamic Asia-Pacific region in general and Southeast Asia in particular, was put in place. It became apparent that, outside South

⁶³ Vinod K. Aggarwal & Rahul Mukherji, *India's Shifting Trade Policy: South Asia and Beyond*

⁶⁴ A series of developments in the period had considerably raised tensions with Pakistan and China on the border: the Indian military adventure in Sri Lanka was a disaster; its policy toward was widely perceived to be strong arm tactics when restrictions were imposed on entry points; and Bangladesh was sore because of what it considered New Delhi's obstinacy over sharing of Ganges waters.

⁶⁵ It later came to be known as the 'Gujral Doctrine'. Its main aspect included: Unilateral concessions with no ostensible reciprocity, except in the case of Pakistan; forging friendly relations with Pakistan while continuing high – level talks to resolve the differences; and making economics as the basis for building South Asian regional cooperation and solidarity.

Asia, India saw Southeast Asia as the only region where politico - strategic and economic conditions offered an opportunity to play a role for itself.⁶⁶

The end of cold war brought about a fundamental change in the international system, which focuses on the economic content of relations between and among the nations that led to the burgeoning of the formation of regional economic organizations. The end of cold war constraints, domestic economic reforms, forces of globalization, frustration with the process of integration within South Asia and the renewed concern of emerging powerful China and its impact on India's security, as well as India's unease at Beijing's growing assertiveness in the Asia Pacific region made India to rethink and reorient the basic parameters of its foreign policy. As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said, the Look east policy is "not merely an external economic policy; it is also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy."⁶⁷

This Chapter will highlight *Firstly*, why India was not paying sufficient attention to its eastern neighbours before the policy was launched. *Secondly*, why India shifted its focus towards the East and Southeast Asia in the early 1990's in the form of Look East Policy as a response to the changed global equations in the post-Cold War era, *Thirdly*, what factors prompted the adoption of Look East Policy, *Fourthly*, the shift from LEP to AEP and *Finally*, why Northeast is the epicentre of India's Act East Policy.

1. Why India was paying less than sufficient attention to its eastern neighbours till 1991?

It was the constraints of the cold war, when India and the nations of Southeast Asia found themselves on opposite sides. With the end of cold war, however, the strategic

⁶⁶ G.V.C.Naidu, *Whither the Look East Policy: India and Southeast Asia*, Strategic Analysis, Vol.28, No. 2. April-June 2004, IDSA.

⁶⁷ Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's keynote address at special leader's dialogue of ASEAN Business Advisory Council, December. 12, 2005, Kaula Lumpur

environment in South and South East Asia underwent a paradigm change creating enabling environment for India and the countries of South East and South East Asia to reorient and restructure their foreign policy goals and objectives to achieve their respective national interests.

1.1. India's association with Southeast Asia can be traced back to ancient times. Probably no other country has influenced the region as much as India by way of religion, language, culture and civilization. There is also enormous historical evidence to suggest that there were flourishing economic and cultural relations between India and the countries of South East Asia in the precolonial era⁶⁸. However, these links were disrupted during the colonial period. It was during the decolonization process that India and South East Asia could discover each other for achieving collective aspirations based on collective consciousness for freedom and emancipation from the yoke of colonialism and imperialism.

1.2. The Cold War Constraints – While India and Southeast Asia had a common approach towards anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism their collective approach began to disappear when the post-World War II world order began to witness the division of the world on ideological lines between the USA on one hand and the USSR on the other. The ideological rivalry between the two ideological antagonistic superpowers, known as Cold War, also created ruptures in India's relations with the countries of South East Asia. While India chose to follow the principle of non-alignment based on equi-distance, the countries of South East Asia aligned themselves politically, economically and militarily with one superpower or the another. The Cold War based world structure created distance

⁶⁸ G.V.C.Naidu, IDSA (2000) *The Indian Navy And Southeast Asia*. New Delhi; Sage Publishers.

between India and the countries of Southeast Asia, otherwise geographically, historically and culturally connected.

1.3. Myanmar closed door policy in the early sixties - During the constitutional period from 1948 to 1962, Burma had a democratic, parliamentary government. However, the country suffered widespread conflict and internal struggle. Constitutional disputes and persistent division among political and ethnic groups contributed to the democratic government's weak hold on power. In 1958, Prime Minister U Nu accepted military rule temporarily to restore political order.⁶⁹ The military stepped down after 18 months. In 1962 General Ne Win led a military coup, abolishing the constitution and establishing military government.

Although parliamentary democracy was practiced from 1948 – 62, the civil war continued unabated. General Ne Win, claiming that the nation was breaking up, staged a coup in 1962 when in fact the other ethnic leaders were trying to prevent the breakup of the nation. General Ne Win, however, arrested all political leaders, abolished all civil rights, took over all private businesses, expelled all foreigners and placed a military officer in charge of every aspect of life. No dissent – political or otherwise, was tolerated.⁷⁰

Even in travel and tourism Burma used to be the hub of air travel in Southeast Asia until the early 60's. Rangoon, Burma's capital at that time was the best airport in Southeast Asia, all the major air links Pan Am, Northwest, KLM, BOAC, Air France etc. operated direct flights to Burma. People from Thailand, Singapore etc. who wanted to travel to

⁶⁹ US DEPARTMENT OF STATE Diplomacy in Action. *Background Note: Burma*. August 3, 2011. Bureau of East Asia and Pacific Affairs.

⁷⁰ Hara Yawngwe; *EU – ASEAN RELATIONS: A Burmese/Myanmar Perspective* (2000), p. 2&3. www.enclburma.net.../141-eu-asean-relations-aburmesemyanmar. Harn Yawngwe is the Director of the European Office for the Development of Democracy in Burma based in Brussels

Europe have to travel first to Burma to take the transit flight. However, in the 1960's Burma kept itself separated from international community and since then Myanmar closed itself to the rest of the world in the early 60's.⁷¹ These developments adversely affected relationship between India and Myanmar closing the gateway for India's interactions with the countries of South East Asia.

1.4. Political and Diplomatic difference between India and ASEAN in the 80's

– India has shared a closed relationship with ASEAN countries since the time of its independence in the Southeast Asia region during the 1950's by supporting the Indonesian struggle for independence and involving itself in the Indo-China crisis in the 1960's. It also signed friendship treaties with Indonesia, Myanmar and the Philippines and consolidated its bilateral and diplomatic relations with them. However, with the signing of an “India- Soviet Peace & Friendship Co-operation Treaty”, relations between India and ASEAN took a downturn. The ASEAN member's perception of the Soviet Union was far from benign and the signing of the treaty made them suspicious of India's intentions.⁷²

Further, under the influence of the Soviet Union, India recognized the People's Republic of Kampuchea regime that was propped up in Vietnam in July 1980 and through the decade, built strong military and political relations with Vietnam. This was contrary to the ASEAN view which condemned the Kampuchean regime and resulted in the worsening of relations between India and ASEAN.⁷³ Through the 1980's relations between India and ASEAN were uncertain and plagued by various political and

⁷¹ Columbus Travels & Tours Co, Ltd. 586, Strand Road (Corner of 7th Street) Lanmadaw Township, Yangon Myanmar. www.travelmyanmar.com.

⁷² Mohammad Ayoob (1990). *India and Southeast Asia: Indian Perceptions and Policies*. London, Routledge.

⁷³ Zhao Hong, “India's Changing Relations with ASEAN: From China's Perspective”, East Asian Institute Working Paper No. 133, October 2006

diplomatic differences which resulted in a compromise of economic relations between them.⁷⁴

1.5. – India vs Pakistan and China and Asian Solidarity - Long before the idea of “Asian Economic Community” (AEC) floated by the South Asian leaders, Community” floated by the South East Asian leaders, the concept of “Asiatic Federation” and the notion of “Asianism” were articulated by the national leaders of India even prior to her Independence which was later operationalized by Jawaharlal Nehru as the first Prime Minister of Independent India. The idea emphasized the need for close cooperation among the post-colonial Asian societies, having common experience of colonial exploitation and suffering, for their future progress. But this perspective of Asianism was destined to crumble with the sharpening of competitive overlapping interest between India vs Pakistan and China in South Asia region. India, being interspersed between West and East Pakistan, has always been perceived as the principal threat to the territorial integrity and national security of Pakistan. In fact, partition of the country on the basis of religion, and formation of Pakistan without any territorial contiguity has instilled in it an inbuilt threat perception from India. However, in 1948, on Kashmir issue, the two neighbors took arms against each other, felt apart, and became archrivals which rendered the first blow to the “Asian Solidarity” movement.⁷⁵

Nehru tried to advance this movement by befriending China and sidelining Pakistan. The Treaty of 1954 between India and China, and the Bandung Conference of Afro-Asian countries held in 1955, in which Nehru and Chou-En-Lai played the leading roles,

⁷⁴ Mohit Anand, INDIA – *ASEAN REALTIONS Analyzing Regional Implications*. Former Research Officer, IPCS Special Report No. 72, May 2009, New Delhi

⁷⁵ Gurudas Das & C. Joshua Thomas (Contributors), *India's Look East Policy: Implications For The Development Of North Eastern Region.*, presented in a seminar on “Peace and Development in the North East” 25th and 26th September 2006 at NEC Auditorium Shillong, Meghalaya. Organised by IDSA, NEC & NEHU

seemed to have restored the credibility of the movement to some extent. But the overlapping interest of both India and China in the Himalayas and their competitive claims for regional power had brought Sino-Indian honeymoon to an abrupt end. The Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962 put the last nail in the coffin of the Asian solidarity movement (Das: 2001)

2. Factors responsible for shift in its focus towards the East and Southeast Asia and the evolution of India's Look East Policy in the early 1990's.

As discussed above India was not having a cordial friendship with East and Southeast Asia in the 60's but eventually with the changed global politico-economic scenario India began to shift its focus towards East and Southeast Asia in the 90's.

2.1. End of Cold War – The end of Cold War with the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 Brought unprecedented change in the nature and contour of world politics. At the same time, it removed the cold war constraints and obstacles that hampered a cordial and cooperative relationship between India and the countries of South, East and South East Asia.

India like our neighbours began to reorient and redefine their foreign policy goals and objectives in the changed global scenario to fulfill their politico-strategic and economic and financial interests. India lost the most valuable friend in the USSR. The USSR was India's not only all-weather friend but also the largest trading partner and the most dependable strategic support system.

With the fall of the USSR and the emergence of the USA as the only superpower India began to shift its foreign policy focus towards the USA and its partners in India's neighbourhood. The thrust of India's foreign policy became economic diplomacy. It is in this context that our Look East Policy evolved in the changed global environment.

2.2. Globalization & Liberalization – of the world economy, for the last two decades, has brought about an increasing integration of economies and societies around the world. The process of globalization refers to an increase in trade, capital movements and investments and people across the borders. It has thrown open both opportunities and challenges to not only the developed states but also the developing ones in more than one way. The globalization process has opened ‘new kind of governance such as regional institutions and adding new actors to the process such as nongovernmental organizations and transnational arbiters and regulators.’⁷⁶ “Globalization has improved access to technological latecomers to advanced technologies, to the extent that technological upgrading is important for development” (Patil & Gopal, 2002:2). Globalization is the process by which events, decisions and activities in one part of the world have significant consequences for other parts of the globe. It extends beyond economic interdependence to include dilution of time and space dimensions because of spread of information technology.

Thus, the concept of globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.⁷⁷

The year 1991 marked the beginning of globalization process in India. Having been depleted of its economic reserves, India was left with no other alternative than to include the globalization and liberalization package in its economic policy. The rich dividends of the policy are yet to reach local levels for the ills always seem to outnumber the merits.

⁷⁶ Ngaire Woods (ed) (2000). The Political Economy of Globalisation. Pg. 3, 1st para, Bloomsbury Publication, USA

⁷⁷ John Baylis & Steve Smith, (ed), (2001) THE GLOBALISATION OF WORLD POLITICS, An introduction to international relations. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Nonetheless, the acceleration of transition towards the market oriented and export led growth strategy has been significant.

The development strategy adopted by India, prior to liberalization of 1991, laid much emphasis on self-reliance and rapid industrialization. This emphasis led to a highly restricted import policy thereby alienating the policy of competitiveness for a considerable length of time. Also, an unprecedented importance was attached to the public sector and the foreign aid/ investment was kept at bay. Mobilization of domestic resources was considered as a viable alternative than relying on foreign aid. Nonetheless, this period registered certain achievements by India in the industrial and technological know-how, capacity to produce capital intensive and defense goods. India became one of the major resources for skilled manpower with rapid growth of technical, engineering, medical and other professionally competitive areas. This self-reliance strategy did not meet the expected levels and the subsequent political instability had greatly hampered India's economic growth. A timely departure in 1991 from the earlier development strategy placed India on the path of a higher growth rate and sustenance.⁷⁸ Thus, the opening up of global economy offered new opportunities, new visions for India to develop competitive strategies.

In the post-cold war era, India had to look for new moorings for its economic growth and development. The remarkable economic performance of the roaring 'Asian Tigers' caught the imaginations of the countries and people around the world which inevitably compelled attention and drew admiration in India too. In fact, India's early economic reforms initiated in 80's were stimulated to an extent by the successful example of how the countries to our East had managed to achieve rapid economic growth and poverty

⁷⁸ Sailaja Gullapalli, (2005) India and Globalization: Policy of look East and Beyond, *Research and Practice in Social Sciences*, Vol. 1, No. 1 August 2005 pp 81-82.

reduction through market-oriented policies with a focus on exports. Realizing that we may have missed some openings that came our way in the past, we were determined not to lose the new opportunities that came our way.

Our changing economic policies, and our growing self- confidence to see globalization not merely as a challenge but also as an opportunity, have given us a new perspective on the importance of the Asian region. As Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has put it, the world wants India to succeed. Other countries, including East Asian countries, want to plug into India's economy growth and opportunities. As India prospers and develops, we want to take our neighbours along with us. When distant countries planned long term strategies to get a share of the large and growing Indian market, why should not our immediate neighbours like Bangladesh benefit? It widely, recognized that by 2020 globalization would have an Asian face. If the 19th century could be loosely termed as "European" and the 20th century as the "American", then the 21st century looks set to be "Asian". Thus, growing cooperation between India and East Asian countries is economically logical, indeed essential, if Asia is to play a larger role in the world of the coming decades. The path of greater openness in trade and investment that India is following makes greater integration with Asia inevitable. Even today, East Asia (including Japan, China, South Korea and ASEAN) is India's largest trade partner, ahead of the EU as well as the US.

2.3. India's and ASEAN – India's relationship with ASEAN is central to our 'Look East' Policy. There is much that brings India and Southeast Asia together. There is no history of conflict, only peaceful interaction, with the flow of trade, people and ideas. India had a long history of civilizational and cultural links with Southeast Asia, symbolized by Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Borobudur and Bali in Indonesia, Bodh Gaya and Sarnath in India. It was only when the cold war ended that natural relationships based

on geographical contiguity and commonality of factors could be re-established. Since then, India has developed multifaceted relationships with countries of the ASEAN region, both bilaterally and in a regional framework.⁷⁹ Centuries of friendship and cooperation between India and East Asian Nations mainly driven by cultural and geographical proximity has culminated into strong ties. With the changing world scenario, relationship between India and ASEAN, a bloc of ten South-East Asian Nations, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam have grown in a profound manner. India's economic and strategic engagement with ASEAN started with its 'Look East Policy' in the year 1991. India became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN in 1992 and Full Dialogue Partner in 1996. In November, 2001, the ASEAN-India relationship was upgraded to the summit level. The 'Act East Policy' was formally enunciated at the ASEAN India East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar in 2014. This has placed Southeast Asia at the core of India's Act East Policy and at the centre of our dream of an Asian century.

India-ASEAN Trade in goods Agreement

This was One Hundred and Thirty-Seven Report on Trade with Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) (*Presented to the Hon'ble Chairman, Rajya Sabha on 25th August, 2017*) and (*Forwarded to Hon'ble Speaker, Lok Sabha on 25th August, 2017*), by the Chairman of the Department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce, Rajya Sabha having been authorized by the Committee.

The India-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (hereinafter Agreement) was signed on 13th August, 2009 and came into force on 1st January, 2010 in respect of Malaysia,

⁷⁹ Address by Shri Rajiv Sikri on *India's Relations with its Eastern Neighbours*, at the Bangladesh Enterprise Institute, Dhaka. The then Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs. 31/05/2005

Singapore and Thailand. In the case of other countries, it came into force as soon as the countries completed their internal requirements and as of now, all the ASEAN countries have implemented the Agreement. A copy of the Agreement is given in Annexure I. The Agreement has 24 articles focusing on the establishment of tariff reduction roadmap between ASEAN and India. In addition, it also contains rules of origin, dispute resolution mechanisms, non-tariff measures, policy transparency, reviewing and amending commitments, the trade defence instruments and exception.

Under the Agreement, the tariff reduction roadmap is divided into five categories with the different levels of progress and tariff reduction viz. Normal Track (NT), Sensitive List (SL), Highly Sensitive List (HSL), the list of Special Products and Exclusion List (EL). Tariff reduction date is from 1st January, 2010.

(i) **Normal Track:** Tariff rates for products placed in the Normal Track will be reduced subsequently and the tariffs will drop to zero by 31st December, 2013 for Normal Track-1 and by 31st December, 2016 for Normal Track-2

(ii) **Sensitive Track:** The tariff rates are to be reduced to 5% and further reductions to 4.5% and 4%.

a. Structure 1: Duties on items with MFN applied tariffs of more than 5 per cent will be reduced to 5 per cent by December 31, 2016.

b. Structure 2: Duties on products with MFN applied tariffs rate higher than 5 per cent will be reduced to 4.5 per cent and then eventually to 4 per cent by December 31, 2016.

c. Structure 3: For products with 4 per cent duty rates in the sensitive list, tariffs will be eliminated in a phased manner.

(iii) Special products: This is a category specific to India. The tariff rates for products such as crude and refined palm oil, coffee, black tea and pepper would be reduced at a much more gradual pace than either the normal track or the sensitive track.

(iv) Exclusion list: No tariff reduction commitments have been made for the product included in this list. However, it has been mentioned in the agreement that the exclusion list shall be subject to an annual tariff review with a view to improving market access.

The Committee was informed by Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry that all ASEAN countries have implemented the India ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement. In order to have an assessment of India-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, the Committee was informed that during 12th ASEAN Economic Minister's (AEM)-India Consultation held on 23rd August, 2015 at Kuala Lumpur, the Scope of Review of India ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement was decided for effective utilization of the agreement which would include the following:

- (i) Review of implementation issues such as rules of origin, need for operational certification procedures, verification processes and release of consignment, focal point of interaction, transposition of tariff lines for standardization etc.
- (ii) Facilitation measures such as custom procedures and traffic facilitation, focus on sanitary and phytosanitary measures and technical barriers of trade and the need for product specific rules of origin.
- (iii) To take into account other negotiations on further liberalization of trade in goods.
- (iv) Promoting India ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement to the stakeholders as the utilization of the FTA is not at the desirable level.

Department of Commerce further informed the Committee that wide consultation with stakeholders were held by DoC for assessing the utilization of India ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement and the gap if any in the implementation and the procedural part. On the basis of the feedbacks received, India has framed a draft MoU on trade data exchange and draft revised operational Certification Procedures. These drafts are currently under the consideration of ASEAN secretariat.”⁸⁰

2.4. BIMSTEC

Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) comprising Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand brings together 1.5 billion people – 21% of the world population, and a combined GDP of over US\$ 2.5 trillion.⁸¹

BIST-EC (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand – Economic Cooperation) was formed at a meeting in June 1997 in Bangkok. Myanmar was admitted in December 1997 and the organization was renamed as BIMST-EC. The grouping expanded when Nepal and Bhutan were admitted in February 2004. The grouping’s name was changed to BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) at 1st Summit Meeting held in Bangkok in July 2004 ⁸².

BIMSTEC is a prudent extension of India’s ‘Look East’ policy. Formed in 1997 it consists of five countries of South Asia and two of South East Asia at the rim of Bay of Bengal. It is an attempt to tap the synergies of land and maritime contiguity in yet another

⁸⁰ PARLIAMENT OF INDIA RAJYA SABHA. DEPARTMENT-RELATED PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE. ONE HUNDRED THIRTY SEVENTH REPORT, Trade with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), (*Presented to the Hon’ble Chairman, Rajya Sabha on 25th August, 2017*), (*Forwarded to Hon’ble Speaker, Lok Sabha on 25th August, 2017*), (*Presented to the Rajya Sabha on 18th December, 2017*), (*Laid on the Table of Lok Sabha on 18th December, 2017*). Rajya Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi, December, 2017/ Agrahayana, 1939, Saka. Website: <http://rajyasabha.nic.in>.

⁸¹ https://www.mea.gov.in/.../BIMSTEC_Brief_February_2014.

⁸² *Ibid*

geo-economic setting. The hallmark of contemporary politics is the proliferation of regional groupings of varied nature and scope. The changes that have taken place in the international field in the early nineties have created a new political and economic context for India's regional diplomacy. Regional framework is being widely accepted as a strategy for meeting the challenges of the present unjust world economic order and overcoming internal structural inadequacies.⁸³ BIMSTEC provides a link between South Asia and South East Asia by way of economic cooperation and linkages in identified areas of co-operation.⁸⁴

Initially, the economic bloc was formed with four Member States with the acronym 'BIST-EC' (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand Economic Cooperation). Following the inclusion of Myanmar on 22 December 1997 it was renamed as BIMSTEC. After Nepal and Bhutan joined the organization in 2004, the full name of the grouping was changed to 'Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation' while the acronym remained the same.⁸⁵ It comprised the countries at the rim of Bay of Bengal. BIMS-TEC inauguration was a low-key affair in comparison to SAARC. There were only Ministerial level meetings for several years. It was in the year 2004 that its first Summit took place in Bangkok in July. It was the first overseas visit of the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh since he took office after the May 2004 general elections. In February 2004, Nepal and Bhutan also became members of BIMSTEC. The acronym no longer represented the full membership of the organization. Therefore, during its first Summit it was decided that the letters of the nomenclature

⁸³ Smita Shrivastava, *BIMSTEC: POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA*. The Indian Journal of Political Science (ed. Sanjeev Kumar Sharma) Vol. LXVI, No. 4, Oct.- Dec., 2005

⁸⁴ Shri B.K. Handique, Minister of Mines & Minister of DONER said in, *Press Information Bureau, Government of India* 21, September, 2011.

⁸⁵ Revised – BIMSTEC, (2016), Ministry of Foreign Affairs Nepal. March 2016. <https://www.mofa.gov.np/uploads/2016>

should stand for Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation rather than the initials of the names of the Asia. It is important to note that the two countries of South Asia that are not members are Pakistan and Maldives.

BIMSTEC was formed at the time when the process of globalization was sweeping the world. India's economy was also opening up. World scene had changed tremendously. Soviet Union had disintegrated and the cold war came to an end. Communism as an ideology was being challenged. European Union was getting stronger. With the end of Cold War, the nonaligned movement lost much of its relevance. WTO had been formed in 1995. SAARC which was formed in 1985, was not making any headway due to mutual dissensions and mistrust of member countries. This was broadly the international and regional scenario when BIMSTEC was being conceived and formed in 1997.

The BIMSTEC process marks a new phase in India's 'Look East' policy. The Congress government led by Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao launched this initiative towards South East Asia in the early 1990's. Mr. Vajpayee deepened the scope and substance of India's 'look east' policy to cover much of Asia, including the ASEAN, China and Japan. The first segment of 'Look East' policy focused on commercial relations and institutional links with Asia. In the second phase of the 'Look East' policy, India is aiming at political partnership, physical connectivity through road and rail links, free trade arrangements and defence cooperation.

In order to achieve the co-operative objectives of BIMSTEC the following measures have been adopted:

BIMSTEC Sectors of Corporation: BIMSTEC members recognized the importance to create air, sea and land linkages. They include the open sky policy in BIMSTEC, development of roads between Thai-Myanmar- India and Thai- Myanmar- Bangladesh which will facilitate land transport from the Bay of Bengal to the South China Sea. In

terms of Sea transport, there are the coastal shipping project and India's proposal to support a feasibility study on Tavoy's deep seaport. Railway links between India – Myanmar and Thailand is also a priority. A stronger and desirable intra – regional trade is contingent upon improved transport network among BIMSTEC countries.

Technical cooperation and human resource development: BIMSTEC countries aim at developing human resources in the region in order to build knowledge-based economy. In the sixth BIMSTEC ministerial meeting, Thailand offered 100 training scholarships to BIMSTEC personnel while India also offered 150 of such.

BIMSTEC Business Travel Facilitation: Member countries agreed to promote the long-term multiple entry visas to facilitate business travel within BIMSTEC. Meanwhile Thailand's initiative of issuing the BIMSTEC Business Travel Card (BBTC) or visa sticker was accepted and the project is being studied by the BIMSTEC Centre.

Other Cooperative Sectors: Current important projects in the energy sectors are the development of regional hydrocarbon and hydropower energy infrastructure (natural gas) energy information centre and energy trading network between members. The region combines countries having large Gas reserves beyond their short- and medium-term domestic requirements, such as Myanmar and probably also Bangladesh and those with immensely untapped potential of hydropower such as Nepal and Bhutan and net energy importing countries like India. It has been realized that a comprehensive framework for regional resource cooperation going beyond simple energy trade relations and linking the region in an energy community is desirable for fully exploiting the potential of energy cooperation in the region.

Cooperation with the private sector: BIMSTEC encouraged cooperation between the government and the private sector, including private participation in various projects. The BIMSTEC Chamber of Commerce was founded on 30 November 2003 in order to

coordinate between the private sectors in BIMSTEC member countries. The members are at different levels of economic and industrial development and share different natural resource endowments. Hence, the complementarities between them are substantial. There are wide income disparities across the countries that border the Bay of Bengal.

2.5. Mekong – Ganga Co – operation (MGC)

Mekong River, the 12th largest river in the world (4, 400 kilometres in length), flows through China and forms common border of Myanmar – Laos, Thailand – Laos, through Cambodia and Vietnam before draining into South China Sea (Source: China to offer Hydrological Data to Mekong River Commission; www.china.org.cn). The river forms a basin that is spread over an area of 795,000 square kilometres, stretching from China's Tibetan Plateau in the north; Myanmar, Laos and Thailand in the middle; and Cambodia and Vietnam in the south, which is also one of the richest in bio-diversity and natural resources in the world. The six countries namely China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia & Vietnam, through which the Mekong River traverses collectively form a region called Greater Mekong Sub – region (GMS).⁸⁶

Rising in the glaciers of Tibet and flowing through six Southeast Asian countries before entering the South China Sea, the Mekong River lends itself to romantic metaphors and impressive statistics, both of which are frequently invoked in the current dam building debate. The lyrical and the clinical are juxtaposed in representations of the Mekong as a symbol of a new era in Southeast Asia, an era of peace, economic growth and development. The river – as – resource, in a glibly bioregional metaphor, has been transformed from a Cold War 'front line' into a 'corridor of commerce', drawing six watershed countries together in the pursuit of sustainable development through economic

⁸⁶ LEAD International Workshop on Sustainable Development 14 – 21 September, 2003. Concept note, *Trans – boundary Resources Flow: A Case Study of Greater Mekong Sub- region*.

and infrastructural integration and cooperation, promoted by multi-and bilateral donors and lending institutions.⁸⁷

India is also part of the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) Project, which also includes Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. It came into being on November 10, 2000 where representatives of the six member states met at Vientiane (Capital of Laos. Situated on a plain just northeast of the Mekong River) and came up with a set of guidelines known as the “Vientiane Declaration”. The declaration outlined the areas for institutional interaction based on assessment of the capabilities of its member states. In order to give a well-structured outlook to the initiative, a concept paper was worked out which delineated the agenda for cooperative efforts, where the project is primarily aimed at the development of three main areas for cooperation; tourism and culture, infrastructure and information technology as envisaged by the Vientiane Declaration.⁸⁸

The MGC or Mekong Ganga Cooperation is therefore, another building block of our Look East policy. It too has a Thailand angle. The idea of bringing together Cambodia, India, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam to form the MGC came up in a conversation between the then Thai Foreign Minister and his Indian counterpart in New Delhi in July 2000. Both the Ganga and the Mekong are civilizational rivers, and the MGC initiative is indicative of the shared cultural linkages among the member countries. The focus of the MGC is on promotion of tourism and on cultural and educational cooperation. To quote Shri Pranab Mukherjee Keynote address at ISIS Chulalongkorn University, 2007, “just a few days ago, we hosted 20 Buddhist pilgrims from each MGC country in India for a visit to Buddhist holy sites”. Initiatives such as these will, we hope,

⁸⁷ Karen Bakker – *The politics of hydropower developing the Mekong (1999)*. Department of Geography, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. E-mail: karen.bakker@geography.oxford.ac.uk.

⁸⁸ Thongkhohal Haokip, *India's Look East Policy (p. 3)*, Third Concept – An International Journal of Ideas, Vol. 25, No. 291, May 2011, pp. 7 – 11.

allow us to revive the cultural, commercial and other linkages that had brought together our countries in the ancient past.”⁸⁹



Source: South China Morning Post, internationalrivers.org

The Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC) is another building block of India’s ‘Look East’ policy. The focus of MGC is promotion of tourism, cultural and educational cooperation and transport and communication. For India, the MGC offers immense scope for creating ‘linkages’ with member countries. India has thus enlarged its engagement with the ASEAN region.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Keynote Address by Shri Pranab Mukherjee, External Affairs Minister at the Institute for Security and International Studies (ISIS), Chulalongkorn University on “India’s Look East Policy: Implications for Thailand and South East Asia” 14/09/2007. Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi

⁹⁰ *Transforming the North-East, High-Level Committee Report*, New Delhi: Planning Commission, 1997

2.6. The Kunming Initiative

It was agreed that regional cooperation should be guided by the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence (FPPC), which emphasises equality and mutual benefit, sustainable development, comparative advantages, adoption of international standards, and infrastructure development in order to enhance connectivity and facilitate widest possible economic cooperation. (excerpt from the Kunming Initiative).

On August 17, 1999, the Conference on Regional Cooperation and Development among China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh held in Kunming, the capital of Yunnan Province in the southwestern region of China, approved by acclamation what was called the Kunming Initiative. The main thrust of the exercise was to exhort the governments concerned to improve communications between the southwestern region of China and northeastern region of India by developing appropriate road, rail, waterway and air links. More specifically, a call was made to revive the ancient Southern Silk Route between Assam and Yunnan.⁹¹

The Kunming Initiative was formed keeping in mind the fact that a regional outlook on the concerns of development, security and prosperity was undoubtedly more beneficial than striking out one's own. It had promising prospects given that the region represents 9 percent of the world land mass and at present, a considerable amount of global GDP and a great majority of the world's population.

As mentioned above the first meeting of Kunming Initiative was convened in 1999 in Kunming presided by a number of representative organizations such as *The Centre for Policy Dialogue* (CPD) from Bangladesh, *Centre for Policy Research* (CPR) from India

⁹¹ P.V. Inderesan, *The Kunming Initiative*, Frontline, Volume 17 – Issue 07, April 1 – 14, 2000. India's National Magazine from the publishers of THE HINDU.

and *Yunnan Academy of Social Science (YASS)* in Kunming, China, from the Myanmar side it was the Ministry of Trade which represented the country.⁹²

The ‘Kunming Initiative’ evolved into a BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar) Forum for Regional Cooperation during its first meeting with the objective to create a platform where major stakeholders could meet and discuss issues in the context of promoting economic growth and trade in the BCIM region, identify specific sectors and projects which would promote greater collaboration amongst the BCIM nations, and strengthens cooperation and institutional arrangements among the concerned key players and stakeholders to deepen BCIM ties.⁹³

Over the years, the Kunming Initiative developed into what came to be popularly known as the BCIM Forum. Successive BCIM Forums were held annually making a seminal contribution in raising awareness about the potential benefits accruing from the BCIM Cooperation. BCIM Cooperation also started to feature an intergovernmental discussion at highest political levels. The initial vision of the Kunming Initiative was to gradually steer the endeavour from an essentially civil society (Track II) to an intergovernmental (Track I) one where political buy-in and intergovernmental ownership would be key to realizing the vision and the objectives of the initiative.

In the present era of evolving regional security architecture, India has been participating in multilateral forums such as the Mekong-Ganga cooperation, which also includes Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. This body, along with BIMSTEC, aims to bring about greater regional cooperation with respect to trade and investment. Mr. Wadhwa stated that India’s relations with countries such as Japan, South Korea,

⁹² Rahman, Mustafizur, *BCIM-economic corridor; An emerging opportunity*. www.thedailystar.net. Transcom Group, Retrived 9th June 2014

⁹³ Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Trade Corridor, Asia Briefing. Dezan Shira and Associates.

Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Australia have laid a strong foundation for the “Look East” policy. India has come a long way from its earlier stance of passivity and is now seen as a reliable 2014 partner. Slowly but steadily, political and military contents are being added through bilateral and multilateral agreements. India is now proactively working towards building an environment that would enable further growth and ensure economic stability.⁹⁴

2.7. BCIM-EC -The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC)

It is a sub-regional cooperation comprising four contiguous countries of Eastern South Asia which includes the two fast growing economies -India and China and the two developing economies of Bangladesh and Myanmar (BCIM). The initiative to explore potential opportunities of cooperation in this sub-region, which came to be known as Kunming Initiative, is essentially a track-II endeavour.⁹⁵

The point of departure for the BCIM cooperation is that the Integration of these strategically located sub-regional areas, particularly the North-East India (NIE), Bangladesh, Myanmar and South West of China, constituting a natural economic zone, is perceived to have the potential to generate substantive economic benefits in the areas of trade, investment, energy, transport and tourism. The economic dynamism of India

⁹⁴ Anil Wadhwa, Secretary (East), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India (GoI) Special Guest of Honor at the International Relation Conference 2014 titled *India's Look East-Act East Policy: A Bridge to the Asian Neighbourhood* organized by the Symbiosis Institute of International Studies. Supported by A Public Diplomacy Initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs GoI

⁹⁵ BCIM forum is a Track II initiative which was floated in 1999 at a conference on regional cooperation which was held at Kunming, the capital of the Yunnan province of the Peoples' Republic of China. This sub-region comprises a number of geographical units in contiguous eastern South Asia: North-east states of India, Southern provinces of China, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Broadly, it covers the four relevant countries, hence the acronym BCIM.

and China could also offer wide range of opportunities for growth and development in the region.⁹⁶

Forum for Regional Cooperation Act East” Policy offers an opportunity in terms of establishing infrastructure for trade and movement of goods. The BCIM-EC, the four-nation economic corridor, is of particular significance for the development of South Asia, in general, and Bangladesh, in particular. It is an important vehicle to complement various regional connectivity initiatives. The BCIM-EC would provide a crucial avenue to strengthen cooperation and sustainable development across South and South East Asia as well as the Indian Ocean region. The major objective of this initiative is to promote economic cooperation among the countries of this sub-region by making best use of their comparative advantages. The idea is to realize the potential benefits accruing from the abundant natural, human and other resources, based on mutual complementarities, through deeper integration of the constituent economies of the BCIM sub-region.⁹⁷

3. Adoption of India’s Look East Policy

As one looks into India’s civilization it is always looking east. For a proper perspective on India’s substantial engagement with the east, one can clearly identify four different waves of such engagement namely, historical or pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial and contemporary.

3.1. Historical - In the pre-colonial period, there is evidence of India’s dynamic and extensive relations with its eastern neighbours since the first century. This phase lasted until the 12th century and can be described as the first wave of “look east” in cultural and

⁹⁶ Mustafizur Rahman, Habibur Rahman, Wasel Bin Shadat, (2007), **BCIM Economic Cooperation: Prospects and Challenges**, Paper 64, *Centre for Policy Dialogue* (CPD) Dhaka Bangladesh, www.cpd-bangladesh.org

⁹⁷ Mustafizur Rahman , Habibur Rahman & Wasel Bin Shadat,(2007),*BCIM Economic CooperationProspects and Challenges*, Trade Working Papers 22297, East Asia Bureau of Economic Research.

commercial engagement. During this period, the first Hindu Empire (in what later became the Indo-China region) flourished based entirely on cultural and philosophical contacts with India. No military missions were launched and no wars took place, save the South Indian emperor Rajendra Chola's periodic encroachments into the Srivijaya Empire in Malaya and Indonesia in the 10th and 11th century.

The expansion of Hinduism was followed by the spread of Buddhism to the east. The religious and cultural messages travelled directly from India as well as through China. This led to the emergence of a cultural synthesis of these two major systems of faith and belief, the imprint of which is evident even today. The popularity of the Ramayana (with varying nuances from one country to another) in the Buddhist heartland of Southeast Asia may be seen as an unmistakable imprint of this synthesis. It is no wonder that the images of Ganesha, Garuda, Shiva, Parvati, Rama and Sita are adored and worshiped in many parts of Southeast Asia, along with those of Buddha. This imprint is also visible in languages, where Pali and Sanskrit provide the texture and base of many Southeast Asian languages. The cultural synthesis is also reflected in the names of the people and places, lifestyles and festivities, patterns of old architecture and temples like Borobudur in Indonesia, Angkor Wat in Cambodia and Wat Phu in Laos. The Angkor Wat in Cambodia and the Luang Prabang temples in Laos have episodes of the Hindu epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, engraved on their walls. It was in this period that Nalanda University in Bihar, India, emerged as the principal centre of learning based on philosophical and religious (Buddhist) discourses for the whole Southeast and East Asian region. It facilitated the spread of Buddhism in China and Southeast Asia.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ S.D. Muni (2011), India's "Look East" Policy: The Strategic Dimension, *Institute of South Asian Studies* (ISAS), No. 121 – 1 February 2011. National University of Singapore (NUS), website: www.isas.nus.edu.sg

Bali Jatra is a landmark example of spiritual-religious aspect of India's eastward engagement, which exist even today. The term literally means 'voyage to Bali'. In the Indian state of Odisha, this festival is held on Gadagadia Ghata of the Mahanadi River in Cuttack to mark the day when ancient *sadhabas* (Oriya mariners) would set sail to the distant lands of Bali as well as to Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Sri Lanka for trade and cultural expansion.⁹⁹ Also known as *Boita Bandana*, the festival of *Bali Jatra* 'witnesses people gathering near river banks or sea shores to float miniature boats (*boita*) as a symbolic gesture that they will leave far away islands of Bali, Java, Sumatra, Borneo and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) to which their ancestors once sailed. It is celebrated in October – November every year for five consecutive days before the full moon. The idea is to memorize the maritime legacy of Odisha and to remember the strong commercial ties that used to exist between India and the countries to its East.¹⁰⁰

After the advent of the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution, and the subsequent rise of the 'West', particularly during the colonial period, most of the newly colonized countries, particularly those falling in Asia, were considered as the 'East', and India too was a part of this wider 'East'. Suddenly the East was identified with poverty and literacy, and with lack of scientific temper and knowledge, and modernity. The East became a synonym of the colonies with rich ancient heritage, which were later defined as Asia.¹⁰¹

3.2. Colonial Period - The advent of Islam after the 12th century and then the colonial expansion that followed Muslim rule in India disrupted these cultural and commercial links. The Second World War engulfed East Asia rather extensively. The war added a

⁹⁹ S.D. Muni, Rahul Mishra (eds), (2019), *India's Eastward Engagement: From Antiquity to Act East Policy*. Sage Publication. For details, see the official website of Orissa Tourism, <http://odishatourism.gov.in/?q=node/155>, accessed 16 August 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

strategic dimension to India's (then British) links with Southeast Asia. The British grasped the strategic centrality of India in Asia and sustained their colonial presence "east of the Suez" including in Southeast Asia, on the basis of their Indian empire.¹⁰² They built India as the bastion of their power and influence in Asia that protected their colonial holdings as far in the east as possible, up to Hong Kong. This period may be considered as the second wave of India's LEP when strategic interests were brought upfront along with the commercial interests, at the cost of cultural and civilizational links. The legacy of India's colonial sway persists in many subtle and diverse ways. It alerts East Asian countries and interested major powers to project and even exaggerate India's possible 'expansionist' and adventurist intents even when there is no evidence to support such intents. It also imbibes Indian policymakers to a wider strategic perspective that enhances the critical significance of the Indian Ocean and the eastern sea board in its security calculus, as was evident in the thought of Nehru and his associates, like Panikkar.¹⁰³

3.3. Post- Colonial Period - The eastern neighbours constituted one of the priority areas in India's commitment to work for Asian resurgence. Nehru called the Asian Relations Conference in March 1947 even before the formal beginning of, 'India's tryst with destiny.' He, as the philosopher and architect of independent India's foreign policy, in general and its Asia policy, in particular, articulated this commitment while underlining the rationale and significance of Asian resurgence in India's worldview. Speaking at the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, Nehru said:

"We are of Asia and the peoples of Asia are nearer and closer to us than others.

India is so situated that she is the pivot of Western, Southern and Southeast

¹⁰² Lokesh Chandra, *India's Cultural Horizon* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1969). Also see, Sarita Dash, „Roots of India's Cultural Diplomacy in Southeast Asia“, MPhil Dissertation, (New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru University, 2003)

¹⁰³ FN- 36

Asia. In the past her culture flowed to all these countries and they came to her in many ways. Those contacts are being renewed and the future is bound to see a closer union between India and Southeast Asia on the one side and Afghanistan, Iran and the Arab world on the west. To the furtherance of that close association of free countries, we must devote ourselves. India has followed with anxious interest the struggle of Indonesians for freedom and to them we send our good wishes.”¹⁰⁴

Nehru’s vision of a, ‘closer union’ with the East was shaped by the strength of India’s geographical proximity, similarity of historical experiences, cultural identity, economic interests and common strategic concerns in relation to the countries of the East. The vast stretch of Indian Ocean and its economic and strategic significance in links with eastern neighbours was not lost on Nehru and his associates¹⁰⁵

The characteristic feature of the third wave of India’s LEP was decolonization and Asian resurgence. Both of these aspects were primarily emotional and ideological in content. The Nehruvian vision had a strong political content to back them but was bereft of much tangible substance; of commerce, culture and economy, as was evident during the first wave period. Nor was much attention paid, save rhetorical recognition, to the security imperatives of the developments in Indian Ocean, except during the late sixties and early seventies when India encouraged and backed the proposals for reducing the great powers’ arms race in the Indian Ocean by getting it recognized as a ‘Zone of Peace’. Therefore,

¹⁰⁴ Asian Relations, Report of the Proceedings and Documentations of the First Asian Relations Conference, (March 1947) New Delhi. Jawaharlal Nehru, *Speeches, Vol.1 (1946-49) and Vol.2 (1949-53)*, Publications Division, Government of India (Delhi: Government of India, 1949 and 1953)

¹⁰⁵ K.M. Panikkar, (Allahabad, 1944), *The Strategic Problems of the Indian Ocean*. K.M. Panikkar, *India and the Indian Ocean: An Essay on the influence of Sea Power on Indian History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1945); and Werner Levi, *Free India in Asia* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1952)

India's efforts and initiatives with regard to Asian resurgence and Asian solidarity, though appreciated, could not be sustained as desired. The Bandung Conference was the first and last of its type. No Asian Relations Organization, as envisioned in the Asian Relations Conference, could take shape. The Cold War powers suspected any move towards Asian solidarity as contrary to their strategic moves and interests, and ensured that such moves did not succeed. In fact, the whole of Asia got divided along the Cold War lines. The Asian leaders failed to forge a common front to emerge as a powerful balancing force in the global divide due to their economic dependence on the former colonial powers and their inherent political and military vulnerabilities. There were also internal conflicts and insurgencies that became proxy wars in the Cold War ideological divide. The unfolding Asian conflicts, some of which were the continuation of the colonial control in different forms such as in the Indo-China region and others that proved to be persistent (also involving India with Pakistan and China) facilitated the machinations of all those who worked to keep Asia divided.¹⁰⁶

But India did not completely give up on its eastward orientation. It played a very constructive role, in working for peace and stability in the Indo-China region, under the UN (United Nations) auspices and as Chairman of the International Control Commission, following the Geneva Agreement of 1954. This difficult assignment delivered by India with passion and perseverance for peace is still appreciated and fondly remembered in Vietnam, Kampuchea (then Cambodia) and Laos. The goodwill earned by India in this region is and can be harnessed even today. Prior to this, India was also involved in the Korean Armistice in 1953 and played a constructive role between China and the West. Very few people know or remember that India under Indira Gandhi also associated itself with the process of the formation of ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations)

¹⁰⁶ FN, 36

during 1966-67. It worked intensely for evolving a broad-based regional organization of cooperation, which did not identify itself with any of the superpowers strategic and Cold War oriented interests. This however, was not acceptable to the powers involved in establishing ASEAN against a strategic backdrop of the messy Vietnam War. The result was an ASEAN representing an ideologically and strategically divided Southeast Asia in which India had no place.¹⁰⁷

3.4. The Fourth Wave of the ‘Look East’ Policy - The current and fourth wave of India’s Look East Policy is credited to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and is said to have been driven by economic and post-Cold War imperatives of India’s foreign policy.¹⁰⁸

India’s Look East Policy was officially defined and articulated in September 1994, by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in his Singapore lecture. He had stressed the point that India’s historical and cultural relations were very old and strong and there was nothing new in India looking towards reinforcing cooperative linkages with its eastern neighbours. He laid emphasis on building strong economic and security relationship between India and its eastern neighbours.¹⁰⁹

Rao’s Singapore lecture in 1994 was a broad articulation of India’s desire and rationale for connecting with its eastern neighbours. Since then, the policy has evolved in phases

¹⁰⁷ Kripa Sridharan, *The ASEAN Region in India’s Foreign Policy* (USA: Dartmouth Publishing Co, 1996). Also see, ‘India-ASEAN Relations: Evolution, Growth and Prospects’, in Chandran Jeshurun (ed.), (1993) *China, India, Japan and the Security of Southeast Asia* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies).

¹⁰⁸ Frederic Grare and Amitabh Mattoo (eds), (2001), *The Politics of India’s Look East Policy* (New Delhi: Manohar); Prakash Nanda, (ed) (2003) *Rediscovering Asia: Evolution of India’s Look East Policy*, (New Delhi: Lancer Publications,); Sudhir Devare, (2006) (ed) *India and Southeast Asia: Towards Security Convergence* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies); and See Chak Mun, (ed) (2009), *India’s Strategic Interest in Southeast Asia and Singapore* (New Delhi: Macmillan Publishers India,)

¹⁰⁹ Text of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao’s speech, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1994.

and directions gradually. One can clearly discern a greater engagement with ASEAN during the initial years with an emphasis on economic ties and institutional partnership.¹¹⁰ After this speech only, the Government of India, for the very first time formally put this term 'Look East' into use and made it the chief agenda in its foreign policy. The term Look East was used by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in its 1995-96 annual report and legitimately adopted this strategy as part of its foremost external policy agenda and the report stated:

As a part of India's 'Look east' policy, efforts to strengthen the already existing good relations between India and the countries of Asia Pacific and Southeast Asia continued during the year, and pointed to the intrinsic and emerging complementarities between the dynamic and fast consolidating economies of ASEAN and the large economy of India¹¹¹.

Therefore, the LEP was a result of Government of India's newly adopted strategy of foreign policy. With the advent of the LEP, India has made a noteworthy advancement in developing a comprehensive rapport with ASEAN and its constituting states separately. The Look East Policy improved financial ties between India and the ASEAN member states in the economic domain which further escalated the economic exchange with the adoption of a number of institutional instruments. The former Joint Trade Committees (JTC) with the ASEAN states were reconstructed as Joint Business

¹¹⁰ FN – 38, p. 12

¹¹¹ Government of India, *Annual Report: 1995-1996*, Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 1996, p.17, www.meaindia.nic.in, (accessed on 18 June, 2014)

Commissions (JBC) and an ASEAN-India Joint Management Committee and India-ASEAN Business Council were created¹¹².

4. The shift from India's Look East Policy to Act East Policy

The first official indication of the change in policy and its nomenclature came about three months before the prime minister Narendra Modi's announcement. While addressing the Indian community in Hanoi (Vietnam), the Minister of External Affairs Mrs. Sushma Swaraj said: 'Now it is time not just to look east but act. Under the (Narendra) Modi government, we will have an Act East Policy', the minister said addressing a gathering of the Indian community soon after her arrival in Vietnam.¹¹³

The 'Look East' policy (LEP) was upgraded to the 'Act East' policy (AEP) by the Indian government when the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power in New Delhi in a landslide victory in May 2014 under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.¹¹⁴

On 26 August 2014, in a brainstorming session of 15 Indian 'Heads of Missions' in Southeast and East Asia, India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj discussed the foreign policy initiatives under the new BJP-led government and urged them to "act east" and not just "look east". The meeting was convened "to chart the future roadmap and to get a frank assessment of Indian foreign policy in the region and its potential"¹¹⁵. This

¹¹² Anindya Batabyal, (2011) "Looking East 1: Southeast Asia and ASEAN" David Scott (ed.), (2011) *Handbook of India's International Relations*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, p. 133

¹¹³ No authentic version of Mrs. Swaraj's address to the Indian community in Hanoi on 24 August 2014 is available from the MEA website. Reports of this meeting were available in the newspapers. 'Time for Act East Policy and Not Just Look East: Swaraj', *Business Standard*, 24 August 2014, https://www.business-standard.com/article/pti-stories/time-for-act-east-policy-and-not-just-look-eastswaraj-114082400624_1.html, accessed 16 August 2018.

¹¹⁴ Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy (2018), Interpreting India's 'Act East Policy' *Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) Working Paper No. 284 – 29 January 2018*, ISAS, National University of Singapore (NUS) www.isas.nus.edu.sg, <http://southasiandiaspora.org>

¹¹⁵ "Sushma tells Indian envoys to 'act east' and not just 'look east'", *The Times of India*, 26 August 2014. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Sushma-tells-Indian-envoys-to-act-east-and-not-justlook-east/article40931866.cms>. Accessed 3 January 2018

was the beginning of the departure from the Look East Policy to the Act East Policy. Later, Modi mentioned that India's LEP had become the AEP¹¹⁶. Prime Minister Modi made the formal announcement of the shift from the 'Look East Policy' to 'Act East Policy' on 12 November 2014 in his opening remarks at the India-ASEAN Summit in Myanmar's capital Nay Pyi Taw. He said:

“An era of economic development, industrialization and trade has begun in India.

India's 'Look East Policy' has become 'Act East Policy'.”¹¹⁷

This was repeated the next day speaking at the East Asia Summit in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar, on 13 November 2014, Prime Minister Modi stated:

“Since entering office six months ago, my government has moved with a great sense of priority and speed to turn our 'Look East' policy into 'Act East' policy.”

The speech of Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Myanmar in November 2014. He formally asserted; India has turned the “Look East” policy into “Act East” policy”¹¹⁸

He stressed that the East Asia Summit was an important pillar of this policy because it was critical for peace, stability and prosperity in Asia Pacific and the world¹¹⁹. Since then, this has become a part of the official discourse of Indian foreign policy.

¹¹⁶ Isabelle Saint-Mezard, “India's Act East policy: strategic implications for the Indian Ocean”, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, Vol.12, No.2, p 178.

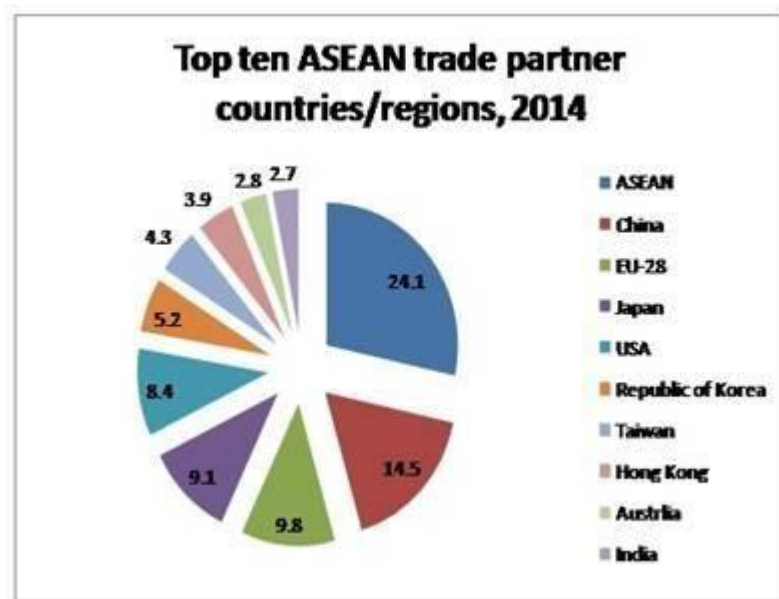
¹¹⁷ S.D. Muni & Rahul Mishra, (eds.) (2019), India's Eastward Engagement *From Antiquity to Act East Policy* p. 197. Sage publication

¹¹⁸ Prime Minister's Office, “English rendering of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's remarks at the East Asia Summit, Nay Pyi Taw,” Press Information Bureau, Government of India, November 13, 2014, <<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=111346>>

¹¹⁹ “English rendering of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi's remarks at the East Asia Summit, Nay Pyi Taw”, 13 November 2014, <https://www.narendramodi.in/english-rendering-of-prime-ministershri-narendramodis-remarks-at-the-east-asia-summitnay-pyi-taw-6881>. Accessed on 5 January 2018.



Source: <http://www.asean.or.jp>



Source: Based on Data provided on <http://www.asean.org/>

Through the Act East Policy, India is not only striving to engage ASEAN member countries, but also the countries of the wider Asia Pacific region in political, strategic,

cultural, and economic domains. This is manifested in ongoing attempts to strengthen ties with Australia, Japan, and South Korea among others.¹²⁰

Key Drivers of a Shift from Look East to Act East Policy

India's AEP did not develop in a single instance. Several developments and factors have impacted and will continue to impact on India's policy in the Southeast Asian region. There are at least six key factors which triggered a shift in India's gear from the Look East Policy to the AEP.

- 4.1 The current geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific region has become more complex. China's growing assertiveness vis-à-vis its neighbours and its strong position on the South China Sea issue, and its naval and diplomatic expansion into the Indian Ocean have become a matter of strategic concern for the countries in the region as well as for India.
- 4.2 The second dynamic for India to pursue a more active Asia-Pacific policy is its lingering threat perception about China's rise and growing assertiveness. India-China relations reached low ebb in 1962 as the countries fought a brief war along the disputed border.¹²¹ Till today, India's strategic community is still very concerned about unexpected Beijing's adventurism. The Indian strategist C. Raja Mohan once claimed that India has been balancing against China since the day the Chinese invaded Tibet in early 1950s¹²². A significant power asymmetry between India and China has translated

¹²⁰ Krishan S Rana, — "Modi Acts East: The Emerging Contours of India's Foreign Policy", *Institute of Strategic and International Studies*, April 2015, p. 8.

¹²¹ Tien-sze Fang, (2014) *India's Act East Policy and Implications for China – India Relations*, National Tsing Hua University, web.isanet.org/.../eceba_784-8da_2-478d-9b07-03ad060f928a...2014

¹²² Cited in Daniel Twining, "The New Game: Why the Bush Administration has Embraced India," *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, December 20, 2006, <<http://www.gmfus.org/commentary/new-great-game-why-bush-administration-has-embraced-india> <

into a “much more active and interventionist Chinese role”¹²³. Recent developments in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Bhutan have generated a fear of India losing ground to China. Perhaps, India has become “very nervous of China”.¹²⁴ That is why the new Indian government changed its approach and narrative.

4.3. Due to the unaccommodating and often confrontational positions of some of the powers in the region, India’s deepening economic and security engagement with the Asia Pacific region is seen as a factor of stability by many countries. Also, India’s economic growth and huge potential have generated significant interest in the country.¹²⁵

4.3 While anti-globalization forces are becoming stronger in the West, Asia remains open, with countries in the region negotiating a number of regional trade agreements. These agreements and their impact on India are very important. It is, thus, natural for India to step up its engagements with the region.

4.4. The most important factor which led to the shift from the Look East Policy to the AEP was the recognition that India’s northeast region lay at the heart of India’s eastward engagement. The Modi government acknowledged that the policy starts in India’s own northeast region and it plays an important role in India’s relations with its neighbours such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka. It was, therefore, imperative to look at and engage India’s extended neighbours

¹²³ Shyam Sharan, “In 2018, India must balance the demands of the neighbourhood against the compulsions of a global role”, *Hindustan Times*, 26 December 2017, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/in-2018india-must-balance-the-demands-of-the-neighbourhood-against-the-compulsions-of-a-global-role/story-QgNCIW7KipwZyJekaoOsrK.html>. Accessed on 6 January 2018.

¹²⁴ Interview with Ambassador Shivshankar Menon, former Foreign Secretary and former National Security Advisor, Government of India, 1 December 2017.

¹²⁵ FN, 53, p.4

from the northeast region, which did not receive enough attention in the past. The development of the northeast region became a trigger and pivot to India's AEP.

4.5. The dynamics of internal growth and the developmental agenda of the Modi government need active external cooperation. New Delhi wanted to make the countries in Asia-Pacific partners in India's growth story. The Indian government not only introduced several economic reforms to improve the ease of doing business, but also underlined the importance of the domestic agenda in India's relations with ASEAN and other major powers in the region.¹²⁶

5. Northeast in India's Act East Policy

Northeastern Region shares borders with all except Pakistan. The NER is cradled by the five Asian states namely – Nepal, Bhutan, China, Bangladesh and Myanmar.¹²⁷ This geographical location itself makes the region strategic.

Topographically, India shares its connectivity with Southeast Asia from three sides- Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Southern Indian tip of the Indian Ocean and from North East side. However, from the three connectivity options, North East region provides the only physical connections between India and Southeast Asia, the other two being water bodies. As such there emerged a considerable optimism in the inclusion of the North East Region while formulating the Look East policy in 1991. However, in the initial phase, NER was never a part of this dynamic initiative since the thrust was not given to the geographical proximity between its North Eastern region and Southeast Asia. The policy was largely consecrated to bring a qualitative and structural change in India's

¹²⁶ FN 53, p. 5

¹²⁷ Neetu Singh (2019), *East India – heart of Act East Policy* **Direction** March 11 2019, Direction Institute for IAS Examination. www.directionias.com

foreign policies in the rapidly changing global environment of the post-Cold War period.¹²⁸

The thrust in the Act East Policy on the North East Region has been clear and serious from the very beginning. The pursuance of AEP so far clearly underlines that the North East Region is attracting more attention of Delhi than ever before. The present government seems to have firmly decided to open the North East Region both for its development as well as political outreach and consolidation. This has been seen in the overall perspective of India's development, and Northeast linkages with South East Asia and other Indo-Pacific countries which encompassed the Indian Ocean. AEP has been a part of these broader perspective, like the concept of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region),¹²⁹ enunciated by Prime Minister Modi in Mauritius on 12 March 2015 and the projects of 'Sagarmala' aimed at developing ports along India's western and eastern seaboard to improve connectivity and trade with its eastern and western Indian Ocean neighbours.¹³⁰ (The Malay Peninsula, the Sunda Islands of Indonesia and Australia to the east and Africa and the Arabian Peninsula to the west)

The policy debate on linking the North East Region with Act East Policy was started when the then President Pranab Mukherjee, while addressing the 47th Conference of Governors, said on 10th February 2015 that 'connectivity of the Northeast States must be improved by strengthening road and rail network. There is need for progressive policy for industrial investment and promotion in the hilly mountainous States'. It was interesting to note that this statement came from him because in his earlier avatars as

¹²⁸ Pema Tseten Lachungpa, (2018), From Look East to Act East Policy: The Importance of the North East Region (NER) and the Emerging Challenges, in the *International Journal of Information Movement*, Vol.2 Issue XI March 2018, pages, 249 - 257

¹²⁹ *The Hindu*, 'Mr. Modi's Ocean View', 17 March 2015

¹³⁰ S.D.Muni & Rahul Mishra, (2019), India's Eastward Engagement *From Antiquity to Act East Policy*. Pg. 213

India's defence minister, he was not comfortable with the idea of opening up the North East Region on account of security considerations. At this meeting, the governors of North East Region asked for a briefing on the AEP which was organized on October 2015. Addressing the governors on 6th October 2015, Minister of External Affairs Mrs. Swaraj described the NER as a 'natural partner in India's Act East Policy' and also a 'land bridge to ASEAN', with AEP as a 'a means to strengthen the stability, economy and prospects of our Northeast region'. Various proposals related to border trade, connectivity, people to people to contacts, cultural exchanges and enhancing capabilities of the NER were discussed at this meeting. This enabled the MOS in the Ministry of External Affairs, Gen. V.K. Singh, to say in answer to a parliamentary question:

The North East of India has been a priority in our Act East Policy (AEP). AEP provides an interface between North East India including the state of Arunachal Pradesh, and the ASEAN region. Various plans at the bilateral and regional levels include steady efforts to develop and strengthen connectivity of Northeast with the ASEAN region through trade, culture, people to people contacts and physical infrastructure (road, airport, telecommunication, power), etc.¹³¹

India's "Act East Policy" trajectory towards North East region is shifted. The Act East Policy along with several initiatives launched by New Delhi for rapid economic development of the country 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India', promoting energy security, creating infrastructure, and building smart cities can be considered as a strategic plan to generate greater flexibility and political space to contend with the

¹³¹ 'Act East Policy', Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs, 23 December 2015, available at <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=133837>, accessed 16 August 2018.

increasing confidence in the region.¹³² Prime Minister Narendra Modi has categorically said that the North East would be at the center of the Act East Policy, whose three key features are connectivity, culture and commerce.¹³³ The objective of Act East Policy is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing connectivity to the states of North Eastern Region. The Act East Policy recognizes the importance of the North East of India as the gateway of the East countries and it is an extended corridor for growth, progress and prosperity of India thus the development of the North Eastern region is a priority in the policy. The Act East Policy along with several initiatives launched by New Delhi for rapid economic development of the country 'Make in India', 'Skill India', 'Digital India', promoting energy security, creating infrastructure, and building smart cities can be considered as a strategic plan to generate greater flexibility and political space to contend with the increasing confidence in the region. In addition, the Act East Policy serves for the purposes of strong trade and business ties with the South East Asian countries and development opportunities to the North East States of India.¹³⁴

The policy focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region. Its primary objective is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at

¹³² Dubey, Rajeev. (2014) 'Northeast India in India's Look East Policy: Constraints and Opportunities', *Social Research Foundation*. pp. 120-128. 2(2) July-December

¹³³ Pulipaka, Sanjay., Singh, Antara Ghosal & Sircar, Saranya. (Eds.) (2017) 'India and Connecting Framework', Delhi Policy Group: Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power. pp. 1-72.

¹³⁴ Ashok Brahma (2018) India's Act East Policy: The North-East States of India with 3 C's Formula, *International Journal of Innovative Research in Science, Engineering and Technology (IJIRSET)*, Vol.

bilateral, regional and multilateral levels which would eventually provide enhanced connectivity to the states of North Eastern region.¹³⁵

If one looks at the transition from the Look East Policy to the Act East Policy, the most important shift is the centrality of the northeast region in the new policy. From the northeast region perspective,¹³⁶ the Act East Policy marks a major foreign policy initiative and is, in many ways, a distinct shift in India's relations with its ASEAN neighbours (Afghanistan, Nepal, Maldives, Bhutan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Sri Lanka)

Conclusion

India's Act East Policy is the upgraded version of Look East Policy. The AEP has very clear defining features which make it different from the earlier policy. Broadly, the AEP has five defining features – the centrality of the northeast region; linking domestic development with the AEP; simultaneous focus on maritime and continental connectivity (both hard and soft); embarking on a subregional, regional, and a multilateral approach; and the use of monitoring mechanisms for timely implementation of plans and projects.¹³⁷

India's idea of the East has evolved through the centuries. It has been shaped by geographical location, civilizational and cultural moorings, economic aspirations and strategic concerns. Broadly, the East to India is a geographically contiguous source of energy, life and light: civilizational and culturally, it is compatible and responsive; economically, it is dynamic; and strategically, this region has not only posed any security

¹³⁵ Namit Singh Sengar (2018), What is Act East Policy and how Narendra Modi's three – nation visit is strengthening it, *Financial Express*. Updated May 30, 2018 6:20:11 PM www.financialexpress.com

¹³⁶ Falguni Rajkumar, "Look East Policy and The Continental Route" in Gurudas Das and C. Joshua Thomas (Eds.), *Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India's Northeast*, New York: Routledge, 2016, p.144

¹³⁷ FN 53 p. 11

challenge to India and vice versa but also even looks towards India for active involvement in balancing other powers like the USA and China.

It is to understand that the objective of Act East Policy is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationship with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional and multilateral levels thereby providing connectivity to the states of North Eastern Region. The Act East Policy recognizes the importance of the North East of India as the gateway of the East countries and it is an extended corridor for growth, progress and prosperity of India thus the development of the North Eastern region is a priority in the policy.¹³⁸ There is a new resolve and a new approach in India's foreign policy discourse.

¹³⁸ FN, 68 p. 10027

CHAPTER: 3

Relevance of Look East/ Act East Policy in the context of North-East with particular reference to Nagaland

INTRODUCTION

Geopolitics has not only made India's Northeast a region of paradoxes, it has also put it at the centre of the discourse of India's engagement with neighbouring countries and ASEAN. The Chapter examines how the policy Look East/ Act East is relevant for Northeast and Nagaland in particular. The policy aspired to create opportunities enlarging economic engagement beyond the borders with the neighbours in South East and South Asia. Apart from regional cooperation, sub-regional cooperation was considered to be the building block of regional integration. Eventually, India unveiled 'Act East Policy' (AEP) with the objective to expand India's economic engagement with Southeast and East Asian countries. India's pro-active role in building a common market with an ambitious but realistic connectivity programme is the key focuses of AEP.

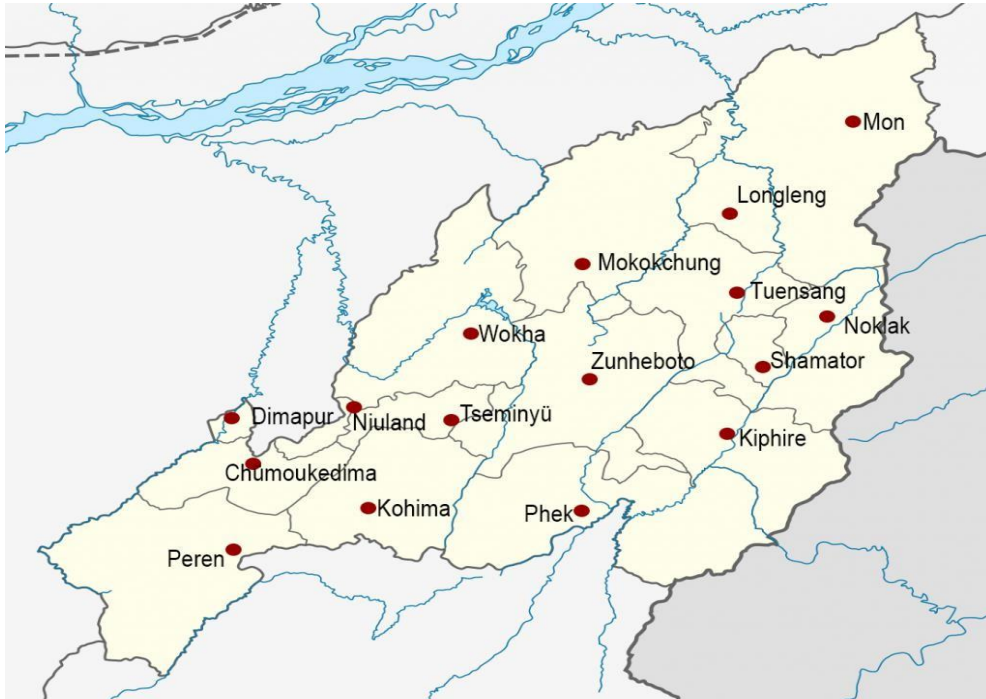
Northeast India offered the space for realizing such aspirations. It is all about a foreign policy initiative towards building connectivity through road, rail, telecommunication etc. connecting India's northeast with the near east neighbours such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and even beyond with Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, East and Southeast Asia. The geographical proximity, historical significance, cultural commonality made the northeast region more relevant for the prospects of regional co-operation in trade, peace and stability.

Nagaland with all its beauty, colours and diversity still fail to capture the national limelight let alone the international countries across the border. Therefore, it is going to be intrinsic as to how the state fits the concept 'gateway'. However, Nagaland geographically have the closest proximity with the country of Myanmar and that is a fact that if LEP/AEP gearing towards connectivity then Nagaland becomes a strategic region to understand the broader concept of the 'gate'.

Nagaland is one of the smallest states of India with an area of 6,401 sq. miles (16, 579 sq km) (Sept. 17, 2018). The state is bounded by Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh to the Northeast, Manipur to the South, and Assam to the west and northwest and the country of Myanmar to the east.¹³⁹ Today the State have 16 districts.¹⁴⁰ (Map of Nagaland with 16th Districts, Figure-1) Each district comprises its own tribal component. Each tribe is unique in character from the other in terms of customs, language and dress. Nagaland became the 16th state of India on 1st December 1963. Mount Saramati is the highest peak at 3,840 meters and its range forms a natural barrier between Nagaland and Burma. It lies between the parallels of 98- and 96-degrees east longitude and 26.6- and 27.4-degrees east latitude north. The state is home to a rich variety of flora and fauna. This Chapter will focus on why Northeast is relevant in India's Look/Act East Policy, with special reference to Nagaland.

¹³⁹ Nagaland – Wikipedia, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nagaland>. Last edited on 16, October 2018.

¹⁴⁰ Nagaland Profile. Official State Portal Government of Nagaland. Last updated on 09-04-2023



Source: Directorate of Tourism, Government of Nagaland.

<https://tourism.nagaland.gov.in/distict/2022>

Relevance of North – East India

Foreign policy preferences tend to be dictated by the geo politics of a particular region. North east as a region has assumed considerable geopolitical significance. In the recent past, because of geographic and strategic location, the North east has prominently figured in the foreign policy agenda. The shifting of the fulcrum of global politics towards Asia is another significant development for the North east India in the realm of foreign policy. Geopolitical significance of India's location has always been an important determinant of the foreign relations.¹⁴¹ North – east did figure in the foreign policy agenda as early as in 1962 during the course of 1962 war when Chinese troops came down to the plains of

¹⁴¹ Jayanta Brahma (2010) *Revisiting Indian Foreign Policy: Mapping the North-East on the Foreign Policy Agenda* in Dilip Gogoi, (Ed) *Beyond Borders Look East Policy & North East India*. pp 19 – 20. DVS Publisher

Assam upto Tezpur in the middle Assam. As a consequence of this war, for the first time, the political class and policy makers from New Delhi realized that North East India is a strategically very important and the region deserves importance in policy making and for the unity and integrity of the nation. India- China War 1962 was the first major defeat India's foreign policy faced. The defeat also changed India's foreign policy approach from high moral ground to real politics.

India's Look East Policy (LEP) and Act East Policy (AEP) signifies a strategic shift in its international political, economic, and military relationships. Regional integration of its Northeast Region (NER) with the countries in East, Southeast and South Asia may potentially generate economic dividends to the region. The significance of the Northeast region had increased in this policy due to its cultural and historic ties as well as strategic geographical positioning in Southeast Asia. Therefore, it is important to examine the affinities of Northeast region with her neighbouring Southeast Asian countries which in itself is an advantage to realize the significance and relevance of Look/Act East Policy.

Relevance in the Context of Neolithic Culture of Northeast India

Northeast is a lesser-known area for archaeological research, however, there are fresh approach with archaeological, linguistic and ethnographic evidence which is adapted and applied in order to understand the relevance of Northeast India, commonly known as the "Seven Sisters", to early origin of pottery and agriculture in South Asia, Southeast Asia and East Asia.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Manjil Hazarika (2006), Neolithic Culture of Northeast India: A Recent Perspective on the Origins of Pottery and Agriculture, *Ancient Asia, Vol.1, 2006*

T.C. Sharma¹⁴³ has pointed out that scholars all over the world are of the opinion that the archaeology of Northeast India is very important for world archaeology, because of the fact that this region is known to have played a great role in the domestication of a number of foods producing plants essential for man including rice.

Nene¹⁴⁴, in his paper, ‘Mango through Millennia’, has shown the origin of mangoes in Northeast India and other parts of the world. Wild mango is found in the Chittagong Hills of Bangladesh and Assam.

The three characteristic features of the Neolithic culture in Northeast India viz. celt making traditions, Cord-impressed pottery, and rice agriculture, are more or less similar to the Neolithic cultures of East Asia and Southeast Asia. A.H. Dani¹⁴⁵ has demonstrated the similarity of stone tools from the various regions of Northeast India with various parts of Southeast Asia and East Asia.

Zone of NE India	Related Zones in Southeast and East Asia
Cachar Hills Zone	Upper Burma, communication through Manipur
Sadiya Frontier Zone	Yunan of Southeast China
Naga Hills Zone	Burma, Malaya, Siam, Laos, Yunan and Cambodia
Khasi Hills Zone	Cachar Hills
Garo Hills Zone	Cachar Hills
Brahmaputra Valley Zone	Shantung province, Hongkong, Naga Hills, Cachar Hills and Garo Hills

Source: *Northeast India and its relations with East and Southeast Asian countries* (Dani, 1960)

¹⁴³ T.C. Sharma (1991), Prehistoric Situation in Northeast India, in *Archaeology of Northeastern India* (J.P. Singh and G. Sengupta, (Eds.), New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House

¹⁴⁴ Y.L. Nene (2001), Mango through Millenia, *Asian-History* 5 (1): pp. 3-6

¹⁴⁵ A.H. Dani (1960), *Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India*, Calcutta: Ferma L. Mukhopadhyay.

The Neolithic culture of Northeastern India is distinguished by the predominance of shouldered celts and the characteristic Cord-impressed pottery. Within the sub-continent the Neolithic culture of Northeastern India has no strict parallels within the Indian sub-continent though the shouldered tool type has a sporadic distribution in the adjacent states of Eastern India. However, as far the Neolithic period is concerned, there appears to be no doubt about the relationship between Northeastern India and the countries of Southeast Asia.

The earliest evidence of pottery in China and Japan dates back to 21,000-18,000 cal. Yrs. B.P. (Such calibrated dates are expressed as cal BP, where "cal" indicates "calibrated years", or "calendar years", before 1950.) the early evidence of rice cultivation comes from the recent discoveries at sites like Yuchanyan Hunan province and Xianrendong and Diaotonghuan ¹⁴⁶, and Jiangxi Province which date the origin of rice agriculture to more than 10,000 years ago. Thus, the origin of pottery and agriculture cannot be presumed as simultaneous. The origin of pottery is much older than the origin of agriculture in East and Southeast Asia. The pottery of East Asia and Southeast Asia is remarkably alike, and include simple forms of cord-impressed, combed, fingertip-impressed or incised vessels, often on tripods and pedestals. The overall homogeneity makes it easy to visualize common ancestral culture, located quite close in time, from which all the descendent cultures of the Yellow river basin originated (Bellwood, 2005: 121) ¹⁴⁷. Almost similar physio-graphic settings, Northeast India, leads one to think about the potential for cultural affinities with Southeast and East Asian countries. The occurrence of potsherds and stone

¹⁴⁶ Y. Yasuda, (Ed.), (2002), Origins of pottery and Agriculture in East Asia, in *The Origins of Pottery and Agriculture*. Japan: International Research Centre for Japanese Studies. pp 119-138.

¹⁴⁷ P. Bellwood, (2005). *First Farmers: The Origins of Agriculture Societies*. UK: Blackwell Publishing.

tools related to the cultivation system in the same stratigraphic horizon at various sites like Daojali Hading, Sarutaru, Garo Hills, indicates similarity in chronology in origin and evolution of pottery and agriculture during the Neolithic period. It is most likely that due to its proximity to China and the Southeast Asian countries, Northeast India was under the strong influence of these cultures during this period.

Relevance in the context of Geography

The strategic location of the North Eastern region at the junction of South Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asian countries and its natural and cultural interconnectivity may explain the cultural diversity of the population inhabiting the area. Apart from the strategic location, its unique climatic conditions with regions having maximum rainfall or being the wettest place in the world, with the associated flora and fauna influences the life and culture of the people of Northeast India. Geographically, Northeast India is destined to play a crucial role in shaping the Indian nation especially the eastern part of the country due to pre-historic movements of people into this region from mainland India, South China and Southeast Asia¹⁴⁸, Medhi, referred to this as the Great Indian Corridor¹⁴⁹. The present state of Assam is confined to the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak rivers though the former state of Assam included the present states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Tripura and Assam. Currently, the names “Northeast India” and the “Assam region” are commonly used to refer to this region.

Because of wide diversity of plants useful to man and favourable climatic conditions, this Northeast region is regarded by geographers and botanists as an ideal place for early plant

¹⁴⁸ S.K. Chatterjii (1970), *The Place of Assam in the History and Civilisation of India of India*. Guwahati: Guwahati University

¹⁴⁹ D.K. Medhi (2003), Potters and Pottery of the Assam Region, *In Earthenware of Southeast Asia*, John Miksic (Ed.), Singapore: University Press

domestication and food production (Vavilov, 1949¹⁵⁰; Sauer, 1952¹⁵¹; Harris, 1973¹⁵²). As a result of the interest shown by international scholars gathered in the Indo-Pacific Prehistoric Congress held in Pune on 20-23rd December 1978, a resolution was adopted regarding the importance of the prehistory of Northeast India and demarcated the region as.

1. A potential area for the domestication of a number of important plants and
11. a physical and cultural bridge between the bodies of India and Southeast Asia.

Northeast India, which has in recent years yielded pre-Neolithic cultural assemblages, offer excellent scope for investigating diversity in human adaptations. Forming as it does a half way house between the Indian mainland and Southeast Asia, this area probably enabled early societies to develop individual identities of their own (Paddayya, 2003-2004:296)¹⁵³

Due to the strategic geographical location of Northeast India which connects the East and the South Asian regions, cultural affinities can be observed in the material cultural objects since prehistoric times. These cultural affinities during the Neolithic period in Northeast India are basically based on the celt making tradition, Cord-impressed pottery, and rice cultivation. These are the characteristics features of the Neolithic culture which connects Northeast India with Chinese Neolithic and Southeast Asia Neolithic cultures. Also, we find some similarities of these features with the Neolithic cultures of Eastern and Central India to some extent. The strong influence of the Neolithic culture of China and Southeast

¹⁵⁰ N.I. Vavilov (1949), The Origin, Variation, Immunity and Breeding of Cultivated Plants, *Chronica Botanica*, Volume 13, Number 176. Publisher: Chronica Botanica Company Waltham Mass USA

¹⁵¹ C.O. Sauer (1952), *Agriculture Origins and Dispersals*, New York: American Geographical Survey

¹⁵² D. Harris (1973), The Prehistory of Tropical Agriculture: An Ethno Ecological Model, In *The Explanation of Cultural Change: Models in Prehistory*. pp 397-417.

¹⁵³ K. Paddayya, (2002-2003), The Expanding Horizon of Indian Archaeology, *Bulletin of Deccan College Post-Graduate and Research Institute*, Volume, 62-63: 291-309

Asia is one of the prominent factors in the origin and development of the Neolithic culture of Northeast India, especially for the origin of pottery and agriculture in this region, we can presume that the cultural elements possibly entered Northeast India from the Neolithic cultures of China and Southeast Asia. This presumption is based on three aspects; the migration of people, linguistic relationships, and archaeological affinity, it can be correlated to the expansion of the culture and migration of the people of China and Southeast Asia during the Neolithic period.¹⁵⁴

Without the presence of absolute dates on the pottery of Northeast India, it will merely be a conjecture to provide a date of origin. However, we can definitely cite the influence of the Neolithic cultures of East Asia and Southeast Asia as to the origin of pottery in Northeast India. The shouldered celts of all varieties, miniature quadrangular celts, and perforated celts of Northeast India again relate its antiquity with the East Asian and Southeast Asian countries. The lesser-known Neolithic culture of Northeast India was probably influenced by prominent Neolithic cultures of surrounding regions.¹⁵⁵

Within the population of Northeast India today, two language families can be identified viz. Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman. Only the Khasi and Jaintia groups belong to the Austro-Asiatic whereas the Tibeto-Burman family is more widespread representing a larger population including the Bodo, Naga, Kuki, Tripuri, Rabha, Mech, Garo, Lalung, Dimasa, Deuri Chutia, Maran, Hajong, Sonowal, Nishi, Apatani, Adi and Mishing etc. The Austro-Asiatic speaking population however is believed to be the original/earliest inhabitants of the region of Northeast India.¹⁵⁶ The linguistic similarity between northeast

¹⁵⁴ Manjil Hazarika, (2006), Neolithic Culture of Northeast India: A Recent Perspective on the Origins of Pottery and Agriculture in *Ancient Asia Vol. 1*, 2nd paragraph, p. 39

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 39-40

¹⁵⁶ N.N. Roy (1991), The Tribes of Northeast India- A Living Museum of Man, *Bulletin of Assam State Museum XII, Vol. 76*, pp 73-81.

India and east Asia and Southeast Asia reveals an interesting possibility as the migration of the Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman language families into Northeast India during the Neolithic time. This indicates strong connections between East Asian and Southeast Asian Neolithic cultures with their counterparts in Northeast India.¹⁵⁷

In India's foreign policy vision North-east India is often described as a gateway to Southeast Asia. Look East policy "envisages the North-east region not as the periphery of India, but as the Centre of a thriving and integrated economic space linking two dynamic regions with a network of highways, railways, pipelines, transmissions lines crisscrossing the region."¹⁵⁸ The Northeast also happens to be the key strategic point through which India can really look further east towards the Southeast Asia and East Asia.

Relevance in the context of History

It is not only the geographical connection which connects Northeast India to South and South East Asia. North East India has a strong historical and cultural tie with its neighbouring countries. Many indigenous communities of North East India are trans-border in nature and lives both sides of the border as a result of past migration history. In the past, there had been high flow of migrations among the trans-Himalayan regions for which communities with similar racial affinities are found in various parts of South and South East Asia. The Nagas, Mizos, Ahoms and Bodos migrated from various parts of the north of Himalayas and the Southwest China and various parts of the Southeast Asia to Northeast as per research reveals. This had greatly contributed to the cultural assimilation in the region and in turn, created a cultural bond among the people of these regions beyond present political borders.

¹⁵⁷ Manjil, op. cit., 3rd paragraph, p. 40

¹⁵⁸ Rajiv Sikri, (2010) Secretary East, Ministry of External Affairs lecture at the Forum "*Northeast India and India's Look East Policy*" at <http://www.ceniseas.org/sikrilecture.doc>.

It needs to be mentioned here that there were four historically recognized routes through which India was connected with South, Southeast Asia in the past. These routes are- 1) the Central Asian Route or the famous Silk Route, 2) the route of Assam, which from Assam to Upper Burma or the famous Southern Silk Route, 3) the route of Tibet-Nepal and 4) the sea routes or the Maritime Silk Routes

Among these, the routes of Assam and Tibet played a crucial role to connect Northeast India with the rest of Southeast Asia, particularly China. The route of Tibet was through Nepal, Bhutan and Lohit region of present Arunachal Pradesh. The route of Assam passed through Burma to China. This route had three sub-routes: i. the first one was by the valley of the Brahmaputra up to the Patkai range and then through its passes up to Burma; ii. the second was through Manipur up to the Chindwin valley; and iii. the third one ran through the Arakan range up to the Irrawaddy valley. All the three met on the frontier of Burma, and then proceeded over the mountains and across the river valley to Kunming which was the southern province of China. These routes were in extensive use in the past. The usage of the Tibet and Assam routes is testified by many historical events of different times. These have significance for the relations that existed in the past between Northeast India and China.¹⁵⁹

Relevance in the context of Culture

It is not only the geographical connection which connects North East India to South and South East Asia but cultural resemblance in festivals, language, dance, ethnic food etc. makes it more viable for the policy relevance.

¹⁵⁹ Act East Policy and Northeast: The Road Ahead (2020) in Northeast Today (NET). Posted in Cover Stories, International, Northeast. 25th April, 2020

The amalgamation of different cultures has led to many similarities which have turned the Southeast Asian countries and the North East of India into one big whole.

The South East Asian countries have much in common with North-eastern part of India. In terms of culture and heritage, both have similarities and are connected due to their common practices and closeness with each other.

The greatest mirror reflection in terms of culture is the festivals celebrated in these regions, especially in the month of April. The festival of Bohag Bihu in Assam, *Pi Mai* in Lao PDR, *Songkran* in Thailand and *Sangkem* in Arunachal Pradesh marked the beginning of a New Year and hold similar importance.

Pi Mai in Lao PDR is celebrated with people throwing of water on each other with dances and songs, with the worship of Lord Buddha. *Sangkem* in Arunachal too follows the custom of throwing water at each other and also follows the worship of Lord Buddha. *Songkrem* in Thailand also signifies pouring of water by the younger people on elders hand as a sign of respect. They too worship Lord Buddha. Bohag Bihu in Assam marks the harvesting season of crops with dances and songs. Elders are paid respect by the youngsters by offering traditional scarves called 'Gamusa' and they seek their blessings. Also, the language of the Tai people living in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam has similarities with the language spoken in Thailand and Lao PDR. Tai – Ahoms or Ahoms are called 'Shan' in Myanmar, 'Thai' in Thailand, 'Lao' in Laos, 'Dai' and 'Zhuang' in China and 'Tay – Thai' in Vietnam. Chin Kuki Mizo community too has similarities with the Chinese. Some of the Naga and Manipuri people of North-East India too have some connection with South-East Asia and may have migrated from South East Asia.

In relation to the dance form, Balinese dance and Manipuri dance forms have similar gestures and they don't have direct eye contact. Regarding the attires, the yellow colour robes among the Tais in Yunnan is similar to the Meitei grooms of Manipur which they wear a day after the wedding. There are similarities between the food habits too as the sticky rice commonly consumed by the tribes of northeast India is like the sticky brown rice found in Japan and China.

Apart from meat and fish, vegetables too are common in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Japan, and other South Asian countries. They all offer similar types of taste with a wide range of unique flavours and ingredients of fermented nature, similar to the North Eastern people of India.

The markets in Myanmar are similar to the North East where goods are stacked in the same way as the Northeast region and have similar products displayed. The Burmese dress is worn just the way it is in Northeast and street food and traditional food items also have similarities.

There are many common physical features in Art and Dance forms, social structure, eating habits, weaving motifs, hunting practices, and cultural practices between the South Asian Countries and Northeast India. Both regions share an intrinsic connection that dates back centuries.¹⁶⁰

Relevance of Nagaland

The Naga Hills, as part of Nagaland then under the British administration used to be called, were for long one of the least accessible regions of India, and beyond the Naga Hills district lay a tribal area over which the Government of India did not exercise any effective

¹⁶⁰ Brothers beyond borders: Similarities between North East India and South-East Asia (2019) in *India Today NE*. Guwahati April 21st 2019

control. Survey parties had penetrated some parts of that unadministered tribal area. But their work had remained fragmentary and large- scale maps of the Survey of India still showed several white patches.¹⁶¹ Nagaland, today no doubt is moving forward in the area of literacy, Village Development Board (VDB), The Nagaland Communitisation of Public Institutions and Services Act, 2002, became a major landmark in the history of innovative development concepts. Built on the foundations of Naga traditional social practices, these programmes put Nagaland on the world map by getting the UN Award for Public Service from Asia and the Pacific at New York in 2008.

‘Nagas are head-hunters’, ‘Nagas are westernized’, these two different statements are often heard about the Naga people which reflect outsiders’ perception based on historical accounts and present-day observations of a largely Christian people with an ‘exotic’ past. That the Naga continue to be known as a head-hunting people, is a legacy from the days of the British colonial rule which extended into the Naga area in the mid nineteenth century, allegedly to put a stop to the practice. Due to the efforts of foreign missionaries since the 1870s, in the last hundred years a majority of the Naga have embraced Christianity in its various forms. Change in religion, education and new political processes have brought about what is regarded in contemporary times as a superficial.¹⁶²

The Nagas are an Indo-Mogoloid folk, living in the north-eastern hills of India, divided into over a dozen of major tribes, speaking languages and dialects more than double the number tribes. A preliminary knowledge of the Mongoloid or Sino-Tibetan and its impact on the composite culture of India and of its repercussions on Eastern Indian history is,

¹⁶¹ Christoph Von Furer- Haimendorf (Ed.), (1976), *The Naga Hills in Return to the Naked Nagas: An Anthropologist’s View of Nagaland 1936-1970*. p. 1. Vikash Publishing House Pvt Ltd.

¹⁶² Vibha Joshi (2009), *The Naga: An Introduction* in the book by Richard Kunz, Vibha Joshi (Eds.), *Naga a Forgotten Mountain Region Rediscovered* in the Museum der Kulturen Basel. Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek: lists this publication in the Deutsche National bibliografie. Pg. 37

therefore, a prerequisite to understand the racial elements in the Indian people and the history of origin of the Nagas as well.¹⁶³

The different legends and stories though varied and dissimilar in details have, however, one thing in common, that the Nagas have come from the Eastern part of the world.¹⁶⁴ In this connection the views of E.A. Gait may be noted with interest. In his, 'History of Assam', he says "with the exception of Khasis the numerous non- Aryan dialects of Assam, all belong to the Tibeto -Chinese and mainly to its Tibeto-Burman sub family. The dialects of this sub-family which are current in Assam belong, in the main, to three groups: viz; Naga spoken language in the east of the Naga Hills; Kuki-Chin spoken in Manipur, Cachar and the Lushai Hills."¹⁶⁵

The Nagas has various theories of migration and settlement, which are recorded mostly by foreign writers. Claudius Ptolemy made the earliest called it as 'the realm of the naked.'¹⁶⁶ Sir G.A. Grierson traced the origin of the Nagas to that of the Tibeto - Burmans on the basis of language.¹⁶⁷ Huang Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim who visited Assam in 645 A.D. made mention of the tribes east of Assam.¹⁶⁸ Ahom Buranjees have records that when the Ahoms came to Assam in the 13th Century, the Nagas were already settled in the Naga Hills.¹⁶⁹ Written sources do not provide the exact date of the Nagas' arrival into the Naga Hills, the exact place of origin, or why they migrated. According to Dr. S.K.

¹⁶³ M. Alemchiba (Author), (1970), A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland in Chapter 1: Origin and Migration, p. 1. Publisher: Naga Institute of Culture. Kohima; Nagaland.

¹⁶⁴ J.N.Hutton (1965), The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland. Vol. 95, No. 1 (Jan – June, 1965) pp 16 – 43.* Published by Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.

¹⁶⁵ Sir Edward Albert Gait (Author), (1962), A history of Assam. p. 5, para 3. Second Edition. Lawyers Book Stall, Panbazar, Guwahati, Assam.

¹⁶⁶ Claudius Ptolemy, *Geographia* VIII, ii, p.18.

¹⁶⁷ G.A. Grierson., *Linguistic Survey of India, Vol.III, Part II*, 1903, p.11.

¹⁶⁸ Thomas Watters., *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India (A.D 629-645)*, 1973, p.186

¹⁶⁹ E.A. Gait, *A History of Assam*, 1967, pp.78-79.

Chatterjee, the Nagas are none other than the Kiratas (Indo- Mongoloids) mentioned in the old Sanskrit literature in 1000 B.C.¹⁷⁰ reference to the Nagas in his popular work, 'Geographia', written in 150 A.D.

The affinity of the nagas with the eastern neighbours itself is a link in terms of history, geography, culture, neolithic culture, ethnic attires, music, dance etc. Several scholars have put forward a plausible hypothesis concerning the sharing of traits by many tribes of the Naga Hills, South East Asia and Oceania (Cole 1945:5, Balfour 1917, 1925, 1926, Smith 1925, Hutton 1921, 1924, 1925, 1926, 1965, 1969). Hutton (1965: 19) maintains that there are close parallels in the cultures of the Naga Hills, the Hills of Formosa and different places of south east Asia, and various cultural elements have penetrated into the Naga Hills from time to time in the historical past. Traces of a Neolithic culture in the Naga hills is widespread. Two types of celts are found in Nagaland. One is roughly triangular and small in size with its widest part at the working edge and the other is much longer and it resembles a Naga adze (Alemchiba 1970: 17-18). In his reference to the Mesolithic culture, Hall (1964:6) writes that there has been much speculation as to the possible connection of this culture with the Neolithic, which succeeded it. Von Heine-Geldern has ventured the theory that the Neolithic oval- axe culture found in Northern Burma, among the Naga's of Nagaland (then Assam), in Cambodia and in eastern island of the Archipelago, is connected with the use of a plank built-canoe, and that both represent a development of Mesolithic culture.

Smith (1925) finds a direct link among the Naga people, people of Malaya and the people of the island of Indonesia as they have some common cultural trait. Some of these are head- hunting, having common sleeping houses for the unmarried men and women,

¹⁷⁰ According to Dr. S.K. Chatterjee, the Nagas are none other than the Kiratas (Indo- Mongoloids) mentioned in the old Sanskrit literature in 1000 B.C.²⁰

disposing of the dead on raised platforms, betel-chewing, tattooing by pricking, having no powerful political organization as such, possessing simple loom for weaving cloth, using large quadrangular or hexagonal shields, and having some crude agricultural techniques. Henry Balfour (1917) published an interesting article on an agricultural tool from the Naga Hills. In the article he tried to show different types of hoes in successive evolutionary stages. He also compared these types with those in the Indo-Chinese area, Burma, the Shans states, Cambodia and the Malay states. Balfour (1925) published another article on thorn-lined traps and their distribution. He described the geographical distribution of a unique form of conical trap employed for catching fish in the Naga Hills. On the basis of Indian museum collections, he compared it with similar traps found in North Arakan, Western Burma, China, Sumatra, Borneo, Malay Archipelago and also New Guinea. His purpose was to show the affinity between the cultures of the Naga Hills and the Melanesians.¹⁷¹

The affinity of the Nagas with the eastern neighbours itself is a link in terms of history, geography, culture, neolithic culture, ethnic attire, music, dance, language etc.

1. Relevance in the context of Social and Cultural similarities between Nagas and Southern Seas.

Affinities between Nagas and Tribes of Southern Seas. The tribes of similarities between Nagas and tribes of southern seas (Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan etc.) is to trace the origin of Nagas. The affinities between Nagas and tribes of southern seas are convincing that they had same ancestor/group and originated from same place.

The comparative study of the Nagas in India and Myanmar and some of the indigenous people of Philippines, Malaysia, and Taiwan shows the similarities in their socio-cultural

¹⁷¹ K.S. Singh, N.K. Das, C.L. Imchen, (1991), People of India Nagaland, Volume XXXIV. *Anthropological Survey of India*, p. 13. Seagull Books

life. The Naga scholar believed that Nagas lived in the Chindwin and Irrawaddy Valley before they migrated to Naga Hills. They also believed that they lived near the Island or Southern seas coastal areas and retreated to northwest of Myanmar and later migrated to the Naga Hills. While the other groups of Naga went further to the southern seas of Malaysia, Indonesia, Taiwan and Philippines.

The custom and tradition of Naga's resembled with those tribes in southern seas (Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines etc.). Some of the tribes living in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines and Taiwan are quite similar with the Naga people in many aspects. The customs and tradition practices by Nagas like Headhunting, Dormitory system, Tattooing, Platform burial, looms, terraces rice field etc. are resemble to those tribes in the Southern Seas. Mc Govern writes that Nagas are very similar to the Dayaks and Kayan's of Borneo, Batak's of Sumatra and certain groups of Formosa (Taiwan) and several other groups in Philippines.

Some of the other writers like, W.C. Smith, Barrows, Shakespeare etc., described the affinities of Nagas with those tribes of Malaysia, Borneo, Philippines, Indonesia and Sumatra.¹⁷² Smith's observation on the cultural affinities of Nagas with Borneo, Formosa, Philippines and Igorot's, W.C. Smith ¹⁷³, after careful study of the cultural traits and physical characters of the Nagas, classified them as Indonesians. In dealing with the Naga affinities outside of the Asiatic Mainland, he took the Dayaks and Kenyans of Borneo, the Batak of Sumatra, certain groups of Formosa, the Igorot and the Ifugao and several other groups in the Philippines as typical examples. He quoted various authors in his book, to illustrate the Naga – cultural similarities to those of the Indonesians.

¹⁷² R.B. Thohe Pou, a Ph.D. Research Scholar, contributes regularly to *e-pao.net*. this article *Affinities between Nagas and Tribes of Southern Seas* was webcasted on 29th June 2006 at *e-pao.net*

¹⁷³ W.C. Smith (1925), **The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam. A Study in Ethnology and Sociology**. pp. 153 – 160. London. Published by Macmillan and Co. Ltd. 1st Edition.

2. Relevance and affinities between the Dayaks (Borneo tribes Indonesia) and Naga's (Tribes of Nagaland India)

The indigenous people in Borneo Island. It is the third largest island in the world primarily mountainous with dense areas of rain forest covering an area of roughly 287,000 square miles. Since a place is connected to history, relations, and individual and collective identity, it is also bound up with questions of power. People often attribute different meanings and emotional ties to places, which can sometimes lead to conflict (Chipman Koty, Citation [2014](#)). Borneo island is located at southeast of the Malay Peninsula and southwest of the Philippines. It composes four political territories; Kalimantan belongs to Indonesia, Sabah and Sarawak are part of Malaysia, and a remaining region comprises Brunei Darussalam (PBS, Citation [1998](#)). Cross border areas between three countries can contribute to economic development especially tourism industries across the borders Borneo Island is a niche area with enormous potential ranging from high-level interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research to multi diversities of eco-tourism attractiveness. The tourism industry has experienced steady growth over the decades and becomes one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world (UNWTO, Citation [2015](#)).

The Dayaks refers to indigenous people of Borneo's Island (Kalimantan) and they are the majority of ethnic groups. Unfortunately, being the majority yet they have a little role in the Island. During the New Order regime in Indonesia during President Suharto, they were not given an opportunity to become the political leaders, head of Government departments, local Governor or other formal leaders in the Government

institutions/agencies. It could probably be due to the system prevented them to gain political position. Thus, they were isolated in their own land or “home”.¹⁷⁴

The Dayak, for generations, have lived in a longhouse within a group. Longhouse is a type of house that has many compartments or rooms or *bilik* which are separated by walls. Each *bilik* is owned by one family, which may be consisted of parents, children, and grandparents. One family’s compartment or room might have 20 meters long and 5 or 7 meters wide. The divisions of the rooms will be separated based on its functions, for instance: living room separated from the kitchen.

According to those and Mc Dougal the Dyaks “passionately fond of headhunting”. Bock says that head-hunting is part and parcel of their religious rites. “When a Dyak wants to marry, he must know himself a hero to his intended, and the more heads he has the more honour he receives from the tribe, and the more she admires him.” On this point Gomes says that “The desire to appear brave in the eyes of his lady – love sometimes leads a young man to mean and cowardly crimes”. The land Dyaks of Sarawak permanently kept heads in a separate house, which also served as the bachelors’ quarters.

In common with the Nagas and other mainland tribes the Dyaks build their houses in the form of piles about twelve feet high. Platform burial is practiced by the Kayans, who belong to the same group as the Land Dyaks. The body is dressed and retained in the dwelling for several months, after which the coffin is placed on high poles, or in the branches of a tree. “Any Sea Dyak whom it is intended especially to honour is not buried underground, but his coffin is placed in a miniature house built for him on piles”

¹⁷⁴ Clara Sada, Yabit Alas & Muhammad Anshari (2019), Indigenous people of Borneo (Dayak): Development, social cultural perspectives and its challenges. *Cogent Arts & Humanities Volume 6, 2019 Issue 1*. Taylor & Francis Online.

Tattoo marks on arms, hands, feet, thighs, chest and temple are very common. The men tattoo when they attain manhood, and women when they are about to marry.

There is no powerful political organization among the Dayaks, “The authority of the chief defends more upon his personal influence...than on his actual power he possesses by virtue of his office” Roth exhibits a loom used by several tribes of Borneo, which is almost identical with the one used by the Nagas and other related tribes.

The land Dayaks live in the hilly interior of Borneo, where they carry on a crude agriculture. They grow rice on the steep hillside, frequently growing a single crop and then leaving the soil to be fallow some nine to ten years. The Dayaks are primarily agriculturist; they are not devoted to commercial pursuits like the Malays; their trade is largely confined to barter.¹⁷⁵

Relevance in the context of the Igorot (Philippine Tribe) and the Naga’s

The Bontoc Igorot is another kinsman of the Dyak and Naga, for he again presents an array of practices which are practically identical with those of these other two groups. Barrows writes of the Igorot: “It is the custom of all these tribes to chop off the heads of the victims in battle or murder, and carry them home as trophies, where they form the objects of feasting and celebration.”

The Bontoc have the bachelors’ house where the boys from three to four years of age and all the unmarried men sleep. This is the centre for several ceremonials, is a repository for trophies the chase and war, and is taboo to women.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, Alemchiba, p. 9

The Bontoc Igorot do not practice platform burial, but place the corpses in hewn-out coffins and bury them. They do, however, keep the corpses several days and have a big feast, which resembles ancient practice of the Ao Nagas to some extent. Among the Ifugao “the dead are sometimes buried in small houses specially constructed for the purpose” Sawyer, in treating the Igorot groups in general, states that “some of the Igorot’s dry their dead over a fire in a similar way to the Tinguianes” (Tribes of Northern Philippines). This drying process reminds one of the practices of ancient Ao Nagas

Among the Igorot “tattooing is very fashionable, the pattern most common being an arrangement of straight and curved lines.” The skin is pricked and soot is pressed into the openings as colouring matter. Likewise, the Konyaks among the Naga tribes follow a meticulous description of tattooing and the process involved in ink preparation, the tattooing itself and so on.¹⁷⁶ Tattoos in Konyak society symbolizes the rank of a person in the society as it is given to the Kings, prince, warriors and also to women when they reach certain stage. Each tattoo pattern is unique for different group of people and symbolizes different meanings. Konyaks are widely known as head hunters, headhunting was the highest profession in the Konyak society. In their old tradition they take enemy’s head during war, this allows them to decorate their face and body with tattoos as a sign of reward.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ Ashim Roy (2004), **The Konyak Nagas: A Socio-Cultural Profile**. *The South Asianist* (Micheal Heneise ed.) Vol.2 Issue 2, 2013, p.139. Leicestershire: Upfront Publishing Ltd. Editor@southasianist.ed.ac.uk. journals.ed.ac.uk/southasianist.

¹⁷⁷ Zenwang Konyak (2020), **Traditional Method of Preparing Tatoo Pigment by the Konyak Tribe of Mon District in Nagaland, India**. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* (JETIR) September 2020, Vol.1, Issue 9, p. 900. www.jetir.org (ISSN-2349-5162)

Relevance in the context of Language

Linguistically, the Sino-Tibetan languages have been classified into two branches – i) Tibeto-Burman, and ii) Siamese-Chinese. All the Naga dialects are included in the former group. The Tibeto-Burman group probably formed an area of dispersion, somewhere in the present province of Sikiang in China, from where they began to spread east and south. From this centre of dispersion, some of the Tibeto-Burman tribes took up their trek along the Brahmaputra River west-wards. They found homes in the mountainous tracts of Balipara frontier tract to the east of Bhotan as Abhors, Akas, Miris, Daflas and in the Sadiya Frontier tract as Mishmis. The Assam-Burma groups of the Tibeto-Burmans include the Nagas and the Bodos, who came down to Burma and entered Assam and Brahmaputra valley in fairly early times, the Kuki and Chin people who are found in south east Assam and in Burma and the Kachins or Singphos and the Lolos who have always remained in Burma.¹⁷⁸

Nagas are found in the hills of the states of Nagaland, Manipur and in North Eastern Frontier Agencies (NEFA). The Naga languages are classified by Sir George Grierson into various groups and sub-groups of the Tibeto-Burmese family, in common with most of the hill languages of Assam, and in contrast to the languages of the nearby Khasia and Jaintia Hills which belongs to the Mon-Khmer (Austro or Austro-Asiatic) speakers within the original Bodo area¹⁷⁹. Dr. J.H.Hutton¹⁸⁰, however, is of the opinion that there are, “distinct traces of the Mon-Khmer language in river and place names, and there are words such as some of those for

¹⁷⁸ M. Alemchiba, (Author), (1970), *A Brief Historical Account of Nagaland*. Naga Institute of Culture Kohima, Nagaland, p. 3, para 2.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ J.H.Hutton (1965), *The Mixed Culture of the Naga Tribes*. Reprinted from the Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol. 95, part 1, 1965, pp. 19. ⁴³ Now known as Zeliang Rong

‘taboo’ which can be definitely linked up with Austro-Asiatic and Oceanic words. This, taken with some aspect of *megalithic* culture, particular that of the Kachcha⁴³ Naga of south-west Manipur and the North Cachar Hills, with the occurrence, in one tribe at any rate, of a shouldered hoe typical Khasi pattern, with traditions, customs and legends strongly suggestive of a submerged matrilineal element, and with some other elements of folklore both Naga and Methei, suggest very strongly that a population of Mon-Khmer affinities has at one time occupied the area, or parts of the area, now occupied by the Naga tribes and is to some extent represented in the present population.”

Various conjectures and assumptions reveal that the Nagas belong to the Indo-Mongoloid race. It is speculated that most probably they moved south and east from Sinkiang (China) some of them trekked along the Brahmaputra and halted at the present-day Arunachal Pradesh. Some were pushed southwards into Indonesia and Burma, and the evidences of strong cultural parallels remain. It can also be assumed that at one time the Nagas might have wondered about before they found their present permanent abode from their myths and legends one gathers that there is some relationships with the natives of Borneo in that the two have had a common traditional way of head-hunting, with the Philippines and Taiwan through the common system of terraced cultivation¹⁸¹

Relevance in the context of Agriculture

One of the agriculture practices in Nagaland is slash and burn or Jhum cultivation, this is a common practice in South and Southeast Asian countries too. Vegetation fires are a common phenomenon in many different regions of the world including South/Southeast Asia (S/SEA). Fuel type, topography, climate, weather, lightning, and other factors govern fire occurrence and spread. Of the different natural factors, drought-induced fires due to

¹⁸¹ Majid Hussain, (1988), *Nagaland: Habitat, Society and Shifting Cultivation*, p 25. Rima Publishing House New Delhi.

El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) in southeast Asia and more specifically Indonesia are most common. In addition to these natural factors, most of the fires in S/SEA are human initiated. For example, fire is used as a land clearing tool during the slash and burn agriculture in the Eastern Ghats and northeast India, Chittagong hill tracts of Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sarawak in Malaysia, Philippines, Jambi, Sumatra and others in Indonesia, northern Thailand, northern Laos, Cambodia, and northern Vietnam. Fires are also extensively used for clearing land for oil palm expansion in Indonesia. In addition, most of the countries in S/SEA are agrarian where farmers use fire for the burning of agricultural residues to clear the land for the next crop.¹⁸²

In the hills of Nagaland, shifting cultivation is a dominant economic activity practiced by the farmers. Jhum or slash and burn cultivation is the traditional system of farming in the state and is practiced on a large scale mostly by the tribal community in hilly regions. Jhum area covers about 72% of total cultivable area and contributes to the total rice production about 49.26%.¹⁸³ About 88.3% of the forests are owned by communities and individuals, and only 11.7% of the total recorded forests constitute government forests. Slash and burn agriculture continue to be the major type of agriculture practiced over ca. (“ca” abbreviations of the Latin word "circa" which means around or approximately) 9,17,087 ha (“ha” means hectare) in Nagaland employing an estimated 73% of the population (Census, 2011). The annually cultivated area (131,349 ha) comprises 58.95% of the total net cultivated area. In other areas, terraced rice cultivation or combined Jhum and terrace cultivation are practiced. Majority of fires are intentional and used for shifting

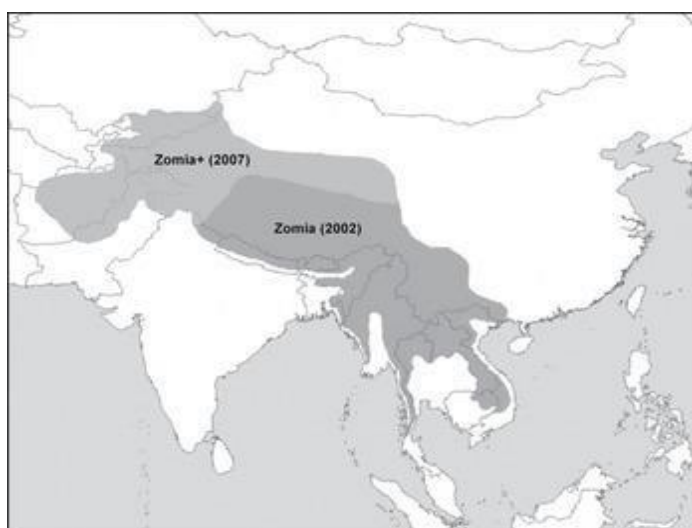
¹⁸² Krishna Prasad Vadrevu et al., (2019), Trends in Vegetation fires in South and Southeast Asian Countries. *Scientific Reports*, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1038/41598-019-s43940-x>. www.nature.com/scientificreports.

¹⁸³ Virosanuo Solo and Khriezo Kikhi, (2021), An overview of the farming system in Nagaland, *Journal of Pharmacology and Phytochemistry (JPP)*. p. 239. Sp 10 (1): 238 – 243. www.phytojournal.com

cultivation, besides a small number of accidental fires, fire wood burning, agricultural residue burning etc. The state of Nagaland is part of Indo-Burma global biodiversity hotspot and is blessed with diverse species of flora and fauna.¹⁸⁴

Relevance in the context of Ancestral root

According to many research scholars of Southeast Asian studies, the Nagas are part of the larger cluster of numerous ethnic people groups who have lived in the hills and mountains of Southeast Asia for thousands of years. These hill peoples are called “Zomia”.¹⁸⁵ This exotic name was coined in 2002 by the Dutch social scientist Willem van Schendel in an article published in the geography journal *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*¹⁸⁶



Van Schendel's original Zomia (2002) and its extension north and west (2007), Zomia+. Map based in part on van Schendel, 'Geographies', p. 653.

¹⁸⁴ Hitendra Padalia, Partho P. Mondal, (2014), Spatio – Temporal Trends of Fire in Slash and Burn Agriculture Landscape: A Case Study from Nagaland, India. *ISPRS Annals of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences, Volume 11-8, 2014, p. 54*. ISPRS Technical Commission V111 Symposium, 09-12 December, 2014, Hyderabad, India.

¹⁸⁵ Mazie Nakhro (Columnists), Could the Nagas be part of the Zomia of Southeast Asia? By *Nagaland Post*, published date: 25/6/2019

¹⁸⁶ Willem van Schendel, 'Geographies of knowing, geographies of ignorance: jumping scale in Southeast Asia', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 20, 6, 2002, pp. 647–68.

Indeed, all research scholars of Southeast Asian Studies seem to share the view that the Zomia were historically ungoverned by the dominant populations who have been living in the valleys or plains under some centralized system of government.

According to Jean Michaud, an authority on social anthropology, the Zomia are found dispersed across several modern nation-states: “From north to south, it includes southern and western Sichuan, all of Guizhou and Yunnan, western and northern Guangdong, most of northern Burma with an adjacent segment of extreme [north] eastern India, the north and west of Thailand, practically all of Laos above the Mekong Valley, northern and central Vietnam along the Annam Cordillera, and the north and eastern fringes of Cambodia”.

Culturally, the Zomia are much more tradition-and-culture based societies, who rely heavily on the words of the rulers or on written constitutional laws, in which those who have access to power or information can control everyone else. In terms of their economic support system, the Zomia are mostly content with having just enough for themselves to survive. The Zomia farmers opt for jhum fields and select crops that can be stored for years while remaining edible. They supplement this subsistent agriculture with domestic animal rearing, hunting of wild animals, and gathering of edible forests products.

Though accumulation of wealth for commercial purpose is not commonly practiced by the hill tribes, they are at least well known for their hard work and self-reliance. Their governing system may be tradition-based and elders-led, it is both more flexible and more egalitarian than the codified, hierarchical societies of the lowland¹⁸⁷ nation -states. This egalitarian culture of the hill peoples also means that their women enjoy a relatively higher status than that of their counterparts in the plains.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Lowland plains are separated by forest hills and mountain ranges. These fertile plains are highly suited to rice growing ethnic groups

¹⁸⁸ Mazie Nakhro, op. cit.

Most of these features of the hill peoples of Southeast Asia are also descriptive of the Naga people in general, so it is quite logical to conclude that “Nagas” are part of the “Zomia”.

Relevance in the context of dance and music

The Southeast Asian music, dance, and song were originally associated with tribal rituals. From the beginning, the main characteristic of Southeast Asian music and dance has been a swift rhythm. The slow and stately dances of the Siamese court were of Indian origin; when they were introduced into Burma in the 16th century, the Burmese quickened the tempo, but, even with that modification, the dances were still called Siamese dances to distinguish them from the native ones. In their oral literature—namely, in folk songs and folktales—the emphasis is on gaiety and humour. Typically, Southeast Asians do not like an unhappy ending.¹⁸⁹

Nagas, dance and music are an essential part of their culture. The tribal dance and music will set your feet tapping. The dance is generally performed in groups on the folk songs perfectly synchronized with music through various musical instruments such as Asem (drums), Tati, Mouth Organ, Bamboo Flute, etc. The tribal dance becomes more extravagant by the virtue of the colourful and unique traditional costumes and jewellery. The folk songs narrate the stories of bravery, romance and historic incidents. Certainly, this place has some fantastic taste in dance and music which tourists tend to cherish.¹⁹⁰

Both the Naga's and the Southeast Asian music and dances have its tribal roots and rituals.

¹⁸⁹ Britannica Southeast Asian Arts. www.britannica.com/art/Southeast-Asian-arts/Kingdom-of-Khmer9th-13th-century

¹⁹⁰ ‘The Mojo of Nagaland Culture - Cultural Diversity of Nagaland’. Art and Culture *holidify* www.holidify.com. Published by Ankit Oberio

Therefore, though Nagaland is relevant in India's Look / Act East Policy is one of the least discussed areas in this context be it in print media, social media, different news channel or even published books and articles but Nagaland in northeast India is a strategic region in terms of her geographical location and her cultural and social affinities. Therefore, one can see how the state shares much commonality in terms of history, practices, culture etc. with the neighbouring counterparts that it is a study of family, kit and kin separated by an international border.

Taking into account the relevance of Look East/ Act East policy in the context of Northeast India with a particular reference to Nagaland, now the concern is what or how the Government of India has taken initiatives in initiating connectivity paradigm of Northeast India with South, Southeast and East Asian countries. Ironically policy makers also initiated fencing countries between borders for strategic reasons. A classic example is, fencing of the Manipur–Myanmar border created barriers to economic exchanges and livelihood while dividing cultures and families. Therefore, understanding the ways in which the fencing affects the border communities is important and crucial for comprehending the role of the border communities living along the Manipur– Myanmar border in India's Act East Policy (AEP), together with in examining the ways in which they can be engaged for the successful implementation of the policy.¹⁹¹

The policy debate on linking the North East Region with Act East Policy was started when the then President Pranab Mukherjee, while addressing the 47th Conference of Governors, said on 10th February 2015 that 'connectivity of the Northeastern States must be improved

¹⁹¹ Munmun Majumdar, India–Myanmar Border Fencing and India's Act East Policy. *India Quarterly* 76 (1) 58 -72, 2020. Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA)

by strengthening road and rail network. There is need for progressive policy for industrial investment and promotion in the hilly mountainous States.’¹⁹²

Progress is being made gradually to build NER’s connectivity with rest of India and its neighbours. A definite development that has happened under the Act East is the linking of the Northeastern states with Southeast Asian capitals through direct flights.¹⁹³ In the context of railway connectivity, in January 2018, the MOS for Railways Rajen Gohain remarked,

The capitals of Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam are already connected by broad gauge railway lines and works for extension of railway lines in Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland are going on with top priority basis, while in Sikkim and Meghalaya, some land related problems have become a hurdle.¹⁹⁴

Thrust Areas of Act East Policy in North East

The eight North eastern states of India despite her diverse culture and language have a common political history. The partition of the country in 1947 blocked the natural sea route through the port city of Chittagong. It had landlocked the region and blocked the river transportation route to the sea. This loss of connectivity insulated the economy and affected accessibility to the markets. The government of India once again with a vision to make northeast India a gateway to South, Southeast and East Asian countries has adopted a good number of projects and proposals as thrust areas of Act East Policy in Northeast.

¹⁹² S.D. Muni & Rahul Mishra, (2019) **India’s Eastward Engagement, from Antiquity to Act East Policy**. p. 211. Sage Publication.

¹⁹³ Ibid

¹⁹⁴ ‘Modi’s “Act East” Policy Boosted Infrastructure in Northeast: Union Minister’, Business Standard, 5 January 2018, available at https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/modi-s-act-east-policyboosted-infrastructure-in-northeast-nion-minister-118010501072_1.html, accessed 16 August 2018

• **The Kaladan Multi Modal Transit Project - The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project** is a project that will connect the eastern Indian seaport of Kolkata with Sittwe seaport in Rakhine State, Myanmar by sea. In Myanmar, it will then link Sittwe seaport to Paletwa, Chin State via the Kaladan River boat route, and then from Paletwa by road to Mizoram state in Northeast India. Recently, the inaugural (May 2023) vessel was flagged off from Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata to officially kick-start the operation of Sittwe Port in Myanmar which is a part of Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP)¹⁹⁵

This project will reduce distance from Kolkata to Sittwe by approximately 1328 km and will reduce the need to transport good through the narrow Siliguri corridor. The project includes a waterway component of 158 km on Kaladan river from Sittwe to Paletwa in Myanmar and a road component of 109 km from Paletwa to Zorinpui along the India-Myanmar border in Mizoram. India has taken the responsibility of building a national highway linking Mizoram with Paletwa.¹⁹⁶

Mizoram commerce and industries minister R. Lalthangliana told the Assembly on Wednesday (June 2019).¹⁹⁷ Lalthangliana said atleast 85.5 percent of the project has been completed. It could get delayed due to compensation claim, he added. The project was launched in 2008 by the UPA government as part of its Look East Policy (Now Act East) policy, will link the eastern Calcutta seaport to Sittwe seaport in Myanmar across the Bay of Bengal, a distance of 539 km. From Sittwe, the route will continue over river Kaladan to the western Myanmar town of Paletwa, 158km away. Paletwa

¹⁹⁵ Swathi Satish (2024) Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Project. ClearIAS current affairs notes. January 26, 2024

¹⁹⁶ Pema Tseten Lachungpa (Article), 2018, From Look East to Act East Policy: The Importance of the North East Region (NER) and the Emerging Challenges. *International Journal of Information Movement*, Vol.2 Issue XI March 2018, pp, 249-257. Website: www.ijim.in. p. 253

¹⁹⁷ Henry L. Khojol, (2019) Border Road by 2020, *The Telegraph* 13, June 2019, EAST, p. 3

will then be connected to the India-Myanmar border by a 110km-long road. The international border will then be connected by road with Mizoram's Lawngtlai town 87.18km away, where National Highway 54 passes.¹⁹⁸ Mizoram is all set to come closer to the rest of India and the world, especially Southeast Asia, as the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, a bilateral project of the India and Myanmar governments to connect both the countries by sea route and road is in progress. The project approved in 2008 has seen major cost escalation, from 563 crores to 3200 crores, and timeline missed in 2015 and 2021. It is now expected to be completed by 2023.¹⁹⁹

- India- Myanmar- Thailand Trilateral Highway** - The **India– Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway** is a highway under construction under India's Look East policy that will connect Moreh, India with Mae Sot, Thailand via Myanmar. Imphal Mandalay-Bangkok 55 km (34 miles) route, consisting of Imphal- Mandalay 584 km (363 miles) and Mandalay-Bangkok 1,397 km (868 mi), is a highway in good condition except for 101 km (63 miles) part of 120 km (75 mi) long Kalewa-Yagyi stretch being upgraded to 2-lane highway by India, revised expected completion date for which is April 2021 (April 2018 update). The road is expected to boost trade and commerce in the ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, as well as with the rest of Southeast Asia. India has also proposed extending the highway to Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The proposed approx. 3,200 km (2,000 miles) route from India to Vietnam is known as the East-West Economic Corridor (Thailand to Cambodia and Vietnam became operational in 2015). This highway will also connect to the river ports being developed

¹⁹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹⁹ Mayank Singh (2021), "India's pushes for strategic Kaladan transit project through Myanmar to rampup its Act East Policy". The situation along the borders has been palpable with the refugees entering India since February 1st when the Myanmar Military seized power, *The New Indian Express*, published: 28th March 2021.

along the way at Kale (also called Kalemmyo) and Monywa on Chindwin River. The Trilateral Highway proposal is a part of the larger Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), an international organization comprising of Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand Bhutan, and Nepal to enhance technological and economic cooperation among the South Asian and South East Asian countries along the coast of Bay of Bengal.²⁰⁰

- **Moreh-Tamu-Kalemmyo-Kalewa section** – The main gate for border trade between India and Myanmar is from Moreh in India to Tamu in Myanmar. The route has overlaps with Asian Highway 1 and Asian Highway 2. On the Indian side, the 109 km section from Moreh to Imphal, the capital city of Manipur state, goes through Palel. On the Myanmar side, a 150 km road from Tamu to Kalemmyo and 10 km road from Kyigone to Kalemmyo were completed by India in 2001, and named the Friendship Highway. This is the only operational cross-border road link along the 1643 km India-Myanmar border. The road from Tamu to Kalemmyo is in good condition as a result of a maintenance work done by the Myanmar government in 2008, India has committed to extend the upgrading of this highway further to Mongywa. This road was built by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) a wing of the Indian Army. India on its part has helped Myanmar in building 160 km of the TamuKalemmyo sector of the proposal link to establish its core interest in this project.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Pema Tseten Lachungpa (Article), 2018, From Look East to Act East Policy: The Importance of the North East Region (NER) and the Emerging Challenges. *International Journal of Information Movement*, Vol.2 Issue XI March 2018, Pages 249-257. Website: www.ijim.in. p.252

²⁰¹ H.Srikanth (2016), Look East Policy, Subregional Connectivity Projects and Northeast India. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. No. 17. pp 46 - 47

- **Agartala- Akhaura Rail Link- Akhaura** - is an Upazilla of Brahmanbaria district under the Chittagong division in the east of Dhaka and it is the adjoining area to the North Eastern Indian State Tripura. Trade and passenger transit occurs through the Akhaura-Agartala check post.

Work on the all-important 12.24 km India-Bangladesh new railway line is progressing at a snail's pace on both sides of the border, more than 11 years after the around Rs 1,000 crore project was finalized between the Prime Ministers of the two countries. Tripura government's Principal Secretary in-charge of the Transport Department Sriram Taranikanti said that the first phase work on the Indian (Tripura) side of the project would be completed this year and the second phase would be finished by June next year. After the completion of the Agartala (India)-Akhaura (Bangladesh) railway project Tripura and other northeastern states would not only be connected with the Bangladesh railway network, the region would be linked with the Chittagong international sea port of that country.

"Cost and time would be saved greatly in ferrying goods and heavy machinery between the northeast region and the rest of the country and abroad using the Bangladesh railway network and ports," said Sujit Chakraborty

IRCON Chief General Manager (Works) Vinod Kumar Gupta said that the journey time between Agartala and Kolkata, via Bangladesh, would be reduced by a third, from 1,613-km through mountainous northeastern states via Siliguri (West Bengal) to a mere 514 km.

"Around 1100 km distance would be reduced and 22 hours journey time would be saved when people and goods from northeast India would go to Kolkata via Bangladesh and

vice-versa," Gupta said. The IRCON official said that on the Indian side, 3.1 km portion of the railway track would be elevated to avoid 26 acres of farm land and habitations.²⁰²

The entire project design is no doubt design to boost the time and economy of Tripura, India. However, like any other it does have its own challenges, for example the terrain of Bangladesh is unfriendly. According to the Railway Board Official, and I quote, "The main problems in Bangladesh is the difficult terrain and heavy rains. Besides, Bangladesh does not keep pace with us even as the entire cost of `887 crore is being borne by the MEA,"²⁰³

Among various issues, one issue is that One-Stop Service is missing; passengers suffer a lot as they need to go to various spots to complete the procedures. For example, after clearing the Customs, Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) check post is half an hour later, passengers need to walk more to reach the immigration office. Bags are checked several times at different spots, which is not feasible. There is no principal digital scanners.

The truck drivers and labourers do not have any resting facilities and toilets. There are electricity and internet connectivity-related issues that make the operations harder. There is only one small warehouse but no cold storage for perishable goods like fish. The land port area is vast, which should be efficiently used.

²⁰² Sujit Chakraborty, "11 years on, Agartala-Akhaura Rail project moving at snail's pace." INS, September 19, 2021

²⁰³ Perna Katiyar, ET Bureau "How poor rail connectivity is acting as a hindrance to India's Act East Policy". The Economic Times, October 20, 2019

Labour opportunities at the land port need to be increased. If goods can be imported through this land port, it will enhance labour opportunities. It will also help in reducing the pressure on the Benapole land port.

The most striking significance at the border is community activity from both side of the country is the Border Haat known as Kamalasagar Border Haat at Kasba, which is on the south part of Akhaura once a week, although now the haat activities are paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The border haat aimed to establish a traditional system of local marketing products like local handmade products through the local market and facilitate a reunion spot for families living on both sides.

Local people are aware of the region's foremost trade and connectivity developments, as many of them are fish exporters. Still, some informational gap exists. The representation of women in trade and allied services is almost zero. Necessary capacity building and awareness generation activities complemented by cheaper financing facilities will bring more women to the sector.²⁰⁴

There are no major political conflicts or issues here, making it easier for the locals to start a business. There are some occurrences of truck hijacking at Sultanpur, a place between Akhaura and Brahmanbaria Sadar at night, which is a safety issue to look out for. There should be some common and regular platforms that enable the people at the grassroots to interact with the private and public sector stakeholders about their needs and concerns. The local people are not much informed and aware of the benefits of developing multi-modal connectivity in the BBIN sub-region.

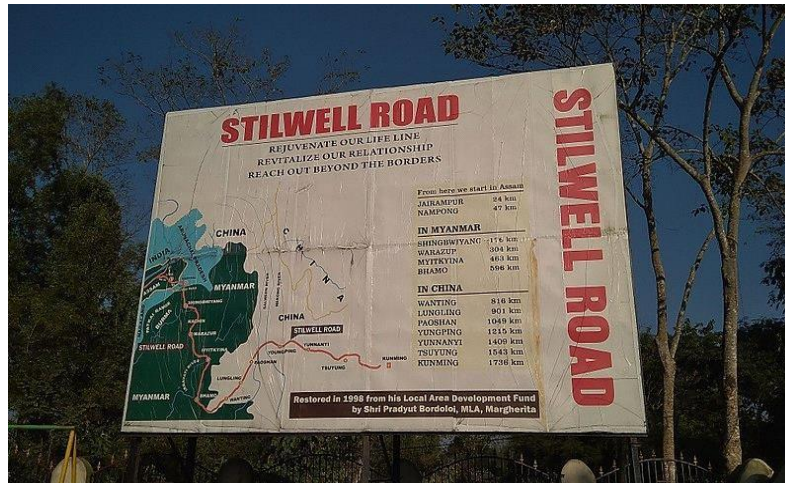
²⁰⁴ Touseef Adnan, "Field Diary Akhaura Land Port: A Major Opportunity for Bangladesh and Northeast India". Bhagladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Multi-Modal Connectivity in the Sub-Region (M-Connect). *CUTS International* August, 2021

- **Zolkawtar- Rhee route** – The route from Zolkawtar in Mizoram state of India and Rhee in Chin state of Myanmar can potentially improve border trade. This route would be the shortest land route connecting Myanmar and Kolkata through Northeast India and Bangladesh if the section from Aizawl to Agartala is improved.
- **Stillwell Road (Nampong Pangsung) route** – Stilwell Road (1736 km) was built during World War II but fell into disuse after the war. Starting from Ledo in India's Assam state, it weaves through upper Myanmar to reach Myittha before turning eastward to end in the PRC (People's Republic of China) Yunnan Province. The road crosses the border at Nampong- Pangsung, where border check –points have been established by bilateral agreement. Currently the border is not open for official border trade.

Indian government has proposed this road for reopening as International Highway for trade route to link Myanmar (Burma), China and other Southeast Asian countries in its Act East Policy. The reopening of this road as trade route will increase the interaction between the people of neighbouring countries and maintain good relationship among the member countries. It will also boost trades and attracts inland and foreign tourists as the road itself is historically famous and significant due to Second World War, which in turn will boost socio-economic development of this most backward border area and will benefit to the local people. The northeast India is geographically isolated and the economic development is lacking behind other parts of India due to several factors even though the region is endowed with natural resources. There is already approved trade routes with Myanmar from Nagaland and Manipur and to Bangladesh from Assam and Tripura which is one of the significant means of foreign trade and regional co-operation towards economic development of the region.

The Stilwell Road, originally known as the Ledo Road, is named after the American General Joseph Warren Stilwell, who undertook the responsibility of constructing the project in December 1942 to open communication links for the Allied forces from India to free Burma (now Myanmar) from the clutches of the Japanese forces. After its completion in 1944, the road was used as a major supply route for the transportation of arms, troops and other essential materials for the Kuomintang Army of China in its war against Japan. The road, covering a distance of 1726 km, starts from Ledo in Assam (India) and goes across Nampong in Arunachal Pradesh (India) and Shindbuiyang, Bhamo and Myitkyina in Kachin (Myanmar) and further links Ledo–Burma roads junction to the city of Kunming in China. The road covers 61 km in India, 1033 km in Myanmar and 632 km in China.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁵ Jajati K Pattnaik, 2016, Should the Stilwell Road be Reopened, *Economic & Political Weekly*. Home Journal Vol. 51, 09 April, 2016. The -author visited Ledo-Nampong sector of Stilwell Road on 29-30 November 2015 and collected data interacting with the eminent public leaders, government officials and other stakeholders at Jairampur and Nangpong towns at Changlang. <http://chandlang.nic.in/stilwell.htm> (accessed on 27 November 2015)



Source: From Wikipedia. File – Ledo Assam updated and as appeared at that time, 15:29, 13th January 2018.



Aerial View of Stilwell Road, 2018

- **Road and railway connectivity within NE and Nagaland** - Connectivity of Northeast include a 4,000 km long ring road connecting all states capitals by 2020, and extending to new destinations; border last mile rail connectivity with Myanmar and restoring rail connectivity with Bangladesh. Twenty port townships are to be developed along the Brahmaputra and Barak River systems to enhance intra-regional connectivity. Modi has also proposed the augmentation of air connectivity to and from the region, in tandem with transport corridors to boost manufacturing. Connectivity is also being upgraded in the border areas for strategic purposes, with highways and development plans approved for Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur, including a four-lane highway between Dimapur and Kohima.
- **BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement** - The landmark of MVA was signed by Transport Ministers of BBIN countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal) in Thimpu, Bhutan on June 2015. Bangladesh, India and Nepal have implemented the agreement but Bhutan is yet to accord its ratification of the agreement.²⁰⁶ Bangladesh, India and Nepal agreed on text of operating procedures for passenger vehicle movement (Passenger protocol), in sub-region under Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA). The passenger protocol agreed upon is document detailing procedures for cross-border movement of buses and private vehicles for transport facilitation in subregion. The agreement will permit member states to ply their vehicles in each other's territory for transportation of cargo and passengers, including third country transport and personal vehicles.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ NEWS SERVICE DELHI (AIR), International News, *Bhutan govt to place bill for ratification of BBIN initiative at its upper senate*. April 15, 2019, 8:12 A.M.

²⁰⁷ *Current Affairs- January 2018*, National, BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement: India, Bangladesh, Nepal approve Passenger protocol.

• **Land Port Authority of India and the management of the Land Custom Stations**

- The Land Port Authority Act (LPAI) has been passed by Parliament on 31.01.2010 and came into existence on 01.03.2012 and notified in the Gazette.²⁰⁸ LPAI is for development and management of facilities for cross border movement of passengers and goods at designated points along the international borders of India.

Rules are being framed. The Land Port Authority (LPA) will only be in charge of the Integrated Check Post which are presently only 5 in NER (Three in 1st Phase and Two in the 2nd phase). There are 42 notified LCSs (Land Customs Stations) including ICPs (Integrated Check Post). The Land Custom Stations are only notified by the Department of Revenue, other sovereign functions are carried out by the concerned Departments/Ministries. The State Governments are to provide the other facilities such as building, roads, water supply, etc. There is no single authority to manage the Land Custom Stations. This Ministry has repeatedly requested that the Land Custom Stations should also be brought under the purview of the Land Port Authority. Having a single authority will ensure that the LCSs are run in a professional manner. It is noteworthy that Bangladesh already has a Land Port Authority.

State Governments use the ASIDE (Assistance to States for Developing Export Infrastructure and Allied Activities) Scheme of Ministry of Commerce for setting up infrastructure facilities in their Land Custom Stations. It is suggested that the ASIDE Scheme should be transferred to the Department of Border Management so that the development of border trade facilities, at least infrastructure related is under the control of a single Ministry. This step combined with covering the Land Custom Stations and Integrated Check Posts under the Land Port Authority will help in creating a single

²⁰⁸ Ministry of Home Affairs, Annexure – 1 BM-11 Division, MHA FAQ. <https://www.mha.gov.in>

controlling authority over all points of overland border trade.²⁰⁹ Thus, the above thrust areas do manifest that there has been an effort at the conception and policy levels to take off “Acting East” via northeast region. However, as one visit any of the Northeastern regions, especially areas identified as gateways via land to Southeast Asia, starkly reveals a different reality if not for limited acceptance like the Moreh -Tamu-Kalemyo - Kalewa a trilateral highway got completed and the proposed a bus service from Guwahati ISBT to Dhaka via Meghalaya.

Conclusion

Connectivity is an absolute necessity for regional cooperation. Development of connectivity between any two regions-physical, institutional, cyber, and people-to-people facilitates faster and greater interaction, thereby minimizing transaction costs, and enabling cohesiveness and convergence. India’s connections with Southeast Asia dates back to historical times. Southeast Asia has become one of the prime regions of the world with steadily expanding production networks and as such providing an opportunity for India to integrate itself with the region’s manufacturing networks. India’s upgraded ties with Southeast Asia can be corroborated by its shift in policy from ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’, trade figure touching \$142 billion in 2018, signing of multilateral and bilateral FTA in trade and services among others. The relationship could be taken to another level if physical connectivity between India and Southeast is enhanced. Realizing the importance of connectivity, India is undertaking projects like the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project with countries of Southeast Asia. Certain projects like the Mekong India Economic Corridor are also being planned.

²⁰⁹ Look East Policy and The North Eastern States (2011), DONER (LEP) Government of India, Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. Pp. 5-6. <https://mdoner.gov.in>

However, building a strong connectivity relationship between India and Southeast Asia requires strong policy initiatives and greater political will.²¹⁰

Thus, given the extensive relevance of the policy in the context of Northeast and Nagaland with neighbouring countries and making the connectivity project a reality will promote the North East Region into a peace and stable state.

²¹⁰ Dhiraj Tayal, India's Engagement with Southeast Asia: Role of Physical Connectivity. *International Journal of Research in Business Studies* ISSN: 2455-2992, Vol. 6 (1), June 202. P. 51

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Impact of Look/Act East Policy on Economic Development, Political Stability and Security Scenario in Northeast and Nagaland in Particular

Introduction

The Northeast region is regarded as remote and landlocked which shares 80% of its border with other countries, including China, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. The region is connected with the rest of India through a narrow corridor at Siliguri in West Bengal. The region is lagging behind in the development from the rest of the country. And remoteness is regarded as a major reason for the underdevelopment. Northeast has the uniqueness of being the only region having overland links with the ASEAN nations.²¹¹ Considering its closeness to the ASEAN region, the then Prime Minister of India Shri Narasimha Rao in 1991 introduced India's Look East Policy and the present National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government has changed into India's Act East Policy when Prime Minister Modi formed the government in 2014. The Indian foreign policy has been advocating opening the region to Southeast Asia to encourage development. The current focus of the central government is to integrate development in the region by improving its relationship with the ASEAN. It is said that greater connectivity and economic integration of India's Northeast with its eastern neighbours is reflected a key focus area for growth and development of the region.

²¹¹ Chiranjeeb Biswas, (2019), Act East Policy and Development of the North East: An Assessment in *Journal of Advances and Scholarly Researches in Allied Education | Multidisciplinary Academic Research*

When the Look East Policy (LEP) was started in 1992, one of the reasons pertaining to Northeastern states of India was that India was in dire need of curbing insurgency in the region. The support of Myanmar was of key importance at that point. Here, an element of logical fallacy catches the analysis who wish to compare the LEP with the AEP. The fundamental difference on this count is that Look East is assessed for what it delivered in 25 years, within its limited role in shaping the domestic agenda in an age of coalition governments, whereas Act East is projected on the basis of the promise it makes to develop and integrate the North Eastern Region (NER).²¹²

India's Look East policy, later renamed as Act East policy, has significant implications for the northeast state of Nagaland. This policy aimed to strengthen India's economic, cultural and strategic ties with Southeast Asian nations and the broader Asia-Pacific region. Here are some key points about the policy significance for Nagaland.

1. Economic opportunities: The policy sought to enhance connectivity and economic cooperation with Southeast Asian countries, which could potentially open up new markets and trade opportunities for Nagaland's industries, such as agriculture, horticulture and handicrafts.
2. Infrastructure development: The policy emphasized improving infrastructure links, such as roads, railways and air connectivity, between Nagaland and the neighbouring countries of Myanmar and Bangladesh. This could facilitate easier movement of goods and people which can benefit the economy of Nagaland.

²¹² S. D. Muni & Rahul Mishra, (2019), India's Eastward Engagement; From Antiquity to Act East Policy. P. 212. Sage Publication

3. Cultural ties: Nagaland shares cultural and ethnic ties with some parts of Myanmar.

The policy aimed to strengthen these cultural bonds and promote people-to people exchanges, potentially benefiting tourism and preserving Nagaland's unique cultural heritage.

4. Security and strategic interests: Nagaland shares a border with Myanmar, and the policy aimed to enhance cooperation in areas like border management, countering insurgency and addressing issues like drug trafficking and illegal cross-border activities.

5. Energy and resource sharing: The policy could potentially facilitate cooperation in areas like energy, with Nagaland exploring opportunities for trade in hydropower and other resources with neighbouring countries.

Overall, while the implementation of the Act East policy has faced challenges, it holds the potential to integrate Nagaland more closely with the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia, promote economic development and address security concerns in the region.

Over the years New Delhi's approach toward the region has changed from a security to a developmental paradigm. This change in position was articulated by India's external Minister, Pranab Mukherjee when he stated that 'geography is an opportunity and the very geographical location of the Northeast makes it the doorway to Southeast and East Asia' (Haokip, 2015, p. 203). New Delhi positioned North East Region (NER) in its 'Look East Policy' discourse, with an aim to connect it with Southeast Asia through connectivity projects to improve trade opportunities in the region.²¹³

²¹³ Sarish Sebastian (2022) Principal Investigator. India's Neighbourhood Policy towards the Southeast Asian Region: A Study on Act East Policy. Department of International Studies, Politics and History. Christ (Deemed to be a University & NCR Campus. Supported by Hanns Seidel Stiftung

Brief profile of the three sample villages

1. Avangkhu (Phek District)

Avangkhu is one of the sample villages for the study. The village is in the sub-division of Meluri. In Meluri Pochury is an ethnic Naga tribe and comes under Phek district, Nagaland. Geographically, Meluri is located on the South and extreme southeast of Nagaland and shares boundary with Zunheboto in the north, Kiphiri in the northeast, Kohima in the west and Manipur in the south. It shares an international boundary with Myanmar in the east.²¹⁴ Meluri Sub-division is rich with different mineral deposits. Mineral Products of Avangkhu can be transported to Dimapur railhead, thereby connecting other regions in India through railways.

Table: 1.1. Road Connectivity and distance from Avangkhu

Routes	Distance by Road
Avangkhu to Shiloi Lake	18 km
Avangkhu to Meluri HQ	149 km (NH202)
Avangkhu to Kohima	310 km
Avangkhu to Dimapur	384 km
Meluri to Kohima	161 km via NH 29

Source: Export Potential Survey and Strategies for Nagaland,

Directorate of Industries & Commerce, Kohima Nagaland

²¹⁴ Sheyamong Pechongri, (2017), Mineral Resources of the Pochury Land in the 25th Anniversary of Pochury Women Organisation, Kohima, Know your Strengths. A Souvenir published by Pochury Women Organisation Kohima (PWOK)

The road that connects Avangkhu with town Wezeho (Meluri subdivision Phek district) is under progress for a distance of 14 km. There exists a road, declared as National Highway, from Kohima to Meluri town with distance of 161 km. Another road connects Meluri to Phokhungri after passing through Wazeho at a distance of 64 km away from the State Highway. Avangkhu is about 118 km away from the foothill road and therefore transportation through using that route may not be cost effective. For goods to be transported from Avangkhu to the South East Asian countries may be difficult in short and medium term as the present road infrastructure on the Myanmar side is still to be developed properly.²¹⁵

The closest city on the Myanmar side to Avangkhu (i.e., the border entry point) is Leshi, which is 25 km away from the border. Leshi is an important town in the Sagaing district in Myanmar. The town Leshi is connected with Htamanthi river port that is at a distance of 65 km on Chindwin River, from where transportation through ferry and steamer is possible to Mandalay. The road from Leshi extends to Tmanthi, which is a major town in Myanmar. Road connectivity from Leshi to other places of Myanmar exists as well. The major road connectivity of Leshi is shown in Table 1:2.

²¹⁵ Final Report on “Export Potential Survey and Strategies for Nagaland” submitted to Directorate of Industries & Commerce, Kohima Nagaland by Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) December, 2018.

Table: 1.2. Major Road Connectivity in Lyashi (Myanmar)

Road Routes	Distance by Road
Border entry point to Lyashi	16 km
Lyashi town to Tamanthi	65 km
Avangkhu to Lyashi	25 km

Source: Export Potential Survey and Strategies for Nagaland, Directorate of Industries & Commerce, Kohima Nagaland

Creation of facilities and operationalisation of Avangkhu and Somara Land Customs Station in Nagaland and Myanmar respectively is bilaterally agreed upon in a Joint Trade Committee meeting in October 2008, which is yet to be notified officially by the Government of India under Section 7 of the Customs Act, 1962 (52 of 1962)²¹⁶ (**Table: 1:3**)

²¹⁶ Look East Policy and North Eastern States (2011), Government of India, Ministry of Development of North East Indian Region.

Table: 1.3.

LCS in India	State	LCS in Myanmar	Status
Nampong	Arunachal Pradesh	Pangshu	Notified but not functional
Zokhawthar	Mizoram	Rhi	Inaugurated on 30 th January, 2004. Functional
Moreh	Manipur	Tamu	Inaugurated on 12 th April 1995. Functional and being developed as Integrated Check Post (ICP)
Avangkhu	Nagaland	Somara	Bilaterally agreed upon in 2008 Not yet notified

Source: Government of India Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region.

1. Economic & Social Profile

In order to understand a brief economic and social profile of Avangkhu village the following sectors were considered. They are education, water, health and agriculture.

Education

Sl. No.	Category	Percentage
1	High School	38.10%
2	Middle School	33.33%
3	Graduate	0%

4	Illiterate	9.52%
5	Can read only	0%
6	Higher secondary	9.52%
7	Primary	4.76%
8	Others	4.76%

High school graduates are the highest category at 38.10 percentage and the lowest being primary education at 4.76 percentage. There are no graduates or beyond at the time of collecting the information at the field. Others means those that fall within the category of class in nursery and those who has a minimum reading ability, comprising 4.76 percentage.

The total literacy rate is approximately 90.47%, in Avangkhu village which can be considered to have a high literacy rate. Typically, literacy rates above 90% are regarded as high and indicate that a significant majority of the population is literate. This suggests that the village has good educational attainment and access to education.

While a high literacy rate of 90.47% indicates that the majority of the population in Avangkhu village can read and write but the absence of graduates or individuals with graduates and master's degrees does suggest that higher education levels are lacking. This can impact the overall quality of education in several ways.

Water

One small channel drain from river Tizu in Meluri runs below the village of Avangkhu located at the boundary which provides a small catchment area as a water source for the village where villagers collect water for household purpose which is about 4 to 5 kms away from the village habitat. Now the government of Nagaland has constructed pipeline that runs through each household. However, since the source area is small because of which there is shortage of water supply especially in dry season

Health

There is no health centre in the village so any sickness they go to Meluri town which is 149 kms away. Other times they seek help from army health centre which is few kms away.

Agriculture

Due to shortage of water the villagers adopt a traditional agricultural process that involves clearing the land with trees and other vegetation, burning it and then cultivating it for paddy. (Slash & Burn method)

Infrastructure

In order to reach Avangkhu one has to reach Meluri first, a sub-division under Phek District, Nagaland. From Meluri to Pongkhuri and from Pongkhuri to Avangkhu. The distance between Pongkhuri and Avangkhu is 13 kms.

The distance between Avangkhu in India to Shera in Myanmar is 17 kms, while to Lashi in Myanmar is 25km.²¹⁷ Both the people across the border socially and culturally live like a family. There is both monetary and barter trade, which is often a regular feature between the two. Travel pass is required for trade purpose.

During monsoon season the frequency of trade drops as the road becomes highly unfavourable. Except occasional buying and selling occurs by using one of the most convenient two-wheelers that can travel even during rainy season where the roads are deplorable. (**Fig:1.1.**). The bike comes from Myanmar and mostly used by the inhabitants of Shera and Leshi (Myanmar) for trade purpose to India. It is also reported that some villagers with stable income in Avangkhu buy similar bikes from Myanmar for trade purpose and sometimes for social activity like visiting family members and friends across the border.

Fig: 1.1. Myanmar bike used for trade



²¹⁷ Directorate of Industries & Commerce. Government of Nagaland

Import & export takes place often. Permission is taken from both the government for the purpose. Import and export duties are levied by government of both sides depending on the commodities. There is no intermediary, trading is done legally, and it is done through the International Trade Centre (ITC).

As far as the awareness of trade policy between the two countries, people of Avangkhu were highly aware. There are some infrastructures constructed by the government of India on Indian side but no infrastructure on Myanmar side at the immediate border. The infrastructure as seen in **(Fig: 1.2.)** are the International Trade Centre (ITC).

Fig:1.2. *International Trade Centre (ITC)*



International Trade Centre (ITC) mission is to enhance inclusive and sustainable growth and development in developing countries, especially least developed countries, and countries with economies in transition through improving the international competitiveness of MSMEs. (Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises)

It is an attempt to promote trade and international activities. Nagaland government opened three border trade centres - Lungwa in Mon district, Pangsha in Noklak district, Avangkhu in Phek district. As of now, only informal trade flourishes at the border. The movement of people is common in the bordering villages and towns. Mostly Self-Help Groups (SHG's)

and Women Organisation were engaged in marketing their products in this ITC where buyers were both from Avangkhu & neighbouring villages in Myanmar

Fig: 1.3.



Road to International Trade Centre (ITC) June, 2023

The road (Fig:1.3.) to ITC from Indian side is satisfactorily maintained so both light and heavy vehicles are pliable from Indian side.

There is rise of annual income due to trade and better livelihood which indicates that there is a prospect of financial growth if proper logistics are in place for the purpose of trade. Road infrastructure from Myanmar side towards India at the border is deplorable however social and cultural connectivity between the two countries is cordial which gives a positive prospect on the growth of socio-economic condition of the people. The citizens of both sides of the country often meet especially while the villagers go to the field.

Political Profile

The political system in the village is traditional, where the village council take the responsibility of making decisions for the welfare of the people and is responsible to

implement the village development projects. The village from 1991 onwards certain development activities were initiated but as per field report there was no substantial result. The road from Indian side from ITC to the border point is good but on crossing the border there is no good road in Myanmar side so, for any product buying or selling it is done by walking or two wheelers in dry season to Shera or Leshi (Myanmar). As most of the villagers in Indian side cannot afford to buy a two-wheeler or even other form of vehicles so by foot they walk across the border especially to Leshi in Myanmar to buy basic needs like rice because families cannot sustain themselves for a year from their paddy products.

As per the respondents the government became more pro-active since 2014. So were the village council. Government officials especially from the department of Industries & Commerce, government of Nagaland did visit Avangkhu prior to 2014 few times even by trekking as there were no roads from old Avangkhu to new Avangkhu (present International Trade Centre). That was the time when the Government of India has proposed a link road to connect Avangkhu to the border point of Myanmar. Accordingly expert teams were engaged then.

Now both the government of Nagaland and the village council of Avangkhu are working hand in hand. The council now consults the community of the problems and as to how to address the problem in all fronts. The elected representative is providing development opportunities. The village got power supply in 2017 and eventually electricity was provided in every household in Avangkhu.

The council began to build confidence among the community through community awareness programme like public gathering, community fishing etc. the traditional political institution also empowered NGO's who were actively involved in waste management and organic farming as the first pilot projects, which is effectively executed up to date.

As per *India Economic Times* on April 23, 2023, said that Union Minister L. Murugan became the first central minister to visit the border village on Saturday i.e. 22nd April, 2023 to the border village. Murugan said that the work on the two-lane road from Meluri in Nagaland's Phek district to Avangkhu along the India-Myanmar border will begin soon. He said the road will pave the way for the development of the border areas.²¹⁸

The minister during a public interaction programme at the International Trade Centre in Avangkhu, said the centre is committed to the development of the Northeast, including the border areas in the region.²¹⁹

Security Profile

The villagers of Avangkhu are engaged into farming as a source of livelihood, the people do have fields at the border, however there is no disturbance from Myanmar side while farming at the borders. There are security forces detailed at the borders and they are on duty 24/7. The security forces are both Indian army and village guard (VG). The presence of armed personnel from the government agency provides safety and security to the villagers.

Since 1991 till 2006, insurgents' groups were the main problem trigger on a daily basis. These groups do not harm the community but the clashes between the insurgent and Indian army, amounts to indirectly attacking the village because for them even going to the field, school or work became a big task due to fear of unexpected spark. This unrest situation among the common people started to decline eventually.

²¹⁸ Press Trust of India, (2023), Two-Lane Road till Myanmar border in Nagaland soon: Union Minister Murugan. Times of India. April 23rd, 2023.

²¹⁹ Ibid

After 2014 the situation became stable in the village. There is the presence of insurgency at the borders too but they do not create any disturbance. The village extends hospitality sometimes like providing them food and water. There is no tax levied upon the farmers by the insurgents, neither on the trader. No drug peddler at the border ever encountered by the villagers nor human trafficking at the border in the past till date. (July 2023)

Beside economic, political and security impact of India's Look/Act East policy on Avangkhu (India), the village is also at the closest proximity of 17 kms with the neighbouring country Myanmar. Both the villagers of Avangkhu (India) and Leshi and Shera (Myanmar) too visits one another not only for trade purpose but also for visiting family members across the border. The Pochury's (Tribe of Avangkhu) sometime for medical care especially in times of emergencies go to Myanmar (Leshi) for treatment in hospitals because to them Leshi (Myanmar) is nearer than to Kohima or Dimapur. (India) There is also inter-marriages between the two countries therefore, visiting one another to celebrate festivals with their relatives and in-laws is frequent. Visa or passport is not required because people at the borders maintained the feeling of oneness and comrades, they always feel that they are one though in two different countries.

2. Longwa (Mon District)

Longwa is one of the largest villages in Mon district and the village chief or the Angh is the ruler here. But what's most interesting about this place is the fact that international border that separates India and Myanmar runs right through the Konyak Angh's house so the Angh chiefs house is divided between Longwa village (India) and the Hukong valley (Myanmar). Infact many Burmese at the border can speak *Nagamese* the lingua franca of

Nagaland. Most shops are in Nagaland and people from the other side come there to buy goods.²²⁰

A resident of Longwa can roam freely in both India and Myanmar. The Angh's exercise control over a number of smaller villages, some of which lay in Mon, Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. Together they have strong customary, traditional and cultural relations.

The Naga's live in parts of Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India and the Kachin State and Sagaing Region of Myanmar. The village Longwa is situated on the Indo-Myanmar border, which is 42 km (by border road) from the headquarters of Mon district. The connectivity of the border point is shown in Table: 2.1.

Table: 2.1. Status of Road Connectivity in Longwa

Road Routes	Distance
Longwa to Guwahati	515 km
Longwa to Dimapur	304.3 km (approx.) via NH129 via Sivasagar, Jorhat, Golaghat (Assam)
Longwa to Kohima	331 km (approx.) via NH2 and 369.2 km via NH129
Dibrugarh to Longwa	190 km (approx.)
Mon to Sivasagar (Assam)	110 km
Longwa to Sivasagar	130 km (approx.)
Longwa to NH in Mon district	34.5 km

Source: Export Potential Survey and Strategies for Nagaland, Directorate of Industries & Commerce, Kohima Nagaland

²²⁰ PTI by HT Correspondent, Kohima (2007), Centre approves border trade centres for Nagaland. *Hindustan Times*. March 32, 2007

Sivasagar in Assam is well connected to other areas of Assam, especially Guwahati, by highway is about 363 km. The route to reach Lahe in Myanmar is shortest through Longwa. Dibrugarh is also an important town in Assam which is connected to Longwa directly. Dibrugarh is also well connected to other parts of India by air and railway. Hence, Longwa can utilize two nearby airports i.e., Guwahati and Dibrugarh apart from the railway connectivity through Sivasagar in Assam. Moreover, Longwa is well connected to Kohima and Dimapur by road (NH 129). Sonari (Assam) is a centre for tea and timber industries and is the gateway to the Mon district of Nagaland. The best way to reach Sonari by road is from Sivasagar town through the Dhodar Ali near which the famous royal mausoleum of the Ahom Kings at Charaideo is situated.

Economic Profile

Longwa in Mon district is a strategic village being in close proximity with Myanmar. The Centre has approved setting Border Trade Centres (BTC) along Indo-Myanmar border in Nagaland to promote trade and commercial activities in the state. This was stated in the annual administrative report of Industries and Commerce department tabled in the state assembly session (2017).²²¹ This deliberation identified Longwa in Mon district of Nagaland to have an International Trade Centre (ITC)

Travel passes or any documentary support is not required for the purpose of trade with Myanmar. Road connectivity is bad between Longwa (India) and Lahe (Myanmar). Import and export activities between the two village is mostly monetary, and to some extent barter system depending on the commodities. Sometimes they also barter a meal for working in the field. Frequency of trade is only sometimes but meeting in person as a part of social interaction is more frequent. Both the villages at the border in both sides of the country

²²¹ PTI by HT Correspondent, Kohima (2007), Centre approves border trade centres for Nagaland. *Hindustan Times*. March 32, 2007

can speak Konyak language, Nagamese and Burmese language as well. So, this lingua franca is a positive prospect, for communication between the two countries.

No permission required from both the government for the purpose of import and export. Both legal and illegal means is used for trading and no import or export duties imposed. Though there is an International Trade Centre (ITC) (**Fig:2.1.**), it stands like a monument because most trading activities are done among themselves across border. About 35% of the population are aware of the trade policy while the rest either they don't know or not aware.

Fig: 2.1. *International Trade Centre (ITC)*



Government of India has built infrastructure through the state government like marketing sheds and approach road beside schools and health centres while the government of Myanmar provides safe drinking water tank. The Burmese also gives practical demonstration on how to use modern agricultural tools. The Burmese brings the gadgets all the way from Myanmar with the purpose of selling it to the villagers in Longwa but those modern gadgets were not at the reach of common people to buy in India, so they end up giving lessons on how to use and operate the machines, only to return back without selling. In return the trainers were given food and vegetable harvest from the fields of Longwa. This gesture is the most common social value practised in a Naga society.

The village Longwa is located in one of the most beautiful landscapes in Mon district however, economically the poorest. As the village though connected with Myanmar to the closest proximity but no road connectivity to the rest of the districts in Nagaland. Moreover, neighbouring villages of Longwa in Myanmar were also the most backward villages in Myanmar. These, has added to the plight of economic development in Longwa.

Security Impact

Since the villages at both side of the country share many commonalities so is their field too where they mostly cultivate paddy beside other regular crops like cassava, yam, millets etc. which is why there is a possibility of problem arising due to encroaching the borders, however such incidents never occurred rather farmers from both side of the country extend a helping hand especially during harvest.

As per the response during the field work there is positive change in terms of exchange of food items, seeking medical care becomes much convenient for the villagers in Longwa to go to the nearby health centres in Myanmar because for the Konyaks in Longwa the distance and lack of small public commute within the district Mon (Nagaland) it becomes a lot more convenient to reach Myanmar. Celebrating festivals together, another common trend between the two countries which has made the bond stronger. However, there are other disadvantages too, for example drug trafficking one common practice across borders has made the village community vulnerable to use drugs in a large scale especially in Mon town because it is affordable and readily available, which pose an alarming threat not only to the families but also the society.

There are security personnel detailed at the borders, both Indian army (Assam Rifles) and village guards. Yes, they protect and provide safety and security to the villagers. Another security concern is the presence of NSCN (K). The National Socialists Council of

Nagaland – Khaplang (NSCN-K) was formed on April 30, 1988. The primary objective of the NSCN-K is the establishment of ‘greater Nagaland’ comprising of the Naga dominated areas of the neighbouring states within India and contiguous areas in Myanmar. This factional group do not disturb the local people directly rather they were mostly considered as an extended family with their home across the border. However, due to occasional interface between the NSCN (K) and the central forces, it creates a feeling of anxiety and restlessness in the minds of the inhabitants especially those at the borders of both side of the country.

Occasional drug peddling does arise, this according to the respondent is largely caused by economic disparity. The cost of drug is cheap in Myanmar and costly in India so especially among youths they indulge into this lucrative business as an alternative source for livelihood as most of the youths were left without job. This is another reason for the growth of drug users in Mon district. Supporting families and getting two square meals a day has become more important than considering the negative consequences of peddling drugs.

Political Profile

Longwa village has a total population of 6703, and all of them enjoy dual citizenship. These people have the freedom to move in and out between India and Myanmar without any restrictions. Longwa is part of the 44 AC Phomching constituency under the Mon district's Indian side and the Yochen Lahe township constituency on the Myanmar side.

The other unique feature of this extremely remote village in Mon district is the Anghs (king) control three villages on the Indian side and five villages on the Myanmar side. They have extremely strong customary, traditional, and cultural ties. The chief Angh's house is separated in the middle by the international border, and his bedroom lies on the Indian side, while the living room is in Myanmar.

Fig: 2.2.

Angh's Palace (outer)



Angh's Palace (Interior)



The chief angh is an Indian voter. He said, "Till now, I have voted in the general election in the Nagaland Assembly election. I have never cast my vote in Myanmar elections," Chief Angh told India Today.

He has the authority when it comes to infrastructure building in these villages. Residents told India Today that development is visible in India but not so much in Myanmar. In Chief Angh's jurisdiction, there is a school where children of both nations study. The schools were built in 2014.

Fig: 2.3.

Way to Burma School



Fig: 2.4.

Burmese Schools in Longwa*



***Note:** All these school buildings are located in Longwa (Indian side) and the Burmese students come to this school for learning. From Indian side some Konyak (Longwa) students attend the same school. These schools are constructed by the village councils (Longwa).



Way towards the Burmese School

The British separated Burma (Myanmar) from India in 1935, thus ending 51 years of the country Burma being ruled as a province of India²²²

When India and Myanmar were partitioned a good chunk of Longwa territory fell within the Burmese jurisdiction so it is called as Burmese school, though the school was built by the Angh of Longwa (India) and children from both countries go for learning in the same school. The medium of learning is Konyak (Mon District, India) language.

The Administrative Divisions in each country has its own administrative system but both have some provisions for the tribes of ethnic communities. In Myanmar the Chin, Kayah, Kachin, Karen, Mon, Rakhine and Shan States are for the ethnic communities. The Ayeyarwady, Bago, Magway, Mandalay, Sagaing, Tanintharyi and Yangon Regions in the plains are inhabited predominantly by the Bamar (Burman). The Chin is recognised as an ethnic minority. The Nagas are not a recognised minority group but have some administrative autonomy in the Naga Townships.²²³

3. Pangsha (Noklak District)

International Trade Centre Pangsha is 36 km away from the District Hq. Noklak. Pangsha is also commonly known as DAN village. It is the last village of the District where the Indo Myanmar Border pillar 146 is located. Pangsha village is a historical village when it comes to local perspective. Places of interest include Bao Yam Shing in Wonthoi Village, Village Guards Museum at Pangsha village etc. This place has been recognized by the

²²² George Kent (2017), When Burma and India went their separate ways. *Frontier Myanmar*. September 5, 2017

²²³ Dr. Walter Farnedes, 2014, FN. 7

Government of Nagaland (INDIA). International Trade Centre (ITC) Dan is the last place in an area between International Trade Centre Dan rest house and the helipad.²²⁴

The Khiamniungans are one of the major tribes among the Nagas and spread across the eastern part of Nagaland state in India and the western part of Myanmar. Khiamniungan literally means “source of great water or river,” (Khiam means water, Nui means great and Ngan means source). The nomenclature is said to derive from the biggest river of the land (Laang) and the Chindwin River downhill with which the former converges.²²⁵

Table: 3.1.

Road Routes	Distance
Pangsha to Itanagar	174.5 km
Pangsha to Noklak	16 km
Pangsha to Nazira railway station (Assam)	79 km
Pangsha to Simalguri (Railway station in Assam)	79 km

Source: Export Potential Survey and Strategies for Nagaland, Directorate of Industries & Commerce, Kohima Nagaland

²²⁴ S.Lisepi Sangtam (2022), Indo-Myanmar International Trade Centre: through the corridor of Nagaland at Pangsha DAN. *International Research Journal of Commerce Arts and Science*. Volume 13 Issue 11 [Year - 2022] ISSN 2319 – 9202.

²²⁵ Bidhayak Das (2018), Dissent in the Naga Hills as India-Myanmar Border Follies Linger. *The Irrawaddy* 7th May 2018.

Economic Profile

The Nagas living in the border areas of Myanmar and Nagaland are being economically and educationally backward, who look upon their brothers in central Nagaland for help. The majority of the people living in these remote and isolated areas are economically so poor facing lots of hardships in every day-to-day life affair. Given this reality, the economic development and stability in the north-eastern region and a better infrastructure along its borders, is crucial for India's Look East policy. (S. Lisepi Sangtam, 2022, p. 3)²²⁶

To promote international trade and commercial activities Pangsha was identified as one of the border points along the international border of Indo-Myanmar.

For the Khiamniungans the tribals inhabiting Pangsha they do not require a pass or visa for the purpose of trade to Myanmar. The road is bad that connects Noklak (District) to Pangsha and towards the International Trade Centre (ITC). Import and export activities takes place between the two countries occasionally for which no permission is required from the government of both the countries. Both barter system and monetary system is used for import and export transaction. No custom duties imposed, there is free trade system. there is both legal and illegal (for e.g. drugs & alcohol) trade. There is an ITC and even a market shed but these identified centres are kept unused, except on special events like community events or high-level official visits from the government of Nagaland then the bazaar area is used. All forms of interactions and import and export is done through people to people between the two countries.

²²⁶ S. Lisepi Sangtam, p. 3

Fig: 3.1. Bazaar Area



Market Sheds on Indian side. June, 2023

Almost the entire village of Pangsha were not aware of trade policy. Most infrastructures in terms of market sheds, health centres, even schools in Myanmar side adjacent to the border were the initiatives of the government of India.

When it comes to better livelihood, it is alarming to observe that there is no concrete economic development even after the 9 years (ever since the inception of Act East Policy, 2014). Connectivity between the two countries in terms of infrastructure is negligible and the socioeconomic conditioned is yet to improve. However, people to people interaction are cordial and friendly relation is maintained between the two countries since time immemorial. The reason for a good relation between the two countries at the border is maintained till today is because of inter-marriages and frequency of interaction between the two countries especially while going for farming.

The government of Nagaland has provided water supply where respective locality was provided with a water tank so now the village has safe drinking water. Even in the health sector there is a health centre where nurses, and compounder are regularly present and the doctor attached to the centre resides at new Pangsha.

Fi: 3.2. *Health Centre at Dan (Pangsha)*



Political Profile

To promote international trade and commercial activities in the Indian sub-continent, five borders have identified along the international border of Indo-Myanmar. One is Pangsha in Noklak district of Nagaland.

The imaginary line that cut across Dan (Pangsha) village and parts of new Pangsha is shrouded in mystery. While it is well known that the Naga hills were divided by the Treaty of Yandaboo signed between Gen. Campbell (British) and Governor of Legaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin (Burma) in 1826, 24th February. Later in 1953 under the Indo-Burmese demarcation in Kohima on the Naga territory by Jawaharlal Nehru and U Nu, the then prime ministers of the two countries. Thus, there is virtually no information to suggest drawing of an imaginary line across the hills that houses villages belonging to the Khamniungan Nagas.

Elderly members of the Khamniungan Tribal Council (KTC) remember two futile attempts, once a joint India-Myanmar initiative in 1970 when soldiers of both nations suffered heavy casualties after they were confronted by underground groups and after 35

years later in 2004 by the Lahe (Myanmar) administration of Myanmar. Each time the Khiamniungan's stood up to thwart attempts to fence the border. "The British never told us of any imaginary line after 1947. We lived as free Nagas and will do so forever," claimed Khiamiungan Tribal Council President L Ngon.²²⁷

The village council is the highest traditional political institution. The chairman is elected. The council hall is used for meetings in regard to development of the village. Whenever there is a problem, village elders and members of the council will gather at the hall. Even students' union can approach the council when there is problem and they will bring their grievances to deliberate in the council hall.

Security Profile

The security scenario in Pangsha when viewed from the community context it is one of the most peaceful village not only within the villagers alone but also with community across the borders in Myanmar because the feeling of oneness is very strong. They don't consider themselves belonging to different countries rather to them its an extended family living across the border.

An attempt was made to build border fence across the border by the government of Myanmar in 2016 to fence about three kilometres of the imaginary border that passes through the sleepy hamlets of Dan and Pangsha in the Noklak district of Nagaland.

²²⁷ Bidayak Dey (2018), Dissent in the Naga Hills as India-Myanmar Border Follies Linger. *The Irrawaddy*. News Letter. May 7th 2018.

Fig: 3.3. *The unfinished boundary fence. June, 2023*



The fencing was halted after massive protests by locals of Dan, Pangsha and other villages, as well as several other Naga organisations.²²⁸ the writer (Bhidhayak Das 2018) continues to narrate his story that there is immense hardships to the proposed fencing and the Indian security outpost is causing to locals. Unlike before, locals from both sides are not able to move freely to plough their fields.

“There are restrictions imposed on us if we move through the check point area, and also if we go through other passages, these Indian men watch us through binoculars,” said Nyukha, the 80-year-old Khaimniungan Naga gaobura (village headman of Dan).

The Khaimniungan Nagas of Pangsha and Dan, who also identify themselves as the “Pangsha,” have 10 jhum fields, three on the Myanmar side separated by dense mountain and seven on the Indian side. The cultivation follows a cyclical pattern and after the first year, the field is left and later to be visited by local jhum farmers. The second cycle will begin after the tenth year when the topsoil regenerates fully with full-grown trees.

²²⁸ Bidhayak Das (2018), India – Myanmar Open Border Policy: A Travesty for Sustainable, Traditional Agriculture. *The Irrawaddy* May 16th, 2018

Usually rice (paddy), millet, maize, black gram, ginger, soybean and other vegetables are cultivated in a rotational format in the first year followed by only millet in the second year before the land is left to regenerate.

The local farmers are worried with the attempt to construct the imaginary boundary fence between India and Myanmar, it is simply because a lot is at stake. Not just the 3,500 hectares of cultivable land that will be gone, but a traditional lifestyle that has been sustaining people in these very difficult and challenging mountains will be destroyed forever.²²⁹

Status of ongoing connectivity project in Nagaland

In order to fulfil the objective of Act East Policy, the government of India initiated connectivity project in Nagaland as reflected above. Therefore, it is desirable to note the present infrastructure development status in the state of Nagaland.

- a) Nagaland have 33 National Highways, approved and sanctioned by Ministry of Road Transports & Highways (MoRTH), out of which 11 roads are under NH Nagaland Public Works Department (NPWD), 13 under NHIDCL and 9 under BRTF (BRO).²³⁰ 4 laning of 114 km along Dimapur Kohima section and the development of Bypass is being done at a cost of Rs. 3,600 Crore.
- b) 4- KM rail line link between Dimapur- Zubza near Kohima. Construction of 82.50-km new broad gauge railway line from Dimapur to Kohima (Zubza) was going on in full swing and was expected to be ready by March 2026 (**Fig:4.1.**), while sanction had been granted to the proposed Dimapur-Tizit railway line. Further, survey for a new line between Furkating-Baghty Valley (24.10 km in Nagaland and 23.30 km in Assam) has also been completed.

²²⁹ Ibid

²³⁰ Our Correspondent, (2023), 33 National Highways approved in Nagaland. *Morung Express* 14.09.2023

Mentioning this, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) Chief Public Relations Officer (CPRO) Sabyasachi De in a press release said the new railway line would bring Nagaland's capital city on the broadgauge railway map of the country. He mentioned that the new railway line project was being executed at an anticipated cost of Rs 6,648 crore and included eight new stations, 22 major bridges, 165 minor bridges, 35 road overbridges/road under bridges and 31-km tunnel.

Meanwhile, the 257-km new railway line project from Dimapur to Tizit at an estimated cost of Rs 4,274 crore had been sanctioned, while survey for a new line at a stretch of 47.40 km between Furkating Baghty Valley (24.10 km in Nagaland and 23.30 km in Assam) had been completed

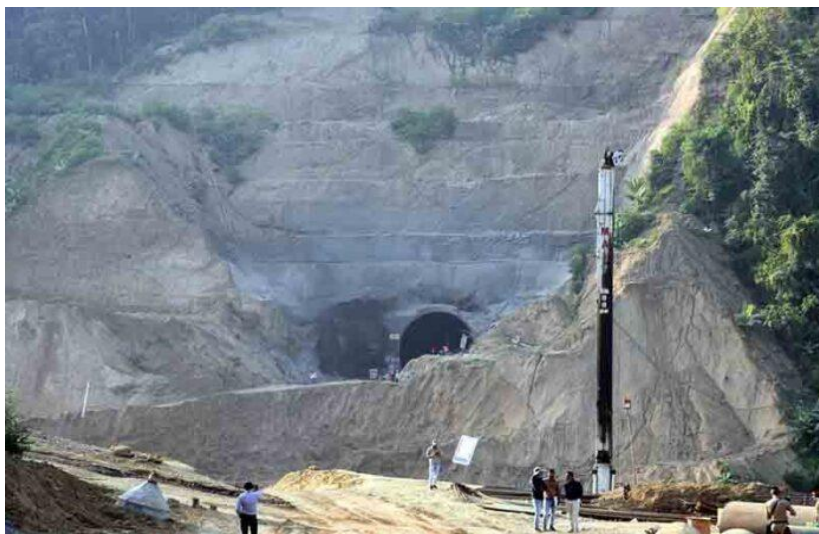
He also said the new rail connectivity would make goods transportation easier and would largely help in boosting the economy of Nagaland. Claiming that Indian Railways had taken up a number of projects for infrastructure development at Dimapur during 2014-22, the CPRO said the railway system had been made passenger-friendly by providing toilets and ramps for divyangjans (differently-abled) at Dimapur railway station.

The goods shed at Dimapur had been revamped with improved facilities and opened for outer stone chips, while 740 freight trains arrived in Nagaland with essential commodities between 2014 and 2022. The CPRO (Chief Public Relation Officer) claimed that Nagaland held an important position in the development of the Northeast, adding that Indian Railways' efforts in transforming the State through transportation would lead to the region's holistic development.²³¹

²³¹ Dimapur-Zubza railway line to be ready by March 2026. Nagaland Post July 07, 2022

The freight train arriving at Dimapur (Nagaland) will boost trade and commerce between India and Myanmar through Northeast and Nagaland in particular by:

- i) It will reduce the cost of transportation, which will boost both big and small traders because freight train is cost effective.
- ii) Integrating the Northeast region with Myanmar through freight train, road, inland water ways and maritime links will develop economic interactions, that would contribute to the regions socio-economic development
- iii) It will reduce using big cargo trucks which in itself will relieve traffic congestion and reduce carbon emission which is a milestone contributing towards environment sustainability.



***Fig: 4.1. Under construction tunnel for Dimapur-Zubza BG railway line.
(NFR) 2022***

Analysis

This section would discuss on political stability, economic development and security scenario in order to determine the impact of the policy in the identified villages. The three villages were used as a single sample of this research.

The three villages are as follows:

1. Avangkhu in Phek District,
2. Longwa in Mon District and
3. Pangsha in Noklak District

In the following paragraph different variables will be analysed which is used in the questionnaire as independent variables. These are some key points which measures the relevance of India's Act East policy. The chapter on the basis of this points will analyse the impact of the policy on economic development, political stability and security scenario in the identified sample villages as mentioned above.

1.1: Gender

'Gender' is an important point to determine the level of political participation and awareness of a society. In this study area too, the role of gender is examined, and it is found that men have more participation and influence in political spheres as compared to women. The study has also found that gender inequality undermines the political stability in the selected villages of the study.

1.2: Family Education, School Drop-Out, School Teachers

Higher family education status is related positively with security scenario but negatively with political stability. Negative because lower family education status does not question the political institutions but on contrary higher status of family education questions political institutions and are pro- active in seeking services from the government so if the government institutions and policy makers are not effective then there is more likely to create community unrest especially among the higher family education status. Thus, resulting into political instability.

Conversely, school dropout rates show a negative relation with both stability and security. However, the status of school teachers exhibits a more subtle influence. These findings conclude the complicated interplay between education and socio-political factors.

1.3: Culture

Culture Category	Political Stability	Economic Development	Insurgency & Security Scenario
Positive change	31.11%	26.79%	27.59%
Negative Change	15.56%	19.64%	20.69%
Cannot say	53.33%	53.57%	51.72%

Out of 60 respondents collected from field study 31% of respondents believe that culture has a positive impact on political stability. This suggests that a significant minority perceive cultural factors as enhancing political stability. Over half of the respondents (53%) are uncertain about the impact of culture on political stability. This shows lack of

knowledge on how culture influences political stability. Around 16% of respondents think that culture has a negative impact on political stability. This represents a smaller group that sees cultural influences as potentially destabilizing politics.

This suggests that many people either do not have enough information or have mixed feelings about how culture influences these areas. It also highlights the complexity and varied perceptions of the role of culture in shaping political, security, and business environments under India's Act East Policy. It suggests a need for more information, dialogue, or education on the specific ways cultural engagements and collaborations with Southeast Asian countries interact with these important societal aspects.

The above analysis states that certain long-standing cultural beliefs, customs or practices may clash with modern governance norms, laws or the ruling political ideology. It further creates friction because cultures deeply rooted in traditions may resist rapid social changes ushered in by political reforms or policies, leading to instability.

1.4: Social Participation

In terms of 'social participation' lower levels of social engagement correspond to lower level in political stability and lesser awareness to community issues and economic development dynamics. While individuals who are office bearers in multiple organizations tend to report higher levels of political stability, greater level of community awareness & economic development. Conversely, those who are only members in one organization tend to report lower levels of political stability.

Individuals with higher levels of social participation, particularly those who are members or office bearers in multiple organizations, tend to exhibit greater awareness of business and community awareness.

1.5: Frequency of import and export activities between the two countries and its impacts on insurgency and security, political stability and economic development.

Category	Insurgency and Security (%)	Political Stability (%)	Economic Development (%)
Sometimes	40%	25%	20%
Never	10%	15%	10%
Often	20%	15%	6%
Most Often	15%	5%	2.5%

Impact on Insurgency and Security

- **Sometimes (40%):** When import and export activities occur sometimes, there is a significant impact on insurgency and security. This high percentage suggests that inconsistent trade activities might lead to instability or be exploited by insurgent groups.
- **Never (10%):** With no import and export activities, the impact on insurgency and security is low. This might imply a stable security scenario, possibly due to a lack of external influences.
- **Often (20%):** Frequent import and export activities moderately affect insurgency and security. Regular trade may introduce some security challenges but also help stabilize the region through economic interdependence.
- **Most Often (15%):** Very frequent trade has a relatively low impact on insurgency and security, indicating that consistent and predictable trade relations help maintain a more stable security environment.

Impact on Political Stability

- **Sometimes (25%):** Sporadic trade activities have a moderate impact on political stability. The irregularity could lead to political tensions due to uncertainty in trade benefits.
- **Never (15%):** The absence of trade has a lower impact on political stability, suggesting that a lack of economic ties doesn't significantly destabilize the political landscape.
- **Often (15%):** Regular trade activities have a moderate impact on political stability, similar to no trade, indicating that other factors may play a more significant role in political stability.
- **Most Often (5%):** Very frequent trade has the least impact on political stability, suggesting that continuous and dependable trade fosters a stable political environment.

Impact on Economic Development

- **Sometimes (20%):** Occasional trade activities moderately contribute to economic development. While beneficial, sporadic trade doesn't provide the consistent economic boost needed for significant development.
- **Never (10%):** No trade results in minimal economic development, as there are no external economic contributions.
- **Often (6%):** Frequent trade activities contribute less to economic development than sporadic trade. This lower percentage could indicate issues like trade imbalances or over-reliance on external markets.
- **Most Often (2.5%):** Very frequent trade has the least impact on economic development. This suggests that excessive dependence on trade without diversification or sustainable practices can limit overall economic growth.

The summary of the analysis is:

- **Insurgency and Security:** Inconsistent trade (sometimes) leads to higher instability, while very frequent trade stabilizes the security situation.
- **Political Stability:** Political stability is least impacted by very frequent trade and most by sporadic trade activities.
- **Economic Development:** Economic development is highest with occasional trade but decreases with very frequent trade, indicating potential issues with dependency and trade imbalances.

Therefore, as per the above analysis it is concluded that, a balanced approach to trade frequency seems to be the most beneficial, minimizing security risks and maximizing economic benefits while maintaining political stability.

1.6: Government infrastructure to facilitate trade

Government Infrastructure	Political Stability	Economic Development	Security Scenario
Government of India	89.3 %	60.0 %	83.3 %
Government of Myanmar	10.7 %	40.0 %	16.7 %
None of the Above	0.0%	0.0%	0%

One of the questions used for the respondents was – whether there is government infrastructure at the border initiated by any of the two government to facilitate trade.

The table above, gives the response value in percentage which indicates that the government infrastructure constructed by the government of India to facilitate trade has a significantly higher percentage 89.3% impact on political stability, 60% impact on economic development and 83.3% impact on security scenario, that shows a positive impact as compared to Myanmar (10.7%, 40% and 16.7%) or having no infrastructure (0%).

This suggest that there is a positive belief in the minds of the identified community that the presence of government infrastructure provided by the government of India can facilitate trade and can give a positive impact value on the political stability (89.3 %), economic development (60.0 %) and security scenario (83.3 %).

1.7: Presence of Insurgency

Category	Percentage
Disturbance	64.71%
Cannot Say	23.53%
Conducive	11.76%

The table shows the degree of response from the identified sample villages for each category on the presence of insurgent groups in and around the border area. The study shows that the response on disturbance having the highest percentage at 64.71%, followed by cannot say at 23.53%, and conducive at 11.76%.

This suggests a strong association between insurgency and political instability. If there is more disturbance due to the presence of insurgency then there is more political instability. There are 23.53% responses on ‘cannot say’ category indicating the challenge of addressing security issues in politically uncertain environments and 11.76% is the smallest

percentage where respondents agree that despite the presence of insurgency there is conducive political environment.

1.8: Presence of armed personnel from the government agency provides safety and security

The existing security scenario between the Nagas and the Burmese while farming at the borders, there is no disturbance. The arm forces on duty were the Assam Rifles on vigil 24/7. One of the questions used as in questionnaire was on the ‘Presence of armed personnel from the government agency provides safety and security’.

Response	Percentage
Yes	45%
Can't say	30%
No	25%

Based on the percentage it appears that nearly half of the respondents (45%) believe that the presence of armed personnel from the government agency provides safety and security. A substantial portion (30%) cannot definitely say whether this presence contributes to safety, possibly indicating a lack of clear consensus. Additionally, a smaller percentage (25%) of respondent disagree, suggesting scepticism regarding the notion that armed government personnel ensure safety and security. This suggests a mixed perspective within the identified sample universe, with a significant number recognising the role of armed personnel in ensuring safety, while others remain unsure.

The armed forces trigger tensions and insecurity in the minds of the insurgency which only creates disturbance and public unrest, were the random responses from common people.

The presence of insurgence at the border if not for the unfavourable scenario with the central forces on duty, they don't disturb the common villagers nor do they levy taxes on the farmer or the trader. There is no drug peddlers at the border nor human trafficking.

1.9: Connectivity

This is another point used to determine how connectivity between the two countries has improved the socio, political, security and economic condition especially the community at the borders of India and Myanmar.

Factor	Yes	Cannot say	No
Political Stability	51.85%	29.63 %	18.52 %
Insurgency and Security	45.83 %	37.50 %	16.67 %
Business Establishment & Community Awareness	58.33 %	25.00 %	16.67 %

As per the table it is shown that over half (51.85%) of the respondents believe that connectivity has positively impacted political stability, while 29.63 % are not sure about the impact and 18.5% feel that connectivity has not improved political stability.

Close to 46% of respondents think that connectivity has enhanced the security situation and reduced insurgency, while 37,5 % are uncertain about the impact on insurgency and security and approximately 16.7% believe that connectivity has not improved security or reduced insurgency.

A significant majority of 58.33%, feel that connectivity has a positive effect on business establishments and community awareness, while 25% are not sure about the impact and 16.7% think that connectivity has not benefited business establishment and community awareness.

In summary, a substantial proportion of respondents perceive that improved connectivity between India and Myanmar has positively influenced political stability, security and economic conditions, particularly for community at the borders. However, a significant number of respondents remain uncertain, indicating that there may be varied experiences or insufficient information among the population surveyed.

The study aimed to evaluate the impact of the look/Act East Policy on economic development, political stability and the security scenario in Northeast India, with a particular focus on Nagaland. The findings suggest that the implementation of this policy had a multifaceted influence on the region, with certain factors contributing positively to political stability while simultaneously being associated with increased insurgency and security concerns.

Improved road connectivity and more straight forward processes for obtaining permissions from authorities emerged as variables that could enhance political stability in the region. However, the study revealed that factors such as higher visa necessity, increased frequency of import and export activities and stricter permission requirements from authorities might increase insurgency and security issues.

On the other hand, variables like specific occupations, disturbances in farming activities, higher duties and taxes levied by the government, the prevalence of existing insurgency, the presence of drug peddlers and higher school drop-out rates were found to have a negative impact on both political stability and the security situation in the region.

Furthermore, the analysis indicated that factors such as increased land holding, disturbances in farming and the age of the respondents were positively correlated with business establishment and community awareness. On the other hand, the presence of government armed personnel for safety and security, lack of awareness about trade

policies and the perceived negative impact of trade on livelihood were negatively associated with business establishment and community awareness.

It is important to note that these correlations as analysed above do not imply causation, but they provide insights into the potential relationships between the policy (independent variables) and political stability, economic development and security scenario (dependent variables) under study. Further analysis and interpretation within the specific context of the Act East Policy and the socio-economic and security dynamics in Northeast India, particularly in Nagaland is desirable.

In conclusion, the Look/Act East Policy had a complex and multidimensional impact on the economic development, political stability and security scenario in Northeast India and Nagaland. The study also highlighted the need for addressing factors that undermine political stability, increased security issues and hinder business establishment and community awareness in the region. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to develop targeted strategies and interventions to maximise the benefits of the Act East Policy while mitigating its potential negative consequences.

Chapter 5

Findings and Conclusions

The entire North Eastern Region is the gateway to South East Asia. Therefore, the development of the communication infrastructure of the northeastern region is very important so that it can be linked to the neighbouring South East Asian countries of Bangladesh Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, Bhutan & China.²³²

In his keynote address²³³, Minister Chandra Mohan Patowary (*Minister of Environment & Forests, Act East Policy Affairs, Welfare of minorities in the cabinet of Himanta Biswa Sarma (Assam) since 2021*) said that the Act East Policy, under the stewardship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has reinvigorated India's engagement with its Eastern neighbours, while the country's relationships with Bangladesh and Bhutan have seen a new era of cooperation in areas of trade, transit, and water resources management.

The Act East Policy Affairs Department Minister also highlighted how Assam and Northeast have been able to reap significant economic benefits due to closer ties with BBN (Bangladesh Bhutan Nepal) and South East Asian countries. The use of Chittagong and Mongla ports in Bangladesh will further strengthen waterways connectivity in Northeast and mutually benefit both countries, he said.²³⁴

The essence of the look east policy is based as the fundamental premise that the economic cooperation is prerequisite for building congenial political and security relationship between the nations-states in the post-cold war world order. The definition of security has

²³² Act East Policy. *Assam State Portal* (2024)

²³³ Bikash Singh, ET Bureau. Act East Policy boost regional cooperation: Northeast India's economic corridors explored in roundtable conference. *Economic Times* February 16th 2024

²³⁴ Ibid

been enlarged to include not only the physical/territorial security but also human security. Human development is defined in term of increasing living standard of the people and expansion in human choices enhancing the longevity of life through qualitative education and health facilities that has become the main concern of the countries of the world, particularly the developing countries like India. Today, all the countries of the world are reorienting their foreign policy towards achieving this basic objective of human development.

The 'Look East Policy' changed into the 'Act East Policy' under the present political dispensation led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. This dispensation has called for a robust and result-oriented diplomacy to attain India's national interest in its Eastern neighborhood. The piecemeal approach is supposedly replaced by a proactive one to steer the course with a renewed spirit to secure tangible results in geostrategic as well as geo-economic terms. Contextualized in India's North-East, the policy has remained a mere rhetoric; yet the recent stride has generated a lot of optimism among the academia, policy-makers and other stakeholders in the region for a relook at the policy with a new paradigm.

Research Question

The research question is on how relevant the India's look/act east policy for Nagaland (Northeast India) is. Since the policy Act East in particular is a policy aspired to create opportunities enlarging economic engagement beyond the borders with the neighbours in South East and South Asia. Myanmar being the immediate country in proximity with Nagaland so the study identified three villages that immediately borders Myanmar.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The scope of the study focused on the areas bordering neighbouring countries through Northeast India and Nagaland. It analysed and examined the issues and areas of cooperation under Look/Act east policy, evaluated the progress made from Look to Act East, and examined the constraints in the implementation of these policies.

Summary of the Chapters

1. The geographical, historical and socio-cultural profile of Northeast India and the advantages of the linkages between the Northeast and neighbouring countries due to its close proximity in terms of geography, history, culture and social practices is described in the *first chapter* of the thesis.
2. The *second chapter* deals with the evolution of the policy from Look East policy (1991) to Act East Policy (2014) and the reasons why India was paying less than sufficient attention to its eastern neighbours till 1991. Then eventually what are the factors responsible for a shift in its focus towards the East and Southeast Asia and the evolution of India's Look East policy in the early 1990's. then came the India-ASEAN Trade Agreement signed on 25th August, 2017. On November 10th, 2000 the Mekong-Cooperation (MGC) was signed by six countries – India, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. Kunming Initiative was signed on 7th August, 1999 for regional co-operation and development by China, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh. Finally, the shift from India's Look East Policy to Act East Policy. all these developments and the shift of policy is discussed in this chapter.
3. The *third chapter* examined the relevance of the Look East/ Act East Policy in the context of Northeast with particular reference to Nagaland. When India's Act East Policy (AEP) was unveiled by the government of India in 2014 the objective was to expand India's

economic engagement with Southeast and East Asian countries. India's pro-active role in building a common market with an ambitious but realistic connectivity program is the key focus of AEP. This is where Northeast India offered the space for realizing such aspirations. It is all about a foreign policy initiative towards building connectivity through road, rail, telecommunication etc. connecting India's northeast with the eastern neighbours Bangladesh, Myanmar and even beyond with Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, East and Southeast Asia. The chapter mainly focuses on Nagaland as to how the policy is relevant for the state. Different steps of relevance were given on the affinity of Nagas with the eastern neighbours which itself is a link in terms of history, geography, culture, neolithic culture, ethnic attires, ethnic food, music, dance and similar agriculture practices.

4. The *fourth chapter* is about the Analysis of the impact of Look East /Act East Policy on Economic Development Political Stability and Security scenario in Northeast and Nagaland in particular. The chapter analyses the impact of the policy on the identified sample study (Avangkhu, Longwa, Pangsha) in Nagaland. The questionnaire was designed into two categories – Independent Variable and Dependent Variable. The policy impact value was done in correlation with all the 3 (three) identified sample villages in the universe (Nagaland).

The reason for identifying these three villages as the identified sample of the study is because – first all the three sample villages immediately border Myanmar, secondly, the study is a quest towards to understanding how relevant the policy is with profound objective and advantages to connect Nagaland (Northeast India) with South and Southeast Asia as aspired in India's Look/Act east policy. Each independent variable was examined and the result of the findings is reflected in the chapter.

5. *Fifth chapter* gives a concluding remark on the answers of the research question as findings, then challenges, opportunities and suggestions for optimizing and leveraging the best out of the policy.

Strategic Linkages and Policy Impacts: The Northeast and Nagaland in India's Act East Initiative

1. Geographical, historical and socio-cultural linkages: The Northeast region, and Nagaland in particular, shares a deep-rooted geographical, historical and socio-cultural tie with neighbouring countries. These linkages have facilitated cross border interactions and exchanges, shaping the region's identity and traditions.
2. Relevance of the Look/Act East Policy: The Look/Act east policy holds significant relevance for the Northeast region, particularly in terms of economic cooperation, connectivity and cultural exchanges, inadequate infrastructure, limited resource allocation and bureaucratic hurdles are some of the main hurdles for the policy to take forward.
3. Shift from Look East to Act East: The shift from the Look East to Act East Policy signifies India's intent to deepen its engagement with Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. This transition has brought about a renewed focus on the Northeast as a gateway to these regions, emphasizing the region's strategic importance.
4. Impact on the Northeast and Nagaland: The impact of the Look/Act East Policy on the Northeast and Nagaland has been mixed. While it has facilitated some economic opportunities and cultural exchanges, the region continues to grapple with challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited access to markets and security concerns along borders.

Findings

The main dimensions investigated within the Look East to Act East policy relevance for Nagaland are economic development, political stability and security scenario. The hypothesis of the study is that the policy will generate favourable economic, political, social, cultural and security forces and that will establish sustainable peace and stability in the region, through external linkages.

Nagaland's Border Dynamics: Infrastructure, Policies, and Socio-economic Realities

To understand the impact of India's Act east policy in the state of Nagaland and the level of participation from both the state and central government and what are the existing infrastructure or ongoing projects are considered important towards social and economic growth of the identified sample villages

The findings were the outcome of the field information collected through questionnaire and personal interactions of the three identified sample villages and a personal interaction with the bureaucrats of the department of Industries and Commerce (Government of Nagaland)

1. State government – the state government of Nagaland is working on the logistics at the identified Border Trade Centre (BTC) there is a cell in this regard however, much more work has to be done in order to fast track and implement different developmental projects and infrastructures. Department of Commerce & Industries (GoN) is currently taking care of the policy related tasks. To a large extent the work of the department was commendable in monitoring and constructing approach roads in the three identified sample villages to the border points of Myanmar. The department of tourism has constructed guest houses in Shilloi lake (Meluri under Phek District) one of the largest lake in Nagaland. The distance between the lake and Avangkhu is 8.5 kms. The state government did build a guest house in Pangsha (Noklak District) just in the border for the people of Myanmar to

rest when they cross over India through the border but due to high security vigilant the guest house remained unused.

2. Government of India – the government at the centre do have well designed plan for the development of Northeast and special packages for Nagaland but one of the greatest roadblocks is lack of sincere accountability cell in monitoring the projects or any developmental schemes. Granting sanctions and giving grants is one thing but the study discovered that in time follow up by the concern department is equally essential otherwise it amounts to under performance or no performance.

Another reason for slow progress of capitalizing the policy in the entire region of Northeast particularly Nagaland is not taking the community at the borders into confidence by both the government at the centre and the state government. The policies made at the comfort of the centre cannot match the knowledge of the sons of the soil which is durable and practical. Here the argument is not to ride away the policies made by the visionary leaders of our country but the success of any pilot project in a backward (term used for Nagaland for economic backwardness) village begins by taking the views of the community too and designing the project accordingly. Here the point is how to blend the ideas of both the decision makers and the common people at the borders. For example, Longwa village in the name of International Trade Centre (ITC) the government was in need of land to expand the road and also build necessary infrastructure, so as the policy requires connectivity in terms of road expansion, the farmers were sensitized that connectivity with neighbouring countries will be a better alternative for livelihood so the farmers had to part their paddy fields but till today no such connection has taken its form and the irony is for those who have part their paddy fields do not have an alternative cultivable field for sustenance.

3. Inadequate infrastructure – lack of all-season friendly road and during monsoon the menace of landslides amounts to no road. It is very important to connect the districts within Nagaland first with good roads then connect with neighbouring countries can be a reality. In August 2023 the road that connects ITC (International Trade Centre) Dan Pangsha to the border of Myanmar was completely damaged due to heavy landslide. Some portion of the road is made with chips soiling so in those areas it's possible to commute but often due to landslides the road is difficult to commute. This natural landscape of the village at the moment gives less scope to maintained a black topping road.
4. Myanmar bordering villages of India – are the poorest villages in Myanmar to name a few are Hempo 8km away from Pangsha (Dan), Chiu 20 kms, Shep 25 km and Lahe is 60 kms. These are the distance in kilometers between Pangsha and neighboring villages in Myanmar. Longwa, Pangsha and Avangkhu villages in India side are also the least developed villages.

Despite being the least developed villages in both sides of the country yet the tribals at the border of India and the tribals at the border of Myanmar have the closest affinity in terms of paddy field, food items, a language to communicate because the Burmese knows the Konyak language and the Konyaks also fluently speak Burmese language, so is the same with Avangkhu and Pangsha village and most importantly they are related through marriage and family lineage due to forefathers living together since time immemorial even before the idea of international boundary was used. Economically, socially and culturally is same even today. The government of Myanmar is yet to extent development to the border villages of their own country.

5. Village guards (VG) – there is village guards in all the three identified villages, they were detailed to be on duty in uniforms along with the central forces. Beside teacher's village guards are the only salary holders but due to intensive vigil and a very low salary of

village guards that there is acute shortage of meeting two square meal a day for their family comparing to regular farmers. The current salary is Rs 3000/- (2023) out of which Rs. 10 is deducted at the time of payment, secondly, going to district headquarter to collect salary is not conducive so one person is detailed to collect salaries for all the VG on a marginal allowance so for which again salary is deducted so by the time it reaches them it comes down to 2500/- or so which is hardly meeting the fees (Rs.700/- per one child) of three children so nothing is left thereafter for sustenance.²³⁵ This also add to the plight of the families especially those men in uniforms.

At this point it is difficult to determine the profound vision and goals of India's Look/Act east policy in connecting borders in achieving economic stability, peace and security. The hard reality is that its 22 years ever since Look East policy was introduced and 9 years after it was translated into Act East policy but the reality of the people at the borders are still struggling for livelihood.

6. Central armed forces & insurgency– comparatively problems arising due to insurgencies is negligible at the moment. However, the presence of insurgency at the borders cannot be ruled out. The presence of central forces at the border has its own advantage and disadvantage. Advantage is extending medical help and protecting the village but at the same time their presence also causes friction with the insurgencies and the victims are the common people. Here victim is not necessarily to do with loss of life but more importantly mental stress with the unknown possibilities of exchange of firing causing mental trauma and unrest. Another complaint from the villagers is that both the border villages of India and Myanmar have families and relatives across the border so they have shared fields working together, singing and dancing during festivals and exchange of food and

²³⁵ Personal interaction in the field (Longwa, Pangsha, Avangkhu) while collecting survey data. (June, 2023)

vegetables (a common cultural practice among the nagas) but now this has been reduced drastically because especially those at the Burmese side don't want to go through the permissions, verifications at the border just to meet family members across borders. This has impacted on their social and cultural interactions.²³⁶

7. Challenges of open borders – there is free trade at the borders, no tax is imposed. Trade is both barter system and monetary system. One negative impact of open borders is the presence of drug and alcohol peddlers. Both young and old are indulging in drugs which is on the rise, especially in Mon town due to cheap availability of drugs in Myanmar which makes its way through Longwa. Which if monitored with appropriate steps then it will reduce the use of drugs and alcohol and the idea of proper accountable planning on entrepreneurship can be encouraged through the borders.

Assessing Economic Development, Political Stability, and Security in the identified villages of Nagaland.

Economic Development:

- There are disparities in factors such as annual income, education levels and land holdings, which could hinder the equal distribution of economic benefits from the policy initiatives.
- Infrastructural deficiencies, including inadequate road connectivity, government infrastructure and trade facilitation mechanisms, posed challenges in leveraging the potential of enhanced connectivity and trade with neighbouring countries.
- People-to-people connect is one of the objectives of the Act East policy, which is vital for ensuring peace and economic development. All the three

²³⁶ Personal interactions in the field (Pangsha) July, 2023

identified villages as the sample of the study have the best form of connection to the people across the border though it may appear to be a threat to the policy makers at the center for fear of insurgency menace. The villagers sharing borders both in India and Myanmar can speak both Burmese and Naga dialect (Nagamese language). They also work in the field together, celebrate festivals together, in Longwa village Burmese children come to the village (India) to study. One of the greatest means of connection in tribal areas is language and when language connects it builds the feeling of oneness, people to people connect is more connecting than big visions and policies for the communities at the borders.

Political Stability

- The prevalence of insurgency, illegal taxation and the presence of drug peddlers raised concerns about political stability, which could deter economic activities and undermine the policy's objectives
- Factors like low social participation, lack of awareness about trade policies, and the involvement of intermediaries suggested a need for greater community engagement and awareness.
- Pro-active participation of both the government at the center and the state of Nagaland is very essential not only to introduce big projects in the name of development but also to monitor closely the progress and make possible changes that might occur due to unseen eventualities of the community at the borders keeping in mind the local aspirations.
- The government of India must expedite a cordial communication with the government of Myanmar to look into road connectivity at their borders because even if there's good connectivity at the borders from the Indian side yet if the

same is not continued from the other side of the country then the idea of connecting India's Northeast to South and Southeast Asia do not have any relevance.

Security Scenario

- Security concerns stemming from insurgency, illegal taxation, and the presence of drug peddlers created an environment of instability, which could hinder economic progress and pose threats to the successful implementation of the policy.
- The deployment of security personnel and the role of government armed forces in providing safety and security were crucial factors in addressing security challenges.
- Promote coordination and intelligence sharing among security agencies and neighbouring countries to combat transnational threats and maintain peace and stability in the region.

Problems faced by the Border villages

- The problem that emerged due to the primary implementation of the policy in Nagaland is giving away cultivable fields to the government for the purpose of making wider roads and building infrastructure because of which those villagers who parted their lands do not have a field to grow their foods for a living. Compensation of land is done but not the best option for sustainability in the long run.
- Secondly, the government gave too much focus on the security front due to porous borders of the villages, because of which it is not helping in maintaining peace and stability rather the threat of unseen clashes between the insurgencies and central forces has created more fears in the minds of the common people. Armed personnels on duty can never replace peace for those community who don't considers the insurgencies as

a threat rather considering most insurgents as any common people living together and working in the field.

- No proper health care facilities, connectivity within the state of Nagaland is a big challenge due to poor road condition as a result buying and selling of vegetable products and hand-woven art and crafts even within the state itself is not conducive because of which the source of income for the villages is negligible. Even imparting quality education is at stake. All these compounded to the disparities of the identified villages.

Challenges faced during the process of the study

1. No official document to determine the date and notification of identifying the three villages in Nagaland as a Border Trade Centre (BTC) or even International Trade Centre (ITC). So, the sources in the write up in this regard was from articles, books and journals
2. Government of Nagaland need to be more pro-active working on the ground realities of the identified border villages in Nagaland identified as Border Trade Centres (BTC). There is a separate cell attached to the Directorate of Industries and Commerce Government of Nagaland with limited information except some few photos gallery.
3. No researched books on the policy in the context of Nagaland. Some published articles and reports on print media were used as secondary sources. The department of Commerce & Industries Government of Nagaland do have some excellent project reports on the identified sample but since most of the recorded information were not updated so it was not matching with the survey reports collected between 2022 to 2023 (personal information collected through questionnaires and interviews)

4. In Nagaland the best way to communicate among rural population is speaking in their local dialect, so language was a barrier. However, with the help of an interpreter most information were collected. Therefore, the research was left with little dissatisfaction for want of first-hand information (with due respect to the field assistance in interpreting the information).

Opportunities & Road Ahead

The three designated border trade points of the state with Myanmar, namely, Avangkhu, Pangsha and Longwa have been comprehensively evaluated in terms of connectivity, existing border trade infrastructure, government initiative, status on the other side, Strength-Weakness Opportunity-Threat (SWOT) analysis etc. This is a report submitted to Directorate of Industries and Commerce, Kohima; Nagaland by Indian Institute of Foreign Trade (IIFT) Kolkata & Delhi Campus; December, 2018.

Despite bottlenecks of the policy when one sees from another perspective then India's Act east policy is a relevant policy for Nagaland. The state may not have roads, no proper infrastructure for hospitality, no indigenous goods in bulk, issues of insurgency and our service sectors still in need of grooming etc. despite all these shortcomings if one shifts the paradigm then Nagaland has the potential to connect with South and Southeast Asia in soft power (culture, sports, Agri and allied products, etc.)

The following points are activities of connectivity between the three sample villages of the study at the border of the two countries and the possibilities on how the state of Nagaland can harness the best on these areas and other possible opportunities that can bring economic development:

Nagaland Handloom and Handicrafts

In India Handloom sector is the second largest employment provider after agriculture. In India male workers are more than female workers in handloom sector, but in Nagaland handloom and weaving are confined to female members of the households as handloom and weaving are assume as a household chore for every female. They generally go for weaving in their off time when there is no pressure for agricultural and other allied works. Weaving is traditionally practised by the women in Nagaland since long. This same system is being continued till today and more particularly in the rural areas of the state.²³⁷

Handicrafts and handloom sector in Nagaland has vast potential for growth due to the availability of abundant skilled labour and raw materials, as well as due to rich cultural traditions of its people. Nagas are inherently skilled people and their handicrafts and handloom products are well known for the beauty and intricacies of work. These products have widespread appeal and demand in the domestic as well as offshore markets. The natural skills of Nagas lie in basketry, pottery, farming, spinning and weaving, carving, dyeing metal work, etc. The colourful shawls, bags and jackets woven by Nagas are extremely popular.²³⁸

Nagas's art and craft are unique especially those in the villages not only have the raw materials but also have the finest skill of creating varieties of art and craft if this can be empowered and connect in the global market chain especially organic and sustainable products then it will open the source of income generation. For this both the Government of India and Government of Nagaland can robbed in micro-finance experts to create

²³⁷ Zayienguno Viyie (2022), A Brief Study of Nagaland Handloom Industry with Special Reference to Kohima. Department of Commerce. Kohima College

²³⁸ Best Business Opportunities in Nagaland - Identification and Selection of right Project, Thrust areas for Investment, Industry Startup and Entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneur India*, 2015.

awareness on micro-finance and empowering farmers as how to commercialize their products.

Noklak District Handloom & Handicraft Council (NDHHC) was inaugurated on 19th July, 2022 at Punyaongan sector Noklak Town. Speaking at the inaugural programme, Hiazu Meru (Deputy Commissioner) Noklak District stated that the districts has many good artisans like handicrafts, blacksmith, pottery, weaving, woodworks etc. and some of the last traditional Naga practices are found in the district such as cotton growing, weaving and traditional product, and under the NDHHC, artisans will get an opportunity to earn their livelihood.²³⁹

Since Pangsha to Noklak is only 16 km, the community of Pangsha can avail the opportunity of NDHHS not only to earn their livelihood alone but they can start capitalizing their skills in handloom & handicrafts by producing in bulk.

Demand for Naga handloom and handicrafts was more even in Middle East and South East Asian countries. Handloom and handicraft “is the only indigenous industry and is like a backbone of industry in Nagaland” DC Dimapur said while urging the department of handloom and handicrafts to tap women entrepreneurs including educated women having the skill and interest in handloom and handicraft sector.

Highlighting on the Look East Policy of government of India, Maogwati Aier (DC Dimapur 2008) said besides other North East states, Nagaland could invest in South East Asian countries and vice versa.²⁴⁰

North East Zone Cultural Centre (NEZCC)

NEZCC along with Ministry of Culture Government of India (GoI) in collaboration with Department of Art & Culture Government of Nagaland (GoN) did organize inter-cultural

²³⁹ NDHHC Office Inaugurated at Noklak. *Nagaland Page*, July 19th 2022

²⁴⁰ Indigenous products in great demand abroad. *Nagaland Post* Sept 8th 2008

events between India and Myanmar at the border was organised on 28th & 29th March 2023, on the theme “*Border Area Cultural Events*”. On 28th it was held at Phokhungri (Meluri; Phek) and on 29th it was held at Avangkhu (Meluri; Phek) where International Trade Centre (ITC) was located. The idea was to promote relationship between India and Myanmar through culture. Cultural connectivity is one of the key objectives of India’s Act East Policy.

Mr. Yitachu Fithu (Former Minister in the GoN) in his twitter account (24th March 2023) commented that Avangkhu International Trade Centre (ITC) in India and Shera in Myanmar will become one of the major business hubs for Nagaland and North East India if implemented successfully. The ITC will have good road connectivity in another 4 years’ time and inland water ways over Tizu river (Avangkhu) connected to existing Chindwin River (Myanmar)

Naga New Year

This year 2024 a Naga New Year was observed on the 24th & 25th of January at Layshi (Myanmar) town. Myanmar is strategic in India’s Act East Policy because it connects India and ASEAN. The celebration is to mark the feeling of oneness and comrades among the Nagas located at the borders of both the countries. Such events are great opportunities to foster people to people connectivity between the two countries.

The Central Government may introduce the following Interventions

- First, the four states of the Northeast, i.e., Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Mizoram, which are sharing 1,643-km-long international border with one of the Greater Mekong Sub regions (GMS) Economic Cooperation constituent country, namely Myanmar, should have deeper integration with GMS in terms of trade and infrastructure co-operation.

- Second, on infrastructure creation, Ministry of Road Transport and Highways sponsored Special Accelerated Road Development Programme (SARDP-NE) need to be completed expeditiously. The completion of four-laning of Asian Highway No.1 (AH-1) to Moreh will provide boost to highway connectivity to the International Trade centres (ITCs) at Longwa, Pangsha and Avangkhu. It is required to move step forward fast to make Trans-Asian Railway line a reality. Razaphema (Nagaland) airport should be constructed as future airport hub for connecting the GMS.
- Third, on trade facilitation, hassle-free provisional medical visa facilities for patients crossing border from Myanmar, mutual recognition of standards etc. need to be ensured.²⁴¹

Infrastructural Development:

- Prioritize the development of robust infrastructure, including roads, railways, air connectivity and digital infrastructure, to enhance connectivity between Nagaland and neighbouring countries.
- Upgrade and modernize existing border trade infrastructure and facilities to facilitate smooth cross-border movement of goods and people
- Promote public-private partnerships (PPPs) to attract investment in infrastructure projects and leverage private sector expertise and resources.

²⁴¹ Dr. Gautam Dutta (Prof. IIFT Kolkata campus) & Team, (2018), Export Potential Survey and Strategies in Nagaland. Directorate of Industries & Commerce Kohima Nagaland. Final Report submitted by *Indian Institute of Foreign Trade*. December, 2018

Enhancing Regional Cooperation:

- Strengthen regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the ASEAN-India partnership, to address common challenges and foster economic and cultural ties.
- Facilitate regular dialogues and exchanges between Nagaland and neighbouring countries at the government, business and civil society levels to identify areas of collaboration and address concerns.
- Encourage the participation of Naga communities in regional forums and initiatives to promote cultural understanding and cooperation

Capacity Building and Skill Development:

- Invest in capacity-building programs and skill development initiatives to equip the local population with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in and benefit from cross-border economic opportunities
- Establish vocational training centers and collaborate with regional institutions to provide specialized training in areas such as tourism, hospitality, trade and entrepreneurship.

Promoting Cross-Border Trade and Investment:

- Simplify and streamline trade procedures, regulations and documentation to facilitate cross-border trade and investment.
- Identify and promote potential sectors for trade and investment, such as agriculture, handicrafts, tourism and services leveraging Nagaland's unique cultural heritage and resources.

- Existing Special Economic Zones (SEZ) or industrial clusters must be managed effectively as a priority because these zones give greater scope for farmers to sell their produce in bulk. Steps to establish SEZ near border areas must be encouraged to attract investment and create employment opportunities. A centralized monitoring cell can be in place to co-ordinate between the farmers, transportation and market.²⁴²

Effective Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to track the progress and impact of the Look East/ Act East Policy in Nagaland.
- Identify key performance indicators and benchmarks to measure the success of policy implementation and make necessary changes or adjustments based on feedback and lessons learned.

This is a very important step that both the government of the state and at the centre must give as an utmost priority as an engine to achieve desired results.

²⁴² This observation is purely personal experience while travelling between many districts of Nagaland and collected information from the vegetable vendors. Also spot survey to the identified SEZ in Nagaland (Ganeshnagar; Dimapur). In fact Nagaland is the first to get SEZ in Northeast (2022 – 2023)

Department of Industries and Commerce Government of Nagaland. (Nodal Department in-charge of Border Trade Centre (BTC) in Avangkhu, Longwa and Pangsha)

The Ministry of Commerce Government of India deals with the BTC and the Department of Industries & Commerce government of Nagaland is the nodal department to deal with BTC in Nagaland. Here they are taking the village and community approach with Avangkhu village as the first to implement common facility centres, setting up infrastructures at BTC. Most of the process are in place but not formalized yet due to non-interaction from government of Myanmar but once trade is formalized, these logistics and infrastructures will be handed to the local market committee of the villages in all the three identified sample villages with BTC.

The village will be given with all required logistics by the government even to the extend independently administering it and the department will monitor. Formal trade may take its own course of time but this is how the department of Industries and Commerce is initiating as the first flagship programme as a part of India's Look/Act East Policy.²⁴³

A two-lane national highway is in progress in Avangkhu under Bharatmala²⁴⁴ so in another 3 to 4 years the highway is expected to complete stated Mr. Yitachu Fithu. The highway will reach till the border point of India. Beyond India it is the duty of the government of Myanmar to built the road infrastructure till the border point. He stated that out of the three (Avangkhu, Longwa and Pangsha) identified BTC (Border Trade

²⁴³ This is the outcome of the interview with Kekhrievor Kevichusa, the Commissioner of Industries & Commerce, Government of Nagaland. 26.06.2023

²⁴⁴ Centrally funded roads and highways development projects which aims to build a solid network of roads, highways and expressways across India, launched in the year 2015 by the Ministry of Road and Transport Highways, Government of India.

Centres) Avangkhu is the first flagship village where both the Government of India & Myanmar had a bilateral agreement to connect in order to boost trade & commerce at the borders.

The government of India is ready to give both financial & material assistance to Myanmar in fulfilling the agreement but due to the presence of insurgency and failing to take in to account the confidence and consultation of the community at the borders this agreement is yet to be implemented from Myanmar side though road construction related work is in progress on Indian side.

He further expresses that no country can have a water tied compartment mode of relation despite political or any other differences.²⁴⁵

Brief status of Border Trade Centres – A document provided by the department of Industries and Commerce; Government of Nagaland (June 2022) (**Annexure – 4**)

²⁴⁵ This is an outcome of an interview with Mr. Yitachu Fithu elected to Nagaland Legislative Assembly from Meluri Assembly constituency from 2003 to 2018. (30.09.2023)

Conclusions:

Developing India's regional connectedness with Southeast Asia demands significant policy efforts. South & Southeast Asia together form a significant geographic zone in continental Asia. Linking Southeast Asia and India is a major goal of the ambitious AEP, which aims to leverage China's economic might and challenge China's geopolitical influence. A functioning single Asian market will be possible if connection projects with Southeast Asia are completed and developed.²⁴⁶

The Northeast region and Nagaland, holds immense potential for fostering closer ties with neighbouring countries through its rich cultural heritage, strategic location and historical connections. The Look East/ Act East Policy if successful then it will promote India's engagement with Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, but its impact on the Northeast and Nagaland has been limited due to various factors, including infrastructure deficiencies and security concerns.

To fully capitalise on the Look East/ Act East Policy and harness the potential of the Northeast region, a comprehensive strategy is required. This strategy should involve infrastructural development, expedite connectivity projects, addressing security challenges, and promoting cross-border economic and cultural exchanges.

²⁴⁶ Dr. Konthoujam Sarda (2021) A Quantitative Analysis of Factors Influencing Connectivity's of India and Southeast Asia: Ties That Bind. *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 2021, Vol. 5, No. 2, 174-185. <http://journalppw.com>

Effective implementation of the policy in the Northeast and Nagaland necessitates a collaborative approach involving the central government, state governments, local communities and stakeholders from neighbouring countries.

Sustainable peace and stability in the region cannot be achieved solely through external linkages, it requires a concerted effort to address internal challenges, such as socio-economic disparities, conflict resolution and inclusive development.

In conclusion, while the Look East/ Act East Policy presents significant opportunities for the Northeast region and Nagaland, its potential remains largely untapped due to various constraints.

Addressing these challenges by adopting a holistic and inclusive approach, addressing infrastructural gaps, fostering regional cooperation, promoting capacity building and ensuring security and inclusive development, the region can harness the opportunities presented by this policy and pave the way for sustainable growth, regional integration and lasting peace and stability.

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SEZ in Nagaland a personal experience while travelling between the districts of Nagaland and collected information from the vegetable vendors. Also spot survey to the identified SEZ in Nagaland (Ganeshnagar; Dimapur). In fact, Nagaland is the first to get SEZ in Northeast. (2022 -2023)

Field Assistant

Konyak Kothai interpreter for Longwa village

Khiamungan Laam interpreter for Pangsha village

Shonglii Shaitalen and Pisangshi interpreter for Avangkhu village

Questionnaire (Independent)

This is a survey on ongoing research titled, “From Look East to Act East: Relevance *for* Northeast India in particular context of Nagaland.”

The questionnaire is structured to gather data about the villages bordering Myanmar, on the community at the borders on their political, socio-economic status security paradigm. The data will be used to explore the prevailing community livelihood, challenges and prospects thereafter analyze the prospects of connectivity across the neighboring country Myanmar. In order to examine the relevance of India’s Look/Act east policy in the identified sample villages

Personal Interview Schedule for Data Collection

Conducted by: Mrs. Monalisa Tase

Department of Political Science

Nagaland University, Lumami-798627, Nagaland

Respondent No. :

House No.:

Name of village:

Date of investigation:

Block:

District:

Name :

1. Gender : Male /Female

2. Age : Years (on next birthday)

3. Education : a) Illiterate

b) Can read only

c) Can read and write

d) Primary

e) Middle School

f) High School

g) Higher Secondary

h) Graduate

i) Post Graduate

j) Others

4. Family Type:

Unit

Joint

5. Family educational status:

Members	Education	Family education status
	a) Illiterate b) Can read only c) Can read and write d) Primary e) Middle School f) High School g) Higher Secondary h) Graduate	Total Educational score/ members

	i) Post Graduate	
	j) Others	

6. Land Holding

Sl. No.	Category	Size-Class	Remarks (Owned/Leased out/Leased in) Please indicate “B” If land is adjacent to border
1.	Marginal	Below 1.00 hectare	
2.	Small	1.00-2.00 hectare	
3.	Semi- Medium	2.00-4.00 hectare	
4.	Medium	4.00-10.00 hectare	
5.	Large	10.0 Hectare and above	

7. Occupation:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| I Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| II Agriculture + Dairying | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| III Service | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| IV Agriculture + Dairying + Service | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| V Agriculture + Service | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| VI Agriculture + Others | <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. Cropping intensity (%)

(Number of crops on the same piece of land in a year)

.....

9. Annual income (Rs. /Year/Capita)

Agriculture:

Business:

Dairy:

Services:

Poultry:

Piggery:

Import:

Export:

10. Social participation:

Sl. No.	Criteria	Frequency of interaction
1.	Member in one organization	
2.	Member in more than one organization	
3.	Office bearer in one organization	
4.	Office bearer in more than one organization	
5.	Distinctive features (MLA and MP)	

11. Utilization of cosmopolite sources of information

Source	Most often (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes	Never
A. Mass media				
Radio				

News paper				
Education film				
Demonstration				
Field trip				
Television				
Smart Phone				
B. Personal cosmopolite				
Block Development Officer Agricultural Development Officer Co-operative Bank Personal Villagers of other village Kit & Kins Village Council Member				
C. Personal Localite				
Personal agents				

Local trader				
Friends/				
Neighbors/				
Relatives				
Progressive/				
Experienced				
Villagers				

12. Do visa or any travel pass for the purpose to trade to Myanmar (Village name.....)

- a) Required
- b) b) Not Required
- c) c) I do not know.

13. Status of road connectivity between your village and Myanmar.

- a) Very Good
- b) Good
- c) Very bad
- d) Bad

14. How frequently Import and Export activities takes place between the two countries

- a) Most often
- b) Often
- c) Sometimes
- d) Never

15. Do you take permission from both the Government for the purpose of import and export

- a) Always
- b) Sometimes
- c) Never

16. Is import transaction in monetary system or barter system.

- a) Monetary
- b) Barter
- c) Cashless Transaction (in Kinds)

17. Import and Export duties levied by government from both sides.

- a) Free trade
- b) Duties levied
- c) Depending on commodities

18. Importers and exporters does trade involving intermediary

- a) Legally
- b) Illegally
- c) Both

19. How is the trade done by You:

- a) Custom station
- b) Border Trade Centre
- c) None

20. Are you aware of any trade policy between these two countries?

- a) Aware
- b) Not aware
- c) I do not know

21. Is there any infrastructure constructed by any of the two government to facilitate trade

- a) Government of India
- b) Government of Myanmar
- c) None of the Above

22. Have you observed any impact of trade for better livelihood

- a) Rise in annual income
- b) Fall in annual Income
- c) Static

23. Do you think that connectivity between the people of these two countries improves the socio-economic condition

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Cannot Say

24. What is the frequency of interaction action with the citizens of Myanmar while doing farming.

- a) Very Frequent. (Daily)
- b) Frequent (Once in a week)
- c) Sometime (Once in a month)

25. There is disturbance from the Myanmar side while farming at the borders.

- a) Always
- b) Sometime
- c) Never

26. Is there any impact on your culture due to having connectivity with the people of Myanmar

- a) Positive change
- b) Negative change
- c) Cannot say

27. Is there any security personnel detailed to guard the borders

- a) Always
- b) Sometime
- c) Never

28. Presence of armed personnel's from the government agency provides safety and security to the villagers

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Can't say

29. Presence of insurgent groups in and around the border area creates

- a) conducive
- b) disturbance
- c) cant say

30. Do the insurgents levy tax on you as a farmer.

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Sometime

31. Do the insurgents levy tax on you as a trader.

- d) Yes
- e) No
- f) Sometime

32. Have you encountered any drug peddlers at the border.

- a) Often
- b) Sometime
- c) Never

33. Have you ever encountered human trafficking at the border

- a) Often
- b) Sometime
- c) Never

34. Student's irregularity in the school is due to

- a) Family obligation
- b) Teacher's irregularity
- c) Peer pressure

35. Status of school teachers in the village

- a) Teachers available and performing
- b) Teachers available and not performing
- c) No teachers.

Questionnaire (Dependent)

1. What are the changes you observe from 1991 (Look East Policy) to 2014 in respect to political stability, business establishment, insurgency, security, community awareness and school drop-out.
 - a) Stable political system and robust business establishment.
 - b) Unstable political system and robust business establishment.
 - c) Unstable political system and weak business establishment.
 - d) Stable political system and weak business establishment.
2. What are the changes you observe in respect to insurgent activity and security concern of the government both central and state.
 - a) Strengthen security measure and increased insurgent activity.
 - b) Strengthen security measure and decreased insurgency.
 - c) Weak security measure and increased insurgent activity.
 - d) Weak security measure and decreased insurgent activity.
3. What are the changes you see/observe during the implementation of Act East Policy: 2014 till 2023 in respect to business establishment and awareness among community for new venture like more export and import related activity.
 - a) Strong business establishment leading toward opening of new venture.
 - b) Increase in strong business establishment leading towards closer of small business establishment.
 - c) Decrease of strong business establishment and growing of small entrepreneurs.
 - d) Decrease in strong business establishment and stagnant growth of small entrepreneurs.

Brief status of Border Trade Centres

1. Nagaland shares 215 kms border with Myanmar. The border points will serve as a **Trading Hub** that connects to South East Asia through Myanmar. Presently **informal trade** between the local people of the two countries takes place. The commonly traded traditional items from the Border Trade Centres are :
 - Agricultural tools and implements
 - Livestock mostly cattle and pigs
 - Handlooms and handicraft produces
2. **Five (5) Border Trade Centres** has been identified along the Indo-Myanmar border. The identified Border trade Centres are :

Sl. No	Border Trade Centres	Infrastructure development made
1	Longwa, in Mon district	Marketing Shed, administrative building, guest house, water reservoir tank, approach road, land development
2	Pangsha, in Noklak district	Marketing Shed, administrative building, guest house, water reservoir tank, approach road, land development
3	Avangkhu in Phek district	Marketing Shed, administrative building, guest house, water reservoir tank, approach road, land development
4	Chenncho in Mon district	No Development initiated
5	Mimi in Kiphire district	No Development initiated

- The infrastructure in the above three Border trade Centres was uniformly constructed under erstwhile ***ASIDE** Schemes under Ministry of Commerce.
- ***ASIDE** Fund is now **delinked**.
- **To establish these five Border Trade Centres is also a Key Priority area and aligned to the Nagaland SDG Vision 2030.**

3. **Potential from the State**

Export potential from the state, as per the production basket of the state, sector-wise products and services to be focused in the present context are as under
(Source – Export Promotion Strategy document):

- a) **Under Agriculture and Horticulture sector**, products like apple, citrus fruits, pineapple, banana, kiwi, orange, maize, potato, ginger, plums, spices turmeric, chilli, black pepper, large cardamom, fresh vegetables, guava, mushroom, walnut, other organic products etc.
- b) **Under Plantation based industries**, sectors like bamboo, rubber, tea, coffee etc.
- c) **Under Forests and Environment related produce sector**, orchids, floriculture, herbal, medicinal plants, cane, bamboo, honey etc.
- d) **Under Handicrafts and Handloom sector**, products like cane and bamboo handicrafts, wood carving, basketry, traditional handloom designs and products etc.
- e) **Under Mineral ore sector**, dolomite, coal, limestone etc.
- f) **Under Tourism sector**, medical tourism.

4. Initiatives Proposed Earlier

- A **Detailed Project Report on Construction of warehouse** at all the designated Border Trade Centre is still under process.
- For **uninterrupted electricity** at Longwa and Pangsha Border Trade Centres, the matter was taken up with the Power Department, Nagaland Kohima. However remains **un-materialized**.
- Supply of **potable water supply** at Avangkhang, Longwa and Pangsha Border Trade Centres was taken up with Water Resources Department, Nagaland Kohima. However remains **un-materialized**.

5. Issues/Challenges

- The major issue and challenges relating to Border Trade Development is **Road Connectivity** particularly on the Myanmar side, which is either weak or non-existent.

Present Border Road Connectivity

- a) Kohima $\xrightarrow{277 \text{ kms}}$ Avangkhu $\xrightarrow{25 \text{ kms}}$ Lyashi (Myanmar)
(Road on the Myanmar side is still undeveloped and not feasible for the commercial vehicles to ply)
- b) Kohima $\xrightarrow{367 \text{ Kms}}$ Longwa $\xrightarrow{60 \text{ Kms}}$ Lahe (Myanmar)
(There is no road connectivity between Longwa and Lahe (especially on the Myanmar side))
- c) Kohima $\xrightarrow{284 \text{ Kms}}$ Pangsha $\xrightarrow{60 \text{ Kms}}$ Lahe (Myanmar)
(Presently there is no road connectivity between Pangsha and any areas in Myanmar)

Removing this bottleneck and offering connectivity solutions will enable economic activity to spread and unlock many opportunities.

- Absence of **warehousing and cold storage facility**.
- Absence of **Logistics and Transport Services**.
- Lack of adequate **Food Testing Lab**.
- Non-existent of **Border Haats**, to carry on cross-border exchange of goods.
- Absence of a fully functional **Land Custom Station** to bridge with the neighboring nations.

6. Requirements/Needs

- Requires **Border Haats** as they are instrumental in strengthening local rural economy and can enhance ethnic and cultural bonds amongst people living across borders.
- The **warehouse construction** including **cold chains** is a pre-requisite for all the designated Border Trade Centres to become fully functional.
- Construction **Food Testing Labs**.
- Potential of **Inland Waterways** for trade needs to be explored.
- To developed and provide un-interrupted **power supply**, availability of **potable water supply**.
- All round **security** at all the designated Border Trade Centres.
- Notified **Land Custom Station** at **Avangkhang** needs to be made operational.
- Setting up of **infrastructure** at **Mimi** and **Chenmoho** need to be initiated.
- **New Trade Routes** should be explored.

- **Other social infrastructure** – Healthcare infrastructure, educational infrastructure, vocational centres, sports infrastructures, and livelihood generation programmes needs to be initiated and established in the three (3) Border points (Avangkhu, Longwa and Pangsha) being a *geographically and developmentally challenged* area with a total population of :

Avangkhu	-	186 (total population)
	-	42 households
Longwa	-	5,132 (total population)
	-	732 households
Pangsha	-	3696 (total population)
	-	797 households

(As per Census 2011)