

Ethnicity in Manipur and Implications for the Act-East Policy

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To

Sikkim University



In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the
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By

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सिक्किम विश्वविद्यालय
(भारतके संसदके अधिनियमद्वारा स्थापित केंद्रीय विश्वविद्यालय)

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Date: 7/2/2018

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “**Ethnicity in Manipur and Implications for the Act East Policy**” submitted to **Sikkim University** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this university or any other university.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**Ethnicity in Manipur and Implications for the Act East Policy**” submitted to **Sikkim University** for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** in International Relations embodies the result of bona fide research work carried out by Nobojyoti Roy under my guidance and supervision. No part of the dissertation is submitted for any other degrees, diploma, associate- ship and fellowship. All the assistance and help received during the course of investigation have been duly acknowledged by him.

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“Ethnicity in Manipur and Implications for the Act East Policy”

Submitted by Nobojyoti Roy under the supervision of Ph. Newton Singh of the Department of International Relations, School of Social Sciences, Sikkim University, Gangtok 737102, INDIA

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Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|---|
| AEP | Act East Policy |
| AFSPA | Armed Forces Special Powers Act |
| AIIB | Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank |
| APEC | Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation |
| ARF | ASEAN Regional Forum |
| ASEAN | Association of South East Asian Nations |
| ASEM | Asia- Europe Meeting |
| BCIM | Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar |
| BCIM | Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar |
| BIMSTEC | Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi- Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation |
| CEA | Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement |
| CEPA | Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement |
| CLMV | Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam |
| CSCAP | Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific |
| DONER | Department of Development of North East Region |
| EAS | East Asian Summit |
| EEZ | Exclusive Economic Zone |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |
| FTA | Free Trade Agreement |
| G-20 | Group of Twenty |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GOI | Government of India |
| IISS | International Institute for Strategic Studies |

| | |
|---------|---|
| ILP | Inner Line Permit |
| ILPS | Inner Line Permit System |
| KSDC | Kuki State Demand Committee |
| LEP | Look East Policy |
| MEA | Ministry of External Affairs |
| MGC | Mekong Ganga Cooperation |
| MNF | Mizo National Front |
| MoU | Memorandums of Understanding |
| NCR | North East Council |
| NDA | National Democratic Alliance |
| NDB | National Development Bank |
| NER | North Eastern Region |
| NEZ | Natural Economic Zone |
| NH | National Highway |
| NSCN | National Socialist Council of Nagaland |
| NSCN-IM | National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Isak-Muivah |
| NSCN-K | National Socialist Council of Nagaland- Khaplang |
| RCEP | Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation |
| SCS | Special Category Status |
| SEA | South East Asia |
| TAC | Treaty of Amity and Cooperation |
| UNC | United Naga Council |
| UNLF | United National Liberation Front |

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CHAPTER -I

Introduction

1.01. Introduction

The main focus of the proposed study is to analyse the Act East Policy in the context of the ethnic mobilisations and assertions in North East India with special focus on Manipur. North East is a region of various ethnic groups where they interact with each other. Sometimes there arise ethnic tensions among different ethnic groups. Such ethnic assertions are visible in Manipur, one of the border states of North East India. This study will explore how Act East Policy whose evolutionary logic is economic interest and security interacts with ethnic issues.

1.02. The Act East Policy

The Act East policy was previously known as Look East policy. To extend the strategic and economic relation with South East Asian countries, Look East Policy was initiated where India's motive was to become as a regional power to resist the emerging strategic influence of China in South East Asia.¹ Look East Policy (LEP) was launched in 1991 during the changing scenario of world politics. This policy was initiated and came into effort during the term of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and it got a successful lead during Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh also.²

World has witnessed a new wave of Globalisation and Liberalisation after the end of Cold War, which has created a new need for the nations to survive in the changing world. Nations started given more importance on foreign investment and free trade.³ During this era the Southeast Asia was gaining lead in economic progress. Huge economic growth and development in Southeast Asian nations attracted foreign investment from different parts of the world. India, being a sub-continental nation, was having a large economic potentiality and it also started playing an important role in South Asian region politically

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Look_East_policy

² <https://selfstudyhistory.com/2015/04/10/prelims-ias-general-studies-solved-paper-with-explanations-2011-part-10/>

³ http://www.whatisindia.com/editorials/wis200501019_indias_look_east_policy.html

and economically. In this context India came up with the idea of “Look East”. India opted to expand its international market for development in industrial sector and for trade & commerce. Along with this India also started military and strategic coordination with the neighbouring nations to counter the China’s influence in the region. So, from the very beginning India’s focus was to bring close relation in commercial and economic field as well as to increase security cooperation among the Southeast Asian nations on cultural, historical and ideological basis.⁴

According to Eric Koo Peng Kuan (2005), “the origin of the ‘Look East’ policy arose from political consciousness, focusing primarily on forging mutually beneficial ties between India with South East Asia and Japan (Kuan, 2005) .⁵

After the end of Second World War, Jawaharlal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India, tried to bring all Asian nations in a common platform to fight against colonialism and meantime he initiated a movement called Non Alignment Movement to stay away from ideological struggle of cold war. So, Look East Policy of India can be regarded as the outcome of the initiative taken by Nehru long back in 1950s. But Nehru’s policy got degraded when India got defeated by China in 1962 which is viewed as the diplomatic and military failure for India. It was a great setback of foreign policy of India to expand its influence in South East Asia. On the other hand even though India was saying her neutral in bi-polar politics, yet India was leaning towards Soviet Union and Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971 is the outcome of it. Due to this reason other Southeast Asian nations lost faith on India and gradually the foreign relations suffered due to this stand. Moreover India was facing its internal disputes and other problems right after independence. That’s why we haven’t seen any solid economic relation between India and ASEAN nations until 1990s.⁶

With the help of Look East Policy, India is aiming to increase economic cooperation and political influence in Asia-Pacific and Southeast Asian region. To become essential part of Asia-Pacific dynamics strategically has become the main aim of Look East Policy.

⁴ <http://lookeastpolicy.blogspot.com/2008/09/>

⁵ http://www.whatisindia.com/editorials/wis200501019_indias_look_east_policy.html

⁶ http://www.whatisindia.com/editorials/wis200501019_indias_look_east_policy.html

Therefore India is trying to make partnership on eco-political and strategic ground regarding the Southeast Asian region. For this India is giving importance on the potentiality of North East India since it is regarded as the gateway to ASEAN economies (Chiru, 2017).

The beginning of the early 1990s was marked by a transformation in the international political economy, contributed by the end of the cold war and the resulting spread of globalization. Globalization was given rise in international competition as well as it also encourages regionalism. As a viable response in a rapidly globalizing world, the trend towards regionalism is being espoused by the developed as well as the developing countries. A large number of states in different parts of the world constitute themselves into regions to give fresh impetus to a wide variety of cooperative ventures based on regionalism. Geographical proximity, economic complementarities, political commitment, policy coordination and infrastructure development provide conditions for formation of such groupings (Haokip, 2015).

During this time India, like many developing countries, faced many challenges – both internally and globally. Internally, the country was unsettled by social unrest, serious political instability and poor economic performance. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, New Delhi lost a major economic partner and its closet strategic ally. India became aware of the growing trend towards regionalism and due to fears of being marginalized from the global economy, she emphasized on weaving a web of durable cooperatives with various countries in the region (Haokip, 2015).

The first ever regional cooperation that India joined in her own neighborhood is SAARC. However it has become a non-starter due to political tensions between India and Pakistan. India also cannot look towards West Asia and Africa for intensive economic cooperation, as the countries of this region look up mainly to the West. During this period, India has got attracted to the high-performing economies of East Asia. Forced by the economic crisis and the dire need of foreign direct investment (FDIs) for rapid economic development, India had enunciated the Look East Policy in 1991 and was determined to work with the spirit of regional economic cooperation with her eastern neighbours. The

policy underlines the renewed thrust towards the Asians perspective of cooperation and development which was undertaken during the Nehruvian era (Haokip, 2015).

In the first phase, Look East Policy aimed to expand trade and commercial investment in ASEAN countries. And in second phase, in 2003, is more comprehensive in its coverage, it tries to extend it to East Asia and Australia, keeping Asean in the centre. The new phase marks a shift in focus from trade to wider economic and security cooperation, political partnership. Physical connectivity through road and rail links (Haokip, 2015).

Prime Minister Narendra Modi after forming his new government in 2014, has given priority to the East Asian countries while US has already engaged in Asian economy. Sushma Swaraj, foreign minister, proposed for renaming the initiative as Act East Policy (Sajjanhar, 2016).

From the initial period Narendra Modi clearly said that India's main focus would be improving economic and trade relations with ASEAN countries keeping the same objectives formulated by Narasimha Rao in Look East Policy of 1991. This step went farther and in Act East Policy India made economic partnership with Japan and Vietnam also in later part of time (Ramabardan, 2017).⁷

1.03. Locating North East in the Act East Policy

From above discussion we got an idea of Act East Policy. In India's effort to look east, the northeastern region has become a significant region due to its geographical proximity to Southeast Asia and China. India's search for new economic relationship with Southeast Asia is now driven by the domestic imperative of developing the northeast by increasing connectivity to the outside world (Haokip, 2015). It is in the context of this emphasis on North East India that the proposed study attempts to analyse the Act East Policy vis-à-vis the ethnic issues in North East India. The question here is whether the Act East Policy would transform the existing ethnic equations as many proponents of modernization argue that the economic rationales would ultimately render the ethnic

⁷ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Look_East_policy_\(India\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Look_East_policy_(India))

problems insignificant, or whether the existing ethnic problems would dictate the implementation of the Act East Policy.

Northeast India is situated in the extreme eastern part of India. There are eight states in this region such as Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and the Himalayan state of Sikkim. North Eastern India is connected to the mainland India via small portion called Siliguri corridor which is of approximately 22 km only. North East India shares border with Bhutan to the Northwest, Myanmar in the East, Bangladesh to the Southwest, China in the North side. 90% of its whole border is international.

The Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, with a width of 21 to 40 kilometres (13 to 25 mi), connects the North Eastern region with East India. The region shares more than 4,500 kilometres (2,800 mi) of international border (about 90 per cent of its entire border area) with China (southern Tibet) in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the southwest, and Bhutan to the northwest. North East India is the homeland of large number of ethnic groups who came to the region from different directions at different historical times (Mahanta, 2014).⁸ For instance, in Assam there are Rabha, Deori, Bodo-Kachari; in Arunachal Pradesh Nyishi, Adi, Monpa, Mishimi; in Meghalaya Garo, Khasi, Rabha; in Nagaland Angami, Ao, Lotha; in Mizoram Pawis, Lushai, Kuki; in Tripura Reang, Chakma; in Sikkim Lepacha, Bhutia and in Manipur there are Naga, Kuki, Meitei etc. These groups belong to the different racial stocks, speak different languages and have varied socio-cultural tradition. As a result the region has become the epicenter of numerous ethnic nationalities (Mahanta, 2014).⁹ The hilly society in North East India reflects a huge diversity since every community is having different and unique characteristics. North East India accommodates high ethnic diversity.¹⁰ Mizoram has around 7 ethnic groups, Nagaland has 17 and Arunachal Pradesh is the largest state in the region with 20 tribes and more than 90 regional languages.

In the Northeast, the whole problem of ethnicity has become quite a complicated issue.

⁸ <http://www.studymode.com/essays/Insurgency-And-Its-Impact-Upon-North-Eastern-49866939.html>

⁹ <http://www.studymode.com/essays/Insurgency-And-Its-Impact-Upon-North-Eastern-49866939.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.mcrg.ac.in/idp1.asp>

The context and the characteristics of the ethnic conflicts in North East India may vary from state to state, but no states among the eight are free from ethnic conflicts. That is why this region of the country is generally defined as the boiling pot in academic analysis (Lintner, 2010).

There is more than one factor that leads to such a phenomenon. However, the factors responsible for ethnic conflict are yet to be explained satisfactorily. Apart from the issues of cultural injustices meted out to the minority communities, ethnicity is also being used of ethnic symbols for their politico-economic purpose is best suitable for self consciousness and specific political gain in the region (Bijukuar, 2013). Thus, if we observe the ethnic dimension in North East India we can see that the region has been witnessing ethnic disputes; ethnic conflicts and the political demands are raised to protect ethnic interests which most of the time leads to the ethnic violence and ethnic insurgency. And due to these ethnic issues many government policies are not being able to materialize in the region.

From above discussion we have come into conclusion that North East India is ethnically diverse and Manipur is facing ethnic assertions which may have implications for the Act East policy. For example, the presence of ethnic clash between Naga, Kuki and Meiteis in Manipur can be big drawbacks for implementation of Act East policy. To achieve the objectives of Act East Policy the policy maker and authority should give importance to the location of Moreh which carries a vital potentiality of becoming economic hub in India's relation with other Southeast Asian countries. Moreh is the border town in Manipur linking Myanmar with India, that's why it is regarded as the gateway to ASEAN countries which are very important for economic and commercial progress for India.

1.04. Survey of Literature

A number of books and articles have been surveyed for this study. The survey of literature has been divided into three sections for the convenience of analysis. The first section reviewed the rationale and implementation of Act East Policy. The second section deals with the Act East Policy and North East India. And third section is related to the ethnic aspects of North East India with particular focus on Manipur.

The first section deals with the background of Act East Policy. *Beyond the Rhetoric: The Economics of India's Look East Policy* (2003) edited by Frederic Grare and Amitabh Mattoo. This book begins with introducing Look East Policy (LEP) which was initiated in 1990s and this policy got converted to Act East Policy in 2014. This book examines the potential for increased economic relations between India and ASEAN, as well as the manner in which the structural problems of the Indian economy could undermine these relations. It also explains how LEP was the outcome of the economic liberalisation initiated in 1991 and how it was one of the springboards of India's integration into the world community. After this LEP initiative India strengthen its economic ties with East Asian region. *Two Decades of India's Look East Policy* edited by Amar Nath Ram, discusses in details about genesis, motivating factors, sectoral dialogue partnership, Asian regional forum, summit level dialogue and post summit Asia-Pacific engagements and future directions. The contemporary Look East Policy, conceived, conceptualized and implemented in the early 1990s first by former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War and in the context of the extraordinary domestic economic challenges confronting the country, had its own contextual rationale, imperative and compulsion. Since then, in the last nearly two decades, it has evolved and acquired its own momentum and arguably critical mass to give it a new and greater meaning, relevance, depth and content in the changing context of geo-politics and globalization.

India's Look East - Act East Policy: A Bridge to the Asian Neighbourhood (2014) edited by Amb. Sudhir, T. Devare and Ms. Shivali Lawale, is the outcome of IRC conference, includes five tracks. This book dedicated to 'India's Trade and Investments in Preface Southeast and East Asia' confirms the emergence of a new architecture of world economy which is marked by trading blocs, promoting economic growth within the region. The priority of any successful cooperation is the presence and scope of connectivity, the track titled 'Road and Maritime Connectivity: Vital Elements for Economic Growth' states that connectivity assumes an important and strategic link but the current geo-political scenario puts forth some security concerns to this plausible accordance, the track 'Security and Defense within the Framework of the LEP' explores the prerequisite of a stable and secure region if the policy has to take a leap forward.

The commonalities of India with Southeast Asia are many compared to the dissimilarities. The region shares cultural and religious values, and forms a large collective weight of the global population with a similar demography. These similarities create a ground to work together towards a peaceful and sustainable future and people-to-people exchanges, the track 'Education and Culture: Vectors of Sustainable Human Development' captures this essence. The policy also points towards the strategic importance of India's Northeast region. Political isolation over the years exacerbated the socioeconomic issues of the region vis-à-vis the rest of country, the track dedicated especially to this region, 'Northeastern Region of India (NER): A Gateway to Southeast Asia' deals with the strategy of economic development in this region, the issues of internal and border security, and the question of socio-cultural identity. The Northeast region has the potential to play the arrow head role in evolution of the 'Look East- Act East Policy', and in fact it would not be wrong to say that looking and acting east will begin from here. South Asian states such as Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan are so closely linked with Act East policy that they also need to be considered as part of the policy (Sudhir, 2014).

Taking Stock of India's 'Act East Policy' by Ashok Sajjanhar, in this paper he tries to examine the motivations for launching the Act East Policy and what it has accomplished so far. It also describes the imperatives of the future, if the policy is to deliver the desired results in promoting India's interests in the strategic, security, economic and cultural spheres, in the region and beyond. *India's Vision on Act East Policy*, a paper presented by Dr. Dhrubajyoti Bhattacharjee, discuss about the Act East Policy in the era of globalization. Globalisation of the world's economies greatly intensified international competition and has, at the same time, given rise to a new wave of regionalism. Changing economic frontiers, India's fast economic growth and international and regional economic challenges, brought the Indian leadership to forge a policy which stressed on bringing the South East Asian nations closer.

The second section of literature survey includes books and articles which have discussed about the Act East Policy and North East India. *Look East Policy: Impact on Northeast India* an edited book by Charles Reuben Lyngdoh and Merostar Rani, discusses about the

economic possibilities of North East India in Look East Policy. It also analyse about the border trade of North East India as a part of Look East Policy and regional economic cooperation between India and ASEAN. It explains the importance of North East India on the implementation of Look East Policy. This book argues that infrastructure and connectivity may transform North East India into an economic hub for the success of Look East Policy. *India's Look East Policy and the Northeast* by Thongkhohal Haokip, studies the evolution of India's Look East Policy, the economic potentials of the Look East Policy linked to the economic interests of the Northeastern region, the continuity and change of India's policy towards the Northeast and in that context examine whether the Look East Policy is likely to attain its goals. It also examines whether it is feasible to adopt a policy for economic development by opening up to the East in the face of possible alienation in the ethnic terms.

Look East Policy and India's North East: Polemics and Perspectives edited by Thingnam Kishan, seeks to critically engage and question the basis of the Look East Policy. The physical location of North East cannot be ignored while connecting India with ASEAN countries in terms of trade or strategic concerns. But the North East region has been witnessing drastic changes due to the transformations at the global as well as regional level, needs a rigorous academic intervention to assess and evaluate the ideologies, attitudes and culture informing that condition. This book examines how Look East Policy failed to address the economic backwardness of the region. *The Look East Policy and Northeast India* by Gorky Chakraborty and Asok Kumar Ray, explains in their book that the Northeastern region has shifted to security paradigm in 1960s and in 1970s it has shifted to political paradigm. Then late 1980s onwards Northeastern region entered into a development paradigm under neo-liberal globalization. The main concern of this book is to see where the region stands today; it tries to analyse the Look East Policy from the perspective of North East India.

Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India's Northeast edited by Gurudas Das and C. Joshua Thomas, captures the success of India's Look East Policy (LEP) in promoting economic engagement with neighbouring countries in Asia and simultaneously its limitations in propelling growth in the bordering North Eastern Region

India's bridge head to South East Asia. It analyses the instrumental role of LEP in bringing a tectonic shift in India's foreign trade by redirecting the focus from the West to the East, thus leading to a fundamental change in the nature of India's economic interdependence. Besides discussing foreign trade, it expounds as to how LEP made India play an important role in the emerging Asian security architecture and liberated Indian foreign policy from being centered on South Asia. The essays also enumerate the reasons for LEP's failure in the North Eastern Region and chart out actionable programmes for course correction that might be factored into its new form the Act East Policy. *Looking "East" through India's North East* by Namrata Goswami. This article throws light on the challenges like lack of infrastructure, crisis of insurgency, the disjuncture between the elites and the social base in the North East regarding the Look East Policy and the states' incapacities during the implementation process of this policy.

Then the third section deals with the ethnic aspects of North East India with special focus on Manipur. *Problems of Ethnicity in the North-East India* edited by B.B. Kumar, tries to understand the multi-ethnic composition of North East India. And it says that Northeastern states make the economic and political demands on ethnic basis which ultimately creates ethnic tension in the region and not fulfilling such demands sometimes leads to the creation of insurgency problem. So due to these ethnic problems many government policies face difficulties for its implementation. *Social Exclusion and Ethnicity in Northeast India* by V. Bijukumar, this article says that Social exclusion is a multidimensional term that encompasses social, economic, political and cultural spheres. Exclusion is linked to the recognition of social identities, resource allocations and power relations. In most cases, both subjective consciousness and actual inequalities lead to ethnic assertions and extremist activities. Unlike other studies on ethnicity and extremism, the present article tries to understand ethnic assertions in northeast India in the context of rampant social exclusion taking place in the region.

Perspectives of ethnic conflict in the North-Eastern India by Stephen Pamei, this article describes that North-eastern part of India is home to many ethnic communities with rich natural resources, yet relatively backward in economic development. It is having

the landscape with potential racial, lingual and ethnic diversity which creates ethnic tensions and conflicts. While studying ethnic conflicts in the 'north-east of India', one cannot but look at Manipur which exhibits as many problems that could possibly appear in the discourse of collective conflict. Perhaps it is the only state in the entire north-east which experiences such varied forms of issues and problems. A study on the state will show the complexity of ethnicity and politics that an amalgamated culture would possess. It is a different issue if such a pattern would successfully explain all other instances of ethnic conflict in the region or the country, but the attempt is to provide a generic picture of conflict as it seems in a territorial entity having multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-sub-national identities. *Patterns of Ethnic Conflict in the North-East: a Study on Manipur* by Bhagat Oinam, this article discusses about ethnic conflict. Manipur in India's north-east has long been riven by conflicts among ethnic groups on issues of exclusivity, dominance and integration. Identities that shape conflict are not necessarily primordial but are a creation of political necessity and administrative convenience. In recent decades, as the Naga-Kuki conflicts and later between the Kukis and Paites demonstrate identity conflicts have been waged not merely on questions of land, immigration and settlement, but also on the overweening fear of loss of identity itself.

Ethnic relations among the people of North-East India edited by N. Joykumar Singh, this book is a collection of papers which provide different aspects of ethnic relation in Manipur as it is a polyglot land inhabited by numerous ethnic communities. The book reveals that underneath the outward ethnic diversity, there are elements of affinity. The indigenous Meiteis, the Nagas and Kuki Chin are all Tibeto Burman racially and linguistically. This volume also discusses ethnic relations with its social, cultural, economic, political and historical experience and their ramifications in identity formations, ethnic conflicts and territorial assertions. *Inter-Ethnic conflict in Manipur: a study of conflict between Meitei-Kuki-Naga* by Hawaibam Herojit Singh, this book basically attempts to study the multiple dimensions of the ethnic conflicts that have been haunting the state of Manipur since the last few decades. The book is objectively a product of an extensive empirical analysis of the conflict between and among the most vocal groups in Manipur namely the Meiteis, the Kukis and the Nagas. It not only tries to

study the contemporary or what has been often referred to as the present phenomenon of the ethnic diversity and conflict in the state, it also tries to provide the historical foundations of the current diversity and conflict in the state. In this sense the work endeavors to study extensively the political and social significance of the colonial administration along with pre-independence political system of Manipur in terms of ethnic conflict and contestation between groups in Manipur.

From the above survey of literature it becomes clear that the Act East policy is driven by economic and security logic from its inception. North East India has been observed as an economic hub in later part of this policy initiation. And it is also to be mentioned that North East India is full of different ethnic groups having different ethnic issues which sometimes leads to ethnic confrontation. Thus we can assume that these ethnic issues of North East India need to be addressed by the Government of India through proper policy initiatives. The available literature lacks the linkage between ethnic issues with the implementation of the Act East Policy which is vital in present time. Therefore in this study we have to discuss how the Act East Policy addresses the ethnic issues or dimensions of North East India.

1.05. Research Problem

The Act East policy was largely dictated by the economic and security logic in its initial formulation. Its main interest is to tie up its economic benefit through connecting the major eastern economies of ASEAN and South East Asian countries. The available literatures focus mostly on North East India as a geo-strategic and economic region for implementation of Act East Policy. The domestic imperative of ethnic issues in North East is overlooked when we talk about the Act East Policy. This reveals a research gap in prevailing literature i.e. whether the Act East Policy takes into account the importance of ethnic issues in North East India.

1.06. Rationale and Scope of the Study

The initiative of Look East policy of 1990s, later on transformed into Act East Policy (AEP), by government of India indicates the geo-strategic importance of North East India due to its physical connectivity with South East Asian countries. North East India shares

borders with China, Myanmar and Bangladesh which can be regarded as the linkage towards the ASEAN countries and that is the economic interest of India to be connected with this growing economy of South East Asia. So the emphasis must be given on North East India as strategic importance for the implementation of AEP.

Ever since the Look East policy was introduced it has been focusing on economic and security aspects only. But it is also important to focus on the ethnic problems of the region which may have influencing role in case of foreign policy implementation process. North East India is ethnically diverse and there are different political demands and ethnic issues prevailing in the region which creates instability in the smooth implementation of government policies. That is why it is crucial to understand the ethnic mobilisations and assertions in locating the North East India in the AEP framework. The ethnic dimension of domestic politics is important to take into account in regard to the success of foreign policy implementation.

Manipur is selected due to its strategic location and also as a place where such ethnic mobilisations take place. Manipur shares border with Myanmar which is situated in the west end of South East Asia. Manipur can be regarded as the gateway towards ASEAN countries which is very important for implementation of Act East Policy of India. Act East policy needs open and free trade for its success whereas Manipur's domestic issues like ethnic conflicts among Naga, Kuki and Meitei may hinder the smooth process of foreign policy implementation.

Therefore this study tries to explore the relation between ethnic aspects of domestic politics and foreign policy implementation. Thus area of Act East policy and ethnic dimensions in North East India needs to be addressed.

The scope of the study will include an analysis of the Act East Policy as a foreign policy initiative. This study will include in its scope the ethnic dimensions in North east India in general and Manipur in particular. The proposed study also analyse the implications of the ethnic issues on the Act East Policy and whether the Act East Policy takes into account the ethnic dimensions of the region.

1.07. Framework of the Study

The Act East Policy as a foreign policy initiative in 1990s driven by the economic and security logic. It tries to connect India with the emerging economies of East Asian and South East Asian countries to counter the increasing influence of China in the region. The proponents of the Act East Policy subscribe to the argument that North East Region can be developed economically which consequently would solve the problem of ethnic issues because the economic rationality would render the ethnic preferences insignificant. On the other hand this study critically examines this economic and security logic of the Act East Policy and it says that until and unless we address these ethnic issues of North East in general and Manipur in particular, it will hamper the implementation of the Act East Policy. Thus, the proposed study will be conducted in this framework.

1.08. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are as follows-

1. To identify the rationale of the Act East Policy and to analyse whether the Act East policy as foreign policy addresses the ethnic dimensions of North-East India.
2. To identify the implications of ethnic issues in Manipur on the implementation of AEP.

1.09. Research Questions

1. Does the Act East policy as foreign policy, while emphasising on the importance of North East India, take into account the ethnic issues of the region?
2. How will the mobilisations and assertions among multiple ethnic groups in Manipur influence the Act East policy of India?

1.10. Research Methodology

The methodology of this research is Qualitative and it has adopted descriptive and analytical methods. Both primary and secondary sources are used for this study. The primary sources like documents from the Ministry of External Affairs official site, the Department of Development of North-East Region (DONER), North-East Council

(NCR), reports of some official agencies are used. Secondary sources are taken from different books, journals, articles etc.

1.11. Chapterisation

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the study of the topic with brief discussion on Act East Policy (AEP), North East India and importance of Manipur. This introduction also deals with the framework of the study, research problem, rationale & scope of the study, objectives, research questions, methodology and some of the literatures reviewed.

Chapter 2: The Act East Policy: Evolution and Rationale

This chapter gives an overview of Look East Policy (LEP), its evolution and progress since 1991. It also discusses about the logic behind for pursuing foreign policy towards East and South East Asia and India's strategic change after the collapse of Soviet Union. The journey of finding new economic and trade ally for India and how India shifted from LEP to Act East Policy (AEP) has been explained here in this chapter. Moreover it touches upon the implementation of the AEP slightly referring the importance of North East India which is discussed in the second chapter in details.

Chapter 3: Locating North East in the Act East Policy

This chapter deals with the importance of North Eastern Region (NER) in the Act East Policy framework. It mainly focuses on how NER can play a decisive role for the implementation of AEP due to its geographical proximity and strategic value.

Chapter 4: Ethnic Assertions in Manipur and its Implications on the Act East Policy

This chapter will examine the nature of the ethnic conflicts in Manipur and how these ethnic issues may have direct or indirect implications on the implementation of Act East Policy. Manipur is one of the eastern most states in India bordering with Myanmar which is regarded as a big opportunity for India to expand its trade and commerce on the verse of Act East Policy. In this chapter we have tried to observe the ethnic history related to its changing nature according to times and how it change the prevailing situation of the state.

Since Manipur is in an important location to play a vital role for implementation of the AEP. Here in this chapter it has been tried to observe how local factors like ethnic assertions or conflicts have certain implications on AEP or does AEP framework take ethnic dimension into account. Would the linking up of ethnicity with foreign policy is just a hypothesis or reality that has been attempted in this chapter. This chapter is followed by the conclusion which gives an overview outcome of all the chapters. It tries to conclude with the summery of the study and the suggestions derived out of the study and also highlight the future possibilities in this area of study. On the basis of the available literature it can be said that the ethnic factor has not been brought into the discourse of AEP policy study in the context of North East India or in particular Manipur. This study has tried to bring the issue that it is essential to see AEP through the local dynamics of the location where it is to be operated.

CHAPTER II

The Act East Policy: Evolution and Rationale

2.01. Introduction

The Act East Policy (AEP) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar in Nov, 2014. AEP is the natural successor to the Look East Policy (LEP) that was put in place by the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992 under radically different geo-political and economic circumstances. LEP was primarily focused on strengthening ties between India and ASEAN countries. Economies of the 6 ASEAN countries (4 countries joined the grouping later in the '90s) were growing at a rapid pace, earning them the sobriquet of Asian Tigers. On the contrary, the licence permit raj put in place by India after independence and the oil shocks of the '70s and '80s had resulted in a situation which reduced the import cover of the country to a mere 10 days as against the normally acceptable healthy level of 3 months. End of the cold war and disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 provided a welcome opportunity to India to reach out to South-East Asia to capitalize upon its historical, cultural and civilisational linkages with this region.

2.02. Evolution of Look East Policy

The evolution of India's Look East policy can be traced to the changed context of the international system in the early 1990s. The policy was also influenced by the changing global politics viz. the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the real genesis of the Look East Policy can be traced to the early years of Indian independence. India's effort towards regional cooperation started in the pre-independence period, where in the mid 1940s and 1950s there were concerted efforts to develop cooperation with Asian and other developing nations of the world. The importance of Southeast Asia was recognized by K.M. Pannikar, an Indian strategic analyst in the 1940s. Jawaharlal Nehru also

recognized the importance of Southeast Asia as an opportunity for India and supported the anti-colonial movements in the region.¹

Even before formal independence Indian leaders convene the Asian relations conference from March 23 to April 2, 1947 in New Delhi, which was attended by twenty five Asian countries, including Egypt, where was an expression of great enthusiasm for regional cooperation from Sri Lanka and Burma. India called the conference on Indonesia in New Delhi on January 20, 1949, to express support to the Sukarno-led armed struggle against the Dutch attempt to re-impose colonial rule in Indonesia in December 1947. Apart from the Indonesian issue the conference passed resolutions calling for regional integration of the participating nations. A major step towards cooperation of the Asian and African countries was taken in the Bandung Conference in April 1955 to develop a policy and common approach to their problems. Apart from the major attempts at regional cooperation there were several other efforts taken, where a number of conferences were organized and attended by India to find possibilities of such cooperation.²

Despite the insistence on Asian solidarity by various leaders during the anti-colonial struggle in the post Second World War, there was negligible cooperation among Asian countries did not work well to the satisfaction of its leaders. The main factors for the failure of India's attempt towards regional cooperation in Asia and Africa in general and Southeast Asia in particular were the inter-state disputes, tensions, distrusts, apprehensions among the individual countries and the tussle for leadership between India and China.³ Although India's debut in the international arena had its origin in Southeast Asia, the initiative for Pan-Asian solidarity by Jawaharlal Nehru did not materialise following the Chinese aggression on the North Eastern Frontier Agency in the Northeastern region of India in 1962 and the subsequent change of India's policy to strengthen its military capability. As I.K. Gujral said in one of his speeches in 1996, every aspect of India's ethos reflects the "footprints of South-East Asia." But "the forces

¹ G.V.C.Naidu, "India and Southeast Asia", World Focus, Vol.17, No.10, 11, 12, October, November December, 1996, p.82.

² For details of India's attempt at regional cooperation during the first two decade of independence see, Sisir Gupta India and Regional Integration in Asia. Bombay. Asia publishing House, 1964.

³ For details see(1)Eric Gonsalves (ed.) .AsianRelations. NewDelhi: Lancer International, 1991.

(2)WernerLevi. Free Indiain Asia. Minneapolis :University of Minnesota Press,1954.

(3)Sisir Gupta. India and Regional Integration in Asia. Bombay: Asia publishing House, 1964

of history and circumstances intermittently disturbed this closeness. Colonialism and the Cold War, despite our efforts to come together, drew artificial boundaries between us.”⁴ Further the focus during that time was more political rather than economic. Issues like decolonization, neutrality and security were the focal point for the leaders of Asia and Africa to rally round a common platform though some contents of economic cooperation were usually there.

Thus, the changing context after the end of cold war and the change in the international system led to the growing emergence of regional economic organizations which focuses on the economic content of relations. This change in the international system, the success of the East Asian economies and the radical shift in India’s economic and strategic circumstances led New Delhi to pay more attention towards the East and Southeast Asia economies.⁵ From the strategic standpoint, realist political commentators pointed out that the end of Cold War and the beginning of the Gulf War (1990-91) had created “unprecedented opportunities” for India,⁶ although Munro argued that India is the greatest loser from the end of the Cold War. Munro made a grim comment that “India’s reach for great power status is in shambles. The keystone of Indian power and pretence in the 1980s, the Indo-Soviet link, in history... India has no ‘useful friends’.” However, by the later half of 1990s India ineffective as a result of the end of the Cold War, India has gained significant advantages by opening up its economy-advantages that will eventually allow the synergisms inherent in India’s circumstances to realise its potential.⁷

2.02.1 India's Domestic and Regional Environment in 1990-91

As nations do not exist in isolation, the domestic as well as external environment have an impact on their foreign policy. The linkage between external elements and foreign policy cannot be wished away as foreign policy constitutes asset of responses to external challenges and opportunities. Consequently, any change in the environment requires

⁴ Statement by I.K.Gujral, Minister of External Affairs and Water Resources, Government of India.
<http://www.asean.org/4338ht>

⁵ Sandy Gordon, *India's Rise to Power in the Twentieth Century and Beyond*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, p.299

⁶ J. Mohan Malik, "India's Response to the Gulf Crisis: Implications for Indian Foreign Policy", *Asian Survey*, Vol.31, No.9, September 1991, p.855.

⁷ Sandy Gordon, "South Asia after the Cold War: Winners and Losers", *Asian Survey*, Vol.35, No.10, October 1995, p.879

change in the behavior of nations. Hence, all developments from 1989 to 1991 affect all nations. India was no exception to all these external developments and they had significant impact on its domestic as well as foreign policy.

The beginning of the 1990s was a turbulent period for India. The country witnessed unstable domestic environment characterized by increasing terrorism and insurgency, political instability, economic doldrums and financial crisis. An unfavorable regional environment like the emergence of Sagiang Division of Myanmar as a safe haven for the insurgent groups of Northeast India, the underground smugglers market of Cambodia as an important source of arms and ammunition and the drug smugglers market in the Golden Triangle etc. compounded the unstable domestic environment like there was an increase in the number of violent incidents perpetrated by insurgents in Jammu & Kashmir and Northeast India. The militant outfits in Jammu & Kashmir became violent and had acquired radical religious ideology in order to legitimize their actions.

On the economic front too, India was facing problem. In spite of reforms during the Rajiv Gandhi led Congress government in the mid-1980s and throughout the later part of the decade, the percentage of trade in relation to Gross National Product had actually fallen from 12.4 percent in 1984-85 to 11 percent in 1988-89. There was low level of trade and as a small percentage of the economy was involved in it, there was little scope for adjusting any rise in the prices of oil within the overall trade balance. The small rise in the price of oil, due to the 1990-91 Gulf Crisis, was translated into a 21.9 percent increase in the import bill in rupee term.' The extent of the emerging problem can be assuaged from the fact that in 1965 India's energy import constituted only about 8 percent of the value of its merchandise exports, whereas by 1990 energy imports constituted nearly 25 percent of the value of exports.

The 1990 Gulf crisis had a deep impact on India's economy as it depended much on the West Asian countries for oil and trade. It was followed by economic recession and political turmoil in India. In the Gulf Crisis India lost remittances of \$205 million from Indians employed in Iraq and Kuwait; it lost an amount of \$500 million owing to it from Iraq at the start of the crisis; and it lost about \$112 million in trade with Iraq and Kuwait. At the same time, trade with the Eastern European countries had suffered severely with

the end of communist rule and the collapse of that system. Consequently, by the mid-1991, foreign exchange reserves had fallen barely enough to cover two weeks imports and India was forced to seek the International Monetary Fund (IMF) help. An agreement was reached by the then Indian government with the IMF in January 1991 on a loan for \$1.8 billion, partly out of the Compensatory Financing Facility (to offset increased oil imports) and partly as a first credit tranche standby.⁸

The political scenario of India during this period was marked by instability, where three successive governments were formed within two years. The developing economic crisis at the end of the 1980s coincided with the electoral cycle in 1989 in which the Indian electorate chose to express its dissatisfaction by opting for political weakness and instability at the centre by electing a parliament with no party in majority. When Congress party, which had the largest elected Member of Parliament, refused to form government, Janta Dal took over power backed by two ideologically contradictory parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Communist Party of India (Marxist). Instead of taking steps to redress the developing economic crisis, the parties in power soon launched populist policies, both economically and socially, which worsen the economic situation. Thus, India came to face both economic crisis and political instability.

The withdrawal of support to the National Front government by BJP by the end of 1990 resulted in the collapse of the National Front government. This collapse was followed by a split in the Janata Dal, which was the main constituent of the National Front government, where Chandrasekhar abandoned the Janata Dal and formed a new party, the Samajwadi Janata Party. After the fall of the National Front government led by V.P.Singh, a minority government with Chandrashekhar as Prime Minister was installed with the support of the Congress party with 195 although his party had only 58 members out of 473 in the Lok Sabha. It was so small that it could only survive because nobody in Parliament wanted another election.⁹ The greatest problem of the Chandrashekhar

⁸ V. Joshi & I.M.D. Little. India: Macro economics and Political Economy, 1964-1991. Washington D.C.: World Bank, 1994, p.66

⁹ K. Shankar Bajpai, "India in 1991: New Beginnings", Asian Survey, Vol.32, No.2, A Survey of Asia in 1991: PartII, February 1992, p.208

Government was the fast disappearance of financial reserves and the inability to formulate any concrete economic policies, even a budget. The withdrawal of Congress party support within a few months led to the fall of the Chandrashekhar Government and resulted in fresh elections in June 1991. The Congress emerged as the single largest party with 232 seats. Subsequently, a Congress led minority government with P. V. Narasimha Rao as Prime Minister, supported by some regional parties was formed in June 1991.

The new government under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao was confronted with the uphill task of putting the derailed economy back to tracks, restoring as emblem of political stability and availing of new opportunities and facing challenges thrown open by globalization and the New World Order. There was an enormous increase in non productive expenditure. Defence expenditure arose from 15.9 percent of central government spending in 1980-81 to 16.9 percent in 1987-88 to nearly 19 percent in 1990-91. Subsidies grew from 8.5 percent in 1980-81 to 11.4 percent in 1989-90.¹⁰ The main thrust of the new government's economic and financial policy was to restructure the framework of economic activity and move the country toward international market and trade.

Compelled by severe balance of payment crisis, gradual erosion of competitiveness of Indian goods in the global market and recognizing the importance of foreign capital in a country's economic development, an economic liberalisation programme was undertaken in June 1991 with a view to firstly attract foreign investments, both portfolio and direct, and secondly to boost exports. The main aim of such liberal economic reforms programme was to integrate India's economy with the world economy. Sandy Gordon sums up some of the measures taken by the government to reform the economy which were introduced in the budgets since 1991-92 as follows:

- Devaluation of the rupee by about 30% against the US dollar, with the aim of achieving full convertibility;

¹⁰ B.B.Bhattacharya. India's Economic Crises: Debt Burden and Specialisation. NewDelhi: B.R.Publishing, 1992

- Raising of the ceiling of foreign ownership to 51% and higher in some instances, with partial repatriation of capital at market rates on a 60:40 basis (with 40% being at the government rate);
- Removal of restrictive controls on the import of most items and lowering of the tariff. The import duty on capital goods was further reduced to 35% from 55%, with a special 25% rate on capital goods destined for priority sectors. The import weighted tariff was to be reduced to 25% in two to three years;
- Abolition of the internal licensing system in all but 18 industries;
- Preparation for sale in principle of upto 49 percent of the government's share in state enterprises;
- In 1993, the floating of the rupee on trade account in 1993;
- Reduction of the excise duty;
- Reform of the financial sector; and
- A substantial reduction in the rate of company taxation in 1994.¹¹

The buzzword of the 1991 economic policy was the inclusion of liberalisation, privatization and globalisation. The main objective of these economic reforms was to bring the derailed economy back to the track by providing a boost to foreign trade and attracting Foreign Direct Investments. As a result, market economy replaces the socialistic pattern of society, which the Congress had long cherished as the goal as well as the means for India's development by building up the public sector domestically while insulating India from international market forces. The economic reform launched in 1991 is significant in India's economic history.

2.02.2 India's Look East Policy

The collapse of Soviet Union compelled India to evolve a new strategic doctrine redefining her foreign policy options and also the domestic economic policy under the leadership of reform minded Prime Minister P.V. Narashimha Rao. Rao initiated economic reforms to attract foreign capital to improve country's economy. Believed in Indian hidden economic potentialities the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

¹¹ Sandy Gordon (1995).op.cit.,p.121

(ASEAN) which were considered as “tiger economies” came forward to interact with India by according sectoral dialogue partnership in 1992. The reciprocity between India and ASEAN was a perfect match that for India looking at the east was an outcome of its quest for a redemptive recompense for missed opportunities and for ASEAN it was a hope that a massive nation like India which would be a counterweight to China besides providing economic opportunities to do business: Unencumbered by other considerations the two sides weighed the economic benefits of closer interactions and responded to each other. Against this background India launched its Look East Policy (LEP) to better its stagnant economy and to achieve its geopolitical goals in the spheres of strategic and security matters in the Asia Pacific region. The economic reforms initiated in the last decade of the previous century made India an investment destination and had also a vast market region to realize profits for the investors. Further, with three years of economic reforms in hand and visible signs of economic change Rao travelled to Singapore in 1994 to woo the countries in Asia and Pacific for greater economic engagement with India. By delivering the famous Singapore Lecture in the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, „India and the Asia-Pacific: Forging a New Relationship’ he invited nations in the region to invest in India. He said: “I can assure this gathering that India not only welcomes but is also worth your time and money. Investment in India is an investment in the future – a future not only for the investor but for a population of one billion which will remain a force for stability in the world.” He concluded his speech by telling: “I trust this vision will be realized in the near future and that the next century will be a century of partnership for us all.” Thus, Rao gave content and tenor to India’s Look East policy. A decade of India’s LEP which was passionately called Phase I targets ASEAN for trade and investment linkages.¹²

The fall of Soviet and other East European countries led to the final victory of capitalist path of development. It prompted the famous commentator Francis Fukuyama to term this victory as the ‘End of History’. Politically, the US remained as the only super power of the world, though other countries like China, Germany and Japan also emerge as important players. The new global economic and political conditions had deep impact on

¹² Dr. K. Raja Reddy, ‘ India’s Look East Policy : Japan and China’, *FPRC Journal No. 8*: 2011

the domestic and foreign policies of global actors. It drastically restructured the interstate relations and India was no exception to it. In domestic front, India introduced economic liberalization, with the twin objectives of achieving rapid economic growth and close integration with the global economy. In external front too, it brought about major changes in the her foreign policy viz. shaking of cold war ideological hangover with greater pragmatism, developing close relations with the US and launching the Look East policy for closer engagement with the East Asia and South-East Asia.

Thus, the Look East policy, initiated in 1991 by the then Prime Minister Narsimha Rao is the outcome of the post-cold war global conditions. The main objectives of this policy are—to develop close economic as well as strategic relations with the countries of this region and to avail better opportunities of market, capital and technology for the rapid and sustained economic growth of the country. This policy has been implemented in two phases so far with the first phase covering the period from 1991 to 2003. During this phase, it mainly focused on the development of trade and investment linkages with the ASEAN members. The Second phase of this policy covers the period from 2003 to the present. During this phase, it focuses on both the ASEAN as well as non-ASEAN countries of East Asia. Besides economic relations, it also focuses on the deepening of the strategic relations in this region.

It is in this background that India tried to restructure her relations in this region. The search for better trade and economic opportunities as well as India's desire to play a greater role in the global affairs prompted India to play a greater role in this region. It was in this background that India introduced its Look East Policy in 1991. The policy has three broad dimensions:

1. Efforts to develop broad economic and strategic relations with ASEAN as an emerging group of nations.
2. Making sub-regional initiatives like BIMSTEC or MEKONG-GANGA Cooperation for developing close ties with countries at sub-regional level.

3. Consolidating bilateral relationship with the non-ASEAN countries of this region, particularly Japan, South Korea, and Australia.¹³

2.03. Rationale of Look East Policy

India's "Look East" policy constitutes an increasingly important dimension of India's foreign policy. Initially focused on the ASEAN countries, India's opening towards its eastern neighbours gradually encompassed China, Japan, and South Korea and, lately, Australia and New Zealand too. With virtually all countries India has an unprecedented level of engagement and, with the exception of China, much greater mutual trust and confidence. Over the last five years, high-level visits have been exchanged with all countries and are now a routine feature of India's ties with the countries of this region. India is a regular Summit-level Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, and a member of both the East Asia Summit (EAS) and the Asia– Europe Meeting (ASEM). Trade, economic, and defence ties have been surging ahead. Air links, tourism, and people-to-people ties have developed dramatically. This region is today India's largest trade partner (about 35% of total trade), ahead of Europe as well as the United States, and an increasingly important source of foreign direct investment into India. It is with the countries of this region that India has been most active in concluding or negotiating Free Trade Agreements (FTA) or Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreements.

Such a close engagement is a far cry from the early 1990s, when India embarked on its "Look East" policy. The phrase itself correctly implies that until then India had not been paying sufficient attention to this region. Why was this so? After all, there is much that brings India and East Asia together—no history of war or conflict, only of peaceful interaction through the flow of trade and the movement of people, and the intermingling of cultures and ideas. Yet South Asia and East Asia have developed independently over the last few centuries. During the last five centuries, when Asia's destiny was primarily shaped by the colonial powers, memories of shared commonalities of history and culture weakened. In the post-colonial era, India and the nations of East Asia (despite some of them being fellow members of the Non-Aligned Movement) found themselves on

¹³ <http://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/indias-look-east-policy>

opposite sides of the Cold War divide. The natural development of India's links with its eastern neighbours was blocked by the state of India's relations with Bangladesh and Myanmar. Bangladesh did not give adequate transit facilities to India. Myanmar was a closed society and its ties with India were quite minimal until the early 1990s. Finally, because of India's colonial links, the Indian elite tended to look towards the West rather than to its then relatively less developed eastern neighbours. While this historical legacy has ensured that there is no baggage to act as a drag on India–East Asia relations in the twentyfirst century, it has also led to a situation where neither region has impinged verymuch on the other's consciousness and foreign policy priorities.

2.03.1. Economic Imperatives

India's "Look East" policy, in the first place, has an economic logic. Factors, discussed above, like the end of cold war, financial crisis, and the logic of globalization—compelled India for economic reforms in 1991. This marked a significant change from India's inward looking economic orientation to meaningful economic integration with the rest of the world. India's early assessment of the potential of the Southeast Asian countries was faulty, which explains why India did not take up an invitation to join ASEAN, but by the 1990s the "Asian Tigers" had started roaring and compelled India's attention. Realising that it had missed some openings in the past because of its autarkic path of development, India was now keen on plugging into the dynamic ASEAN region that was rapidly evolving into a critical mass of global economic strength. In recent years the faltering of the Doha Round of global trade negotiations and the proliferation of regional trading arrangements in Asia have added urgency to this quest. India's growing self-confidence arising out of its success both in meeting the challenges posed and in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by globalization has given it a new perspective on the importance of East Asia. As a reality check, however, it should be noted that trade with India currently is still a very small fraction of the overall foreign trade of the East Asian countries.

Central to India's "Look East" policy is India's economic engagement with ASEAN. India became a full Dialogue Partner and a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996. However, it was only at the turn of the century that India's "Look East"

initiative elicited a serious response from ASEAN and other East Asian countries. Since 2002 India has become a Summit-level Dialogue Partner of ASEAN. India acceded to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia as early as 2003. This step, together with India's offer to conclude an FTA at the first India– ASEAN Summit in Cambodia in 2002, brought credibility to India's seriousness of purpose in engaging with ASEAN. What is important in the India–ASEAN engagement is the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement signed in 2003, which envisages the establishment of an FTA in goods, services, and investment over the next decade or so. Tough negotiations caused a delay of more than three years in finalizing the FTA in goods. Negotiations were concluded in July –August 2008 and the India– ASEAN FTA in goods should be formally signed at the next India–ASEAN summit some time in 2009. Discussions should begin shortly on negotiating an India– ASEAN FTA in services and investment. India has reason to be satisfied with its “Look East” policy, which not only strengthened India's relationship with ASEAN but also provided a complementary institutional framework and a catalyst for India's bilateral ties with individual ASEAN countries. Besides, it has opened the doors to India's membership of the EAS and ASEM.

Much better infrastructure, including connectivity—by air, road, rail, and sea—is needed to sustain the anticipated accelerated all-round growth in relations between India and East Asia after the India– ASEAN FTA comes into force. As a result of India's initiative to significantly liberalize its civil aviation policy, air connectivity between India and the region, particularly with ASEAN, has vastly improved since 2004. India is building many cross-border road links with Myanmar. An India–Myanmar – Thailand Highway project is under consideration, although progress is much slower than originally envisaged because the three countries haven't been able to agree upon the financial terms of the project. In 2004 there was a hugely successful India–ASEAN Car Rally starting from Guwahati and ending on Batam island of Indonesia, just off Singapore, after passing through Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Singapore. This event brought home to the people of both India and the ASEAN countries in a dramatic matter the little understood geographical contiguity of India, especially its Northeast Region, and ASEAN. It did promote greater awareness of the potential for trade, tourism, and people-to-people contacts between India and ASEAN, but there is need for active

follow up. As for rail connectivity, India is conducting a feasibility study for upgrading and building the missing links between Jiribam in India's Manipur State and Mandalay in Myanmar, and is assisting in upgrading the Mandalay –Yangon railway sector. The eventual goal is to establish a Delhi–Hanoi rail link via Myanmar, Thailand, and Cambodia. Over time, these road and rail links could connect with the various north–south transport arteries being developed between China and Southeast Asia, thereby providing not only a cheap means of transport of goods, tourists, and pilgrims between India and the Indo–China countries, but also overland connectivity between the heartlands of India and China via Southeast Asia. Were such an economic artery bypassing the Malacca Straits to be established, this would have enormous commercial and strategic implications.

2.03.2. Strategic Considerations

The second factor driving India's policy towards this region is strategic. India's "Look East" policy is equally a response to the end of the Cold War that changed the global strategic environment. Moreover, natural relationships based on geographical contiguity and commonality of factors could now be re-established. It was increasingly untenable, illogical, and detrimental to India's long term national interests to regard South Asia and East Asia as separate strategic theatres interacting only on the margins. Over the last decade and a half or more, as frozen frontiers in Eurasia have thawed, and peace has returned to Indochina, new transport and other economic arteries have steadily come up all around India. Eurasia has diversified its connectivity with the outside world, with new transport and energy corridors linking it to the rest of the world, particularly China. Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam are being hard-wired with China and inexorably sucked into China's economic whirlpool. These mushrooming linkages are creating new long-term political linkages and economic interdependencies among Asian countries. Unfortunately, these leave out India, thereby creating a situation where India could remain strategically and economically boxed up in the South Asian region, mired in dealings with its fractious neighbours. The continuing relatively low share of its South Asian neighbours in India's global trade gives India limited economic opportunities in its immediate neighbourhood. In order to fulfill its aspirations of playing a greater regional

and global role, India needs an extended political and economic strategic space beyond South Asia. Given the constraints to India's west, a region full of imponderables, challenges, and troubles, moreover one with a relatively small population, the east is the only direction in India's strategic neighbourhood where opportunity beckons.

As a rising power possessing nuclear weapons, India is regarded as having the capability to play a "swing" role in the global and regional balance of power. ASEAN, Japan, and South Korea see closer ties with India as providing a useful balance and a hedge against China's current economic dominance and future uncertainties. Smaller countries in the region, fearing unilateralism by the big powers, see India as a potential security provider, even though it obviously cannot match China's military and economic power and presence in the region. India, which initially concentrated on the economic aspects of its "Look East" policy, is now giving increasing attention to its security aspects. Thus it is natural that India's defence cooperation, including joint exercises, coordinated patrolling, and training with many countries in ASEAN and East Asia should have dramatically grown in the last few years. Counter-terrorism and transnational crime, an area of growing concern to ASEAN since the Bali bombings of 2003, is a fast growing area of cooperation with ASEAN as a whole and with individual ASEAN countries. India has wide-ranging defence cooperation with Myanmar, holds regular naval, military and air exercises with Singapore, undertakes coordinated patrolling with Thailand and Indonesia along the international maritime boundary, and has growing defence and security cooperation with Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Malaysia.

The Tri-Services Command in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands gives credibility to India's regional naval capabilities and posture in the Bay of Bengal and adjoining regions. At the same time, seeing that the strategic horizons of many of the East Asian countries converge with those of India in the eastern Indian Ocean, India needs to keep in mind the sensitivities of the Southeast Asian countries. Malaysia was very upset over India providing an escort of high value US cargo through the Malacca Straits in 2002. Malaysia and Indonesia have been resisting any US initiative for the security of the Malacca Straits, which they feel should remain principally the responsibility of the littoral states. This is a position that India has broadly supported. There are two other

considerations to bear in mind. One, the Southeast Asian countries are looking for an alternative to Chinese domination. Two, they are very afraid that they will be caught in an India–China rivalry. Fortunately, there are many confidence-building and cooperative frameworks already in place, such as the India-sponsored MILAN exercises generally held at two-year intervals with the participation of ASEAN countries, Australia, New Zealand, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka; India’s active participation in the ARF; and India’s participation in the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (RCAAP). There are some other informal and Track-II dialogues such as the “Shangri-la Dialogue” sponsored by the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP). India’s growing bilateral military ties with the countries of the region have also served to create a higher level of mutual comfort between India and these countries. All these are integral components of India’s maritime policy to its east.

2.03.3. Domestic Dimension

More recently, India’s “Look East” policy has developed a third important prong having an important domestic dimension, namely, how to help its Northeast Region (comprising the States of Sikkim, Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, and Mizoram) get over the handicap of its geographical location. Ninety-eight percent of the Northeast Region’s borders are with Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Tibet. Its only land link with the rest of India is through a narrow sliver of land because Bangladesh refuses to give transit facilities to India. Not fully integrated—both economically and emotionally—with the rest of India, the Northeast Region lags behind the rest of India in development and suffers from widespread insurgency movements. In order to help the Northeast Region get over these inbuilt constraints, India’s strategy envisages an intensification of the Northeast Region’s communication and economic links with Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries, thereby reducing the Northeast

Region's current overwhelming dependence on an unhelpful and uncooperative Bangladesh.¹⁴

2.04. From 'Look East' to "Act East Policy"

Initially, Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy decision-making hinted to a prioritisation of relations within India's own neighbourhood. This lent India's Look East policy even greater momentum, leading to an upgraded 'Act East Policy'(AEP) during the India-ASEAN Summit in Myanmar in November 2014. The foundation, objective remains the same but the policy was upgraded to provide impetus and increase its importance and focus on it, However, Prime Minister Modi's commitment to stability in the South Asian neighbourhood will not necessarily come at the cost of East Asian engagement. India's North-eastern states cannot be easily accessed from the mainland without Bangladesh's cooperation, therefore positive relations with India's South Asian neighbours is crucial to enhancing its land connectivity with Southeast Asia. In addition, the Prime Minister, Modi has advocated a 'Look East, Link West Policy' pointing to a broader Indo-Pacific conceptualisation of India's region. India is for greater regional integration of Indian economy with that of the ASEAN by expanding the scope of trade and investment. The 4th EAS Foreign Ministers' meeting focuses on cooperation in the areas of energy, education, disaster management and enhancing connectivity. Sushma Swaraj, India's Foreign Minister, reiterated India's position that India "would soon draft a five-year action plan starting 2016 for enhancing connectivity and cooperation in diverse areas". The three pillars on which regional integration hinges are culture, commerce, and connectivity. There are historical linkages between these countries in terms of culture and commerce but the implementation of the third pillar, i.e., connectivity, has become crucial in affirming the plausibility of strengthening regional ties. There is a need to improve connectivity through transport, technology, and cultural ties. India and the 10-member countries of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) signed the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in services and investments on September 8, 2014. The final

¹⁴ Rajiv Sikri, India's "Look East" Policy, *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 2009

agreement was signed two years after the conclusion of detailed negotiations on the pact. In 2010, India and the 10- ASEAN member countries signed the Free Trade Agreement in goods. The realisation of the FTA in services is expected to give the much needed impetus to India's trade and investment relations with the ASEAN member countries. The Indian government as well as the private sector has been ready for the agreement but the ASEAN members couldn't expedite the pact. Countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand took several months to set things right domestically. The other nine countries viz. Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam have ratified the agreement. The reason for the Filipino apprehension was that the Indian services sector might sweep the Philippine market and dominate the ASEAN services industry. However, as the FTA in services is implemented, India's share in total trade would also rise as India is a leader in the services sector, making India-ASEAN FTA a 'win-win situation' for all. With the completion of India-ASEAN FTA, the road to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) seems clearer. RCEP includes the 10 ASEAN member countries and its six partners including India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.¹⁵

To benefit most from the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, India has to keep going on the economic reform path. In this regard, steps to strengthen its medium, small and micro enterprises (MSME) sector are critically important which will help it not only sustain the free flow of trade, but also to become a more competitive player. For India, an integrated South East Asia remains something to look forward to. India signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with the ASEAN region in August 2009, which has come into effect fully. However, like any other economic partnership, because of FTA implementation, there will be some gainers and some losers – some sectors in which India has competitive advantage will gain, whereas the sectors where the ASEAN has competitive advantages, India is likely to lose.¹⁶

¹⁵ Dr. Dhrubajyoti Bhattacharjee, "India's Vision on Act East Policy" at the National Seminar on "India's Act East Policy: Problems and Prospects in North East India" at Imphal, Manipur: 28-29 January 2016

¹⁶ Dr. Dhrubajyoti Bhattacharjee, "India's Vision on Act East Policy" at the National Seminar on "India's Act East Policy: Problems and Prospects in North East India" at Imphal, Manipur: 28-29 January 2016

CHAPTER III

Locating North East India in the Act East Policy

3.01. Introduction

Ever since the introduction of the Look East Policy (LEP) presently known as Act East Policy (AEP), the North Eastern region of India has to play an important role for the implementation of the AEP. North East India's geographical and strategic location is the main factor of its gaining importance in the second phase of Look East Policy. So, in this chapter we will try to understand the North East India as geo-strategic location and then we will also focus on the ethnic issues which are prevailing in the region.

3.02. North East India in the Act East Policy

The North Eastern region has an important role to play in India's "Act East" policy because of its geographic proximity to the South East Asian region. North-East India shares international border with China, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, and Bangladesh. The historical trade links between the North-eastern part of India and the Southeast Asian countries were severed during the colonial rule, and it is perceived that the revival of connectivity and trade will enhance India-ASEAN trade. Border trade between India (through the north-eastern states) and ASEAN promises a huge potential. Potential for trade and investment includes skill development, agricultural products, manufacturing, and energy among others (Haokip, 2010). North East India is expected to gain through project initiatives such as India- Myanmar Friendship Road or the Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa Road; India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway; Kaladan Multimodal project and the Optical fiber network between North-East India.¹

The strategic significance of NER was identified by the policymakers at a much earlier stage, though looking east through the lens of NER became a priority for India's foreign policy only in 2003. This initiative apparently intended to see NER not as the periphery

¹ Speech Of Hon'ble Governor Shri V. Shanmuganathan On The 1st Academic Session, "Act East And India's North-East: How To Reap The Dividend", Organised By The ASEAN Study Centre, Indian Council Of Social Science Research (ICSSR) - North East Regional Centre (NERC), North-Eastern Hill University (Nehru), Shillong On 09 Aug 2016

of India but, as the centre of an integrated economic area (Baruah, 2004). Given this policy shift in the LEP, the prospective beneficiary should have been the Northeastern states and with almost a decade passing by, there should have been sufficient industrial, infrastructural and economic growth in comparison to the rest of the country.

The LEP has no doubt enhanced the trade relationships between India and ASEAN with trade estimating US\$ 76 billion in 2012-13 and growing to US\$ 39 billion in the first six months of 2013-14 (Government of India, 2014) and nearly US\$ 44 billion in the first six months 2014-15 (Government of India, 2015). But, the benefits for the NER have been very minimal (AIC, 2014).

The North Eastern Council (NEC) of the Ministry of Development of North East Region's (MDONER) *North Eastern Region: Vision 2020* document released in 2008 has rightly stated that 'despite the fact that the Look East Policy has been in existence for more than a decade and a half and even as it has substantially benefits the states in other parts of India, its benefits to NER has been negligible' (Government of India, 2008). The *North Eastern Region: Vision 2020* document highlights that this is because maximum trade between India and Southeast Asian countries flows through the sea routes (through Chennai, Kolkata and Vizag). The land routes passing through NER, which can be the most beneficial measures to improve the trade by reducing the transit cost and time, have not been fully utilized. The LEP is in its third decade and NER still remains aloof from the regional benefits (Dahiya, 2012).

A major constraint to trade through the land routes of NER has been inadequate transport connectivity to this region with its eastern neighbours. Also, the existing roadway and highways within the Northeastern states especially along the borders are in poor condition and are not suitable for high-volume international trade (Downie, 2015). The logistic arrangements and trade facilities measures along the borders are not sufficient and a large amount of trade takes place through the illegal medium (Singh, T.n.d.). These infrastructural gaps need to be addressed soon and a well-developed transport infrastructure within Northeast and with the rest of the country simultaneously along, with the development of cross-border connectivity with the neighbouring countries is essential (Das, 2016).

Towards this, Indian government has undertaken various bilateral and multilateral projects to enhance the connectivity, such as Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project and Rhi- Tiddim Road Project. But these projects, initiated almost a decade ago, have not been completed and the government is yet to bring any progress in the infrastructure development in NER. The condition of the road infrastructure of the Trilateral Highway on the Thailand side is well developed and progressing on Myanmar side, but the proposed roadway within Northeast, particularly between Moreh (Manipur, India) to Myanmar stands crippled. The Stilwell Road/ Ledo Road, also a major link to extend trade linkages with Myanmar and China faces major hindrance due to the disagreements between Indian and Myanmar government. Both India and Myanmar are reluctant to open this route for trade because of security concerns.²

Northeast region is important in the sense that it has the potential to facilitate or prevent India's vital Look East Policy. Connectivity in all its aspects with the Northeast and beyond will have to improve substantially for this policy to achieve the substance and credibility that it deserves. Without this, India will be left out of the process of East Asian integration, a process, which Southeast Asia finds itself completely enmeshed with.

The geographical proximity between its Northeastern region and Southeast Asia was not given much importance initially when India launched its 'Look East' Policy (LEP) in 1991. Among the factors that hindered the possibilities of garnering regional economic complementarities was the lack of adequate physical connectivity between India's Northeast and Southeast Asia. It was only after 1997 when Myanmar was admitted into ASEAN as a full member, India's Northeast assumed importance in its LEP. This policy facilitated India's economic and strategic relations with Southeast Asia but the Northeast in this policy remained insignificant.

There has been growing realization that development of physical connectivity with Southeast Asia is a prerequisite to fully harness the opportunities provided by LEP. For the LEP to be relevant for the region, India has to give greater emphasis on improving

² Saikia, Panchali, 'Embracing India's Northeast in BIMSTEC', *Look East to Act East Policy: Implications for India's Northeast*

connectivity through all the possible modes of infrastructure development such as land routes, railways, air connectivity, waterways, energy infrastructure development both in field of hydroelectric and hydrocarbon and telecommunication linkages.

Realising the importance of the region, India has started some bilateral projects and also become party to some multilateral projects, to enhance connectivity between the Northeast and Southeast Asia. Some of these projects include the Moreh –Tamu--Kalewa Road, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Trans Asian Highway, India-Myanmar rail linkages, Kaladan Multimodal project, the Stilwell road, Myanmar-India-Bangladesh gas and/or oil pipeline, Tamanthi Hydroelectricity project and optical fiber network between Northeast India and Southeast Asia. However, the existing geographical, technical, political and security challenges limit the process of infrastructure development.

What is needed to address these challenges is to initiate intraregional capacity building programmes in the Northeast, development of better connectivity within the region, development of export oriented industries, development of technical and entrepreneurial skills in the local population and develop consensus over a common agenda for the development of Northeast to utilize all the sanctioned funds in an effective and result oriented manner. The Northeast should be involved in various sub-regional initiatives, such as the BIMSTEC, MGC and Kunming initiative, as a separate economic entity, which, in turn, would facilitate the harnessing of available regional economic opportunities. The bottom line is that the idea of enhancing connectivity between Northeast and Southeast Asia is a welcome step and has the potential to change the socio-economic landscape of the region. But to make this effective, it should be supplemented by efforts to prepare the Northeast for this opportunity.³

3.03. The Look East Policy and the Northeast

The economic reforms of 1991 in India opened up India's economy and put economics in the forefront of its foreign policy. The initial economic diplomacy of India aimed at

³ Levesque, Julien, 'Northeast in India's Look East Policy' IPCS

promoting regional economic integration, by looking towards the East, particularly with Southeast Asian countries. In due course of time, the 'Look East' policy is in consonance with India's economic transformation and growth, help foster closer strategic contacts between India and Southeast Asian countries, and help increase in the volume of bilateral trade with other developing countries in Asia and people-to-people interaction. India's trade with countries bordering its northeastern region also witnessed dramatic expansion; but this increase in the volume of trade with the eastern neighbours has had little or no impact on the Northeast (Haokip, 2009, p. 115). This is primarily because India looks towards the 'East' but not through its 'northeast'. In order to end the isolation which Baruah (2005) termed as 'colonialism's most enduring negative legacy', borders need to be opened and the age-old practices and ties that existed in the borderlands, particularly among the trans-border communities, also need to thrive. The Look East policy, in principle, aims for the creation of an enabling environment to end the landlocked situation and isolation of the northeastern region by opening up the borders and reintegrating the region's economy through improved connectivity and trade between northeast India and Southeast Asian countries.

Culturally North East India is diverse region and it is very rich in natural resources with a possibility to emerge as the economic hub since it is close to Southeast Asian countries. It shares border with Myanmar, Bangladesh, China and Bhutan which is the linking ground of India with the ASEAN countries which is vital for the implementation of Act East Policy. This part of the country cannot be avoided for India's objective to become regional power to gain economic benefits.

For the government of India, North East India is the linking space with Southeast Asia and if the free trade and economic intervention is materialized this Northeastern region will get immense opportunities and people of this region will be able to get engaged in the economic activities brought by the new foreign policy of India, the Act East Policy. The region's geographical location and its historical and cultural affinities with its neighbours across the borders can be taken advantage of as a 'soft power resource' (Baruah, 2004: 33).

India launched Look East Policy second phase in 2003 which focus not only the increasing ties with ASEAN economies but also it gives more importance on looking East via North Eastern India. The term “Look East” was not that much popular during 1990s, but it gained popularity recently which is becoming a core of the discussion in current time. Previously North East India was regarded as the periphery, now has given new importance as a region, which calls as “extended North East” (Das, 2010). North India is to be place of free trade and opening of border by relaxing the authoritative complexities is gaining its lead. Myanmar and Bangladesh seem to play an important role in the beneficial implementation of Look East Policy or Act East Policy in present.

In January, 1994 a border trade agreement was signed between India and Myanmar to give new effort to Look East Policy. This agreement was initiated to benefit equally for both side of the party. This border trade should be done through the Land custom System called as Moreh for Manipur and Tamu on the Myanmar side; Zokhawthar and Rih in Mizoram & Myanmar respectively and other places can be decided by both countries mutually.

In April, 1995 the border trade between Moreh and Tamu was opened and Rih-Zokhawthar part in January, 2004 agreeing on 22 items to be traded. Some more tradable items were included in 2001. The border trade between Manipur and Myanmar is of a daily experience of the people living in both side of the border (Prabhakara, 2004).

Other than the formal trade there are a lot of goods and services exchanges between the countries. 2006, July India opened the Nathula pass via Sikkim for trading with China, likewise there is a large possibilities for India to get engaged in the international trade if the infrastructure is developed properly. North East India can be transformed into economic hub by opening the new trade routes towards neighbouring countries like China, Bangladesh, and Myanmar.

For successful materialization of the objectives of the Act East Policy, India has initiated some Foreign Trade Agreement with Southeast Asian countries. The expansion of border trade between North East India and neighbouring counties are taking a pace gradually. India should give importance on exportable goods rather than importing foreign goods.

To enhance the economic environment of North East India has initiated many projects for among the neighbouring countries to improve the connectivity to reach ASEAN countries. It can be mentioned here that regarding these projects India build 165 km in Myanmar as sign of friendship between the countries. Some of the essential projects are taken such as Trilateral Highway which pass through India, Myanmar and Thailand, India- Myanmar Railways, Trans-Asian highway, gas pipeline via India- Myanmar and Bangladesh.

India and Myanmar also concluded agreement for opening Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Facility to improve the water transport of North East India to access the facility to avail the benefit of Myanmar's Sittwe port. If this project comes into reality India can take some economic steps through North east India because water route will be more efficient and less costly. India also put more efforts to improve the road ways via Mizoram. Apart from road links India also trying to construct a rail links which connects Jiribam of Manipur to Vietnam.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee, then prime minister of India, shown interest to held ASEAN car rally in the ASEAN- India summit of 2003 held in Bali and accordingly the car rally was held in 22nd of November, 2004. After this Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also rregarded the importance of North East India by saying it as the gateway to the central Asia. This ASEAN car rally indicates that there is a clear land route passing through Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia where North East India works as a vital region. Another India-ASEAN car rally was done in November-December, 2012 with the objectives of economic interrelation and cooperation with the concerned states. Here also North East India brought into focus.

With the advent of Globalisation the national borders literally vanishing since the governments of different countries made so many relaxations for the trade and commerce between and among the countries on economic terms. Efforts have been put to bring North East India's state in the discourse of free trade while discussing about Look East Policy or Act East Policy. Act East Policy should give a space to the ethnic groups to participate in the border trade within the formal system pursue by India and Myanmar by bilateral agreement (Haokip, 2015).

3.04. Challenges Ahead

Recently there came a dramatic change in the extension of international trade with bordering countries of North East India. But comparing to the large picture of Act East Policy North East has been playing a very nominal role because most of the trade are done through sea routes. Still North East India carries a huge potentiality to link up the Myanmar-India trade. Government should give efforts to increase the tradable items between India and Myanmar.

Following their research on India, Goldman Sachs Company's economists, Jim O'Neill and Tushar Poddar (2008), came up with a report on 'Ten Things for India to achieve its 2050 Potential'. Some of the findings, such as, improving governance, increasing trade with neighbours, increasing agricultural productivity and improving infrastructure, are essential elements needed in the northeastern region. In order to reap the benefits of this policy, particularly from FTAs with the economies of the East, Sushil Khanna (2005) has identified a few key variables, such as, transit arrangements, proliferation of trade routes and custom check posts and easy visa regime, making it possible for traders, business persons and transport operators to move in and out of the region (Haokip, 2015).

Therefore, this North Eastern region needs a huge investment to improve infrastructure by constructing roads, airports, rail links, fast internet and communication system. In Shukla Commission in 1997 calculated the investment which would exceed 25000 crores (Sukla commission, 1997).

Vision 2020 for North Eastern India tries to increase investment and productivity of the region to equalize the economic progress with the rest of the states of India. Government cannot do such a large investment alone so there comes the necessity of private enterprise. Government of India is looking for parties to invest in North East India.

To attract foreign investment as well as domestic investors an adequate economic environment is required. For this reason the Government of India should deal with the ethnic conflicts which took the form of insurgency. Insurgency is one of the vital problems in North East India due to which the investors do not want come in this region.

Moreover India should not limit its neighbouring relation only with counter insurgency steps (Khanna, 2008).

The Act East Policy also worked as the instrument to take help from the bordering countries to resist the insurgency problems of India for long lasting solution of this issue.

The sound governance is also an issue in North Eastern India since this region is the most troubled section of the country. It is difficult to govern the ungovernable which creates a big challenge for central government to implement its foreign policy including North East in its frame (Rosenau, 2007: 88).

Another problem is that the insurgent groups run a parallel authority of governance which is very challenging to deal with because the common people are motivated by the insurgent groups on ethnic ground which helps them to gain the faith and loyalty to run extra government in the locality.

Unless there is good governance, there cannot be progressive development, and there cannot be good governance unless the socio-political problems in the region are solved. These correlations indicate that the ultimate goal of the Look East policy cannot be attained unless socio-political problems which continue to plague the region are solved and upon which the continuity of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) of 1958 depends (Haokip, 2015). By observing the current situation we can say that without addressing the insurgency problems we cannot expect economic growth in the region.

Along with this insurgency there is another demand of Inner Line Permit system which also acts against the free trade in in the North Eastern region. In this system outsiders needs to obtain a permit for entering into the 'protected areas'.²⁰ Though the colonial rule integrated the Northeast with mainland India, their policies, which were enacted in various acts and regulations, have acted as a barrier and prevented socio-cultural and political interaction between the hill areas of the Northeast with the plains. When everyone in the region wants spoils from regional economic cooperation under the Look East policy, the Inner Line Regulation can hinder the implementation of this policy. This disjunction has to be seriously looked into once again. The concerns of the tribals in the

region, like protecting identity, culture and land, can be dealt with in other ways without restricting the movement of people across state borders (Haokip, 2010, p. 97).

Besides the regional problems, the imagination of an 'extended Northeast' for commercial and people-to-people contact is straight-jacketed by the 'Sinophobia' of India. A realist assessment by Batabyal (2006, p. 179) sees the Look East policy as a strategy 'to play a new balancing game against China in the Southeast Asian and the Asia-Pacific region'. This assessment is always downplayed by official India; yet, if one carefully looks into any initiative involving China, such as the BCIM Forum and the rebuilding of the Stilwell Road, it is a non-starter. However, sub-regional cooperations that do not involve China such as MGC, BIMSTEC and the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project are pursued with vigour by India. So, how much India is willing to meaningfully engage with China in the future will depend on the normalization of strategic and territorial disputes. Besides '[t]he internal dynamics of the region in terms of the clan loyalties of the tribal people, inter-tribal clashes, insurgency, transborder ethnic ties also adversely affect the security of the border areas' (P. Das, 2010, p. 9), leading to stricter border controls despite the increasing mobility of people and goods.

To make trade in the northeastern region meaningful, processing industries have to be set up to manufacture quality goods, which can be exported in international markets at acceptable prices. Agriculture has to be improved both in terms of production and productivity. In the absence of which the region would just be a corridor between mainland India and Southeast Asia. The new 'North East Industrial Policy, 2007' has practically made the whole region a special economic zone (Kumar, 2007).

The role of the northeastern states in the Look East policy is negligible and the policy seems to be dictated by the Central Government. This is in sharp contrast to the role played by Yunnan province of China in its relationship with its Southeast Asian neighbours. The Yunnan province plays an important role in the institutions of the Greater Mekong sub-region. However, there is little room for India's northeastern states in the MGC or in BIMSTEC. It is only through concentrated efforts in various thrust areas that northeast can hope to be a part of the bridge connecting India and Southeast Asia. Giving the northeastern states a direct role in this policy by taking advantage of the

region's history and shared cultural ties with East and Southeast Asia can ensure a successful Look East policy (H.N. Das, 2007).

The Look East policy is expected to bring in a new era of development for the Northeast. There is vast scope for cooperation between India and East and Southeast Asia, and India's northeast can benefit enormously from formalized regional and sub-regional institutional arrangements. For this, infrastructure of the region has to improve and its resources geared up to meet the demands of the globalized world. However, for any meaningful activity to take place in the region, several hurdles need to be overcome. Government of India needs to forge cooperation with the neighbouring countries to address some of the important challenges like insurgency, illegal migration and drug trafficking, which are all transnational in nature. Initiatives to facilitate interactions between transborder communities and ensure the participation of these communities in border trade and inter-country trade can be taken up. The bottomline is the region should not be reduced to a mere transit corridor but as a source of local manufacture and enhancing people-to-people contact. The emphasis should be on industrialization and growth and the eventual overall development for which the Indian government and the northeastern states must adopt proactive role and provide not only infrastructure but also political stability and good governance. Greater participation of the local people in trade, production, particularly raising agricultural productivity, and distribution activities should be given importance.

In this continuing stalemate, the possible community–geography trade-offs could be: increased improvement of transport and communication in the borderlands; an easy visa regime and other related mechanisms to ease the regulation of movement of goods and people in borders; and special provisions for local communities in such fortified borderlands for various economic ventures in border trade points. There is dilemma between securitization of the border on the one hand, and facilitation of trade and people-to-people contact on the other hand. However, an appropriate balance between the two would be a pro tem solution in this current scenario. The lacunae in 'policy' and practice can only be obviated with a strong focus on resolving local problems and politics of the northeastern region first, before looking beyond the borders. An effective border

management system could be the way out in negotiating the rigid state-centric territoriality and transborder socio-economic life.

With the changed orientation from looking east to acting east in recent times, the policy should be receptive to ideas and include the notion of community groups debating the 'policy' as well as participating in the implementation of the policy. Thus, as the reorientation of the policy indicates, before India 'acts East', the government must have ardent will to solve the complex problems in the region, upon which the success of the policy depends to a large extent. This could reduce the difference in policy ideals, from the 'integrated economic space' and the new political imagining of 'extended northeast', to the existent realities, the internal and external dynamics that adversely affect security in the border areas. How elusive the ideals of the 'Look East' policy may appear, with the right commitment and intervention of the national government and by giving a role to the northeastern states in this process, the obstacles in this policy can be overcome.

For many years now, since 1992, when it laid its seed and slowly gathered momentum in policy circles, the "Look East" policy has been oft repeated in New Delhi's strategic and policy circles as one of India's foremost long-term policy visions to open up its economy for investment and trade with Southeast Asia. Increasingly now, the reference has changed from "Looking East" to "Acting East" by which one would expect that the policy is in its implementation phase. In augmenting the "Act East" policy, the northeast of India emerges, by the criterion of geography, as the region which will act as the 'strategic catalyst' or 'game changer' in accomplishing the vision that the policy aspires to embolden. Situated between China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Myanmar and with an international border stretching up to 4, 500 km, the region has held the promise of acting as a bridge between India and Southeast Asia for years.

3.05. Look East/Act East and Northeast: Measures Underway

Some of the measures which have been undertaken under the aegis of the "Look East/Act East" policy with a focus on northeast India include the proposed Asian Highway and Asian Railway Link and the natural gas pipeline, the Imphal-Tamu road going on to Kalembo railway onto Mandalay in Myanmar, and also the plan to construct a 1360 km

trilateral highway from Moreh to Mae Ot in Thailand through Bagan in Myanmar. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Facility aimed at establishing connectivity between Indian ports on the eastern side and Sittwe port in Myanmar through a riverine transport corridor and road in Mizoram is envisaged as providing an alternate trade route to the northeast. For purposes of Burmese gas transfer through the northeast, India is investing \$100 million in improving the old colonial Burmese port of Sittwe on the west Burmese coast. It is expected that with deeper ties between these countries, the largely illegal flow of goods through Moreh (Manipur) into other northeastern states from Southeast Asia will become legalized. In this context, it is arguably possible for the northeastern states to develop individual economic relations with, for instance, Thailand or Vietnam. Many analysts are of the firm belief that this kind of a two-way model will create a truly federal system of democracy in India.⁴

The region is also expected to benefit from the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Kunming Initiative which have been undertaken by India and China respectively to reach out to ASEAN. The Mekong-Ganga Cooperation was launched by India on November 10, 2000, at Vientiane, Laos, to boost cooperation in tourism, culture and education with India, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Myanmar as signatories. These countries agreed to undertake joint transportation projects, including the trans-Asian highway. This initiative is India's most significant venture in the region. The best part about the Mekong initiative is that it has the potential for direct flights between Guwahati- Ho Chi Minh City-Imphal-Hanoi. For China, the Kunming Initiative linking the Chinese province of Yunnan with Myanmar, India's northeastern states, and Thailand, holds promise of greater economic interaction. Northeast India, by reviving its old historical, cultural and traditional ties with Southeast Asia will profit, if one is to take a hint from other significant trans-border linkages like those of Basque, Catalonia, and Ireland, where the European Union allows "transnational politics of recognition", which empowers them from a marginalised existence in their own states. In this context, the old Stillwell Road connecting Margherita-Ledo in Assam through Myanmar's Hukawng and Magaung

⁴ Namrata Goswami, Looking east through India's North East, p.9.

valleys to the Yunnan province in China, built by Joseph Stillwell and the 14th Allied Army during World War II could be a potential road link.⁵

On July 02, 2008, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh released the *North-Eastern Region Vision 2020*, a document which identified various challenges required to bring about peace and prosperity in the northeastern region by 2020. In one of its chapters, *Vision 2020* specifies the benefits of the “Look East” policy for the northeast. According to the *vision*, “the LE (Look East) policy should be an important factor in promoting economic ties of the NER (North Eastern Region) states with its neighbours with a view to ending its economic isolation”.⁶ The document stressed the fact that since the people of the northeast share cultural ties with the Southeast Asian countries and China, strengthening relations with them is going to assist development. Some of the recommendations of the *Vision Document* include the removal of restrictions on border trade via Moreh, Nathu La, and other entry points; unrestricted trade with neighbouring countries in agriculture and meat products; activating of land customs stations; and integrating IT facilities in promoting trade with the ASEAN countries. The bottom line for outlining the several measures and the *Vision Document 2020* is to bring home the fact that there has been an effort at the conception and policy levels to craft the idea of “Acting East” via the northeast.⁷ This by itself is laudable. However, any field visit to the northeast region, especially the areas, for example, the Moreh town, which have been identified as gateways via land to Southeast Asia, reveals a completely different reality that counters the rosy picture portrayed by the “Act East” policy. The roads are non-existent; the markets dilapidated; there is hardly any respectable financial transfer system or trade outlet for serious trading in border towns; and economic activity is at best illegal and haphazard with no predictable charts to help business from Southeast Asia plot their investment plans.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ North Eastern Region Vision 2020, no.13, p. 271.

⁷ ibid

3.06. Conclusion

There seems to be realization of the importance of the region for the success of the Act East Policy. On the surface, everything look optimistic with possibilities increased trade enormous, and the promises of a better life once the Asian highway and railway are set in place. There are, however, a few pressing challenges, which have to be dealt with simultaneously for the people of the northeast to truly benefit from a massive opening up to Southeast Asia. North East India is geo-strategically and economically vital for the implementation of Act East policy since it is the connecting point between mainland India and ASEAN countries. In many bilateral and multilateral cooperation of India North Eastern region can play an important role. However, there are also multiple challenges. First, the “Look East/ Act East” is a foreign policy conceptualised in the 1990s in the backdrop of the end of cold war and the subsequent vacuum created in Indian foreign policy. As a result, the policy was more of a response to the changing international politics rather than uplifting the northeastern region of India. It was only later around 2000 that the need for a proactive engagement of northeast India was felt. Second, there is a visible lack of local support or in other words, local people have not yet realize the possible opportunities it may yield. This is possibly because in the conceptualisation of the “Act East” policy, there is no room for the unique local ways of doing trade. The trade envisioned is of a high order, which ethnic societies are not prepared to handle. Even when it comes to border trade, the Indo-Myanmar trade agreement of 1994 does not provide for trade in agricultural goods, and, hence, it does not account for the needs of the northeast, which is heavily dependent on agriculture.⁸

Third, there is poor infrastructure. Road connectivity is pathetic and this is true for most of the roadways all across the northeast. The NH-39 (envisioned as Asian Highway 1) is in a pathetic condition. Road connectivity to towns and villages gets completely washed off during monsoon due to rains and landslides. Fourth, there is the problem of ethnic insurgency in the region, which is to be addressed for the success of the policy. The internal ethnic issues of North East India has also its implications on India’s foreign policy i.e. AEP. It becomes very important now to understand the tribal or ethnic

⁸ Ibid.

structure of the region before involving it into the larger framework of Act East Policy. The next chapter focuses on this important aspect of how ethnic identities in the region play out their politics and what implications it has for the Act East Policy.

CHAPTER IV

Ethnic Assertions in Manipur and Its Implications for the Act East Policy

4.01. Introduction

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of the various ethnic assertions in the states of North East region. This is followed by a discussion which focuses on the state of Manipur and particularly on the ethnic tensions which prevail among the three major communities in the state viz, the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis. The last section of the chapter discusses how ethnic conflicts in the state which essentially takes the form of claims of ethnic territories may impact India's Act East Policy.

4.02. Ethnic Assertions in India's North East

Ethnic conflict has occupied a considerable length of history of different nations both developed and developing. In Indian context ethnicity not only remains an important part of the reality but it also happens to be the source of a series of major problems. Ethnic conflict in India in recent history has religious, economic and sociological and political character. The story of north eastern state is hardly different from that. (Ethnic conflict in North East India: A case of Assam with special reference to B.T.A.D., Nipan Haloi)

The North-eastern region formed a separate geographical entity linked to the Indian mainland only by a narrow corridor. Here the linguistic reorganization formula could not be applied in the same way because of the existence of a very large number of tribes and languages and territorial intermixture of such tribes. Therefore, differences arose among the various ethnic and linguistic groups which had small populations but strong sub-regional and racial sentiments. Popular movements all over the region and some violence and insurgency resulted in the Union Government passing the North-Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971, which divided the North east region into seven distinct entities all of which ultimately became states of the Indian Union. Nagaland, of course, had become a state earlier in 1964.

“The reorganization of territories in North-East India was effected to enable the diverse ethnic and linguistic groups who inhabit the area to shape their own destinies without interference and to remove the feeling that they were being exploited by others.”(Majumdar, 92). This hope was belied, however, when smaller ethnic groups and sub-groups started demanding further vivisection of some of the states. Insurgent outfits also emerged demanding full independence for this or that part of the seven states and threatening to secede from the Indian union.

It is important to realize that before independence the British government’s policy was to keep the hill people isolated. They did not allow the hill people to be integrated with the main-stream of Indian life. This was exemplified by the Inner Line Permit system which quite successfully prevented the hill people from being swamped by others. However, this also prevented any real relationship between the hills and the plains people in economic, social and cultural fields.

After independence Prime Minister Nehru adopted a policy framework for the tribals influenced by the famous anthropologist Verrier Elwin. In fact, Nehru wrote the foreword to Elwin’s famous book “*A Philosophy for NEFA*”. NEFA became Arunachal Pradesh later. Nehru wrote that “the problem of the tribal areas is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and develop according to their wishes and genius. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled or that customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed upon them, will alienate them.” Elwin’s philosophy has been criticized as romantic. Adverse comments have also been made about his 1939 book *The Baiga* where he had advocated for some sort of “National Park” for the tribes in “a wild and largely inaccessible part of the country”. Later, Elwin regretted this and said that his suggestion was “badly put” and that “I should have realized the unfortunate connotations of the expression National Park”. Elwin explained that “there was no idea of keeping anything static and, in actual fact, there is continual creative development in all these fields.” While translating these ideas into action the then Advisor, NEFA, late Nari Rustomji, worked under the conviction that “the Hillman has, essentially, a morbid complexes induced by the unnatural life of city folk”. Rustomji, therefore, condemned the “reckless talk of uplifting

and civilizing the tribes. Officials and social workers must go to the suffered themselves and wish through their experience to spare others the pains they have to endure.”

When the Constitution of India, 1950 was drawn up during the years following independence the then Prime Minister of Assam, Bharat Ratna late Gopinath Bardoloi personally ensured that special provisions contained in the sixth schedule relating to the hill areas were included in the Constitution. He also initiated actions for inter-mixing of the hills and the plain people through various socio-cultural activities.

In spite of all these attempts at integration, however, fissiparous tendencies made their appearance as mentioned earlier. Many factors were responsible for these developments. The desire for self-expression, the perception of discrimination and injustice, aspirations of small states and a host of other factors were responsible for the rise of sub-national and ethnic movements all over Assam and the North-East.

In the wake of India's independence in 1947, the Nagas were the first to raise the flag of revolt. Even during British days many interior parts of Naga inhabited area remained un-administered by the imperial power although the British had annexed most of what is now called Nagaland around 1832.

Way back in 1918 the Naga Club came into existence. It became the platform for Naga unity. On January 10, 1929, the Naga Club submitted a memorandum to the Simon Commission in which it pleaded, on behalf of the Nagas, to the British Government “to leave us alone to determine for ourselves as in ancient times”. When India became independent, the Nagas demanded their own independence. Earlier they had formed the Naga National Council in 1946, which marked the beginning of political movement by the Nagas in search of their self-identity. Their struggle was based on the premise that the “nagas had no affinity with India whether racially, historically, politically is not part of Indian Territory neither are Nagas Indians.” Insurgency began under the leadership of A.Z. Phizo.

It was in the Shillong Accord of November 11, 1975, that “the representatives of underground organisations” of the Nagas first “conveyed their decision, of their own volition, to accept, without condition, the constitution of India”. Later events showed that

this promise was not carried out, in letter and spirit, by all the Naga outfits. Starting from late 1980, till the government of India reached an agreement with the Issac Muivah faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN) for a cease-fire, violence continued. Even after the formal cease-fire and intermitted talks sporadic incidents of violence have been recorded.

It is true that the Naga underground got divided into various groups, some of which fought against each other. But most organizations continued to demand an independent and greater Nagaland or Nagalim. They were not satisfied with Nagaland even as a full state of India. They were certainly not happy that some Naga uninhabited areas of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh had been left out of Nagaland. The basic fact is that these Naga outfits consider Nagas to be ethnically different from the other Indians and they want their right of self-determination outside India. Several rounds of talks have been taken place in recent years, but a lasting solution to this vexed problem, which has plagued the North-East for more than half a century, is not yet in sight.

It was the last British Deputy Commissioner of the erstwhile Naga Hill district of Assam, C.R. Pawsey, who established the Naga Hill District Tribal Council in April, 1946, with the objective of uniting all Naga tribes under one banner. Pawsey also reported to have played a pivotal role in the formation of the Naga National Council whose policy was “to establish a sovereign independent Naga country and to develop it according to the genius of Naga democratic customs and culture”. That was the beginning of insurgency in Nagaland. To quote the distinguished Anthropologist D.N. Majumdar, “during the British period, maybe due to the encouragement from British Officers like Charles Pawsey, ethnic identity organizations grew up among many of the major tribal communities of North-East India. In fact, the ground had been already prepared by the feeling among the hill tribes that ruling class, be it British or Indian, tended to adopt a policy of ethnic discrimination towards the hill people.”

In the erstwhile Lushai Hills districts of Assam, a similar role was played by the then Superintendent (same as Deputy Commissioner) McDonald who convened a meeting of the tribal chiefs in January 1946 and got a constitution called McDonald Roral Khawl drafted for Lushai Hills which provided for a separate legislature and a ministry. Later,

the Mizo Union was formed as a political party. They demanded, like the Nagas, that all areas with Mizo population in the neighbouring Manipur, Tripura and Chitagon Hill tracts should be included in the Mizo district proposed by them.

It was, therefore, the British administrators who planted the idea of separation and independence in the minds of the concerned ethnic groups and organizations. This later metamorphosed into insurgencies in both Nagaland and Mizoram. The British officials named above were obviously unhappy with the decision of their home government to leave India. They made every effort to scuttle the proposal. Failing that they prepared the tribes to cause confusion and pandemonium after India's independence. But it was the factor of ethnicity which they capitalized on. In Mizoram this feeling was so strong that some secessionist groups wanted to merge with Burma (present Myanmar) because they were ethnically closer to the tribes of upper Burma.

For almost two decades after independence the tribes of Lushai Hills district simmered with discontent over many issues. They felt deeply hurt by the alleged discriminatory treatment by the Assam Government particularly during 1959 "Mautam" (famine) in the wake of large scale flowering of wild bamboo and the 1960 introduction of Assamese as the official language. The Mizo National Famine Front, formed in 1960 to help the famine victims, converted itself into the Mizo National Front (MNF). The MNF raised the banner of insurgency on February 28, 1966 when it attacked several important government installations, looted the Aizawl Treasury and kidnapped the Sub-Divisional Officer, Lungleh. On March, 1966 the MNF, under the leadership of Laldenga, formally declared independence from India.

Insurgency continued for twenty long years till the Mizoram Accord was signed on June 30, 1986. The insurgent leader Laldenga was sworn in as Chief Minister on August 21, 1986. Mizoram, which had been made a union Territory on January 21, 1972, became a full-fledged state on August 29, 1988. Laldenga's ministry lasted only for eighteen months. But since then Mizoram has been peaceful.

Tripura has been the homeland of 9 different tribes. It was a peaceful princely state under the British. For a thousand years Tripura was ruled by a dynasty of tribal origin. Its ethnic

problem started with the partition of the country in 1947. Hundreds of thousands of Bengali Hindus from the erstwhile East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) came rushing into Tripura and swamped the indigenous tribals into a minority. Later even Muslim migrants from Bangladesh came and swelled the non-tribal population. This created a crisis of identity for the tribals.

The Tripura Upajati Juba Samiti (TUJS) was formed on June 10, 1967 to fight Bengalee chauvinism as well as the neglect of the tribals. The tribals resented the consequences of their economic deprivation and political eclipse. About the same time the leader Hrangkhwal revived the Sangram Union which had been formed earlier. This started the insurgency in Tripura. The main demands of TUJS included the creation of an autonomous district council under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution for the tribal people, restoration to the tribals of their land which had been illegally transferred to non-tribals, recognition of tribal Khasi as a state language and adoption of Roman scripts for Khasi. The violence that was unleashed by TUJS and some of the other insurgent outfits rocked Tripura for a long time resulting in the death of large number of Bengalee people and damages of property belonging to individuals and institutions. It also gave birth to the opposing organization- Amra Bengali- which killed a number of tribals besides fuelling the tension among the communities.

In 1977 CPI (M) came to power in Tripura. Led by Chief Minister Nripen Chakravorty the Communists initiated certain reforms in order to assuage tribal feelings. Khasi was recognized as the second official language of Tripura beside Bengali, Khasi was also made the medium of instruction in the primary schools of the tribal areas, restoration was ordered to the tribals of whatever land had been earlier appropriated by the Bengalis without the permission of District Magistrates, necessary steps were taken towards fulfillment of tribal quotas in employment, enabling legislation was passed for constitution of autonomous district councils similar to those in Assam and various other welfare steps were initiated for the benefit of the tribals. An Accord was signed with Hrangkhawl, the insurgent leader, at New Delhi in August, 1988. Sporadic violence, however, is still continuing. In the past few years Tripura has achieved tremendous progress in the economic field. The tribals have been enabled to share in this prosperity

by the State Government under the Chief Ministership of Nripen Chakravorty and after him under Manik Sarkar.

In Meghalaya ethnicity was the dominant factor, besides neglect and lack of economic development, in the very emergence of the state. What is significant, however, is the fact that three principal ethnic groups- Khasis, Jaintias and Garos- decided to live together in Meghalaya. They have had their conflicts and problems but are still remaining in one state. Some sporadic violence, particularly in Shillong, against outsiders erupts from time to time. But these are not very serious compared to what is happening in Tripura or Manipur.

In Arunachal Pradesh the different tribes have different aspirations. There are pockets of dissatisfaction and many grievances. But there have not yet been any major insurgencies or violent incidents.

Assam is big and the problems are multifarious. With scores of tribes living in the plains and the hills, Assam has a long history of agitation over this or that issue. Separation of Nagaland, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh made erstwhile Assam much smaller in area. But the problems did not diminish. The Assamese majority remained dissatisfied with the Centre. The other tribes had grievances against the Assamese and the Centre. These became more intense. The influx of millions of foreigners from Bangladesh, and some from Nepal, complicated the situation so much that the crisis of identity, which spawned insurgencies in Tripura, made its ugly appearance in Assam also. The rich mosaic of cultural variety turned into a nightmare of political maze which engulfed the state in a spate of insurgencies and consequent violence.

The United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) was born on April 7, 1979 in the playfield of the Ahom Kings in Sibsagar. It demanded freedom for Assam and separation from the Indian Union. The violence it unleashed in the late eighties and the early nineties has no parallel in the North-East. The damages it wrought can be compared with those in Jammu and Kashmir and Sri Lanka by their own insurgent outfits. ULFA has gone through several phases of transformation during the past quarter of a century. Its popular support has been eroded due mainly to its violence against civil population and its aligning with

ISI of Pakistan as also its tacit support to the Bangladeshis. Its cadre strength has been decimated by surrenders, arrests and deaths. It has lost its bases in Assam and it has been flushed out from its hideouts in Bhutan. ULFA's overall power is declining with its leaders and ranks getting distanced from each other. That is why ULFA has joined talks with the government albeit indirectly through the People's Consultative Group it has formed with some of the leading citizens who support ULFA's cause. But even now sporadic violence is being perpetrated by its hardcore elements particularly against the soft targets.

The Bodos have been giving vent to their grievances for a long time. But actual insurgency started only in the late eighties mainly due to the short sighted, narrow-minded and haphazard action of the Assam Gana Parishad Government which was misguided by some self-seeking junior bureaucrats. In fact, the Government did not have any policy at all. The Bodo insurgent outfits did tremendous damage to life and property. But they hurt themselves more in the process. The Bodos have now achieved Bodoland Territorial Autonomous Council (BTAC). It is doubtful, however, whether they will remain satisfied. They will probably try ethnic cleansing in the BTAC area where Bodos have a population of about 28 per cent only. Already the problems have started with the Koch Rajbangshis demanding their own territorial hegemony and their inclusion in the list of scheduled tribes. The Muslims have suffered at the hands of the Bodos. They are now apprehending ethnic cleansing. This will lead to more tension and conflict in the near future because the Muslims are not likely to remain passive for long. Already a number of Islamist insurgent groups have raised their heads. The Muslim Liberation Front of Assam (MULTA) is the chief among them.

In order to arrive at a solution of the problem experiments have been tried in the past few decades including creation of separate states to satisfy the smaller sub-nationalities. The North-East Council and the Ministry of DONER (Department of North-Eastern Region) have been formed, both of which are pumping in more money to the region for economic development. Beside BTAC other territorial Councils of Mishings, Tewas and Ravas have been formed to confer more power to these tribes. Many more powers have been transferred to the already existing districts council under the Sixth Schedule of the

Constitution. All these have been done in order to solve the ethnic problem. But whether these will fully satisfy the aspirations of all the ethnic groups will be seen only in the future. (Das, H.N., *Ethnic Aspirations and Insurgency in the North-Eastern Region of India*; Problems of Ethnicity in the North-East India edited by B.B. Kumar, Astha Bharati: Delhi, 2007).

Ethnicity is more in evidence in the insurgencies in Manipur. Here the Meities in the plains and the two main tribes of Kukis and Nagas in the hill are perpetually fighting. The Meiteis, who converted themselves into Vaishnavite Hindus in the seventeenth century and who form the majority community, feel neglected and discriminated against by the centre. In fact, “the average Manipuri blames New Delhi for most of their woes. This sense of grievance has fanned separatist sentiment”. Later, many insurgent outfits emerged which include the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in the mid-seventies of the last century. The other insurgent organizations which sprung up about the same time were the People’s Revolutionary Party of Kangleipak (PREPAK) and the Kangleipak Communist Party (KCP).

In the hills, the Nagas and the Kukis fought. Each had its own insurgent organization. They fought against the Centre and against each other. They also had problems with the neighbouring states because the Manipuri Nagas believed in greater Nagalim.

The violence is still continuing. But the scale is much less. The insurgencies in Manipur, both in the hills and the plains, are based on ethnicity as in the other states of the North-Eastern region. The following section focuses on the claims and contestations among various ethnic groups in the state of Manipur.

4.03. Ethnic Issues in Manipur

Manipur is the eastern most state of India which was merged to Indian Union in 1949. Manipur shares a long international border with Myanmar and this is the fact which makes Manipur as an area of focus while discussing about India’s foreign policy such as Act East Policy. Due to its geo-strategic location Manipur can play a vital role in determining India’s foreign policy because Manipur is the gateway to the South East Asia or to be more proper it is the linking ground of India and the ASEAN countries. Since last

two decades India is trying to build up a sound economic relation with ASEAN economy. Thus, Manipur is gaining more importance recently for the implementation of Act East Policy. As we know that for proper implementation as well as economic development relating to a foreign policy one particular region should be peaceful and cooperative. But in case of Manipur this requirements is lacking somewhere due to some internal ethnic assertions or ethnic conflict. So, this chapter discusses the prevailing ethnic assertions or conflicts among the major ethnic groups in Manipur and consequently we will also have a discussion on the implications of such ethnic conflicts on the Act East Policy.

4.04. Manipur and its People

Manipur is situated at the extreme eastern part of India, it shares border with Myanmar to the East and in the West there is Cachar district of Assam, to South Mizoram and in North there is Nagaland. Manipur is divided in two parts, hills and plains. The valley is the centre of Manipur which is only 10% of the total land. Meiteis inhabit the valley portion of the land, they call it “Sanaleibak” which means land of jewels. On the other hand hills occupy 90% of the total territory of Manipur. But interesting fact is that 90% of total population lives in the 10% valley. And plain people cannot buy land in hills, but hill people enjoy all the rights to purchase and to live in the valley region which looks a kind of disparity, but this was made during British period itself and the Constitution of India also recognized this policy to protect the rights, age old culture and tradition of the hill people. There are different tribes and community people who come from different religion, culture and traditions. The son of the soil in Manipur is of Mongoloid origin and linguistically they are in Tibeto-Burman stock. As per the census of 2011, the total population of Manipur is 2,570,390 and approximately 55% of this population is Meiteis. The Meities mostly live in Jiribam, the border area of Cachar district, Assam. The Meiteis are Hindu and they follow a religion called “Sanamahi”. Along with this there is a small section of Muslim community consisting 8% of total population called the Meitei-Pangals. Meitei-Pangals mainly live in the middle of the valley portion of Manipur (Siamkhum, 2014).

The hill is surrounded by valley and there we find the inhabitation of the Nagas and Kuki, Chin, Zomi, Mizo ethnic groups. In Naga clan there are different tribes who are

living in Senapati, Ukhrul and Tamenglong district. On the other hand Kuki, Mizo & Zomis are living at the district of Churachandpur, Sadar hills and some areas of district Ukhrul and Chandel. In Manipur there are 29 tribes which are constitutionally recognized. Nagas, Kuki, Zomi & Mizo follow Christianity and all these tribes constitute 38% out of the total population in Manipur and they live in the majority portion of the total land which comes around 90% of the total territory of Manipur (Siamkhum, 2014).

The ethnic conflicts of Manipur are visible largely among the major tribes like Nagas and Kukuis, Nagas and Meities etc. Within the same ethnic groups also conflicts are visible like in 1960's we witnessed a clash in Mizo/Zomi-Kuki between Thadou Kukis & Hmars and another conflict between Zomis and Kukis were in 1967-68. Moreover in the valley region also there occurred a ethnic conflict among Meiteis and Meitei-Pangal in 1993 which led to the casualties of 150 people.

In the last period of 20th century witnessed a few violent ethnic conflicts in Manipur. The three main ethnic groups, Naga, Kuki and Meitei were living in peace and harmony, but this peaceful situation was threatened when the tribal interests of different group has started clashing with each other. This ultimately led to political turmoil and economic instability in the state. The conflict between Naga and Kuki prevailed from 1992 to 1998. This created a series of conflicts in later period of time such as in May, 1993 there was a clash between Muslims & Meiteis, at Moreh there occurred a Kuki-Tamil conflict in 1995 and 1997-98 conflicts between Paite and Kuki took another turn. There is very old clash between Naga and Kuki regarding the control over Moreh, which is an important trading location bordering with Myanmar. An understanding of the ongoing crisis requires a serious study of the growth of identity formation and growth of nationalism among these groups from a historical context as these groups rely mostly on historical accounts for claiming their uniqueness as well as setting the inter-group relations.

4.05. The Meitei-Naga Ethnic Tension

Due to different historical background of the ethnic groups in Manipur there are conflicting interests and objectives of each ethnic groups, although a hidden conflict is ridden in Manipur yet it has not led to armed conflict among ethnic groups in day light

situation. The National Socialist Council of Nagaland- IM (NSCN-IM) wants to include some Naga populated areas of Manipur in their demand of Nagalim and the apex of Nagas in Manipur, the United Naga Council (UNC) demands for Alternative Arrangements (AA). But the Meiteis on the other hand are completely opposing this demand of separation of Manipur. At any cost they are not ready to part Manipur. The Nagas are of the opinion that they were completely independent except some land annexed by the British and they were never under the rule of Manipuri king. The British made a division for administrative reason, otherwise it was a greater Nagaland in their view. That's why Nagas want an integrated land consist of Naga populated areas of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh. This is the idea of Nagalim they are demanding ever since the independence of India. A section of Nagas also agree not to have independent Nagalim if they get the state by having all the powers in their hand.

Government of India (GOI) made an cease-fire agreement with NSCN-IM in 1997 and NSCN-IM are of the demand that they are not ready to accept any provision if GOI does not fulfill the demand of integrated Nagalim. But so far this has not been materialized, specially the issue of territorial integration. Many talks were held between authority and the demanding party, still the result is yet to come.

A huge violent protest occurred in the Manipur valley when GOI extended cease fire territorial jurisdiction outside to Nagaland border on 14th June, 2001. The United Club of Manipur (UCM) organized different agitation in the protest of this action by government. The agitation took so violent turn that the mob even burned a building of Legislative Assembly of Manipur. To control the mob police had to open fire and it killed 18 people and many people got injured. Then after this incident Government of India withdrew the order of extending territorial jurisdiction of cease fire and limits its jurisdiction within Nagaland. Along with this Manipur government also declared 18th June as "State Integrity Day" in the honour of 18 people who lost their lives in police firing (Siamkhum, 2014).

In this time, All Naga Students' Association of Manipur (ANSAM), started a 52 days economic blockage to protest against the "state Integrity Day" of 18th June declared by the Government of Manipur. National Highway 53 and 39 are the only life-lines of

Manipur and due to this long protest of blocking highways Manipur faced a big problem when it run out of essential things including medical products. Indian Air Force then served by supplying essential items to Manipur. After three months this protest reduced when counter protest had started by other communities, but it did not lead to any solution of the situation. UNC and Naga people opined that the declaration of 18th June, 2001 was the failure of Manipur Government in the hands of protest group. The extended cease fire jurisdiction spoiled the relation between Nagas and Meiteis in Manipur and many people blamed Government of India for this.

The relation between the two ethnic groups degraded more when Th. Muivah, NSCN-IM General Secretary tried to give a visit to his birth place at Ukhrul district, Manipur in May, 2010. The GOI provided the permission to visit, but Manipur government stopped him from doing this. During this time some Naga association rose against the banning of Th. Muivah in the village of Ukhrul district. On 6th May, 2010, at Mao Gate, a violent protest occurred and 2 students got killed in police fire and many got wounded. The Naga community of both Manipur and Nagaland said that GOI has failed miserably to keep its promise. All the people got surprised to see how such a small action of Government of India led to such a huge violence. Many innocent people has lost their life in those protest some of them were not even the part of it.

After the Mao Gate incident and failure peace negotiation of the GOI and NSCN-IM, the UNC demanded Alternative Agreement (AA) by asking either a separate state or union territory by merging some parts of Manipur where Naga people live with Nagaland. Soon the UNC and ANSAM declared protest against the Manipur government by boycotting all its authority and they even board exams organized by Education Board of Manipur. All these demands and political changes further worsen the relation between the two communitis in Manipur.

From the above discussion we can say that the main problem among the Nagas in Manipur is Government of Manipur and Meiteis stand on not disintegrating the land of Manipur. The Meiteis uncompromising stand led to more turmoil in the situation of Manipur where no easy solution to be found now is.

4.06. Naga-Kuki Ethnic Armed Conflict

Territory is the main factor of conflict among Nagas and Kukis. The Naga-Kuki conflict precisely is the conflict between Thadou Kuki and the Nagas. It did not affect the other group of ethnic community while the conflict was going on in different areas of Manipur. There are multiple reasons and factors which led to the ethnic conflict in Manipur. The backing factor of the 1992-94 conflict was on controlling the land ownership. Nagas demand sole ownership in Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglang district in Manipur. Every ethnic community in Manipur wants to control the resources and opportunity of the land which ultimately gave birth to the insurgency groups in Manipur. And this is reason of the emerging arms conflict in Manipur since 1990s.

The conflict among Kukis and Nagas spread in such a large extend that it damages economic and political stability in the state and due to this ethnic clashes thousands of people lost their lives and belongings and the situation made them refugee in their own land which is really unbearable as a human being. During 1994 this conflict somehow reduced to a little extend but it totally destroyed the peaceful relation among different ethnic communities in Manipur, now they have to live in the shadow of terror all the time.

The Nagas are having a political demand of integrated Nagalim and for administrative arrangement and they are continuing their journey of protest. On the other hand Kukis also demand a separate Kukiland out of Manipur which is another root cause of prevailing ethnic conflicts in Manipur. These demands of the communities are backed by arms groups of every ethnic groups in Manipur which is the main threat to the peace and harmony of the state. Newly, the Kuki State Demand Committee (KSDC) was formulated to strengthen the demand of Kukiland or Zalengam. It also supports the arms outfit of this agitation called Kuki National Organisation (KNO). There are insurgent groups in Manipur who take shelter in Bangladesh and keeps their operation from a safe distance.

This demands of separate land created clash among the ethnic groups like Naga, Kuki and Meiteis because the demands are overlapping with each other and Government of

India is also unable to deal with the issues due to such complexities. Meiteis are in favour of territorial integrity of Manipur and therefore they are protesting against the creation of separate Kukiland and Nagalim out of Manipur. Moreover there are clash on the claims of Kukiland and the demand of integrated Nagalanda and Meiteis oppose any kind of territorial fragmentation in the boundary of Mnaipur, still a demand is there by UPF to create an Autonomous state under the provision of Part x, Article 244A of the Constitution (Siamkhum, 2014).

The UPF's demand of creating an autonomous region including the whole hilly areas of Manipur may not create any problem for the integrity of Manipur on territorial ground if some constitutional amendment has been done. Thus if this demand fulfilled by the Government of India it will create problem for the Kuki and Naga demands. And along with this Meiteis see as the setbacks for the integrity of Manipur because even if there is amending provisions they ultimately create a separate autonomous state out of Manipur.

Now the hill and valley clash took different turn whe Meiteis also started demanding for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status being from Mongoloid origin and linguistically under Tibeto-Burman clan which is recognized by the constitution as ST. This demand is opposed by the hill people because if Meiteis get ST status they have to share certain rights and opportunities which were enjoying by the hill people of Manipur exclusively. This will also create a tough competition among the Hill people regarding job, admission in colleges and other government platform in gaining opportunities to progress (Siamkhum, 2014).¹

4.07. Implications for Act East Policy

From the above discussion we can come to this point that Manipur is ethnically divided and diverse and a lot ethnic clashes keep disturbing the peace and development process in the state. However, in recent times, there is an increasing conviction that the future of the region lies in India's much-vaunted 'Look East' policy. The Northeast, in short, happens to be the key strategic point through which India can really look farther east towards

¹ Siamkhum, Th., 'Ethnic Conflict in Manipur: Cause and Prospects for Resolution', *International Journal in Management and Social Science*: Vol.2 Issue-11, (November 2014)

Southeast Asia. Informed by such conviction, a plea is made for ‘connecting the region with its transnational neighbours’ and appreciating the ‘opportunities’ that such connection offers to us in ‘our era of globalism’. The plea is based mainly on two rather complementary arguments: (a) Nation states of South and Southeast Asia with their more or less firmly drawn territorial borders have already become dysfunctional to economic development of the Northeast. Thus to cite an example, a transit route through Bangladesh, according to one estimate, would have ‘halved’ the transportation cost of commodities shipped to the Northeast from the rest of India. It is further argued that this would enable Bangladesh to set off her current adverse balance of trade with India. (b) Corresponding to a reconfiguration of economic space, thanks to the whole set of reforms initiated in the wake of globalization, there occurs or should occur a certain ‘softening of national borders enabling the formation of transnational regions.’ (Das)

However, in this euphoria and optimism, the ethnic scenario of the region is completely overlooked or as Samir Das puts it, is ‘held captive to India’s grand security design’. While there is a plea for a ‘free’ market unfettered by international borders in promoting and developing economies of the region, there are also the autarkic demands voiced by many an ethnic group which thrive on generation and use on the part of an ethnic group or a group of them, of some norms of exclusion from the larger society and economy. Such exclusion is widely noticeable in the region. Autarkic groups in most cases are seen to retain their market linkages and transactions – notwithstanding their mutual hostilities, by way of investing them with an ethnic character. Thus when there occurs any conflict between market interests and people’s ethnic preferences, the latter seem to prevail over the former. Autarkic demands in market transactions and most importantly without severing them may take any of the following three forms or maybe any of their combination: (a) refusal to sell goods and services to people belonging to an alien community (a section of Meiteis for example, refused to sell goods including some essential commodities to the Nagas of Imphal valley in June 2001 and thereby causing severe hardship to them); (b) refusal to buy goods and services from people belonging to an alien ethnic community; and (c) manipulating prices for either buying or selling or both, in cases where members of an alien ethnic community are involved. It is true in this region that inter-ethnic conflicts are also accompanied by ethnically constituted market

forces. Penetration of markets does not do away with the already existent ethnic preferences in the Northeast. It is rather the other way round: Market exchanges and transactions follow the already existing lines of ethnic preferences (Das).

Ethnic assertions in the region have also direct implication on the implementation of the Act East Policy. One incident which testifies the implication of ethnic assertions on the Act east Policy was the call for an indefinite blockade by the Kukis, who are mainly settled in the Indo-Myanmar border region, under the banner of Kuki State Demand Committee (KSDC) during the second ASEAN–India car rally to press their demand for the creation of a separate Kuki state to be carved out of ‘Kuki traditional lands’ (*The Telegraph*, 12 December 2012). They also ‘threatened to block the entry of the Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar (BCIM) Car Rally into “Kuki areas” of Manipur’ (*The Times of India*, 13 February).

The insertion of the Northeast into larger transnational region is required for removing the ills of underdevelopment and the cult-de-sac situation. However, the proposal may not be a perfect solution considering the interwoven ethnic questions of the region. In a study of Mexican trucking across border-lands, Alvarez Jr (1995) argues that Mexican truckers continually constitute and recreate ethnicity as part of an entrepreneurial process of successful penetration of foreign markets. He pointed out the ambiguities of identities in borderlands, which can also be strategically played upon to forge, reformulate and even mobilize ethnic identity to advantage. Flynn (1997) also illustrated that Shabe border residents in Bénin–Nigeria border have similarly forged a sense of border identity in the face of economic change and decreased transborder trade. As such, the proposed transnational regime under the Look East policy is not likely to be effective if the ethnic factors of the region are also not taken into account. As witnessed in North America and West Africa, there has been mobilization based on ethnic identity to take advantage of the transborder trade, and the already fragile inter-ethnic relations in the region could be in constant peril. Ethnic conflicts have also taken place to control the lucrative and prosperous Moreh border market in Manipur. Thus, connecting the Northeast with the larger transnational region per se will not take care of the ethnic considerations that afflict

the region. Thus, the ethnic issues have a strong bearing on the fate of the India's Act East Policy.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion

In the Northeast, the whole issue of ethnicity has become quite a complicated one. Though there are contextual differences in terms of the nature of conflicts, there is no state amongst the seven sisters that does not face the problems of ethnic conflict. This region has often been described as a boiling cauldron by many academicians and journalists because of various problems inflicting the region.¹ There is more than one factor that lead to such a phenomenon. However, the factors responsible for ethnic conflict are yet to be explained satisfactorily. Apart from the issues of cultural injustices meted out to the minority communities, ethnicity is also being used of ethnic symbols for their politico-economic purpose is best suitable for self consciousness and specific political gain in the region. Thus, if we observe the ethnic dimension in North East India we can see that the region has been witnessing ethnic disputes; ethnic conflicts and the political demands are raised to protect ethnic interests which most of the time leads to the ethnic violence and ethnic insurgency. And due to these ethnic issues many government policies are not being able to materialize in the region.

It is in this context that this study was carried out to examine the ethnic issues in the region in general and Manipur, in particular and examine implications of ethnic issues in Manipur on the implementation of AEP. From the perspective of the Indian state, the Act East Policy as a foreign policy initiative in 1990s is driven by the economic and security logic. It tries to connect India with the emerging economies of East Asian and South East Asian countries to counter the increasing influence of China in the region. The proponents of the Act East Policy subscribe to the argument that North East Region can be developed economically which consequently would solve the problem of ethnic issues because the economic rationality would render the ethnic preferences insignificant.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the Act East Policy (AEP) was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Nay Pyi Taw, Myanmar in Nov, 2014. AEP is the natural successor to the Look East Policy (LEP) that was put in place by the then Prime

¹ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/33089/5/05_introduction.pdf

Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992 under radically different geo-political and economic circumstances. LEP was primarily focused on strengthening ties between India and ASEAN countries. Economies of the 6 ASEAN countries (4 countries joined the grouping later in the '90s) were growing at a rapid pace, earning them the sobriquet of Asian Tigers. On the contrary, the licence permit raj put in place by India after independence and the oil shocks of the '70s and '80s had resulted in a situation which reduced the import cover of the country to a mere 10 days as against the normally acceptable healthy level of 3 months. End of the cold war and disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 provided a welcome opportunity to India to reach out to South-East Asia to capitalize upon its historical, cultural and civilisational linkages with this region.

In India's effort to look east, the northeastern region has become a significant region due to its geographical proximity to Southeast Asia and China. India's search for new economic relationship with Southeast Asia is now driven by the domestic imperative of developing the northeast by increasing connectivity to the outside world (Haokip, 2015). The strategic significance of NER was identified by the policymakers at a much earlier stage, when looking east through the prism of NER became a priority for India's foreign policy in 2003, paving a new dimension to its Look East Policy (LEP). This policy initiative apparently intended to see NER not as the periphery of India but, as the centre of an integrated economic area (Baruah 2004).

Northeast India is the eastern-most region of India. It comprises of the contiguous Seven Sister States (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura), and the Himalayan state of Sikkim. The Siliguri Corridor in West Bengal, with a width of 21 to 40 kilometres (13 to 25 mi), connects the North Eastern region with East India. The region shares more than 4,500 kilometres (2,800 mi) of international border (about 90 per cent of its entire border area) with China (southern Tibet) in the north, Myanmar in the east, Bangladesh in the southwest, and Bhutan to the northwest. North East India is the homeland of large number of ethnic groups who came to the region from different directions at different historical times.²

² <http://www.studymode.com/essays/Insurgency-And-Its-Impact-Upon-North-Eastern-49866939.html>

The region also has persisting problem related with ethnic issues for a long time. Particularly in the state of Manipur, the state has witnessed forms of contestations and clashes among the major ethnic communities viz, the Meiteis, the Nagas and the Kukis.

Conflicts in Manipur are largely ethnic in nature between and among the three major ethnic groups. There are also instances of intra-ethnic conflicts within Kuki-Zomi/Mizo ethnic family in the 1960's between the Thadou Kukis and the Hmars, and in 1967-1968, between the Zomis and the Kukis. Also in the plain, there was Meeteis- Metei-Pangal, ethnic conflict in 1993 for a brief period resulting to the death of 150 people from both sides.

Manipur, in the last decade of the twentieth century was marked by violent ethnic clashes. Being inhabited by different groups of people which can be classified broadly into Meitei, Naga and Kuki, a harmonious existence of the state is being threatened as the interests of one group clash with the other. This has given rise to assertion of group identity; inter group competition for resources, political instability, insecurity and under development. However, when we look at the problems affecting the region, it certainly is linked largely with the ethnic equation in the region.

Despite the problems afflicting the state, Manipur is important in the implementation of the Act East Policy. Manipur shares a long international border with Myanmar and this is the fact which makes Manipur as an area of focus while discussing about India's foreign policy such as Act East Policy. Due to its geo-strategic location Manipur can play a vital role in determining India's foreign policy because Manipur is the gateway to the South East Asia or to be more proper it is the linking ground of India and the ASEAN countries. Since last two decades India is trying to build up a sound economic relation with ASEAN economy. Thus, Manipur is gaining more importance recently for the implementation of Act East Policy.

It is in the context of this emphasis on North East India that the proposed study attempts to analyse the Act East Policy vis-à-vis the ethnic issues in North East India. The question here is whether the Act East Policy would transform the existing ethnic equations as many proponents of modernization argue that the economic rationales would

ultimately render the ethnic problems insignificant, or whether the existing ethnic problems would dictate the implementation of the Act East Policy. But the study suggests that when there occurs any conflict between market interests and people's ethnic preferences, the latter seem to prevail over the former. And most of the ethnic conflicts essentially take the form of claims for territories which is evident in the case of the conflict between Nagas and the Kukis which began from the competition over control of Moreh town, an important border town between India and Myanmar. Therefore, without understanding the dynamics of ethnic equation in the region, the AEP may not realize its potential. This is besides the other important challenges which include poor infrastructure and connectivity. Connecting the Northeast with the larger transnational region per se will not take care of the ethnic considerations that afflict the region. However, it becomes evident that the policy, guided largely by economic and security consideration has not properly addressed the ethnic issues plaguing the much feted region of northeast. Ethnicity, as Samir Das puts it, is 'held captive to India's grand security design'.

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