



### Book Review

H. Srikanth and Munmun Majumdar (eds.), *Linking India and Eastern Neighbours: Development in the Northeast and Borderlands*, NewDelhi: SAGE Publications,2021, pp.352, ISBN: 9789391370725.

#### **Tayenjam Priyokumar Singh**

*M.A. Political Science from University of Delhi, Delhi, India.*

It is necessary to understand the comprehensive political-economy of the North Eastern Region and its historical linkage with mainstream India and neighbouring countries because this region is recognised as the Gateway for India's eastward journey. The Indian government also changes its looking of this region to development from security perspective. In this context, this book tries to give an overall view of the region from different dimensions.

This edited volume is divided into two parts. The first part has eleven chapters. This portion focuses on the politics of economic development in the region. It presents a broad picture of India's relation with eastern neighbouring countries like Nepal, China, Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh, and its potential to build regional organisation. In this section, authors attempt to draw national and regional perspectives.

In the first chapter of the first part, 'Northeast India as Engine of India's Growth: Reorienting the Act East Policy Goals', Mahendra P. Lama tries to explain why Northeast India is still lagging behind compared to other parts of the country. He gives some concrete reasons for this underdevelopment syndrome, such as the partition of 1947, insurgent movements, looking of this region through the prism of security by Centre, landlocked region, conflicts, etc. All these factors establish a fear and reluctant among the investors to invest in different sectors.

In the next chapter, 'Political Economy of Road Infrastructure in India's Northeast since Liberalization,' Rakhee Bhattacharya critically analyses India's economic policies and their impacts on this region. She discusses mega road projects which are going on despite being security concern. She also addresses India's compulsion economic cooperation with its eastern neighbouring countries. She also highlights the apprehension and fear that this region might be reduced to just a transitional zone if not inclusive development path breaking happens.

In the third chapter, 'Irritants in India-Nepal Relations and Potential Benefits of Greater Cooperation,' Bishnu Dev Pant opines an external view of India-Nepal relations. Despite being their relationship could not maintain momentum, he emphasis the need of the hour for Nepal to engage directly with the North East Region of India. Many Nepali people live in the area as a citizen of India even though they have historical and cultural linkage with Nepal. The author appeals for rejuvenating the India-Nepal relations based on equality and mutual respect.

Yedzin W. Tobgay highlights the continuously mutual and cordial relationship between India and Bhutan in the fourth chapter, 'Indo-Bhutanese Relations: Evolution and Changing Contexts'. She expresses India's role in Bhutan's social, political, and economic developments. During Operation All Clear in 2003, the Bhutanese government cooperated with the Indian Army to wipe out Northeast



militants hiding in Bhutan. Except for Bhutan, India does not have a forever friendship-type relationship with any neighbouring countries in South Asia normally.

Since pre-colonial times, Bangladesh has had relations with this region in different areas like trade. After forming East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1947, the North Eastern Region became the landlocked sub-region in India. This region connects with mainland India only through the Siliguri Corridor. And this region becomes the focal point for the Act East Policy in recent time, yet physical connectivity with the rest of India happens to be the biggest hurdle to achieving this policy's goals. In this context, in their joint article, 'Bangladesh and Northeast India: Planning Communication Links under GATT Article V,' Abu Hena Reza Hasan and Sayada Jannatun Naim offer an external perspective that by becoming Bangladesh a land bridge to connect with its north eastern region, India would get its fruit of the above policy.

Border skirmishes are regular phenomenon between India and China. On different fronts, they are competing with each other. Most negotiations could not bring a viable solution to their disputes due to multiple factors. India's big headache concern is also to compete with China. Some literature opines the historical linkages of north eastern people with China's Yunnan province. These people belong to Mongoloid race. China has been removing the Yunnan Province from the tag of landlocked. In this context, in her chapter, 'Yunnan and Northeast India: Chinese Perspective on Sub-regional Development,' Hu Xiaowen asserts the importance of cooperation of India with China's Yunnan Province for the benefits of both India's North Eastern States and Yunnan Province.

Myanmar is strategically a critical neighbouring country, especially for the North Eastern States. The changing political and economic nature of Myanmar significantly impacts this region. This region largely depends upon this country for imports and exports. India also aims to reach out to Southeast Asian countries. So, it is imperative for India to have a proactive role in promoting political, economic and strategic engagement with Myanmar. These concerns are highlighted in Munmun Majumdar's chapter, 'The Northeast and Myanmar: India Myanmar Engagement in the Modi Years.'

In his chapter, 'Trade in Pre-colonial Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet,' Amrendra Kumar Thakur expresses the historical connection of Arunachal Pradesh and Tibet. Since pre-colonial times, these two parts have had trade relations. He exerts a critique of colonial's primitive view and isolationist policies towards these tribes.

In her chapter, 'Reviving Border Trade and Tourism along Nathu La in Sikkim,' Dechen Bhutia shows the impact of Sino-Indian conflicts on the trading practise and tourism between Sikkim and Tibet through the Nathu La pass. The author hopes that reviving this pass like the earlier one would give economic benefits to these borderland communities.

In her chapter titled 'Tripura-Bangladesh Borderlands: Socio-economic Significance of Border Haats,' Suparna Bhattacharjee opines that the revival of border haats would benefit the people's livelihood in the border areas. Due to the demarcation of the international boundary, haats were closed, which affects the socio-economic system of these people. Like the above chapter, in his chapter titled 'Meghalaya-Bangladesh Border Trade: A Study of the Balat-Sunamganj Haat,' Rakhil Kumar Purkayastha too expresses the similar concern.



The second part of the volume has seven chapters. It primarily deals with inter and intra-community conflicts and cooperation's of the ethnic communities of this borderland area. It also highlights the indigenous communities' reactions to the illegal influx.

In the first part of the second section of the volume, 'Nepali/Gorkha Settlers in Northeast India: Colonial Encounters and Post-colonial Dilemmas,' Tejimala Gurung Nag attempts to address how Nepalese settle in North East India.

The Indian migrants played a considerable role in the economic development of Myanmar. With the rise of right-wing nationalist movements, the Indian Burmese face survival issues in Myanmar. These issues are examined in Emdorini Thangkhiew's chapter, 'Burmese Indians: Growth of Burmese Nationalism and Ethnic Discrimination.' Likewise, in his chapter, 'Returnees and Refugees from Burma to India: Differing State Responses,' Saurabh Kaushik presents the chronology of the refugee influx from Myanmar and their dilemma and Indian states' responses to them.

In their collaborated chapter, 'Drug Trafficking in and through Myanmar and Manipur', H. Srikanth and T. T. Haokip highlight the burning issues of drug trafficking in Manipur. Manipur's neighbouring country Myanmar is a part of the notorious drug producing region called the Golden Triangle. The magnitude of this problem in Manipur state is beyond imagination. They express that the ongoing wire fencing of the porous international border would reduce smugglers to some extent.

In the last three chapters, 'Understanding the Kukis' Opposition to Fencing of the Indo-Myanmar Border' by T. T. Haokip and H. Srikanth, 'Borders That Divide: Naga Ethnoscape and Idea of Supranational Citizenship' by Jelle J. P. Wouters, and 'Chin Migration to Mizoram: Ethnic Affinity and Changing Perceptions' by R. K. Satapathy and P. C. Lalthansiami shed lights about the concern of identity and ethnic issues who are living in the north easter region's borderlands. The separation of Myanmar (then Burma) in 1935 from British India created the above matters to those tribal communities like Naga, Kukiwho are living in this borderland area. The mega projects for border fencing in these international boundaries add more separation of economic, social and cultural bondages in these tribal communities.

Overall, this edited volume highlights different issues existing in the region like ethnic conflict, illegal migrants, economic development issues, political issues, border fencing conflicts, separatist movements, etc. The beauty of this work is that it is a blend of different essays from different field scholars. The external views upon the region are also vividly available. It successfully adds a new discourse of the regional framework and politics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.