

## **Importance of Spatial Justice in Economic Integration of Northeast India**

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The worldwide trend towards free market reforms at the end of cold war international and national economy became a crucial fact. The international status of a country depends much on its wealth, therefore by the end of 1991, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao gave a not requiring foreign office and its diplomatic posts abroad to pay greater attention to economic aspect of India's external relations.<sup>1</sup> During the Cold war years the foreign policy of India was structured by somewhat ideological factors but gradually with end of cold war India shifted its focus on economic relations with prosperous region. China's rapid development becomes an eye opener for Indian policymakers. China's economic linkages with Southeast Asian Countries remained the key behind such realization. Moreover rapid growth and prosperity have influenced the decision of Indian Policymakers. Gautam S. Kaji, the former managing director of World Bank articulated in April, 1995 that "Certainly, the East Asian nations are still grappling with some of the same problems as India, albeit on a lesser scale. But they have demonstrated with..., it is possible to move very far. With the same kind of commitment, I am convinced that there can be an 'Indian Miracle'.<sup>2</sup> "The illustrative influence of modernization of the Chinese economy, and the economic performance of the members of ASEAN and others such as South Korea and territories such as Taiwan gave an impetus to the process.' It was indeed, a surprising change in the Indian state of mind, given that the country suffered from a superiority complex for many years, and refused to even entertain any comparison with a small country like South Korea."<sup>3</sup> This situation led to declaration of Look East Policy which basically aims at economic integration with Asian nations. As a follow up of Look East Policy, Act East Policy has been declared by the Modi Government to strengthen economic and strategic ties. In such economic integration process what has been crucial from inception that is Northeast India. Northeast India has been considered as the gateway of Southeast Asia. Northeastern States are rich in resources and its geographical proximity to Southeast Asia is also conducive for economic linkages.

Border economy of Northeast has contributed to National economy. In the post-Independence era development of Northeast India was an area of greater attention among policy makers of different regimes but these policies have dual effect on Northeastern economy. At the one hand modernist approach of development has been taken into consideration on the other hand post-modernist approach was ignored. Moreover, effect of Partition is huge on Northeastern economy. The partition hampered ages old inland water and road connectivity and traditional trade routes

Some efforts are really made on government's part. For facilitating official trade linkage related assessment B. R Das and Bordoloi have depicted a study by Kathing (2005) on Indo-Myanmar border trade indicates that traders are reluctant to transact business under regular trade and the letter of credit system because the official exchange rate of currency appears to benefit Indian traders. In such context, barter system offers a feasible remedy for carrying out trade between the countries. It might be noted that trade and trade oriented services increased not only in border towns of Moreh and Tamu but also in different places of Manipur. Trade services include shops trading in variety of products like electronic items, furniture, food items, etc. The traded products are imported from Myanmar via Moreh. There are more than 1000 shops in different places of Manipur and these shops are selling goods from Myanmar through the border. On the other hand, there are also more than 1000 shops in Namphalong market in Tamu. These shops offer a variety of products ranging from agricultural goods to industrial goods which are originating from third countries. All these suggest that border trade between India and Myanmar has done a large number employment opportunities among the economically active people on both sides of the border.<sup>4</sup> To ensure uninterrupted border trade, formalization has been executed by the Indo-Myanmar Border Trade Agreement signed on 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1994. Moreh was transformed into Land custom Station (LCS) in 1995. Four LCSs have been located in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland for trade with Myanmar. Zokhawthar in Mizoram is functional.<sup>5</sup> Despite all these developments spatial dimension has not been taken care. The distinct spatial features which could have been utilized were not taken into consideration. Connectivity routes like Tamu-Kalewa-Kalemo have been initialized, highway projects and also internal waterways are developed but spatial justice remains untouched by the entire policy implementation. People's mental mapping of their lived experiences is not matching with the given reality. The entire region faces the troubled effect of "Structural Adjustment" directed by "Washington Consensus" which already has become an alien notion to the people of Northeast India where they were used to trade through barter system. The neoliberal form of economic integration and subsequent development projects are not implanted in tandem with the cognitive mapping of border area based tribes. The space of their lived experiences has not been taken into consideration while implementing developmental plans. The people of Northeast India have not been integrated into the alien economic model which was planned and implemented without considering socio-spatial attributes of Northeast India. In this case by the statist approach Northeast India is considered as a space of economic rejuvenation and connection to the Eastern nations for trade linkages. People to people contact or cultural linkages of cross-border cousins have been ignored. Socio-spatial justice remains an overlooked phenomenon throughout the

process. In case of development plans not only geographical spatial dimension is important but also the space of mental mapping and lived experiences of people is equally important. Spatial justice can be met only through the integration only if the process include the socio-spatial attributes along with other modernist approaches and the state has a significant role in it.

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<sup>1</sup> Haokip, Thongkhohal; India's Look East Policy and The Northeast; Sage Publications; India Pvt; New Delhi; 2015, p 29.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p 30

<sup>3</sup> Saint-Mezard, Isabelle; Eastward Bound: India's New Positioning in India; Centre de Sciences Humaines; Manohar; New Delhi; 2006; pp 33-35.

<sup>4</sup> Das, B. R & K. Bordoloi; Opportunities of Border Trade in North East India: With Special Reference to Indo-Myanmar Border Trade; World Journal of Research and Review (WJRR) ISSN: 2455-3956, Volume-1, Issue-1, November 2015; p 6; accessed through [https://www.wjrr.org/download\\_data/WJRR0101010.pdf](https://www.wjrr.org/download_data/WJRR0101010.pdf), on 25.11.18, at 22.28.

<sup>5</sup> Chakraborty G, Look East Policy and Northeast India: Is it a conjectured Vision?; (eds) A. Sarma et all; Mainstreaming the India's Northeast in Look and Act East Policy. Palgrave Macmillan; 2018, p 73.