



BOOK REVIEW TITLE: BEYOND BORDERS: LOOK EAST POLICY & NORTHEAST INDIA

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<p>Received 28th May 2021 Accepted: 10th June 2021 Published: 22th July 2021</p>	<p>The book, Beyond Borders: Look East Policy & Northeast India is fundamentally a product of Cotton Conclave, an initiative on behalf of Cotton College, Assam. India. It features the perspectives and ideas of young Indian and international intellectuals. This anthology principally focuses upon the northeast region of the Indian subcontinent and its interactions with its neighbors, mainly in the context of the Look East policy effort, and is reflective and deliberate within the same field, particularly in Northeast India discourse. The book provides an idea of the most important facts and prospects in the process of strengthening relations between India and neighboring nations, in particular in the integration of Northeast India in the vicinity of South and Southeast Asia.</p>

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This book emphasized the opportunities for openness, connectivity, and border trade and reveals at the same time the obstacles and hazards posed by these development and cooperative efforts. This book highlights the locations of North-eastern India and their research of great significance. In the globalization age and Asia's century, all connected efforts and contacts with India and other surrounding Southeast Asian nations, as well as China, aims to promote economic development and cordial partnerships. Regardless of regional policy concerns, the country's national strategic objectives were the driving force behind policy adjustments toward positive engagement with neighbors, including the formerly hostile countries. This book also underlines the security and geostrategy relevance which is inevitably concerned and has maintained an eye on the Asian economic behemoth in every step.

The author Dilip Gogoi is an Assistant Professor in Political Science. He teaches Human rights and International politics at Graduate and Post Graduate levels in Cotton College, Guwahati. He has a keen interest in Indian foreign policy, South Asia in contemporary world politics, and studies relating to Northeast India. He has also edited various books titled Contemporary Concerns: Essays by Young Minds, 2008 etc.

The book, Beyond Borders: Look East Policy & Northeast India is a collection of 12 essays/papers imparted by scholars/intellectuals who have keen interests on issues concerning the North-eastern region vis-à-vis the Look East policy and its transnational neighborhood.

Dilip Gogoi emphasizes the North-eastern area of India's uniqueness in a distinct physical and political realm that displays genealogical and ethnic ties to the rest of Southeast Asia in his introductory comments. He emphasized how the iron-curtained political rule, as well as a reluctance to provide research visas to international researchers, have hampered current study on the country's political ties with its neighbors, as well as issues of border trade and transnationalism. He rationally said that if there is no influence in India on the area, India's Look East Policy would have a limited significance. But the Northeast remains in economic captive with the mainland Indian economy and its foreign frontiers until now, notwithstanding this strategy.

Jayanta Brahma, in his chapter, analysis, and deals with the importance and interaction between domestic issues and foreign policy and regarded foreign policy as the result of the interplay of a large number of factors that affected the formulation of policy in different ways in different circumstances. The circumstances include geography, history, politico-economic imperatives, socio-cultural milieu, perceptions of the ruling elite of national interests, and ideological consensus. He viewed that the linkage between domestic and foreign politics in rising its significant in international studies, due to the interdependence of nation-states and globalization of the economy. He argued that the challenge is to accept both security concerns and development in the conduct of foreign policy and to exploit the geo-economic potential of the Northeast region as a gateway to East and Southeast Asia.

Dilip Gogoi describes how India's internal front and its neighboring nations have changed dramatically since the Cold War ended. He attempts to elucidate the origins and logic of India's Look East Policy. His chapter investigates the Look East Policy, as well as the opportunities and potential of Northeast India in the context of sub-regional interaction with its neighbors, namely geography as an opportunity, the region's economic potential and natural resources, cultural ties across international borders, and development strategy and special treatment of the Northeast. He also acknowledges the challenges that arise both within and outside of the organization. Within, there is violence and a separatist movement against the Indian Union, claiming a distinct ethnic homeland or territory free of Indian Union rule. The external environmental concerns highlighted are illicit border commerce, narcotics, and minor trafficking, which also brings illegal migrants infected with contagious illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. The most crucial China factor in India's foreign policy evolution.

Yogendra Singh examines various possible avenues for enhancing the connectivity between Northeast India and Southeast Asia but he also highlighted the challenges too in his chapter. He offers a detailed review of the states of India's involvement in various ongoing and potential infrastructure projects related to transport, energy, and telecommunication linkages, such as the Moreh-Tamu-Kalewa road, Indian –Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, Trans Asian Railways, Kaladan Multi-Modal Project, Stilwell road, Myanmar-India-Bangladesh pipeline, Tamanthi Hydro-electric project, and the optical fiber network between Northeast India and Southeast Asia. It also emphasizes the numerous obstacles that the process of linking the two regions has, including topographical, technological, political, and security issues. It will be impossible to make the Northeast a gateway to Southeast Asia without successfully resolving these problems, according to Singh.

Shubrajeet Konwer analysis the disputed international borders in Northeast India that have the potential to erupt a major conflict in the region. He divided the conflicted borders into three sectors namely Kashmir (Western sector), Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh (Middle sector), and Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh (Eastern sector). The settlement of India and China's border disputes follows difficulty due to the double problems of Tibet and Tawang. The chapter emphasizes the question of the boundary dispute between India and China in Arunachal Pradesh and provides for a solution and highlights the main impediments to the peaceful resolution of borders.

Jabin T Jacob in his chapter contrasts China's Western Development Strategy (WDS) with India's Look East Policy (LEP), as well as the outcomes and ramifications. While China's WDS "began as a foreign policy plan to enable New Delhi to reach out to East Asia and, in particular, Southeast Asia," Jacob says India's LEP "began as a foreign policy strategy to enable New Delhi to reach out to East Asia and, in particular, Southeast Asia." While the Chinese WDS "serves as a public and symbolic show of the central government's preoccupation with national unity, inequality, and poverty," he complains. India does not yet really have a comparable North-East Development Strategy in place and even the LEP's inward focus towards the North-East is of recent vintage and is far from being a coherently articulated strategy". New Delhi, like Yunnan in China's foreign policy, needs to pay more heed to the views of its North-eastern states and accept interdependence and cross-border links as a method of maintaining regional growth and stability.

Connectivity is the motto of the Look East Policy, as Ashild Kolas and Camilla Buzzi noted. The North-eastern area is notorious for being a "landlocked" region with weak infrastructure, which is sometimes given as an explanation for its underdevelopment. Simultaneously, they argue that India's strategy of "opening up" to Myanmar is a hazardous enterprise in which Northeast India has the most to lose. They believe that allowing the borders to open will expose Myanmar to non-traditional security threats. However, according to C.Raja Mohan, "Borders on the subcontinent do not have to be political obstacles." They must be converted into economic cooperation zones among regions that were previously part of the same cultural and political sphere.'

In her chapter, Olindita Gogoi describes the plethora of tensions that exist between India and Bangladesh, including the immigration of Bangladeshis into Northeast India and its consequences, continuous aid, abetment, and sheltering of insurgents, cross-border criminal activities, the mass inflow of small arms through Bangladesh, and the network among the Jihadi groups. According to her, such actions promote insurgency and terrorism in Northeast India. The Awami League's entry into power under Sheik Hasina's leadership in Bangladesh on 6 January 2009 has

established a friendly and cooperative relationship with India. The new administration in Bangladesh, she thinks, would brew to boost the ongoing rebellion and thereafter lessen the economic stagnation in the area.

Namrata Goswami in her chapter analyzes armed conflict ethnic movements in Northeast India across three variables. These are: depth of violent ethnic movements, nature of violence, and scale and acceleration of violence by illustrating the cases of i) Dima Haram Daogah (DHD) and ii) United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in Assam and across the border in Bangladesh, iii) National Socialist Council of Nagalim led by Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu-NSCN (IM) based in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, and across the border in Myanmar, and iv) United National Liberation Front (UNLF) based in Manipur, Bangladesh, and Myanmar. The chapter also indicates the implications of the variables across three levels of the analysis unit, national, regional, and international. She concludes by making policy proposals to alleviate ethnic violence in India's North-eastern terrain.

Biplob Gogoi illustrates how cultural links and affinities are inextricably linked to other major factors of a nation-foreign state's policy architecture. Because it has close ethnic and cultural links with India's eastern neighbors, the northeast region of India has played a key role in India's Look East Policy. In this chapter, Gogoi tries to reposition a cultural paradigm in India's foreign policy, examining how better understanding and positive rehabilitation in the foreign policy echelons can aid in achieving a viable synergy in foreign policy implementation, promoting the national interest, and bridging the gap between two Asian regions.

In his chapter, Pradip Saikia analyses the threats that China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar pose to Northeast India. The relationship between India and the nations bordering Northeast India has continuously evolved since the outward-looking economy was launched under the economic reforms in 1991. "Despite an upbeat attitude," Pradip claims, "these security problems might undermine the Look East Policy." In this light, he examines the different security issues that may arise as a roadblock to the entire process, attempting to discover plausible reasons and policy options that might help the Look East Policy avoid strategic errors. He believes that the concerns relating to Northeast India should be reprioritized.

In his concluding remarks, Dilip Gogoi noted that the desire to promote economic diplomacy, which would work as a catalyst for growth and also open the North-eastern region's historic connections to society, must play an active role in raising public awareness and setting the agenda on the correct track.

The Look East Policy's numerous upheavals are detailed in this book. However, from some perspectives, the policies of this LEP appear to have resulted in an unfair distribution of development in the Northeast region, with Assam, the largest and most developed state in the region, gaining an advantage over the smaller border states. As a result, the North-eastern states may find themselves in a conundrum. Thus, the government's correct process for policy formation is aimed at achieving a balance of development and equilibrium in this landlocked region. Throughout the analysis of this book, there is a serious lack of Indian policymakers about the organizational cultural aspect of the neighbors that is East and Southeast Asia concerning Northeast India. Therefore, the rejuvenation of a cultural paradigm for the Union government, which once successfully recognized the region of Northeast as a diverse pattern of cultures to be enriched and preserved instead of skeptical unifying the region with the religious fold is required. Moreover, some of the chapters in this book slightly deviated from the main theme and linkage with the objective.

This book critically engages with the issues of security, foreign policy, regional economy, and sub-regional corporation, about the Northeast region and its neighborhood which could not only help better the understanding of the region but also assisting the policymakers to frame a holistic approach towards the development of the neglected borderlands and frontiers of Northeast India. The region is yet to find a meaningful place in the present wave of sub-regional cooperation and it urges for adoption of comprehensive policy strategies that could help to realize the full potential of the region and the nation. The focus of the present book is on Northeast India, the success of the Look East policy has to be measured in terms of how much Northeast benefits from this policy.

Overall, this book has a lot of contemporary relevance and is quite informative. It's a fascinating review of Northeast India's growth and current political environment and policies since it provides the reader a concise flow of the political scene and developmental circumstances in a very plain and detailed manner. The writers of this book not only recognized the issues but also provided essential recommendations and solutions. This book is deemed to be of great use not just to politicians, policymakers, and the general public in terms of raising knowledge and making decisions about a home and international policies. But this book is regarded to be of much help and value in the field of academics, researches, and students alike. It is a must-read book for all North-easterner brothers and sisters who want to have a better understanding of the region's status and growth.

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