

Book Review

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[*Global Governance and India's North-East: Logistics, Infrastructure and Society* Edited by Ranabir Samaddar and Anita Sengupta, Routledge, 2019.]

Contemporary academic engagement with the process of globalization encompasses multitude of themes ranging from international division of labour to the visible changes in the nature of states, civil society, citizenship, democracy, nationalism, political identities etc. drawing attention to social production of space and its historical transformation. It has been recognized that social relations are becoming increasingly interconnected on a global scale and space, and no longer appears as a static platform. It is historically produced, reconfigured, and transformed. The current wave of globalization, as argued by Neil Brenner (1999), is leading to (1) the transcendence of the state-centric configuration of capitalist territorial organization that prevailed throughout much of the twentieth century; and (2) the production of new configurations of territoriality on both sub – and supra – national geographical scales. For him, globalization is a dialectical process through which: (1) the movement of commodities, capital, money, people, images, and information through geographical space is continually expanded and accelerated; and (2) relatively fixed and immobile socioterritorial infrastructures are produced, reconfigured, redifferentiated, and transformed to enable such expanded, accelerated movement. As Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues, it is only in the wake of this epochal transformation “from the production of things in space to the production of space” that the geographical foundations for each successive wave of capitalist industrialization have been themselves continually produced, recognized, and transformed through capital’s own contradictory developmental dynamics.

Setting the agenda for an intense academic discourse in the specific context of Asia, Ranabir Samaddar and Anita Sengupta have raised some very crucial questions related to reimagination and reconfiguration of space in the Introduction of this book. The questions are pertinent to the processes of re-constitution of the contours of societies, economies and historical geographies, and more importantly about the implications of the processes. How do the people of the reconstituted borders and frontiers negotiate with the changes and what new forms of governance do they entail? The book, therefore, is primarily engaged with the projected transition, especially, of the North East frontier

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of the Indian nation, consequent upon the much talked about Look and Act East Policy. The policy essentially attempts at fostering trade relations between India and Southeast Asia with the former's North East as an intermediary, increasingly transforming the troubled periphery into an economic corridor. The periphery of the Indian nation state that became crucial for logistical expansion has been envisaged as a natural bridge between Southeast Asia and India, and attempts are being made to seamlessly integrate the region with a new paradigm of statist development. The envisaged network of connectivity, communication and trade has been projected as the panacea for historic deprivation, consequent underdevelopment and insurgency. Therefore, this volume essentially questions, whether this projected paradigm of infrastructural governance can be operated independently of social governance.

With a much broader framework, this volume seeks convergence of myriad elements of India's policy paradigm, especially of the Look and Act East Policy, formulating the concept of 'logistical governance' to imply (a) the imperative of governing logistical transformation of society, economy and space; (b) the relation between material infrastructure and social infrastructure building; and (c) understanding the imperatives of governance in the light of logistical planning. The chapters in this volume have, implicitly or explicitly, tried to encapsulate the implications of logistics and infrastructure building.

The first part of the volume 'Imagining Space through Mobility' incorporating the contributions of Priya Singh, Anita Sengupta and Iman Mitra attempts to relocate China with its renewed concerns for emerging as the 'infrastructure epicentre' of Asia in the broad canvas of emerging connectivity and capital driven global governance. With an in-depth analysis covering various dimensions and political implications of China's expansionist initiatives, Priya Singh has demonstrated how the contemporary phase of globalization creates potential for China to be the epicenter of regional economics and geopolitics. Anita Sengupta provides a detailed account of the Sino-Indian dynamics in re-imagination space by the Asian 'regional' organizations. Iman Mitra has focused on the intrinsic relations between finance capital and infrastructure-led developmentalism in the context of India's Look and Act East Policy and the idea of 'Seamless Asia'. The first part of the volume emanating from the larger context of the shift in the axis of the contemporary phase of globalization provides a framework for analyzing the specificities, the inevitable implications at the micro level and the interconnectedness between global and the locals.

The second part of the volume, with the chapter by Subir Bhaumik and the next chapter which is a joint contribution of Iman Mitra and Mithilesh Kumar, has essentially been architected for locating the relations of global logistics and governance with India's Look East Policy. Focusing on historical interdependencies embodied in India-Bangladesh 'love-hate' bilateral relations, Subir Bhaumik has emphasized on how crucial is integration of economies and infrastructure between the two nations in the present context. The chapter contributed by Iman Mitra and Mithilesh Kumar has analyzed the process of making Kolkata a logistical hub in envisaging India's

Look East Policy especially considering its locational advantages in the historicity of infrastructural accumulation.

The third section of this volume 'Governing connectivity: logistics, infrastructure and society in the North-East' with four contributions is crucial for understanding the social, political and economic nuances of the region, often perceived as the troubled periphery of the Indian nation. Look East Policy with myriad connectivity projects has emerged as one of the effective measures of ideological integration of the region and hence governmentality of the nation state on one hand and as a means to end isolation of the region inflicted upon by partition and independence on the other. Mapping the resources, material and financial infrastructure available in the region, besides addressing the basic questions related to social governance, Ranabir Samaddar and Snehashish Mitra have analysed the process of evolution of the Look East Policy and its present embodiment. The contribution made by Soma Ghosal and Snehashish Mitra has focused on the areas of connectivity, commerce, cooperation and critical constraints in the context of India's Look East Policy and located three frontier towns of Moreh, Tamu and Champhai as gateways to the realization of India's Look East and ASEAN's Look West Policies. Focusing specifically on the political imbroglios of Nagaland during the period after independence, Paula Banerjee and Sucharita Sengupta analyzed how social governance becomes crucial especially in a conflict economy. Addressing one of the most contentious issues in the North East frontier of India at present, the contribution made by Sucharita Sengupta and Samir K. Purkayastha attempted to comprehend the intricacy and dynamics of migration and its implications on control of resources. As they have argued, it would be naïve to assume that development alone can resolve insurgencies and problems of identity conflicts in the region.

With a much broader framework of analysis and coverage than the multitude of existing narratives on India's Look or Act East Policy, this volume has contextualized India's emerging concerns with Southeast and East Asia. This volume has dealt with the ramifications of the renewed concerns embodied in the much discussed policy formulated within the framework of development of global logistics and governance. Attempts are being made to restructure India's North East frontier to work as a bridge or a trade corridor going beyond the traditional geo-political engagement of the nation state with the region. Despite its critical engagement with the North East frontier, this volume, as it seems, presupposes developmentalism as the determining ideological component of the people of the region at large. However, are the people marked by myriad ethnic identities of the region ready to accept the statist developmentalism as an alternative to their aspirations for cultural and political autonomy manifested through multitude of identity discourses?

References

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