

Development and Discontentment in South Asia: with Special Reference to North East India

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This paper, from the sociology of South Asia perspective, clearly reveals a consensus on the significance of trade relations and increased social mobility both within and across the nations of South Asia as factors that could enhance an overall economic integration of the region. It also examines the debates on the matrix of relationship between development and discontentment in North East India involving cross-border movement, social mobility and trade relations. The discourse also showed a changing attitude towards North East region. This paper attempts to examine the contours of the debates on development and discontentment, rather than executing an in-depth analysis of the policies and strategies of the government.

North East India comprises of eight states viz; Manipur, Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Tripura, Nagaland and Sikkim. The area covers a landmass of 262,500 sq. km. wherein 98% of its borders shared with neighboring countries of Bhutan, Bangladesh, China and Myanmar. The region has a population of 39.04 million which constitutes 3.80% approximately of India's total population as per the Census of India 2001. The biodiversity, natural and mineral resources are not largely explored by the investors. The region's rich natural resources do not enhance the process of development due to historical reasons. However, in the recent years, the government has taken a keen interest to develop the region to be at par with other states.

What will be the impact of India's look East Policy? This policy of the Government of India facilitates promising opportunities and challenges for the future of North East region. The North East is a part of the Indo-Burma Biodiversity Hot Spot accompanied by innumerable species of flora and fauna. The contributions of the North East also include tea and rice. Undoubtedly, the North East would emerge as a producing and exporting region in South Asia if the policy is properly implemented. Time will tell us if this policy would bear fruit in a desirable manner.

North East–business hub of south Asia:

Will the North Eastern states trade with the neighboring countries unimpeded by barriers successfully? There has been a debate about the

possibility of allowing North East region to become the hub of business centre in South Asia because of its strategic geographical location. Trade relations (both legal and illegal) through Moreh town (one of the business centre in Manipur) and Tamu town (Myanmar) have enhanced economic integration to a certain extent. However, an in-depth research has to be carried out to examine the trends of integration that prevail as a result of trade relations. If the North East were developed as a business hub of South Asia, backed by the entire required infrastructure, how much India would benefit in terms of sheer logistics?

Innumerable problems such as ethnic conflict, unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDs, insurgency and illegal immigrants are significant indicators of discontentment in the North-East. There was great influx of Bangladeshi and Nepali migrants into India. How will India tackle such a crucial problem? The dilemmas generated by the cross-border movement of people between Bangladesh, Nepal and India can be tackled by diplomatic bilateral relationship based on a dialogue of trust and cooperation between them. A combination of an agreement and a bilateral institution accountable for supervising the cross-border movement of people can address this sensitive issue. The need of an hour is also to bring back insurgent groups to the national mainstream and provide them with skills to focus on development programs through rehabilitation plans. These sensitive issues need to be examined and thoroughly study in a collective manner by the intelligentsia, social activists, NGOs and the government.