

New Capital, Emerging Conflicts and Social Governance in Northeast India: Nagaland and Manipur

Paula Banerjee and Sucharita Sengupta

Discussant: Subir Bhaumik (Senior Journalist and Strategic Commentator)

The research questions that the paper aims to examine appear relevant. But the research need to be fleshed out and detailed. Greater clarity is needed in some cases. For instances, the abstract says the research will "delve into new forms of disruption of new logistical apparatus in the Northeast.". We need to be clear about what would constitute 'new forms of disruption' and 'old forms of disruptions'. The Northeast is facing a host of new protest movements that have erupted over India's emerging development plans. Most important among them is the protests in Assam and Manipur over plans to build huge dams for generation of hydel power. India's Northeast is said to have potential to produce 40000 MW of power, mostly clean hydel energy, and Indian governments (led by Congress and BJP alike) see this as a huge resource to power a growing economy. So plans are afoot to commission huge hydel power projects in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur (Tipaimukh project).

Groups like the Krishak Mukti Sangram Samity led by Akhil Gogoi have blocked work on projects like the Subasiri dam for years now because they feel such projects could be dangerous for downstream states like Assam, not the least because the whole region is prone to high levels of seismicity and has a history of deadly earthquakes. Now if these movements constitute 'new forms of disruptions', we also have some older forms of disruptions that originate from traditional conflicts within the region. India's efforts to create a transport corridor through Nagaland and Manipur to connect to Myanmar and onward to South-east Asia is severely challenged by a spate of road blockades unleashed by Naga groups demanding integration of Manipur's Naga-dominated areas into Nagaland (along with merger of other Naga areas of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh as well). As of now, such a blockade has been in force since early November 2016 and all efforts by the Indian federal government have failed. Now, this disruption grows out of an old conflict, between the Naga separatists and the Indian state, but it has taken a new form where the Naga groups do not see Delhi as the major enemy anymore and rather see state governments like Manipur as a bigger threat for

realising their plans. Also, their main objective does not appear to be secession from India, but securing a 'Greater Naga Lim' or an expanded Naga state. Also the disruption does not come in the form of an armed movement resorting to guerrilla activity as in the past -- rather it is played out through blockades and strikes, apparently legitimate instruments of protest in India, but sometimes violent.

Also to be noted is the reaction of the many underground groups of Manipur to India's efforts to develop the rail link from Assam to Imphal, Manipur's capital, and then on to Moreh on the border with Myanmar as part of India's efforts to play into the proposed Trans-Asian railway network. The rebels are not stopping work, but are more keen on extortion of companies involved in construction to raise funds for their own activity. So if Naga groups are not opposing use of the Dimapur-Kohima-Imphal highway for connecting to Myanmar as part of 'Look East' and if rebel groups are not opposing the railway expansion (eventually to link with Myanmar and south-east Asia) but only extorting as rent seekers, they are different from groups like KMSS who would oppose construction of dams and not seek to extort from construction companies. It is important to categorise these different resistance movements in view of their obvious agendas -- a typology of resistance movements may be in place for lending greater clarity of understanding on the key research questions elaborated upon.