A number of scholars have argued that in a globalizing and regionalizing world, sovereign states, as dominant actors in realm of international relations and foreign policy, are fast losing their importance to other institutions. Processes of globalization, regionalization and geopolitical fragmentation are exposing the state-centric geopolitics to new challenges. In short, the State can no longer be seen as a unity and instead statecraft needs to be seen as multitude of practices. The global civil society and various trans-national economic actors such as banks, firms, multinational corporations and markets are becoming increasingly assertive in term of their role in shaping the new world order (Buzan and little, 1999). Equally important is to acknowledge (as this thesis does) the emergence of new centres of political-economic power within the Westphalia State and the implications of this growing trend for various geopolitical culture and practices of foreign policy and diplomacy.

However, it is too early to conclude that such developments are completely writing off the importance of boundaries and nation-states. No doubt borders are becoming more and more porous and sovereignty is being shared by various actors within the nation-state. Yet the defining feature of geopolitics (i.e., the written geographies of international politics in terms of inside /outside; Self/Other) persists in various forms. At the same time, geoeconomics forces are becoming relatively autonomous, even though in most cases they appear to be moving along, though not necessarily in harmony with, the geopolitics (Ibid.).

Apparently, in India-ASEAN relations both geopolitics and geoeconomics are playing a central role but a closer and critical look has revealed that there is much more to the interplay between the two than meets the eye. The ongoing debate on this subject continues to raise various contentious issues for further scrutiny, some of which have been duly addressed in this thesis. Some would argue (see Gray, 1996) that geopolitics and geoeconomics are not inimical to each other; rather they are complementary. In other words, geopolitical and geoeconomic imperatives are not mutually exclusive. Others would point out that it is probably naive (and unduly optimistic) to believe that future
prospects for international security will be shaped primarily, let alone exclusively, by economic competition rather than political-military struggles. Such an optimistic view may make good sense for the post-modern, post-military societies of the European Union, but for the rest of the world, including Afro-Asia, it may not hold much ground. One of the key findings of this thesis is that India’s ‘Look East’ policy has been dictated and driven by both geo-economic hopes and geopolitical fears, with China factor looming rather large in both in some form.

So far as the domain of India’s foreign policy is concerned, Indian diplomacy in the post-Cold War era has gone far beyond the traditional geopolitical concerns restricted to country’s immediate neighbourhood. Against the backdrop of considerable continuity in the security and strategic concerns of the Indian elite as well as an outstanding change in India’s self-image since 1947, India’s foreign policy today is characterised by unprecedented pragmatism as well as cautious optimism. Looking at the change in India’s foreign policy, I.K Gujral, (1996) is reported to have said, “India's foreign policy has assumed a positive outward orientation with new policy initiatives aimed at consolidating traditional relationships, developing new relationships with countries and regions where we have vital strategic interests, a greater emphasis on economic dimensions in foreign policy (Ibid.: 1527).

A major change in the mental maps of the Indian intellectuals and institutions of statecraft became noticeable during early 1990s, when the then Indian Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao, (impressed by the economic miracle of East Asian economies) started pushing the agenda of economic liberalization. India’s ‘Look East’ policy was in a sense both an important cause and consequence of the geopolitics of re-orientation.

Theoretically speaking, for more than a decade now, spaces and regions (and their meanings) have increasingly being conceptualized as socially constructed in and through political, social and cultural practices. Within Political Geography and International Relations, the approach of critical geopolitics in particular has challenged empiricist and descriptive approaches by focusing on space-producing practices, symbolic meanings, questions of identities, etc. This thesis has been based on the premise that while it is useful to engage with state-centric institutional accounts of [Indian] foreign policy, it is equally important to turn to representational aspects. In other
words, there is a need to overcome the traditional distinction between “real” and symbolic or imagined spaces, for the latter are as real in their existence as the former.

In the light of the above, this thesis has been concerned as much with ‘maps of meaning’ as with ‘maps of states’ and makes reference to both when appropriate. The analysis performed in the thesis has been based on the assumption that various regions and sub-regions (e.g., Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia) are to be approached and analyzed not as simply bounded spaces on the global map but rather as complex mixes of representational projection and material functional interrelationships. Rather than taking the geography of politics as a pre-given, we need to scrutinize the ‘making’ or production of space through foreign policy [e.g., ‘East Asia’] to illustrate how spaces of foreign policy and diplomacy are created through the will to generate, exercise and sustain power.

This study makes an attempt to identify and analyse both continuity and change in India’s foreign policy. The forces of globalization have brought into unprecedented eminence a multitude of actors and agents at the national and sub-national levels to meet the challenge of dynamic and complex economic geographies of globalization. In case of Indian establishment, this transformation has been taking place rapidly at the level of the Ministry of External Affairs, and the conduct of diplomacy is no longer under the exclusive tutelage of the Ministry. As a result, multiple ‘sites’, such as, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Defence, the corporates, and the sub-national governments of various states of the Indian Union have been actively involved in carrying out India’s foreign policy. All these sites produce their respective geographical knowledge(s) on India’s relations with ASEAN in accordance with their locations, functional mandates, institutional interests and dominant official discourses.

Chapter one lays down the theoretical moorings of the thesis. It argues that a study in the geopolitics of reorientation (such as this thesis) should pay attention to the relationship between discourse and practices. It is useful to investigate how through discourse certain discursive spaces (i.e. Southeast Asia as India’s ‘extended’ neighbourhood) are created, that actors may choose to assume, and from which certain actions (India’s ‘Look East’ Policy) are socially facilitated. The chapter argues that
India’s ‘Look East’ policy is a good example of how geo-economic imperatives deploy both geopolitical visions and cultural symbols to create discursive spaces of foreign policy and economic diplomacy. Outlining the major contributions of a critical geopolitics to a better understanding of foreign policy, the chapter points out that much greater attention should be paid to various facets of interplay between geopolitics and geoeconomics. Equally important and insightful is the argument of David Harvey that different geographical knowledges (emphasis on plurality) about ‘foreign’ policy are produced at different institutional-sites and, therefore, it is vital to take into consideration the geopolitical visions of various institutions and agencies, for example, engaged in the pursuit of India’s ‘Look East’ policy.

Chapter two examines the key factors and forces (geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic) behind India’s Look East policy in the post-Cold War period. It shows how varied geographies of ‘East’ have come to be scripted by the Indian foreign policy establishment over a period of time. It argues and illustrates that different actors and institutions have varied geographical imaginations and visions of India’s Look East policy as well as India-ASEAN relations. The chapter highlights the emerging plurality of practical geopolitical reasonings and shows how, besides the Ministry of External Affairs, various other institutional ‘sites’ have started contributing to the discourse as well as practices of India’s ‘Look East’ policy. It also illustrates how cultural resources and iconographies (common historical memories) are being deployed and manipulated both by the foreign policy establishment and market-corporate actors to realize certain geopolitical and geoeconomic goals. The role played by the Hindutva (Hindu nationalist actors and agencies) and the Indian/Hindu diaspora in Southeast Asia is also being critically examined, with special reference to the central role of ‘cultural diplomacy’ in India-ASEAN relations.

Chapter three looks into the geoeconomic dimensions and dictations of India-ASEAN relations, including trade. The chapter examines the role played by the new actors and agents taking part in India’s economic foreign policy, such as various ministries, the corporate sector, and the sub-national actors. Extremely noteworthy is the active participation of some states like Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in India’s Look East policy. The chapter illustrates how the Indian political elite is willing to embrace the vocabulary of ‘geoeconomics’ where ‘the authority of state bureaucrats can be asserted
anew, not in the names of military security this time, but rather to protect "vital economic interests" by geo-economic defenses, geo-economic offensives, and geo-economic diplomacy. And how in the pursuit of commercial diplomacy, the old idioms and old maps appear to be giving way to new cartographies, especially in matters like energy security. Does this mean that geo-economics is replacing geopolitics? Is the ‘power of pace’ taking over the ‘power of place’ as spaces of flows with interconnections and networks link distant parts of the previously fixed globe? The chapter shows the resilience and resistance of geopolitics in India’s ‘immediate’ neighborhood and how these borders (material and mental) come in India’s way of connecting to the ‘extended’ neighborhood. It also shows that New Delhi is still struggling to plug India’s Northeast into its Look East policy.

Chapter four critically examines the challenge of maritime security before India and her neighbours in Southeast Asia as well as the prospects of sub-regional cooperation. While outlining the vulnerabilities, challenges and imperatives of the Indian Ocean Region (against the backdrop of growing militarization of the Indian Ocean space), the chapter demonstrates that the boundaries between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are already blurred when it comes to the challenge of maritime security in the face of non-traditional threats. Be it maritime terrorism or piracy, small arms trafficking or trafficking of drugs, such threats are not confined to either the Indian Ocean Region or Southeast Asia. From one perspective, Southeast Asia is the contiguous eastern arm of the Indian Ocean, with its littoral states having access and stakes in the Indian Ocean for maritime borne trade and flow of energy resources. The chapter, therefore, concludes that both India and ASEAN countries belong to the same Regional Maritime Security Complex. As far as the sub-regional cooperation is concerned, even though much leaves to be desired in terms of implementation of various agreements, it offers India, as pointed out by P. V. Rao (2005: 169) “the most practical strategy of dealing with the ASEAN.”

Chapter five explores at length the China ‘factor’ in India-ASEAN relations. China is set to become India’s largest trading partner in the near future. If geoecomics were to have a complete say, Sino-Indian relations can be expected to undergo a gradual but steady growth. A question may arise, however, from a longer term point of view regarding China’s intentions, both in global and regional sense, once it realizes the stated
goal of becoming an advanced nation, comparable to the Western powers around 2050. Both India and ASEAN will continue to keenly watch the graph of China’s geopolitical rise. The chapter also brings out that, broadly speaking, one finds three categories of geopolitical discourses in India on how China’s rise to power should be approached and analyzed; the optimists, the pragmatists and the hardliners. It can be argued that the pragmatists (those who believe in engaging and balancing China at the same time) are likely to exercise greater influence on India’s foreign policy in the near future.

China is going to remain a major factor in India-ASEAN relations. Both for India and for ASEAN countries, the astute display and deployment of geo-economic soft power diplomacy by China will continue to be a matter of great interest and concern. China’s military-naval modernization may also continue to invite New Delhi’s concerns. India may also have to take into account China’s naval activities and intentions in its neighbourhood, that is Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and the Indian Ocean. China’s entry into the Indian Ocean with a carrier-task force is not likely to happen before several decades. However, for Beijing the Indian Ocean will continue to be important both for energy security and the security of the trade sea lanes of communication that China maintains with Southwest Asia, Persian Gulf and Africa.

As far as Sino-India relations are concerned, it is worth asking whether there is any concrete evidence thus far that geoeconomics is replacing geopolitics. Sino-India bilateral trade continues to show strong growth and both governments have revised the trade target to 60 billion dollars by 2010. India’s Commerce Minister will visit China in April 2008 for the 8th meeting of the Joint Economic Group. And yet Chinese officials have expressed regret at Indian Prime Minister’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh in end January 2008. The Minister’s visit to Arunachal Pradesh was described as a visit to assure Indian citizens that the Government is mindful of their developmental needs, and is ready and willing to assist them through concrete projects. “The fact that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India has been clearly conveyed to the Chinese side by Government,” remarked Mr. Mukherjee (2008: Internet Source).

Chapter six looks at the impact of 9/11 and its geopolitical fallouts on India-ASEAN relations. Both India and ASEAN countries have been victims of terrorism in their own ways and have demonstrated the necessary political will to cooperate on
meeting this extremely complex threat. The chapter has shown, however, that the responses of various Southeast Asian countries to the events of 9/11 are varied. Neither India (with the second largest Muslim population) nor ASEAN countries like Malaysia and Indonesia can afford to subscribe to the ‘Clash of Civilizations’ thesis of Samuel P. Huntington. Instead both would benefit immensely from the much-needed dialogues between civilizations.

Thomas Barnett’s work is the main example of a more widespread form of neoliberal geopolitics implicated in the war-making in this chapter. This geopolitical world vision, we argue, is closely connected to neoliberal idealism about the virtues of free markets, openness, and global economic integration. It is linked at the same time to an extreme form of American unilateralism. The chapter shows how parts of Southeast Asia are being mapped in terms of neo-liberal geopolitics and points out the implications of such mapping for cooperation and peaceful-diplomatic resolution of conflicts. After the incident of 9/11, India and ASEAN countries have been cooperating on the issue of terrorism, both on land and at sea. Owing to the fact that a few of ASEAN countries are Muslim majority countries, makes the region more vulnerable to the threat of terrorism. Post- 9/11, American military-strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific oceanic region is likely to increase with implications of its own for India-ASEAN relations.

Looking Ahead

The first phase of India’s Look East policy was launched in early 90s and lasted till the end of that decade. The second phase, with its various collaborative projects, is still in progress. It is widely accepted that India-ASEAN relations did not achieve much during the first decade after the launch of India’s ‘Look East’ policy. During the first phase, the policy was more rhetorical in nature and not enough was done to translate ‘Look East’ as a discursive space into ‘Act East’ practices. Whereas the second phase of the policy, which started post-2000, has been assessed much more positively and favourably by various observers and analysts. Both India and ASEAN countries have engaged each other in new and diverse areas besides political, economic and security fields. Both continue to cooperate on the new issue-areas such as maritime security, tourism, climate change, energy security, information and communication technology, and international terrorism. There is enough empirical evidence to suggest that India’s relations with
ASEAN are evolving in mutually beneficial ways despite the fact that it is also a challenge of achieving cooperation between a state-actor (India) and a regional grouping with diverse membership (ASEAN).

Despite obvious geographical proximity India and ASEAN remained geopolitically distant for most of the Cold War period for reasons discussed at length in this thesis. Geopolitical compulsions of the Cold War variety pushed, among other things, the matter of connectivity between the two to the background. However, of late, both are making efforts to get connected through land route besides the air and maritime links. India and ASEAN countries have improved the connectivity between them. Today, there are over 215 direct and indirect flights every week between various major cities of India and Singapore, 115 flights with Thailand and nearly 50 with Malaysia. But India needs to seek much more from the Open Skies Policy with ASEAN and has expressed her desire to join the ASEAN Open Skies regime once it is finalized (Singh, 2007a: Internet Source). It was reported in the media that Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Facility has been started to connect India’s eastern ports to Sittwe port of Myanmar. It is proposed that later on, using road and river networks, Myanmar will be connected to Mizoram. Such transportation routes are expected to save a considerable amount in transportation costs (The Tribune, 2007d).

As discussed in the thesis, some of the federal constituents of the Indian Union are now participating quite actively in the economic foreign affairs of India. West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh in particular have been forging economic relations with the countries of Southeast Asia. Of late, Bihar too has shown its will and ability to cash upon India’s ‘Look East’ policy (The Tribune, 2007c). The Chief Minister of Bihar, Nitish Kumar, sent State Tourism Minister, Nand Kishore Yadav, and secretary, tourism department, Anjani Kumar Singh to take part in a three-day conference in Tokyo on Indian tourism which began in September 2007. Both of them were carrying with them 100 copies of a book on Buddhist circuit in India in Japanese with photographs of Lord Buddha, Vaishali and Vishwa Santi stupa (Ibid.). This also shows that cultural diplomacy is going to play an increasingly important role in India-ASEAN relations.

India’s economic cooperation with ASEAN countries is being strengthened through several measures, including efforts aimed at (i) finalization of the ASEAN-India
FTA; (ii) holding of a dialogue between ASEAN and India on an open skies policy; (iii) launching of mutually agreed special tourism campaigns in India and ASEAN countries, to enhance people-to-people contact and facilitate tourist flow in both directions; and (iv) encouraging setting up of joint flagship projects that would capitalize on the complementary strengths of India and ASEAN. India-Singapore and India-Thailand Free Trade Areas are already functional. India’s Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Kamal Nath, has recently informed that a proposal is underway for commencing negotiations for an India-Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) from January 2008 (Negotiations for India-Malaysia Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement to Commence from January 2008 Kamal Nath inaugurates “Malaysia-India Business Opportunities”, 2007: Internet Source).

India-ASEAN Free Trade Area agreement is still under negotiation The FTA draft agreement includes a fourth list of goods which includes things like tea, coffee, copper, crude palm oil, and refined palm oil (Khare, 2007). India had agreed to cut down duties on the above mentioned items up to 50%. However, ASEAN asked for more cuts. India is trying to accommodate this demand and the discussions within the trade and economic reforms committee (TERC) are in process for the same (The Economic Times, 2007). Till the beginning of 2007, India-ASEAN Free Trade Area seemed to be quite distant owing to the fact that both could not reach a consensus on the ‘negative list’ of 850 plus items (the items that would be excluded from the proposed FTA agreement). On 25 July 2007, Malaysia’s Trade and Industries minister, Rafidah Aziz, declared that ASEAN had suspended talks with India on the FTA as this list comprised 30% of ASEAN exports to India. However, later in August, the list was reduced to 560 items (Thakurta, 2006: Internet Source).

The then-Special Secretary to India’s Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Gopal K Pillai, is on record to have said that India could reduce tariffs on refined palm oil from 90 to 60 percent, crude palm oil from 80 to 50 percent, black tea from 100 to 50 percent and pepper from 70 to 50 percent. This helped negotiations between India and ASEAN over the FTA to move forward.

According to Government of India (see briefing by Secretary (East), Shri N. Ravi, on Prime Minister’s forthcoming visit to Singapore to attend the East Asia Summit
India-ASEAN trade has more or less been balanced till about 2006. In 2006, Indian exports to ASEAN were about 12 billion dollars and ASEAN exports to India were close to 18 billion dollars (Ibid.). Quite a bit of this was contributed to by the increased imports of crude oil from some of the countries in the region and also increases in palm oil prices. The price of crude oil being what it is, it also got reflected in that.

So far as the element of competitiveness is concerned, there are many areas where India still has to compete. It is a very complicated package in the sense that input costs in some of the Southeast Asian countries, for let us say automobile components, are extremely competitive when one compares the same input costs in India. So that is one area where India can really move forward (Ibid.). There are other areas where India is said to have certain competitive edge, in some of the food-processing areas and some of the manufacturing areas. Indian private investment into Southeast Asian countries has become quite visible now. It totals just about 600 million dollars in three different fields, in the last year and a half (Ibid.). This has been cited as an example to show that Indian private industry is taking steps to invest in the Southeast Asian countries to improve their own, shall we say, balance sheets and so on.

Even though India-ASEAN relations have been constantly improving, various obstacles still remain in the way of achieving substantial success. We have already discussed some of them in the thesis. There is a need to reform the traditional Ministry of External Affairs working on foreign policy. How do we ensure that a bad geopolitics does not come in the way of good geoeconomics? The answer to some extent also lies in institution building and institutional reforms. India’s foreign policy has entered into new kinds of domains, hitherto unanticipated and/or unthinkable, as argued and illustrated in this thesis, and the traditional foreign policy institutions are not geared for for new kind of geo-economic changes and challenges in a globalizing world. New institutions will have to be created and nurtured in the spirit of inter-institutional as well as intra-institutional dialogues. An important step in this direction has been the establishment of the Ministry of Overseas Indians, which, it is hoped, will encourage and support Indian Diaspora in Southeast Asia to promote and strengthen inter-cultural dialogues between Indians and Southeast Asians. One of key challenges before India’s pluralist foreign
policy and multi-dimensional diplomacy (ranging from commercial to naval to cultural) would be to develop the necessary institutional-functional ability to grapple with the complexity of interplay between geo-economic imperatives/aspirations and geopolitical impediments/fears on the ever widening spectrum of India-ASEAN relations.