

BOOK REVIEW

Shipping industry in India – colonialism to globalisation (a spatio-temporal analysis), Sadanand Gupta, New Delhi, Pentagon Press, 2016, 165 pp., INR 895, ISBN 9788182748910

With 95% of India's merchandise trade by volume carried onboard ships, it is easy to understand the deep interlinkages between India's economic growth and the rate at which India's maritime infrastructure develops to keep pace with growing demands. Therefore, in this context, India's maritime capabilities play a crucial role in the overall economic development of the country. While a maritime ecosystem has many facets, shipping and port facilities are arguably the most significant factors that impinge on commercial activities on the seas. This is well recognised by the government of India and is evident by the renewed thrust on development of coastal and shipping infrastructure. "Make in India", Project Sagarmala and the maiden Maritime India Summit in April 2016 are all manifestations of the Indian government's intent to kick-start port-led economic development in the country.

In such an environment, the book titled *Shipping Industry in India – Colonialism to Globalisation (A Spatio-Temporal Analysis)*, by Sadanand Gupta, comes at an opportune time when maritime issues are at the forefront of the discourse on future economic growth of the country. The book finds its roots in the author's MPhil dissertation, which focused on restructuring of major ports of India. This study provides a detailed description and analysis of the shipping industry in India from a holistic perspective – one not constrained purely by economic imperatives. The author envisages target readership to include government planners at the central and regional levels, academics, researchers and other bodies associated with economic development and the shipping industry.

The author introduces the book with a brief narrative of the importance of ports to India's economic growth and the basic administrative structures that are in place for the management of the country's ports. The importance of this study is in the context of India's post-reform economic model, and the author accordingly defines the scope of the book together with the methodology of research and sources of data used. There is a detailed review of existing academic work organised broadly into four sections, viz. conceptual studies, port privatisation, productivity and modernisation of ports.

The book is organised into five chapters. The first two chapters are focused on data pertaining to traffic and productivity of ports. The next three chapters provide analyses of issues related to modernisation, containerisation and governance of ports in India.

The first chapter examines traffic at each of the 12 major ports in substantial detail. It includes a brief historical and geographical overview of each major port, establishing in the process the context for subsequent analysis, which in turn leads to a comprehensive insight into the evolution and present status of each of the ports. It also highlights the addition and subsequent removal of Port Blair to the list of major ports in 2010–2011. Some analysis of the background to this quick reversal could have provided an insight into what can arguably be termed as a major administrative oversight. Understandably, each of the 187 minor ports is not dealt with in any detail, but useful data and trends are provided on the overall contribution of minor ports to handling of seaborne cargo. A significant conclusion that is arrived at using these trends is that minor ports are likely to achieve greater growth rates in the ensuing years, primarily due to the edge they enjoy in attracting private investment and the large number of

greenfield projects that are likely to fructify in future. Analysis of state-wise and commodity-wise traffic also offers notable insights into where and what is being transported to and from ports in India.

In dealing with performance and productivity of major ports in Chapter 2, the author first introduces the indices used in the evaluation and the time intervals used for comparative assessment. The composite index used to indicate overall position of the port hinges upon factors such as quantum of cargo handled, turn-around time, number of vessels, etc. The sequential and logical presentation of each of the six indices provides a strong empirical basis for the overall performance assessment of the major ports. The analysis also throws out interesting outcomes – the ports of Ennore and Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust (JNPT) top the charts in operational performance. Ennore is the only corporatised port in India while JNPT is in the process of corporatisation. This finding tends to confirm the author's premise that corporatisation and privatisation of ports are essential for improving their performance.

The essence of assessing ports on the basis of operational performance indices is described in the section that lists causes for the poor performance of major ports. The author highlights the insignificant investments over the years in augmenting infrastructure of major ports. The fact that ports form a part of the surface transport ministry, which itself is provided insufficient budgetary support, together with inherent inefficiencies in planning and implementing port augmentation projects, is correctly identified as a significant shortcoming. This assertion is supported by the fact that though the Indian government controls all major ports, it has yet to evolve a comprehensive port management policy. These factors accrue severe adverse outcomes for the Indian economy, with a large number of modern shipping services reluctant to accept operational inefficiencies at ports.

The second half of the book is devoted to analysing factors that distinguish one port from another, and to highlighting issues that could be acted upon in order to make the ports operationally more efficient. The first, and arguably the most significant issue that is dwelt upon is the process of privatisation of ports, with a start having been made especially in minor ports. It also highlights the benefits of harnessing advances in the field of information technology to make port operations efficient, effective and inexpensive. Adoption of these recommended measures together with the efficiencies achieved are highlighted using examples. Another key issue highlighted, but one that could do with greater emphasis, is the importance of hinterland connectivity to port operational capacities. This is especially true for India, where the need is now being felt for a holistic transport infrastructure augmentation plan that approaches surface transport as a composite whole – a sum of parts – as opposed to individual silos of roadways, internal waterways and railways. It is now well recognised that the internal transport system has a direct bearing on international seaborne trade.

The book also delves into Special Economic Zones (SEZ) and their benefits to port operations. The location of industries close to port cities reduces the cost of commodities and goods by significantly lowering internal transportation costs, especially in a vast landmass such as India's. Container traffic is analysed in significant detail together with attendant benefits and challenges. It traces the road to containerisation in India to the need to evolve a systematic and efficient way of handling large and diverse amounts of cargo. Here the author also highlights that minor ports are likely to play a large role in moving containerised cargo in and out of the country but are at present constrained by the inability to act as trans-shipment ports, thereby failing to act as hubs for the efficient movement of cargo.

The book is unarguably a valuable source of information and analysis pertaining to Indian ports. However, since the title of the book alludes to the Indian shipping industry, it may have been useful to touch upon other aspects of the industry such as the Indian mercantile fleet and

the significant challenges it faces with respect to modernisation, repair and refitting capabilities. The content of the book is focused singularly on ports, which are without doubt the mainstay of the shipping industry but need to be studied keeping other facets in the contextual framework. The author has logically highlighted the increasing role that minor ports are bound to play in India's economic growth. This is especially pertinent in light of the relaxation of cabotage laws for container shipping, by the Indian government in March 2016. In this context, it may have been useful to propose a roadmap for operational augmentation of these ports by examining the facilities and management framework of a model port anywhere in the world.

The book provides useful inputs to individuals and agencies involved in the Indian shipping industry. It presents and analyses data related to operational parameters of ports and provides a useful basis for examining shortfalls and recommending future growth plans. With India moving towards a Blue Economy and the government according high priority to the development of national maritime infrastructure, this book comes at an opportune time as a comprehensive source of data and analytical outcomes relevant to the ports of India.

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