

# Tribal Situation in North East India

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## INTRODUCTION

North East India in the context of India occupies a distinctive place due primarily to its geographical, historical, social, cultural, and political features. North East India comprises seven states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The north eastern region is surrounded by foreign territories like Bhutan, Tibet-China, Burma, and Bangladesh on the north-south and the east except for a long narrow passage in the west which connects the region with West Bengal and the rest of India. North East India occupies an area of 255,000 sq km. This largely hilly area comprises about 7 per cent landmass of India. The valley of the river Bramhaputra in the state of Assam is the most expansive plains area in North East India.

North East India is the homeland of a large number of ethnic groups who came from different directions at different historical times. These groups belong to different racial stocks, speak different languages and have varied socio-cultural traditions. This region has been occupied by different streams of the Mongoloid people who came from the north and the east at different periods. The Australoids came to this region before the coming of the Mongoloids who partially or fully absorbed the Australoid strains (Das, 1960,1970). The physical features of different tribes of North East India suggest that the Australoid elements are present in some of the tribes. It has been stated that long ago one section of the Indo-Mongoloids spread over the whole of the Bramhaputra valley, North Bengal and East Bengal (now Bangladesh) giving rise to various tribal groups inhabiting this region (Chaterji, 1974: 27-8). The diverse Mongoloid groups in course of time settled down in different habitats and ecological settings of the north eastern region crystallized into distinct entities which are referred to as tribes today (Bhagabati, 1988: 1-2; 1992: 1-2)

The migration of people from ancient to present time and from various directions to North East India have significantly contributed towards the growth of ethnic diversities. Besides the tribal

groups, a few other non-tribal groups have also come into existence as a consequence of prolonged interactions between the cultures of the migrants and those of the indigenous people. The spread of Hinduism; invasions of different outside rulers at different historical periods; integration of the north eastern region with the rest of India in the nineteenth century and migrations that took place as late as the last century have resulted spectacular social, cultural, economic and political transformations in this region.

The total population of North East India, according to 1991 census is nearly 32 million, which constitute 3.73 per cent of India as a whole. Table 1 shows the distribution of population by religion in the states of North East India. It is evident from the table that the overwhelming majority of the people living in North East India are Hindus (60.93%). The Hindus constitute dominant population in Tripura (86.50%), Assam (67.13%) and in Manipur (57.67%). The second largest religious group is the Muslims who constitute 21.55 per cent of the total population of North East India. They are not dominant in any of the states of North East India. Their largest concentration is in Assam where they constitute 28.43 per cent of the total population of the state. The Christians who constitute 13.63 per cent of the total population of North East India, are dominant in two states, viz. Mizoram (85.73%) and Nagaland (87.47%). The Buddhists are not dominant in any of the states of North East India. In Arunachal Pradesh, they account for 12.88 per cent of the total population of the state. A significant concentration of the Buddhist population is found in the Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. In Mizoram and Tripura they constitute 7.88 per cent and 4.6 per cent of the total populations of the two states, respectively. It is to be noted here that in Arunachal Pradesh, the majority of the people practise different forms of tribal religions. The people who pursue tribal religions constitute 2.45 per cent of the total population of North East India and they are dominant in Arunachal Pradesh (36.22%). The Jains constitute only 0.07 per cent of the total population of North East India and of the total

**Table 1: Distribution of population by religion in the states of North East, 1991**

| State             | Total population | Hindus                | Muslims              | Christians           | Sikhs            | Buddhists          | Jains            | Other religions*   | Religion not stated |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Assam             | 22,414,322       | 15,047,293<br>(67.13) | 6,373,204<br>(28.43) | 744,367<br>(3.32)    | 16,492<br>(0.07) | 64,008<br>(0.29)   | 20,645<br>(0.09) | 138,230<br>(0.62)  | 10,083<br>(0.05)    |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 864,558          | 320,212<br>(37.04)    | 11,922<br>(1.38)     | 89,013<br>(10.29)    | 1,205<br>(0.14)  | 111,372<br>(12.88) | 64<br>(0.01)     | 313,118<br>(36.22) | 17,652<br>(2.04)    |
| Manipur           | 1,837,149        | 1,059,470<br>(57.67)  | 133,535<br>(7.27)    | 626,669<br>(34.11)   | 1,301<br>(0.07)  | 711<br>(0.04)      | 1,337<br>(0.07)  | 14,066<br>(0.77)   | 60<br>(0.003)       |
| Meghalaya         | 1,774,778        | 260,306<br>(14.67)    | 61,462<br>(3.46)     | 1,146,092<br>(64.58) | 2,612<br>(0.15)  | 2,934<br>(0.16)    | 445<br>(0.02)    | 298,466<br>(16.82) | 2,461<br>(0.14)     |
| Mizoram           | 689,756          | 34,788<br>(5.05)      | 4,538<br>(0.66)      | 591,342<br>(85.73)   | 299<br>(0.04)    | 54,024<br>(7.83)   | 4<br>(0.0006)    | 1,859<br>(0.27)    | 2,902<br>(0.42)     |
| Nagaland          | 1,209,546        | 122,473<br>(10.12)    | 20,642<br>(1.71)     | 1,057,940<br>(87.47) | 732<br>(0.06)    | 581<br>(0.05)      | 1,202<br>(0.01)  | 5,870<br>(0.48)    | 106<br>(0.01)       |
| Tripura           | 2,757,205        | 2,384,934<br>(86.50)  | 196,495<br>(7.13)    | 46,472<br>(1.68)     | 740<br>(0.03)    | 128,260<br>(4.65)  | 301<br>(0.01)    | 2<br>(0.00007)     | 1<br>(0.00004)      |
| N.E.India         | 31,547,314       | 19,229,476<br>(60.93) | 6,801,798<br>(21.55) | 4,301,895<br>(13.63) | 23,381<br>(0.07) | 361,890<br>(1.14)  | 23,998<br>(0.07) | 771,611<br>(2.45)  | 33,265<br>(0.10)    |

East India, 1991

\* Mostly tribal religions

(Figures within brackets indicate percentage of each religious groups of the total population of the state)

Source: *Census of India*, 1991, Series 1, Paper 2 of 1992, Final population totals: Brief analysis of Primary Census

Jains, the majority live in Nagaland.

North East India represents a sort of ethnological transition zone between India and neighboring China, Tibet, Burma and Bangladesh. It is located between 22° north latitude and 29.3° north latitude and 89.7° east longitude and 97.8° east longitude. North East India has an overwhelming and almost incredible ethnic diversity.

### TRIBES OF NORTH EAST INDIA

Northeast India is the homeland of a large number of tribes. There are 145 tribal communities of which 78 are large each with a population of more than 5000. They constitute around 12 per cent of the total tribal population of India and 25.81 per cent of the total population of North East India.

In so far as the distribution of the tribes in North East India is concerned, it may be stated that some tribes are widely spread out while others are concentrated into relatively small territory (Taher, 1977: 16-26). Spatially many of these tribal communities cut across the administrative boundaries and are found in a contiguous tract spreading over two or more states. The numerous culturally or politically autonomous tribal groups live in a situation of contact and communication with their respective neighboring populations. Myths and legends of various communities as well as history are replete with evidences of inter-

group contacts and culture exchange (Roy Burman, 1974: 303-7).

In the seven states of North East India, the percentages of tribal population varies significantly. In the states of Assam, Manipur and Tripura, the percentages of tribal population to the total population of the respective states are 12.82%, 34.41% and 30.95%. In Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland the percentages of tribal population to the total population of the respective states are quite high. In Mizoram, the tribals constitute 94.75 per cent of the total state's population. Table 2 shows the tribal population in the seven states of North East India.

**Table 2: Tribal population of North East India, 1991**

| State             | Total population | Tribal population | Percentage of Tribal population to the total population |
|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|---|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 864,558          | 550,351           | 63.65   |
| Assam             | 22,414,322       | 2,874,441         | 12.82   |
| Manipur           | 1,837,149        | 632,173           | 34.41   |
| Meghalaya         | 1,774,778        | 1,517,927         | 85.53   |
| Mizoram           | 689,756          | 653,565           | 94.75   |
| Nagaland          | 1,209,546        | 1,060,822         | 87.7  |
| Tripura           | 2,757,205        | 853,345           | 30.95   |
| N.E.India         | 31,547,314       | 8,142,624         | 25.81   |
| India             | 8,46,302,688     | 67,758,380        | 8.08  |

Source: *Census of India*, 1991, Series I paper-1 of 1993, Union Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The largest of all the tribes are the Bodos, Khasis, Khyntriams and Pnars, Garos, Mizos, Karbis and Mishings. It is to be noted here that except the Mishings who primarily live on the banks of the Brahmaputra and its major tributaries, all other groups are spatially widely distributed. The Bodos extend from North Bengal to the western Nagaon and the western Darrang. The Khasis and the Garos have well-defined homelands. The Mizos are primarily found in Mizoram and Cachar-Manipur border. The Karbis spread over Karbi Anglong, north eastern Meghalaya and western Nagaland.

Konyak, Ao, Sema and Angami are the largest tribal communities in Nagaland. Tangkhul, Kabui, Thado and Hmar are the important tribal communities of Manipur. In Arunachal Pradesh, the largest groups are Galong, Nishi, Wancho and Adi.

The tribes of Northeast India living in the hill areas mainly practise *jhum* (shifting cultivation). A few small communities living in the extremes of the north eastern parts of Arunachal Pradesh and the eastern boundary of Nagaland, carry on non-monetized exchange system. These tribes are involved in market economy through a large number of weekly and by-weekly rural markets. The shifting cultivators also supplement their earning working as wage laborers and petty businessmen. The tribes mainly living in the plains of the region like the Bodo Kacharis, Rabhas, Mishings, etc., have built a peasant based economy. The trend of occupational diversifications has also emerged among many of the tribes of North East India.

We have already discussed the spatial pattern of the tribes of Northeast India. It is to be noted here that though the overwhelming majority (89.86%) of the tribal population of the region is rural, yet in all the states of Northeast India there are tribals who live in urban areas. Table 3 shows

the rural-urban distribution of the tribal population in the seven states of North East India.

It is evident from table 3 that excepting Mizoram, in all other states of the region the percentage of the rural tribal population is about 80%. In Mizoram, the percentages of rural and urban tribal populations are 54.80 and 45.20% respectively. In other two states, Meghalaya and Nagaland, the percentages of urban tribal populations are 13.56 and 12.04% respectively. In the remaining states, the percentage of urban tribal population are relatively low and in Tripura it is the lowest (1.65%). The urban tribals mostly live in the state capitals, district headquarters and small towns in their respective states.

The north eastern region has extreme heterogeneity in terms of distribution of tribal populations in different parts, their social structures and cultural patterns. There is spatial variation in the tribal characteristics of a single tribe. For example, the sub-divisions of the Khasis, viz., the Wars, Khyntriams, Pnars and Bhois are not only territorial groups but each of them has acquired identifiable different socio-cultural traits. The Dimasa Kacharis are distributed in different places of Assam and in the neighboring state of Nagaland. The Dimasa Kacharis living in North Cachar Hill district appear to have retained much of their traditional tribal mores. On the otherhand, in the case of the Dimasa Kacharis living in Nagaon district of Assam, the influence of Assamese culture is very much discernible and in the case of the Dimasa Kacharis living in the Cachar district of Assam, one notices the influence of Bengali culture. The Rabhas, Koches, Mishings and Deuris of Assam, because of their living in close contact with the non-tribal Assamese people have acquired the socio-cultural norms of the latter to a considerable extent. The degree of acculturation in different sectors of socio-cultural life of the tribes is different

**Table 3: Rural-urban distribution of tribal population in North East India, 1991**

| State             | Population | Rural            | Urban          |
|-------------------|------------|------------------|----------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 550,351    | 518,222(96.16)   | 32,129 (5.84)  |
| Assam             | 2,874,441  | 2,777,308(96.62) | 97,133(3.38)   |
| Manipur           | 632,173    | 578,930(91.57)   | 53,243(8.43)   |
| Meghalaya         | 1,517,927  | 1,312,093(86.44) | 205,834(13.56) |
| Mizoram           | 653,565    | 358,113(54.80)   | 295,452(45.20) |
| Nagaland          | 1,060,822  | 933,145(87.96)   | 127,677(12.04) |
| Tripura           | 853,345    | 839,264 (98.35)  | 14,081(1.65)   |
| N.E.India         | 8,142,624  | 7,317,075(89.86) | 825,549(10.14) |

Source: Census of India, 1991, Series I paper-1 of 1993, Union Primary Census Abstract for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

(Taher, 1977:21). The tribes of Northeast India may be divided into three major linguistic groups: those belonging to Austro-Asiatic family; those of the Siamese-Chinese sub-family; and those belonging to Tibeto-Burman sub-family. The last named linguistic group numerically predominates.

### TRIBES OF ASSAM

Assam is one of the seven states of Northeast India. It is situated within 24° and 28° North latitudes and 91° and 96° east longitudes. Assam is bounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Meghalaya and Tripura on the south, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the east and Meghalaya and West Bengal and Bangladesh on the west.

Assam covers a territory of 78,523 sq km, roughly a fourth of it comprising rugged hills and the rest verdant alluvial plains out of which 78,088 sq km is occupied by rural and 485 sq km is occupied by urban areas. The alluvial Brahmaputra valley commands the lion's share of the territory.

According to 1991 census, the total population of the state is 22,414,322 out of which 11.09 per cent are urban and 88.89 per cent are rural inhabitants. The state of Assam is divided into 23 districts. Of the total districts, two districts are hills districts. These are Karbi Anglong and North Cachar Hills districts.

Assam is blended with hills and plains. Topographically it can be divided into three distinct zones: the Brahmaputra valley or the Brahmaputra plains in the north; the Karbi Anglong and the North Cachar Hills in the middle; and the Barak valley or the Barak plain in the south. The Brahmaputra valley which is about 500 km in length and 60 km in breadth is the most expansive plain area of the three zones. The Brahmaputra itself is highly braided due to low gradient and tends to form river islands. The largest of them, Majuli (929 sq kms) is said to be the world's largest.

In the valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak, the soils are mostly alluvial. In the hill areas the soils are red in colour and they are also acidic. The climatic condition of the plains is quite suitable for the cultivation of the variety of crops, and the climatic condition of the soils in the hill areas are quite suitable for cultivation of certain crops like coffee and rubber.

Assam has an agricultural based economy and more than 70 per cent of the population

depend on agriculture as their primary source of livelihood. Rice is the main crop cultivated by the people. In the interior hill areas, the tribal people practise shifting cultivation. The tribal people raise mixed crops along with paddy in jhum cultivation.

Racially, there are a number of ethnic groups in Assam including the indigenous tribal communities professing different religious faiths and beliefs and speaking different languages and dialects.

The state has a large number of tribes with their variety in tradition, culture, dresses, and exotic way of life. Most tribes have their own languages; some of their traditions are so unique and lively that these causes wonder to others. Boro (or Kachari), Karbi, Koch-Rajbanshi, Mishng, Mishimi and Rabha are also among these tribes exhibiting variety in tradition, culture, dresses, and exotic way of life. Assamese is the principal language of the state and is regarded as the *lingua franca* of the whole North East India.

In Assam there are as many as 23 tribal communities which constitute 12.82 per cent of the total population of the state. The tribes of Assam may broadly be divided into two categories: plain tribes and hill tribes. The plain tribes mainly inhabit the plain areas of the state and the hill tribes are mainly concentrated in the hilly areas.

Bodo Kacharis constitute the largest tribal group in Assam who account for 38 per cent of the total tribal population of the state. Next to the Bodo Kacharis, the Mishings constitute 16.16 per cent of the total tribal population.

The districtwise breakup of tribal population in Assam shows that in North Cachar Hills district the tribals constitute 65.54 per cent of the total population of the district. In Karbi Anglong district, the tribals constitute 51.56 per cent of the total population of the district. In Dhemaji district, they constitute 43.92 per cent and in Kokrajhar district they constitute 41.15 per cent.

A significant percentage of tribal population in the districts of Kamrup, North Cachar Hills, Karimganj, Dibrugarh and Hailakandi are urban. Their percentages are 11.83 (Kamrup), 11.76 (North Cachar Hills district), 8.68 (Karimganj), 7.93 (Dibrugarh) and 6.72 (Hailakandi). The high percentage of urban tribals in Kamrup district may be explained in terms of rapid industrialization and urbanization in Guwahati-the state capital situated in this district and Guwahati is the

premier city in the whole of Northeast India.

### TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

Arunachal Pradesh is India's land of the rising sun. Situated on the easternmost tip of the country, it shares its international border with Bhutan, China and Burma, and its national border with Assam and Nagaland. Arunachal Pradesh, bordered on the south by Assam state, on the west by Bhutan, on the north and northeast by China, and on the east by Myanmar (formerly known as Burma) is a sparsely populated mountainous area in the extreme north eastern part of the subcontinent. Arunachal Pradesh has an area of 83,743 sq km. It became a union territory in 1972 and India's 24th state in December 1986.

Most of Arunachal Pradesh is mountainous. Its terrain consists of lofty, haphazardly aligned ridges that separate deep valleys and rise to the peaks of the Great Himalayas. The state's main rivers are the Brahmaputra known in Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang, and its tributaries, the Tirap, the Lohit (Zayü Qu), the Subansiri, and the Bharali. The climate of the foothills is subtropical; in the mountains, temperatures decrease rapidly with altitude. Rainfall averages between 2000 and 4000 mm (80 and 160) in a year.

Most of the population of Arunachal Pradesh is of Asiatic origin and shows physical affinities with the peoples of Tibet and the Myanmar hill region. There are number of tribes and subtribes, each with a specific geographic distribution. In western Arunachal Pradesh the main tribes are the Nishi or Dafla, Sulung, Sherdukpen, Aka, Monpa, Apatani, and hill Miri. The Adis, the largest tribal group in the state, occupy the central region. The Mishmis occupy the north eastern hills, and the Wancho, Nocte, and Tangsa inhabit the southeastern district of Tirap. These tribal groups speak about 50 distinct languages and dialects, belonging mostly to the Tibeto-Burmese branch of the Sino-Tibetan language family. They are often mutually unintelligible and, thus, Assamese, Hindi, and English are used as *lingua francas* in the region. As a rule, the tribes do not intermarry, and each follows distinct social, cultural, and religious practices. The tribal languages of Arunachal Pradesh are Adi, Bodo/Boro, Mikir, Mishmi, Monpa, Nishi/Dafla, Nocte, Tangsa and Wancho.

The westernmost tribal group in Arunachal Pradesh is the Monpa, which has six sub groups.

The rest of the Monpas, the Sherdukpens, Akas, Khowas and Mijis inhabit the west Kameng district. The Bangnis are predominant community in the east Kameng district along with Sulungs, Mijis and Akas. The Nishis, Apatanis, Hill Miris, Tagins, Nas and Sulungs live in the upper and lower Subansiri district. There are 15 sub groups of Adis. The Mishmis have 3 sub groups and the Tangsas have 15 sub groups. The Tirap district is inhabited by the Noctes and Wanchos. The Mishmis are spread in the districts of Dibang valley and Lohit. The Lohit district is also inhabited by the Zakhrings, Meyors, Khamtis, Khamiyangs etc.

The most common religious practice is animism, in which deities of nature and various spirits are worshiped. Ritual sacrifice is also common, and the mithun (a domesticated gaur, or wild ox) is especially revered as a sacrificial animal. Hindu beliefs and practices have penetrated the region, especially among populations near the Assam lowlands. Tibetan Buddhism is found among groups near the Tibetan border, and some tribes along the Myanmar border practise the South East Asian form of this religion, Hinayana Buddhism.

### TRIBES OF MANIPUR

With an area of 22,356 sq kms, Manipur has a population of 1,420,953 and a rich tribal culture. The capital of Manipur is the town of Imphal. Manipur was made an integral part of the Indian Union in 1949. Bounded by the states of Nagaland, Assam and Mizoram, Manipur shares an international boundary on the east with Myanmar. It is geographically divided into two distinct tracts - hills and plains. Predominantly a hill state, it is watered by the rivers Imphal, Iril, Thoubal, Irang and Barak, all of which flow from north to south. The people and tribes of Manipur include Meities, Naga and Kuki-Chin-Mizo groups and other communities. The characteristics of Manipuri people vary according to these geographical divisions. The plains are inhabited by Meities, while Kukis and Nagas occupy the hills.

The Manipur valley was remote, inaccessible and existing in isolation and yet migratory movements of Aryans from the west and Mongoloid people from south-east-Asia was evident through the terrain of the valley.

Manipur is a mosaic of traditions and cultural

patterns in the field of art and culture. The tribal folk dances of Manipur are an expression of nature, creativity and aestheticism of the tribal way of life.

While, almost every household in Manipur owns a loom, womenfolk alone are the weavers. The handloom industry is the largest cottage industry in Manipur, with the finished items often being exported.

Manipur is inhabited by 29 communities of which 22 are Scheduled Tribes, (75.86 per cent as against the national average of 13.72 per cent). There are 3 distinct human conglomerates in this state. The Meitei as a population group also includes the Loi, Pangal, Yaithibi and Thanga. The other older group is the Naga consisting of the Kabui, Kacha, Tangkhul, Mao, Maram, Marim and Tarao. The third group is the Kuki-Chin which includes the Gangte, Hmar, Paite, Thadou, Vaiphei, Zou, Aimol, Chiru, Koiring, Kom, Anal, Chote, Lamgang, Koirao, Thangal, Moyan and Monsang.

The two distinct parts of Manipur valley are dominated by the Meitei, Pangal, Loi and Yaithibi and immigrant groups like the Nepali and the hill area is inhabited by the Naga group and the other by the Kuki Chin groups.

### TRIBES OF MIZORAM

Mizoram, perched on the high hills of north-eastern corner, is an amalgam of the former north and south Lushai hill districts. It is flanked by Bangladesh on the west and Myanmar on the east and south. Mizoram has the most variegated hilly terrain in the eastern part of India. Till 1972, it was just another district of Assam and known as the Lushai Hills. There are, more or less, six to seven parallel ranges of hills from north to south, tending to be higher in the middle of the territory. The valleys are hot and wet during the summer, but up in the hills it is pleasant and cool.

Geographically conditioned to be ruggedly independent, the Mizo people originally belonged to a number of distinct tribes and were given the collective name of *mi* (man) *zo* (either mountain or cold) because their neighbours regarded them as the tough people from the high cold mountains. The term Mizo is a generic term and it stands for several major and minor tribes in the area. The Mizos belonging to the Mongoloid race, are original settlers of the Shan state of Burma. Two of the tribes, the Lusei and Hmar migrated to India and occupied the Lushai Hills. Mizoram was

annexed in 1891 by the British as Lushai Hill district and made a State of Indian Union on 20th February 1987 following the historic Mizoram Peace Accord signed between the Central Government and the Mizo National Front in June 1986.

The Mizo are divided into several tribes - the Lusei, Pawis, Paites, Raltes, Pangs, Hmars etc. The present population is composed of 15 broadly divided communities. Groups like the Ngente, Kiangte, Chawngthu, Renthlei, Zowngte and Khwlhring are no longer considered as separate groups having identities of their own. The communities that still maintain a sort of identity of their own are Lusei, Hmar, Paite, Pawi, Mara, Bawm, Tlau, Ralte, Pang, Hualngo and the Baite.

Previously believers of the good spirit called Pathan, the Mizo community today is greatly influenced by Christianity. Mizos have accepted English as their medium of instruction, but the Mizo language is still widely spoken. Lushai/Mizo is spoken by 365,813 persons (1981 census). The other important languages spoken are Hmar, Lakher, Paite, and Pawi. Most of the Mizo tribes speak their own languages that belong to the Tibeto-Burman sub family of Tibeto Chinese languages such as Bawm, Baite, Hualngo, Lakher (Mara), Magh, Paite, Pang, Ralte etc. Aizwal, the state capital is the cultural center of Mizos. Festivals and dances of Mizos have a unique appeal. Some of the dances are Cheraw, Sarlamkai/Solakia, Chheihlam, Khuallam, Chawnglaizawn, Zangtalam, Tlanglam

### TRIBES OF MEGHALAYA

South of Assam, Meghalaya, "Abode of the Clouds", is a small state with an area of 22,429 sq.kms. and a population of 1,335,819 which speaks Khasi, Garo and English. Called the 'Scotland of the East', by the colonial rulers long ago, it is a region of unsurpassed scenic beauty, waterfalls and mountains, lakes and valleys.

Meghalaya was declared as a state on 21st January, 1972. Carved out of Assam in 1973, Meghalaya comprises the erstwhile districts of Garo Hills and United Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The population of the state according to 1991 census is 1,760,626.

The state of Meghalaya has 7 administrative districts namely West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills, East Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi, South Garo Hills and the Jaintia Hills. The bulk of the people belong to three major tribal groups - the

Khasis, the Garos, and the Syntengs (Pnars) who are more popularly known as the Jaintias. The term Khasi is applied to the group of matrilineal and Mon-Khmer speaking people who presently inhabit the East and the West Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya. The term includes Amwis and the Lyngams. Garo is a term used by others to refer to a particular group of people who are mainly concentrated in the Garo hills. The Garos prefer to be called by '*Mande*' or '*Achik*'. The term Jaintia is a generic term which includes the Pnars/Synteng and other sub groups. While another section of the population is made up of such other tribal groups as the Rabhas, the Hajongs, the Tiwas and the Koches, there is also a sizeable number of non-tribals scattered in different parts of the state.

The societies of the Khasis and the Jaintias, and to a great extent of the Garos, are matrilineal in character, which distinguishes them from other societies of the region. Meghalaya has a matriarchal law of inheritance where the custody of property and succession of family position runs through the female line, passing from mother to eldest or youngest daughter. While the language of the Garos, belongs to the Bodo group of the Tibeto-Burman family, the Khasis and the Jaintias speak languages that belong to the Mon-Khmer family of Austric affiliation. Christianity has made considerable impact on the major tribes of Meghalaya, particularly among the Garos and the Khasis. There are, however, some sections among them who still follow the traditional religions. The non-Christian Garos call themselves Sangsarik.

#### TRIBES OF NAGALAND

The state of Nagaland was formally inaugurated on December 1st, 1963, as the 16th State of the Indian Union. It is bounded by Assam in the west, Myanmar (Burma) on the east, Arunachal Pradesh and part of Assam on the north and Manipur in the south. The state consists of eight administrative districts, inhabited by 16 major tribes along with other sub-tribes. Each village of Nagaland has its own definitive population, area and administration. Not surprisingly Nagaland is sometimes described as a conglomeration of 'village republics'. Each tribe is distinct in character from the other in terms of customs, language and dress.

According to Hutton (1921), the state is predominately inhabited by the Naga communities and hence it forms a single cultural region

generally definable by a common culture and linguistic traditions. Nagaland comprises the former Naga districts of Assam and the former Tuensang frontier divisions. Nagaland lies to the south of Jorhat in Assam, and is home to myriad tribes and sub tribes. Nagaland is divided into eight main districts of Mokokchung, Tuensang, Mon, Wokha, Phek Zunheboto, Kohima and Dimapur.

The predominant Naga tribes are the Angami, Ao, Chakesang, Chang, Chirri, Konyak, Lotha, Khiamngam, Makware, Phom, Rengma, Sangtam, Sema, Yimchunger and the Zeliang.

The linguistic situation of Nagaland is marked by numerous complicated dialectical variations. Before the advent of the British, the Nagas belonging to different communities used to communicate with one another in Nagamese or broken Assamese.

Tribal dances and war dances give an insight into the rich cultural heritage of Nagas. The total geographical area of the region is 2,55,037 square kilometers, or 7.7 percent of the total area of the country. The major part of the region is hilly and peopled by the Indo-Mongoloid tribal groups.

#### TRIBES OF TRIPURA

Tripura is the second smallest state in India. Its 2,053,058 people speak as many as 23 languages. Bengali is spoken by the largest number of persons followed by Kakbarak and Manipuri. Previously a princely state, and subsequently a Union Territory of Independent India, Tripura was elevated to the status of a state on January 21, 1972.

It is an ancient land, which has ever been a melting pot for tribal and non-tribal cultures producing an exotic cultural synthesis. The capital of Tripura, Agartala, is surrounded on three sides by hills. Tripura, a land-locked state, lies to the south-west of Assam, and to the east of Bangladesh. This is a land of transition; a satisfying compromise between the old order and the new; a fusion of styles and cultures of the hills and plains.

Today, Tripura is largely dominated by Bengali community which forms a major chunk of population, inspite of having a sizeable population of Scheduled Tribes. The tribals, with a rich and varied culture, belong mainly to the Reang, Chakma, Deobarma, Halam and Usai communities.

Ecologically, Tripura is divided into 2 zones.

The northern and southern parts of the state have a hilly terrain, home 32 communities including the Chakmas, Jamatias, Maghs, Noatias and Riangs. Among the Scheduled Tribes, the most numerous are the Riangs, Jamatias, Chakmas, Halams, Maghs and the Noatias.

The majority of tribals live in elevated houses of bamboo called 'tong'. Music and dance are an integral part of Tripura. Their dances reflect the emotions of these people. Tripura is unique in having fascinating variety of handicrafts made from simple material such as bamboo, cane, ordinary yarn and palm leaves.

### CONCLUSION

The history of North East India from the mythical through recorded past to recent past is characterized by quite considerable population movements. The in-flow of people to North East India from various directions brought diverse racial and linguistic groups having distinct socio-cultural patterns and varied economic organizations. The diverse racial groups who were overwhelmingly Mongoloids settled down in different localities and ecological settings of the region. These groups in course of time have transformed into tribal and non-tribal entities.

One of the conspicuous developments among the contemporary tribals in North East India is ethnicity, which has its roots in the past and continuing throughout the history of North East India. Ethnicity among the tribes of the region has come to play in many cases a decisive role in various political developments in North East India.

**KEY WORDS** Migration; tribal situation; North East India; ethnicity.

**ABSTRACT** This note portrays on anthropological, geographical and historical perspectives, the phenomenon of migration, emergence and distribution of various tribal groups in the seven states of North East India. The tribes and the tribal situation of North East India may be considered as concrete examples of the theme of variation and diversity of bio-social and cultural life in terms of genetic strains, languages, ideologies,

social organizations, cultural traditions, political organizations economic life, etc. The tribal groups have adapted themselves to varying ecological conditions of North East India with the help of their indigenous technological know-how. One of the most significant developments among the tribes of North East India is the ethnic identity movements based on factors like territory, language, religion etc.

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