

Ethnicity in North-East India

North-East India is considered to be one of the most diverse, culturally rich and environmentally rich regions of the country. It is a land where multiple ethnicities reside; every ethnic community has a history and shares a cultural memory. There exist tensions among these communities and the conflict of space and identity is further intensified by immigrant forces and acculturation. The region is diseased with separatist and militant issues worsened by nationalist-nativist conflicts. Often considered far away from the mainland India, the North-Eastern Region faces the dilemma of being ignored and isolated.

Every state of North-East India is itself an abode of multiple ethnicities with a bulk of people converted to Christianity by the European Christian Missionaries. There are around 220 ethnic communities in the North-East India alone and more than 220 dialects. The hills states in the region like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are predominantly inhabited by native ethnic communities with a degree of diversity even within the ethnic groups. The region's population results from ancient and continuous flows of migrations from Tibet, Indo-Gangetic India, the Himalayas, present Bangladesh and Myanmar. Adivasi, Assamese, Bhutia, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Biata, Bodo, Chakma, Chhetri, Dimasa, Garo, Gurung, Hajong, Hmar, Hrankhwil, Jamatia, Karbi, Khasi, Khampti, Koch, Kom, Kuki, Paite, Vaiphei, Zou, Teddim, Simte, Gangte Lepcha, Lushai, Meitei, Mishing, Mizo, Poumai, Mao, Maram, Tangkhul, Anal, Monsang, Naga, Nepali, Noatia, Paite, Pnar, Purvottar maithili, Rabha, Reang, Rongmei, Singpho, Sylheti, various Tibetan tribes, Tamang, Tiwa, Tripuri, Zeme Naga, Chorei and Limbu are different ethnic groups inhabiting the region.

Besides the diverse native population, the region has been witnessing huge immigration from before independence. There is internal immigration from the states; again, there is external immigration from the neighboring nations. Naturally, there are inter-ethnic conflicts. The ethnic demand for homeland created a number of smaller states in the North-East. For instance, the greater Assam was broken down into Nagaland (1963), Meghalaya (1972), Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram (1987) to meet the demands of these ethnic groups. And, there are further new state demands, 7 months back, the ethnic party; Tipra State party had demanded a separate state called Tipra Land as their community is on the verge of extinction. Besides this, there are multi-ethnicities which and external ethnicities which suffer intercultural clashes due to diversity.

Homogenization of Diversity: There is diversity among the natives. There is again diversity among the immigrants. The situation is not simply multiethnic but multicultural as well. Now, there is unequal representation of native ethnicities which leads to crisis among the natives. Again, there are huge immigrants who have better access to socio-economic variables. But these immigrants are also not represented in the larger sphere. Rather the ethnic communities and the immigrants are homogenized into a collective entity referred to as the North-East with "unity in diversity". Due to such misrepresentation, under-representation and unequal representation of multi-ethnicities, there sparks a sense of identity crisis which results in the demands for new state by ethnic identities. The North-Eastern

people are viewed as “chinky” irrespective of their particular ethnic origin. They are humiliated, isolated, ignored and even threatened in many cases.

Isolation of the homogenized block: The diverse block is reduced as homogeneous and is further reduced and differentiated in the mainland India. Due to differentiated racial features, the people from this region are not assimilated but isolated and alienated. They are scorned and as they share inter-national features, they are taken to be unpatriotic.

North-East as the third world of India: The treatment meted out to this region echoes the treatment which India faced by the Europeans in the global arena. Referred to as uncivilized, underdeveloped, erotic, mystic, and oriental; India has always been sidelined and referred to as the third-world. Similarly, the Indian population, media and politics under-rates, marginalizes and treats the region as the third-world of the country. The representations of this region in the media and the assumptions about the valley are stereotypical and consistent from ages.

The virgin North-East: Often depicted as the unexplored paradise, the region echoes the negation of Native Americans in the history of America which was referred to as the virgin land. Like the natives of America, the natives of North-East have also been pushed to the frontiers and extremely marginalized. If there are natives and there is diversity of ethnicities, how can the land be termed as “unexplored paradise”!

The Brand North-East: With the initiation of the Act East Policy, the region is treated almost as a commodity packed in vibrant colors, posted far and wide as attractive. The region has been reduced to a brand which has potential to earn huge revenue for the govt. and simultaneously boost tourism.

Table: Composition and distribution of tribes in N-E India

State	Tribal Population (in lakhs)	Percentage of total population	Major tribes
Assam	33.00	12	Boro (or Kachari), Karbi, Koch-Rajbanshi, Mishing, Mishimi and Rabha
Arunachal Pradesh	7.05	64	Galong, Nishi, Wancho and Adi.
Manipur	7.40	35	Thadou, Tangkhul, Kabui, Poumai, Kabui, Inpui and Rongmei
Meghalaya	19.90	86	Khasis, Garo and Karbis
Mizoram	8.40	95	Lusei, Hmar, Paite, Pawi, Mara, Bawm, Tlau, Ralte, Pang, Hualngo and the Bait
Nagaland	17.70	89	Angami, Ao, Lotha, Sumi, Sangtam, Chang, Khamniungan, Konyak
Sikkim	1.03	23	Lepchas and Bhutias
Tripura	9.90	31	Reang, Chakma, Deobarma, Halam and Usai