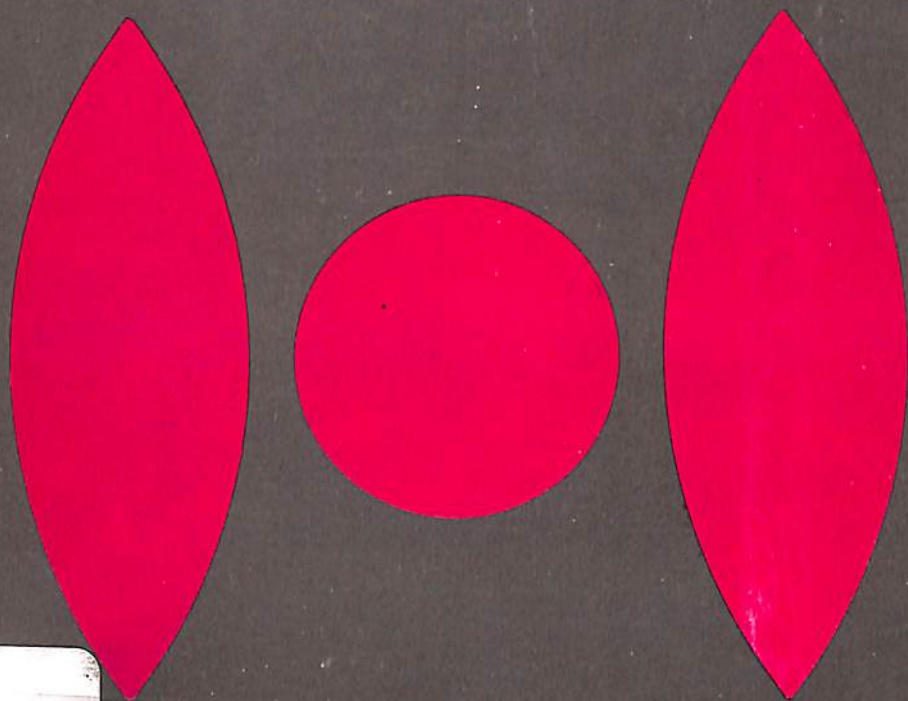


TRIBES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA



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TRIBES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

Biological and Cultural Perspectives

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PREFACE

The present work is an attempt to contribute to the growing literature on the biological and cultural perspectives of the tribes of North East India. During last few decades, social scientists have increasingly turned their attention towards the development and problems of the tribes of India and literature on the subject at present is voluminous. However, in recent years, a tendency has been observed among many social scientists to avoid precise and clear cut definition of the term '*tribe*' employed by them in their studies. It is true that the definition of *tribe* in the Indian context appears to be in an inconstant state, as the word has been perceived variously. The word can be defined at different level having different perspectives. On academic parlance the *tribe* can be defined on theoretical level. Definition of the term may be on historical, anthropological or on sociological context. There is yet another approach to the definition of *tribe* which is charged with ideological orientation - the Marxian approach. However, in the present context of India, most of the attributes of the above mentioned approaches have lost their significance and existence. Defining *tribe* in terms of single set of attributes is thus, immensely difficult. Again, if we strictly follow the above indicators, probably many groups which are scheduled as tribals would cease to remain as tribal while some other non-scheduled groups may easily claim the scheduled status.

In contemporary India, the Scheduled Tribes are basically a politico-administrative category and are devoid of any academic definition. In the present compilation, therefore, the word '*tribe*'

refers to those communities which are declared as such by the Constitution of India. It would not be out of place to mention here that Government of India declared that only those who were in the list of 'primitive tribe' in the Census Report of 1931 were to be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. For Constitution, Scheduled Tribe are those which are backward and which deserve special provision for development. The problem of specifying the members of Scheduled Tribes (art 342) though entrusted to the President of India, the Constitution however, did not define the Scheduled Tribes. At present the tribes so specified in the order number about 450 approximately, and about 130 such communities inhabit in North East India.

North East India, the earswhile greater Assam, presently the land of seven sisters covers political units namely the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura and is located between latitude 20° and 22° North and longitude 89°46' and 97°5' East. It has an area of 2,55,082 sq. km., having a hilly and wild topography. The indigenous inhabitants of this region, who are mostly tribes, are bewildering in their variety, ethnicity, culture and folklore. The area is endowed with rich resources of land, water, forests, and minerals etc., and perched at the confluence of countries like China and Tibet in the north, Myanmar in the east and north and Bangladesh in the west. This region is connected with the rest of India by a narrow corridor between Nepal and Bangladesh. This has greatly enhanced its strategic importance.

It is estimated that out of approximately 31.4 million people living in North East India, about 8.1 millions of them are made up of tribal people of the hills and plains. At present, in four of the seven states in North East India, tribals are in majority. Arunachal Pradesh which attained statehood from Union Territory status only in 1984, alone accounts for some twentyfour major tribal groups and these constitute about 70.0% of the total population. Tribes living in the states of Assam are categorised into fourteen hill tribes and nine plains tribes and the state accounted for merely 11.0% tribal population. Manipur is abode of twentyeight tribal groups which makes up approximately 28.0% of the total population. Meghalaya which came into being in 1972 is a tribal dominated (81.0% to the total population) state and noted for its three matri-

archal tribal groups besides others. Mizoram, the land of Mizos which also was born in 1972, is again dominated (94.0%) by the tribals. Nagaland which was made a separate state in 1963 where tribal population constitute more than 84.0% and is inhabited by thirteen major tribes and sub-tribes speaking different dialects. Among the Nagas, there are sixteen distinctly recognised tribal groups. In Tripura, where Scheduled Tribe constituted 29.0% of the total population, is the home of nineteen different Scheduled Tribes (Census, 1981).

North East India is the land of co-existence of the extreme forms of both tradition land modernity. Ethnically the tribes of North East belong to the Indo-Mongoloid racial stock. The tribal people of this region speak languages of different divisions and sub-divisions of the Sino-Tibetan linguistic family. However, a few speak Mon-Khmer (Austro-Asiatic) languages. In some tribes, the literacy rate is remarkably low. Again few tribes could take their literacy rate to a respectable stage which is much above national level. Majority of the tribes are patriarchal while, matriarchal tribal societies also exist in few pockets. Some are in transitional stage.

Traditionally the tribes of North East are *jhum* (shifting) cultivators, while many of them are settled cultivators and as good peasants as others. Market economy prevails but barter trade also exists. Simple family system is the basic norm although extended family system is also followed by some. Cross cousin marriage is almost a common factor. Certain tribal groups have stratified society. Chieftainship is prevalent among some, while others prefer to be ruled by a village council. Though a large number of them was brought under the orbit of institutionalised religion like Buddhism, Hinduism (both Vaishnavism and Brahmanical) and Christianity, yet many still practice traditional religion based on magico-religious practices. Most of the festivals are celebrated by them centering round agricultural activities.

Many tribal groups of the region cannot be considered as fixed or static category as tribe - caste transformations in some areas have been in operation till very recent times. However, very recently a tendency of revivification and consolidation of traditional awareness has come in this process. Ethnic tensions resulting from:

economic and cultural imbalances between tribes and others are also discernible here. Of late, tremendous upsurge of primordial sentiments in the form of 'tribal movement' and 'insurgency' have also been noticed. The boundaries of several tribal communities are no longer well defined. If some tribes live in the remote inaccessible rugged and hostile regions, where linkages with wider society were non-existent, on the other hand many others since historical times have been living in close proximity to and have maintained close socio-political contact with the non-tribal people of neighbouring area. During freedom struggle score of North East tribes join the nationalist movement. Many tribes live on international boundaries and share ethnic and cultural affinities with other people across the frontier.

The history of tribal studies in North East India is quite old. There were works reported mainly by British officers, travellers, missionaries, etc., which appears from the second quarter of the last century. Most of these studies however, suffer from personal bias and other methodological grounds. Even today, empirical studies on the various tribal people of North East India surprisingly remain as rarity. No serious attempt has yet been made to make the available basic information about the tribal groups of the region upto date and recording of new information about hitherto least known groups. During the last few decades there have been a renewed academic interest on tribal studies based on authentic researches by few social scientists. The repository is still insufficient to elicit any clear socio-cultural or historical picture of the region.

The present volume is an compilation of work to combine the studies and analysis of celebrated anthropologists, sociologists, political scientists, administrators on the tribes of North East India. The scholars who have contributed these articles have long standing experience with tribal situation of North East India.

As the title of the book suggests, it encompasses a wide range of tribal panorama of North East India. The papers which follow are undoubtedly unique in their own way and do refer to the broad canvass of the compilation in one way or another.

The book opens with an article by Prof. R.K.Kar, who

introduces in a nutshell the whole canvass of the book and lessens the burden of the editor from writing a separate introduction. A brief description has been given for some important tribal groups of each of the north eastern states. The discourse have been delimited to the ethnological, philosophical, linguistic, mythological and historical aspects of the population with special emphasis on tracing the origin and affinity of the different groups of people. In next article, Prof. B. Pakem discussed in details the constraints in the application of tribal-research findings in North East India in planning, development and administration and the role of social scientists. He also critically reviewed and assessed the position of social policy research to the solution of contemporary social problems and the amelioration of the social ills.

In one article, Prof. S.N. Ratha, deals with the aboriginals of Arunachal Pradesh in a very interesting way. Another is the work of Dr. J. Sarkar who deals with further descriptive account of the society and culture of tribals of Arunachal Pradesh and presents exhaustive picture of the life, society and culture change among these tribes.

Tribal ethnography is the prime concern in anthropology. It is fitting that two articles in this volume in essence an ethnographic account, one on the Sonowal of Assam (by K. Barua) and the other on the Jamatia of Tripura (by D. Mandal). Both the authors make a careful observation and truthful reporting of social structure, kinship, clan, phratry; ceremonies relating to birth, marriage, and death; different social strata; faith and superstition etc., in detail.

The world view, in essence, is a set of inferences or assumptions that the people derive or make about their own world and the world around them as well as other people. The concept of world around the Lisu tribe of Arunachal Pradesh and as they conceive it, is from the pen of Dr. A. Maitra who has dealt with the topic in detail.

The existence of age old institutions of Chieftainship among the Noctes and Wanchos of Arunachal Pradesh and its continuity and change in the event of the introduction of the Statutory Panchayat System is meticulously described by Dr. P.C. Dutta. Dr. D. K.

Duarah's article on Apatani kinship system is an important contribution to a hitherto unstudied virgin area. Based on empirical data, the concept and cause of disease, the indigenous method of treatment and health practices including documentation of medicinal herbs and application of animal items in folk medicine with particular reference to the Idu Mishmis of Arunachal Pradesh have been portrayed by Dr. S. S. Duttachoudhury and Dr. G.C. Ghosh.

The economy of the Karbi tribe of Assam is the subject matter of Dr. B.K. Medhi. Under the economic condition, the author discusses agriculture, shifting (*jhum*) cultivation, animal husbandry, sericulture and the various other professions of the people. The system of land management, pattern of ownership and also the mechanism of production vary from one tribal community to another. Dr. B.N. Bordoloi's study in this context present in the framework of nature-land-man relations, its continuity and change among the hill tribes of Assam in general and Zeme Naga in particular. Dr. T. K. Bhattacharjee has attempted to study the problems of land alienation with particular reference to hill tribes of Assam. Special provision of Sixth Schedule, Rules and Regulations and the role of District Council to safeguard the interest of the tribals thereon are carefully assessed and stated very clearly through his articles.

Few contributions in the volume deal with the demographic aspects such as index of selection intensity among the matrilineal Pnar tribe of Meghalaya (by M. Banerjee, D. Choudhury, D. Adak), dermatoglyphic features of the Lakher (Mara) tribes of Mizoram (by N.N. Sengupta), morpho-genetic characters among the Mao and Maram Naga of Manipur (by M. Mani Babu). One essay having bearing on micro-evolutionary dynamics among the Deoris of Assam is by Dr. S. Sengupta and H.B. Chetry, where a comparative study of different segments of the tribe has been attempted.

Continuity and change in the traditional way of life among the Naga community is also reflected in two thought provoking articles. The process of cultural fusion and fission that are going on among the Chakhesang, Pochury, Zeliangrong and Yimchunger Naga for political power and economic benefit is highlighted by Dr. N. Saha and Dr. S.S. Mishra through their paper. Dr. J.K.K. Saikia has dealt in her article with the Angami Naga tribe and their religions

in past and present. Their conversion to Christianity and its impact on socio-economic and cultural life of the tribe has been examined.

Dr. R.P. Athparia through his article has shown the political institutions of the Chakma, a numerically small tribe of North East India. He examines how the political institutions in them took shape in the course of history.

North East India is a region where the social scientists investigate not only the lives and behaviour of tribal communities but also the tensions and conflicts prevailing among various ethnic groups. Studies in tribal ethnicity and identity in last two decades are increasingly becoming important in several states in North East India, where numerous tribal communities have made their homeland. In the concluding article, Dr. J. Ganchoudhury attempts to examine the dynamics of ethnicity and identity orientation among tribal populations in the states of Tripura in North East India.

Obviously, the present treatise do not claim or aspire even to cover the whole gamut of bio-cultural perspective of North East Indian tribes within its limited space. It touches upon only some important segments of the vast and varied area of the canvass. I am well aware of the lapse and lacunae the present compilation contains. It is not free from the thematic inconsistency with regard to various states of North East India. The reason, the present compilation cannot be made comprehensive and presented as a volume of assorted research articles because it proved impossible for a number of would be contributors to meet the deadline set.

I personally owe a debt of profound gratitude to all those scholarly contributors for so kindly responding to my request and readily contributed to this book through their articles. A few articles included in this volume were originally published in various journals. However, they have been modified or expanded for the present publication. I would like to thank the editor and publisher of these journals for permitting me to include these articles in this volume.

I also take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation to my wife Kaveeta and my sons Sushruta and Samrat for their unlimited confidence, tolerance and encouragement; to my nephew

Caesar Sengupta for cartographic works ; to Mrs. Neelanjana Barua for her efforts to prepare the typescript ; to my research students for secretarial assistance rendered by them. My thanks are also due to Messrs M.N. Dutta and Shovan Sengupta and Mrs. Priti Sengupta for their kind help in my academic pursuit. Before I close down my pen, I must thank Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi for undertaking its publication expeditiously. They really deserve my special appreciation.

My endeavour will be rewarded if the book proves to be informative and useful, and arouse interest to scholars and researchers as well as administrators and policy makers.

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1

The Tribes of North-East India : An Overview

R.K. KAR

The Civilization of India is the joint creation of her diverse peoples; Aryan, Dravidian, Austric (Kol) and Mongoloid.

Rabindra Nath Tagore, in one of his great poems *Bharat-tirtha* ('The Sacred Waters of India') has sung of India as the Ocean where Humanity in all its diversity has merged and united. The poem goes as :

*Keha nahi jane, kar ahwane, kato manusher dhara durvara
srote elo kotha ha'te samudre ha'lo hara hethay Aryya, hetha
Anaryya, hethay Dravida, Chin Saka-Huna-dal Pathan-Mogal
ek dehe ha'lo lin Paschim aji khuliyache dwar, setha ha'te sabe
ane upahar dibe ar nibe, milabe milibe, jabe naphire ei Bharater
maha-manaver sagara-tire.*

In the poem he says, "No one knows at whose call so many streams of men flowed in resistless tides from places unknown and were lost in one sea; here the Aryan and non-Aryan, the Dravidian, Chinese, the bands of the Sakas and Hunas, and the Pathan and Mughal have become combined in one body. The door to the West has also been opened, and they bring presents from there : they will give and they will take, they will unite and be united, and will never go away, -in this ocean shore of the Great Humanity of Bharata or India".

The poem, in noble poetic language sums up the main trend of India's history in the past and of India's destiny in the future-how there has been a synthesis of races and cultures in the past leading to the creation and characterization of a composite Indian people and a composite Indian civilisation, diverse in its origin but united in its ideals and aspirations-ideals and aspirations which are acceptable to all mankind; and how India looks forward to a still greater unification of all mankind, both within her shores and outside (Chatterji, 1974 : 1).

As a matter of fact, from time immemorial peoples of different races and languages and cultures have come to India, and in course of time have settled down here for a peaceful comingling and cultural as well as racial fusion with their predecessors in the land.

North-east India is not an exception to this process. North-East India is commonly conceived of as the land of seven sister states, namely Assam, Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura. The land is considered by many scholars as a cultural corridor between India and South East Asia and has a tremendous strategical importance, not only because of its geography but also because of its history, demography and culture.

According to 1991 census, the total population of the region is around 31.4 million who are distributed over an area of around 2.6 lakh sq. km.

North East India Provides shelter to numerous populations of various ethnic affiliations having different social structures and cultural

heritages. There is a rich assembly of tribal cultures and communities in this rugged expanse of the eastern Himalayas. All told there, are upwards of 130 major tribal groups in North-Eastern India, including the few inhabiting the plains areas. In other words, one third of the total number of listed tribes for the whole of India are to be found in this region (Table 1).

The ethnic affinities among population groups can be studied at various levels. At the broadest level, the whole mankind can be grouped into three or four categories like Caucasoids, Mongoloids and Negroids etc. On the other hand one can attempt to see differences between sub-groups of a small tribe at micro-level, these being caused because of relative isolation from one another. The affinities can be observed on the basis of a number of criteria. For example, (i) biological differences (ii) variations in cultural patterns (iii) linguistic similarities and (iv) geographical location. Besides, history and mythology are also important factors in discussing the origin and unity of human groups. History, however, was unknown to the early inhabitants of North East India. It started only with the Ahom invasion in 1228 A.D. Earlier periods can be reconstructed from a few ancient inscriptions, from the observation of a Chinese traveller, and some dubious and fragmentary references in the *Mahabharat*, and in the *Puranas* and *Tantras* and other similar records. Some general indications regarding the ancient movements of the people, however can be suggested by philological and ethnographical considerations.

From ethnic point of view the people of North East India may conveniently be divided into two broad groups : the 'Indid' and the 'Mongoloid'. 'Indid' group mostly comprises the Hindu castes and the Muslims, who may be considered as Caucasian in origin, while the 'Mongoloid' group includes the various tribes, both hill and plains tribes and also other Mongoloid populations that have not been referred to as tribes. Prior to these two ethnic groups, representatives of another ethnic group called the Australoid also came to this region. Perhaps the Mongoloid groups have completely absorbed this conjecturable autochthonous population of this region. The Vedic Aryans could also recognize these two types whom they referred to as the *Nisadas*, *Sabaras*, *Pulindas* (for the Australoids) and *Kiratas* (for the Mongoloids).

North-western China between the headwaters of Hoang Ho and the Yang-tze Kiang rivers is supposed to be the original homeland of the Mongoloid populations, wherefrom they migrated southward and west-ward during the pre-historic time. Migration took place in succession. But, it appears that certain large scale movements started in the early part of the first millennium B.C. First they moved south-ward to reach north of Burma where they bifurcated; one group moved further south and came down to Burma and then to South-east Asia, while the other moved towards the Brahmaputra valley. One section, however, migrated towards west following the sub-Himalayan tract to reach Nepal and other areas.

It is generally agreed that the Mongoloids, mentioned as the *Kiratas* in ancient Sanskrit literatures of India, once occupied practically the whole of the north-eastern region. It has, for instance been surmised that long ago one section of the Indo-Mongoloids, namely, the Bodo-speakers spread over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley. North Bengal as well as East Bengal (now Bangladesh) giving rise to various groups whom we know to-day as Bodo-Kachari, Garo, Hajong, Tripuri, etc. (Chaterjee, 1951 : 27-28). The diverse Mongoloid groups which eventually settled down in different habitats and ecological settings of the north-eastern region thus crystallised into discrete entities that we call tribes today.

It has been noted earlier that the non-tribal plains-men of North-East India are mostly Caucasoid origin. But, because of prolonged interaction with neighbouring Mongoloid populations through inter-marriages and assimilation, particularly with those who have been living in the plains and in the adjoining areas, Mongoloid features are not uncommon among them. Similarly, it is no wonder that certain Caucasoid ethnic strains have also entered into the tribal population of North East India.

In the present paper discussions have conveniently been confined mainly to the Mongoloid tribal population of the region. Further, the discourse has been delimited to the ethnological, philological, linguistic, mithological and historical aspects of the populations. Biological variations and the process of micro-evolution operating on various groups have not been brought within the purview of the

discussion. Relative emphasis, in the paper has been laid on tracing the origin and affinity of the different groups of people.

The Mongoloids are characterised by yellow or yellow-brown skin and wavy and coarse head hair. Their eyes are black or dark-brown in colour. The eye-slit is oblique. One of the typical characteristics of the Mongoloid is the presence of Mongolian fold in their eyes. Their face is broad and zygomatic arches are very prominent. Another important feature is scanty growth of facial and body hairs.

The Indo-Mongoloids of North East India speak different languages of Sino-Tibetan linguistic group. This group of languages has been divided into two broad branches-Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese. The Siamese-Chinese branch includes in it Siamese, and its connected speeches or dialects like *Davi* or *Thai*. The Ahom, Khamti, Khamyang, Aiton, Phakial, Turung, etc., living in different parts of North-East India speak languages belonging to this *Thai* sub-division. The other Indo-Mongoloids of North-East India except the Khasi and the Pnar, speak languages of Tibeto-Burman branch. One of the sub-divisions of the Tibeto-Burman is North-Assam groups of languages spoken by the tribes of Arunachal and some parts of Assam. These tribes are Aka, Adi, Mishing, Nishi, Mishmi, etc. Another sub-division of Tibeto-Burman is formed by Assam Burma group, which includes the speeches of North and East Bengal, Assam and Burma. These include (i) the Bodo speeches-Bodo, Mech, Rabha, Garo, Kachari, Tipra and few more, (ii) the Naga dialects-Ao, Angami, Sema, Tangkhul, Sangtam, Konyak, Lotha, Mao and Kabui, etc., (iii) the Kuki Chin speeches of Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram, the most important of which is Meitei or Manipur which is quite an advanced literary speech.

Linguistically, the Khasi with their sub-division stand apart from other tribes of North-East India, because they speak a dialect of the Mon-Khmer linguistic group which belongs to Austro-Asiatic language family. Thus, it is interesting to note that the Austric speaking Khasi are living in an isolated pocket encircled by peoples who speak Tibeto-Burman languages.

The Mongoloid population of North-East India may conveniently be grouped under following categories : (i) Arunachal tribes,

(ii) Bodos, (iii) Khasis, (iv) Lushai-Kukis, (v) Nagas, and (vi) Others. This grouping has been done on the basis of the other factor like linguistic affinity, cultural similarity and common territory.

Arunachal Pradesh provides shelter to a large number of Mongoloid tribes. Central Arunachal tribes inhabiting eastern Kameng, Subansiri, Siang and Lohit districts form one broad ethnic groups. These are Aka, Nishi, Tagin, Hill Miri, Apatani, Adi and Mishmi. The Mishing of Assam plains are akin to this group. The Monpa and Sherdukpen of western Arunachal Pradesh are close to Tibetan and Bhutanese. The Nocte and Wancho of eastern Arunachal show similarities with the Naga. Some Shan tribes, e.g., the Khamti are found in the eastern part.

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh are believed to have come from the North, i.e., the Tibetan region, and North-East. With regard to their movement in that region, different groups, however, nourish different stories. One legend, e.g., tells that the Nishi and the Mishings are descendants of two brothers. The Nishi preferred to live in the hills while the Mishing came down to settle in the river valleys. One section of the Mishing, called the Hill Miri, however, live in the hills and they are very much akin to the Nishi. The tribes of Tirap district, more particularly the Nocte and Wancho appear to have migrated to the region not from north but from east and south east.

The Bodos were the first among Tibeto-Burman speakers to enter this region. They may perhaps be described as the aborigines, or the earliest known inhabitants of Assam. They were probably the most important section of the Indo-Mongoloid people in Eastern India. Once they settled and ruled over the entire Brahmaputra valley and spread in the west up to North Bengal, and in the south they occupied Cachar, Sylhet and Mymensingh districts. They are undoubtedly of trans-Himalayan origin, but it is uncertain by what route and stages they reached the valley (Baines 1976 : 128). It is generally agreed that the home of these Tibeto-Burman speakers was the north west China from where they moved south wards to enter North East India and hills and valleys of South East Asia.

Certain legends are prevalent among some of the Bodo tribes. Playfair (1909) has elaborately dealt with the migratory routes of

the Garo from their ancestral home land Tibet to their present habitat Garo hills. The Rabhas also maintain legendary stories about their migration. Das (1960) reports that the ancestors of the Rabha tribe migrated from the sub-Himalayan region; north of Tezpur towards the Brahmaputra valley.

Thus, the traditional stories prevalent among the Garo and the Rabha point to Tibet or eastern sub-Himalayan region, as their ancestral home. Playfair analysed certain cultural elements found among the Garo which confirm traditional link between the Garo and their ancestors in the Tibetan region.

It has been noted earlier that the people from those regions come to north-eastern India not in one migration but in successive waves. One such migration probably brought the Kacharis to North East India. Endle (1911) is also of the opinion that the original home of the Kacharis is Tibet and China.

Taking Brahmaputra as the dividing line, the Bodo groups may be divided into two divisions : northern and southern. In the legends of the Garo and the Rabha we find that the ancestors of the Bodo crossed Brahmaputra to reach its southern bank. The Garos occupy the southern bank. A section of the population migrated further south towards east to take the name of Dimasa. Another group moved further south-west to reach Tripura and the adjoining areas where they are referred to as Hill Tripura. Still another group settled in Nowgong district (Assam) and are known as Tiwa (Lalung).

In the eastern Assam we come across some sections of the Kachari like Sonowal, Jharua and Thengal who were brought there by the eastward expansion of the Kachari. It is believed that all the ancestors of the Bodo did not cross the Brahmaputra. This is supported by some legends also. Some of the Kachari, Rabha, Mech and Koch, etc. were left behind. These groups at present occupy different regions of the northern bank of Brahmaputra.

The Khasis belong to Mon-khmer linguistic group. The available information suggests their migration from south east Asia. They might belong to a wave of Austric speakers, who initially migrated towards east and intermingled with the Mongoloid population of south Chinese area. These people are Mongoloid but have

retained the austric speech. There are some tribes in Burma, Thailand and Kampuchia who share these characteristics with Khasis. On the other hand some tribes of Western and Central Himalayas like the Kinnaura and Limbu have elements of austric speech in their dialects. These might be the remnants of the austric speakers, who once inhabited the vast areas of the sub-continent (Chatterjee, 1951).

With regard to the origin and migration of the Khasis, Das (1978) has suggested two possibilities. One is that they are an Australoid population speaking austric language but have undergone remarkable changes in physical features, because of strong intrusive Mongoloid strains. The other possibility is that the Khasis are Mongoloid. They came down from the same area of dispersion of the Tibeto-Burman speakers. But they adopted austric language, most probably while they were in northern Burma from where they migrated to their present habitat. Das (1978) further opines that the Khasis are the earliest settlers in this part of the country. It may be relevantly noted here that Endle (1911) and others consider Kacharis as the original settlers in North East India.

In the southern Manipur and Mizoram we encounter Lushai-Kuki tribes, which are closer to Chin and Burma. The Meithei of Manipur valley show intermediate characteristic between the Naga and the Lushai-Kuki. They are however, the dominating people of Manipur. Some Kuki-Chin tribes like the Aimol, Hmar, Paite, Thado and Vaipheis and also Naga tribe like the Kabui, besides other small populations live in the State of Manipur.

The Lushai-Kuki also came from north east and south east. In this connection it may be noted that one branch of the ancestral Tibeto Burman group migrated southward to reach as far as south east Asia. Some sections of these migrants perhaps are the ancestors of the Naga and the Lushai Kuki tribes. Perhaps the Naga came earlier. They were followed by the Lushai-Kuki.

The Naga is a generic name for a group of tribes inhabiting Nagaland, northern Manipur and bordering districts of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The various Naga groups include Ao, Angami, Sema, Konyak, Lotha, Phom, Chang, Rengma, and others. The

heterogeneity among the Nagas may be because of prolonged inbreeding and lack of intermixture within the Naga group of tribes.

All the Naga tribes have legends which refer to their movements in North East India. In the monographs written on various groups, these legends have been incorporated by respective author. Taking into consideration all the Naga tribes as a whole, it may perhaps be said that the Naga came to this region from north-east, east and south-east. Oliver (1958) maintains, "Though they trace their ancestry from north-west China and north-east Tibet, but seem to have reached their present habitat by the southern routes, driven by Lushai-Kuki tribes".

The most numerically dominant original inhabitants of Tripura are the Tripuri (Tippera). Then we find the Chakma. The Magh, another tribe of Tripura are migrants from Burma. The Riangs were originally inhabitants of Mizoram, but now live in Tripura. Besides these tribes some members of the Kuki-Chin group like Purum, Thado, Vaiphei, Paite and Jamatia and also Tankhual Naga who have migrated from the adjoining areas are found in Tripura.

The early history of Tripura is clouded in mystery and romance. The tale is told in the *Rajmala* that gives the story of Tripura kings and their subjects. People (both tribal and non-tribal) from the British India started migrating to Tripura towards the second half of the nineteenth century.

Of the various tribes and clans, only the Durlongs, who came from eastern Burma some three centuries ago via the Mizo Hills and now confined largely to Kailasahar, claim to be indigenous to Tripura. The rest are by and large southern Kukis who migrated to Tripura from Lungleh a couple of centuries back following the large scale invasion of Mizo Hills from tracts in Burma. The Lushais first came to Tripura in 1912 after the terrible Mizoram famine in 1911.

Saigal (1978 : 93) observes that the Tripuris can be subdivided into five sections, namely, Old Tripuris, Deshi Tripuris, Riangs, Jamatias and Noatias. The Deshi Tripuris have almost completely submerged their identity with the Bengalis.

There is a story that in the old days the Riangs lived in the Maiyanithlang area of Lushai Hills, bordering on and stretching into the Arakans of Burma. Most probably at that time they spoke in a tongue closely related to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages. In the 14th century they migrated to Chittagong Hill Tracts, and later on to Hill Tipperah (now Tripura).

The Chakmas and the Maghs are all Buddhist. In the oldest book (*Agartara*) of the Chakmas, it is mentioned that the Chakmas came originally from Champaknagar (opinions, however, differ as to whether the place falls in Bihar or Cambodia). About their origin L.G. Loeffler has put forward a theory that the Sak tribe, a small tribe living on the borders of Chittagong Hill Tracts and the Arakans, descended from the same people as the Chakmas (cited in Saigal, *ibid.* : 108). From a linguistic study of the Sak language he concluded that they are related to the Kadu of upper Burma and to the Loi of Manipur. He asserts that during the 15th to 17th century the main group of the Sak population appear to have adopted Bengali culture and language and become Chakmas in the modern sense of the term.

While dwelling back on the people of Assam, the Karbi of the Karbi Anglong district is an interesting tribe in the sense that though they belong to Assam-Burma group of Tibeto-Burman linguistic family they can neither be put under Bodo nor any other linguistic group. Grierson (1904) classed them as an intermediate group between the Bodo and the Western Naga on the basis of language. Again, some others want to suggest that Karbi language shows mixture of Austric and Bodo language, though they undoubtedly belong to Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. According to some scholars the Karbi language has some similarities with certain Naga dialects on the one hand and Lushai-Kuki dialects on the other. Lyall (1881), however, maintained that the Karbis are more akin to the Bodo than the Khasis. Among the Karbis also several traditional stories of migration are in prevalence. It is believed that they also came from the north in one of the waves of migration.

In this context, it may be noted that many of the groups in North East India tend to trace their line of descent from certain

mythological heroes of the Hindus. Thus, the Kacharis claim their descent from the marriage of Bhim with Hirimba as described in *Mahabharata*. This suggests an early contact of some of the north-eastern population with Caucasoid people.

It needs be borne in mind that in comparatively recent years as well as in the long past there were movements of different groups from one area to another in this region of the country. In some cases they spread over larger areas, while in other cases they were confined to a circumscribed territory of their own.

Further, contrary to popular notions, the numerous culturally or politically autonomous communities lived in a situation of contact and communication with their neighbouring populations. This is authenticated by the myths and legends of various communities as well as history. Instead of isolation, most of the communities imbibed and absorbed inspirations emanating from many different quarters. This is e.g., exemplified by the fact of adoption of Buddhism of the Tibetan variety by tribes like the Monpa and the Sherdukpen of Western Arunachal Pradesh, and of the South East Asian variety by tribes like the Tai Khampti and the Singpho of the eastern and south-eastern parts of the same State. In the State of Manipur, the evolution of the Meitei society in the Imphal Valley through the forging together of tribal groups of Kuki-Chin linguistic stock provides another example. "In the Assam-Meghalaya region many of the autonomous groups were integrated into the Hindu social order long before the advent of the British and the process continued well into this century" (Bhagabati, 1988 : 4). "One may, for example, find a continuum between the interior Hill Garos (a matrilineal tribe of Meghalaya) upto the Hinduised Koch, Hajong or Rajbanshi of the foot hills and the plains" (Sinha, 1967 : XIV).

Until recently, formal acceptance of Hinduism was a common occurrence among many of the Bodo-speaking tribal groups of Assam. In the plains of Assam, infact, the tribal groups such as the Bodo-Kachari, Rabha, Mech, Hojai, Lalung and the Deuri Chutiya had, for centuries, provided the main source of Hindu population, through a process of conversion and subsequent sanskritization. The continuums from the tribal base to the Hindu caste and can still be seen in many a cases. For instance, the Hindu Chutiya caste is said to be the

consequence of progressive sanskritization of the former Chutiya tribe, whose priestly section, the Deori, still preserves the traditional tribal culture and recognised as a scheduled tribe of the Assam plains (Saikia 1976 : 1-2). An indication of the manner in which indigenous tribesmen were converted to Hinduism and then absorbed into a remarkably open caste system is found in the Census Report of 1891 (Gait, 1892 : 225). Through giving up former habits and customs such as eating pork and other forbidden food and drinking strong liquor, undergoing *prayachit* (atonement) and receiving *saran bhajan* (religious instruction and mode of worship) from a Vaishnavite *Gosai* (preacher), the aboriginals could gain admittance into the Hindu society. In Manipur where Hinduism became the principal religion of the Meiteis by a royal edict in 1705, the inhabitants of a village could be elevated en masse, if the *Raja* so decided (Johnstone, 1896 : 84).

It thus apparent that fission, fusion and diffusion in both racial and cultural fronts, and both micro and macro levels, have since long been in operation in shaping the present population scenario of North East India.

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Table 1

Distribution of Some Important Tribes in Different States of North East India

State	Important tribes
I. Arunachal Pradesh	1. Adi <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ashing ii. Bogum iii. Bokar iv. Bori v. Botng vi. Gallong vii. Komkar viii. Karka

State	Important tribes
	ix. Lodung
	x. Milang
	xi. Minyong
	xii. Padam
	xiii. Pailibo
	xiv. Pangi
	xv. Pasi
	xvi. Ramo
	xvii. Shimong
	xviii. Tangam
	2. Aka
	3. Apatani
	4. Bangni
	5. Khamba
	6. Khampti
	7. Khowa
	8. Memba
	9. Miji
	10. Hill Miri
	11. Mishing/Miri
	12. Mishmi
	13. Monpa
	14. Na
	15. Nishi (Dafla)
	16. Nocte
	17. Sherdukpen
	18. Sulung
	19. Singpho
	20. Tagin
	21. Tangsa
	22. Wancho
	23. Yobin (Lisu)
	24. Zakhring (Meyor)
II. Assam	<i>In the autonomous districts :</i>
	1. Chakma
	2. Dimasa, Kachari
	3. Garo
	4. Hajong
	5. Hmar
	6. Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lynggam
	7. Any Kuki Tribes
	8. Lakher
	9. Man (Tai speaking)
	10. Any Mizo (Lushai) tribes
	11. Mikir

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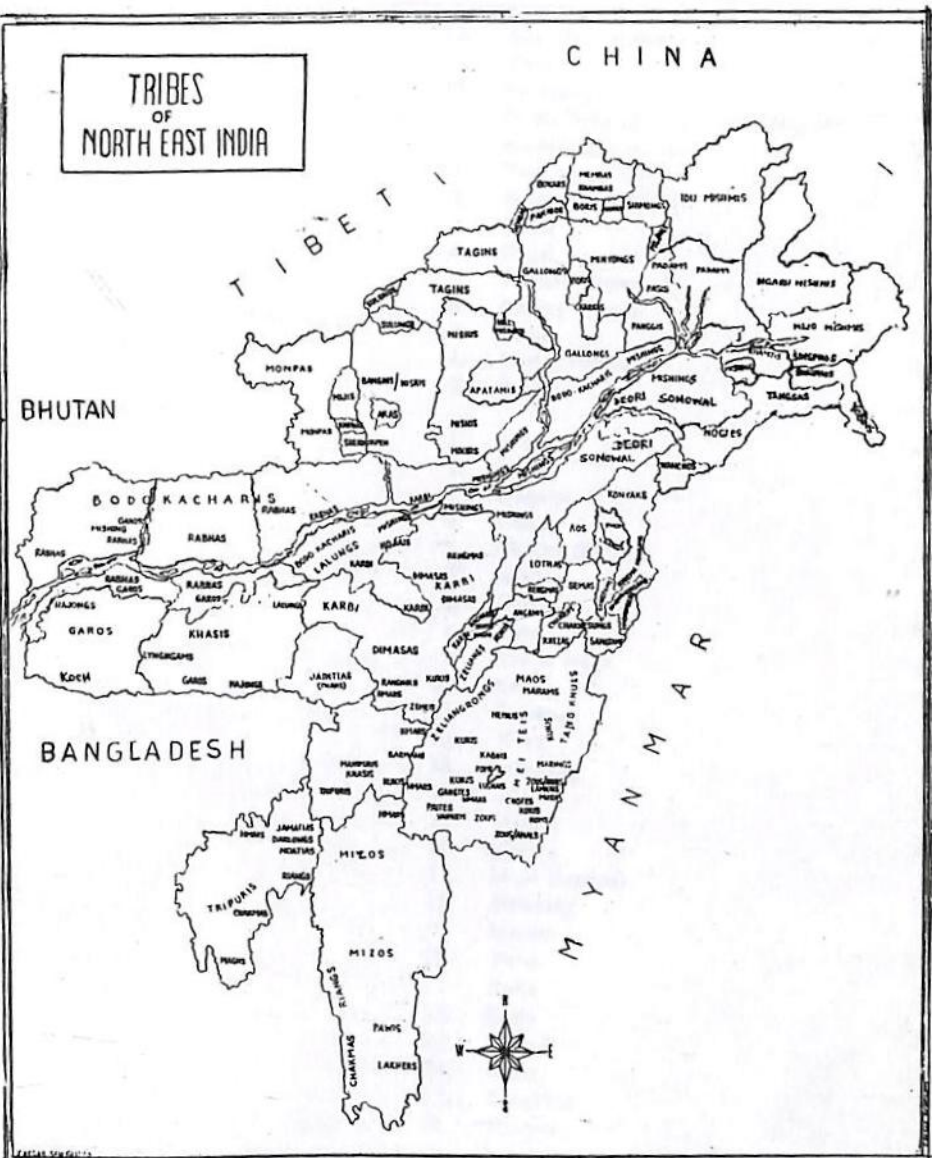
CHINA

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BANGLADESH

MYANMAR



State	Important tribes
	12. Any Naga tribes
	13. Pawi
	14. Syntheng
	<i>In the state of Assam excluding the autonomous districts :</i>
	1. Barmans in Cachar
	2. Boro, Borokachari
	3. Deori
	4. Hojai
	5. Kachari, Sonowal
	6. Lalung (Tiwa)
	7. Mech
	8. Miri (Mishing)
	9. Rabha
III. Manipur	1. Aimol
	2. Anal
	3. Angami
	4. Chiru
	5. Chothe (Purum)
	6. Gangte
	7. Hmar
	8. Kabui
	9. Kacha Naga
	10. Koirao
	11. Koireng
	12. Kom
	13. Lamgang
	14. Mao
	15. Maram
	16. Maring
	17. Mizo (Lushai)
	18. Monsang
	19. Moyon
	20. Paite
	21. Ralte
	22. Sema
	23. SimteA
	24. Sahte
	25. Tangkhul
	26. Thadou
	27. Vaiphai
	28. Zou
IV. Meghalaya	1. Bhoi
	2. Boro
	3. Chakma

State	Important tribes
	4. Dimasa (Kachari)
	5. Garo
	6. Hajong
	7. Hmar
	8. Jaintia
	9. Karbi (Mikir)
	10. Khasi
	11. Koch
	12. Kuki
	13. Lakher
	14. Lyngngam
	15. Man (Tai speaking)
	16. Mizo (Lushai)
	17. Naga
	18. Pawi
	19. Pnar
	20. Rabha, Raba
	21. Synteng
	22. War
V. Mizoram	
	1. Chakma
	2. Dimasa, Kachari
	3. Garo
	4. Hajong
	5. Hmar
	6. Khasi, Jaintia, Synteng, Pnar, War, Bhoi, Lyngngam
	7. Any Kuki tribes :
	i. Biate, Biete
	ii. Chngsan
	iii. Chongloi
	iv. Doungel
	v. Gamalhou
	vi. Gangte
	vii. Guite
	viii. Hanneng
	ix. Haokip, Haupit
	x. Haolai
	xi. Hengna
	xii. Hongsungh
	xiii. Hrangkhwal, Rangkhoh
	xiv. Jongbe
	xv. Khawchung
	xvi. Khawathlang, Khothalong
	xvii. Khelma
	xviii. Kholhou

State	Important tribes
	xix. Kipgen
	xx. Kuki
	xxi. Lengthang
	xxii. Lhangum
	xxiii. Lhoujem
	xxiv. Lhouvun
	xxv. Lupheng
	xxvi. Mangjel
	xxvii. Misao
	xxviii. Riang]
	xxix. Sairhem
	xxx. Selnam
	xxxi. Singson
	xxxii. Sitlhou
	xxxiii. Sukte
	xxxiv. Thado
	xxxv. Thangngcu
	xxxvi. Uibuh
	xxxvii. Vaiphei
	8. Lekher
	9. Man (Tai speaking)
	10. Any Mizo (Lushai) tribe
	11. Karbi
	12. Any Naga tribe
	13. Pawi
VI. Nagaland	1. Adi
	2. Aka
	3. Dimasa (Kachari)
	4. Galong
	5. Garo
	6. Khasi and Jaintia
	7. Khowa
	8. Kuki
	9. Karbi (Mikir)
	10. Mizo
	11. Any Naga tribe
	i. Ao
	ii. Angami
	iii. Chakhesang
	iv. Chang
	v. Chiru
	vi. Khiemnungan
	vii. Konyak
	viii. Lotha

State	Important tribes
VII. Tripura	ix. Makwari
	x. Phom
	xi. Rengma
	xii. Sangtam
	xiii. Sema
	xiv. Tikhir
	xv. Yimchungre
	xvi. Zeliang
	12. Synteng
	13. Momba
	1. Bhil
	2. Bhutiya
	3. Chaimal
	4. Chakma
	5. Garo
	6. Halam
	7. Jamatia
	8. Khasia
	9. Kuki tribes
10. Lepcha	
11. Lushai	
12. Magh/Mog	
13. Munda	
14. Noatia	
15. Orang/Oraon	
16. Riang	
17. Santal	
18. Tripura, Tripuri or Tippera	
19. Uchai/Ochoi	