

# **NORTH EAST INDIA IN PERSPECTIVE**

---

**BIOLOGY, SOCIAL FORMATION  
AND CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS**

**EDITED BY  
RAJAT K. DAS  
DEBASHIS BASU**

**NORTH EAST INDIA IN PERSPECTIVE  
BIOLOGY, SOCIO-CULTURAL FORMATIONS  
AND  
CONTEMPORARY PROBLEMS**



*EDITORS*  
**RAJAT KANTI DAS  
DEBASHIS BASU**

**AKANSHA PUBLISHING HOUSE  
NEW DELHI**

**AKANSHA PUBLISHING HOUSE**

R 37-B, Vani Vihar, Uttam Nagar

New Delhi-110059

Email: [ektabooks@yahoo.com](mailto:ektabooks@yahoo.com)

*Showroom*

4649/21B, Ansari Road

Darya Ganj

New Delhi - 110 002

Ph. : 23263193 / 9811582579



**North East India in Perspective**

© *Editors*

*First Edition 2005*

ISBN 81-87606-90-8

**Call No.** 304.27095416

**Acc. No.** 7955

*All rights reserved. Including the right to translate or to reproduce this book or parts thereof except for brief quotations in critical reviews.*

[ The responsibility for the facts stated, conclusions reached etc. is entirely that of the Authors. The publisher is not responsible for them, whatsoever. ]

**PRINTED IN INDIA**

Published by M.P. Misra for Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi  
and Printed at Tarun Offset Press, Delhi.

## Foreword

---

The north eastern part of India has received the attention of anthropologists ever since the British colonial days. As a matter of fact, anthropological studies commenced here even before the beginning of Anthropology as a formal academic discipline. Consider, for example, E.T.Dalton's *The Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* published as early as 1872. The flows of publications have never ever ceased. In fact, in the recent decades, authentic, research based publications have steadily increased. Yet we can not really claim that all that is worth doing in the realm of anthropological research has already been done and that we know all that is worth-knowing about the people, their culture, society, economy, bio-genetic makeup, and so on. There is so much more to know and the need for so much to cover.

The combined, dedicated effort of professor Rajat Kanti Das and his young, energetic associate, Dr. Debashis Basu in bringing out this volume covering the entire domain of Anthropology is praiseworthy. The collections of nineteen papers with a very contemporary focus on the region are not all by professional anthropologists. Several writers are from cognate disciplines. Yet their contributions have great significance for understanding the region's populations. The expansive coverage reflected by the rather disparate topics discussed by the different authors appears to be a matter of deliberate choice of the editors. It is both a pointer to breath-taking scope of the discipline and to how little we have really covered so far. The compendium of papers in the pages that follow are certainly not meant to be casual, bed-side reading. Each paper should be able to stimulate further research. The editors and the contributors deserve our congratulations.

**Prof. A.C. BHAGABATI**  
*Vice-Chancellor,*  
*Arunachal University (Retd.)*

## Preface

---

---

The realisation that both biology and socio-cultural attributes shape human development has an important place in the current anthropological thinking. This has on the one hand enlarged the scope of anthropological dimension and on the other has opened up new possibilities for anthropology with the induction of new perspectives and approaches of allied disciplines. North East India has always been a happy hunting ground for the natural scientists, population biologists and social scientists including anthropologists because of the rich diversity of culture and language on the one hand and a considerable degree of biogenetic variation on the other. One distinct advantage of anthropology is that it could successfully combine the cultural and biological aspects of humankind into an integrated approach. It has been said time and again, *albeit* mechanically, that anthropology aids in integrating the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities.

It cannot be denied that at present there has been a growing interest in human variation, stimulated by advances in genetics and evolutionary biology in the last few decades. It is common practice to explain variation or variability in terms of biogenetic differences manifested at the population level. In a situation where a number of ethnic groups share almost the same environment this is understandable. Moreover, it has been increasingly realised that genetic variability within populations is important to the variability of some special kinds of behaviour. For decades anthropology has remained confined to seeking cultural and environmental variables affecting human behavior. But biology and, more specifically, genetics will always remain a major source of variations in human beings. Adequate methods have now been developed and used to separate genetic and environmental influences on quantitative traits and behavioral differences. Since North East India manifests a considerable range of diversity in terms of human populations and social groups, it can be visualised as variation across time. In order to have a clear understanding of this variation, taking an ecological viewpoint may be necessary, where adaptive interactions among bio-cultural and environmental variables could be assessed. North East India provides ample opportunities for doing that.

and Asian identity in Urban East Africa, Campbell (1999) makes a valid point. He observes:

“an emphasis on formal institutions also ignores the manner in which the various traditions and social identities have been reproduced, particularly the struggles which individuals are engaged in to ensure personal survival and cultural continuity.”

Here the role of ideologies deserves mention. Though ideologies contribute to cultural constructions, these are not to be taken as ‘timeless creation’. With regard to culture, there has now been a shift from ‘psycho-social perspective’ to ‘constructionist’ design. Cultural descriptions now-a-days belong mainly to the second category. The interpretative part reflects the deliberate attempt to develop a pre-conceived design on the part of cultural analyst. The larger question of group identity is involved with it. The authors of this volume have one common concern. All of them seek to describe and analyse the distinctive features or situations of some North East Indian communities as biological or socio-cultural formations representing specific entities in time and space. Of course, it has to be admitted that cultural or social estimation and bio-genetic evaluation do not always coincide. Both, however, need to be understood in a historical perspective, which may have a regional overtone.

**RAJAT KANTI DAS**  
**DEBASHIS BASU**

## Acknowledgements

---

It is difficult to offer acknowledgements to all the contributors to this volume adequately in a brief note. However, it must be put on record that we are grateful to all of them for their active cooperation and for contributing their bit in the preparation of this volume. Their contributions are not only relevant to their respective areas of expertise, but will go a long way in enhancing our understanding of North East Indian situation. No doubt, these could successfully underline the need for looking at North East India in proper perspective. We express a sense of gratitude to the Editor, *Man in India* and Editor, Departmental *Journal of Political Science* of Vidyasagar University, Midnapur, West Bengal, who could realise the importance of the papers by Ajit K. Danda and Debnarayan Modak. Incidentally, Ajit K. Danda's paper was first published in *Man in India* and the original version of Debnarayan Modak's paper appeared in the Political Science Journal of Vidyasagar University. Special mention must be made of North East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong for giving us permission to include R.K. Bhattacharya's Memorial Lecture in the volume. (We acknowledge our deep sense of gratitude to Prof. A.C. Bhagabati for the foreword which is of tremendous academic and personal significance to us).

We are indeed thankful to M. P. Misra of Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi for processing the production and publication of the volume. Our thanks are also due to Miss Rita Paul for doing the initial typing and composition. Lastly, we thank everyone, who is even remotely connected with the preparation of this volume.

**RAJAT KANTI DAS  
DEBASHIS BASU**

# Contents

---

---

<i>Foreword</i>	iii
<i>Preface</i>	v
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>List of Contributors</i>	xiii

## PART ONE: INTRODUCING NORTH EAST INDIA

1. A Profile of North-East India and its Disadvantaged Populations 3  
—*B. Dutta Roy*

## PART TWO: POPULATION, GENETICS, HEALTH

2. Emerging Trends in Genetic Epidemiology of Haemoglobinopathy in the Seven Sister States of North Eastern India 17  
—*R. S. Balgir*
3. Genetic Heterogeneity and Population Structure: A Study of North East India with Reference to Neighbouring Populations 38  
—*Debashis Basu, Vikram Kumar & B. Mohan Reddy*
4. Genetic Relationships of Two Tibeto-Burman Speaking Tribal Groups of North East India with Two Other Indian Tribal Groups Speaking Different Languages 60  
—*C.S. Chakrabarti, M. Roy, N.K. Sengupta, R. Lalthantluanga, P.P. Majumder*
5. Distance Between the Sema and other Mongoloid Populations of Assam and Meghalaya in respect of certain Genetic Traits 73  
—*D. K. Limbu*
6. Dermatoglyphics of the Tai-Phakes of Assam 90  
—*Tiluttoma Baruah*
7. A Framework for Studying Health Maintenance Behaviours among the Meiteis of Cachar District of Assam 109  
—*Arupendra Mozumdar, Sujata Kar & Subrata K. Roy*



**PART THREE: TRIBE AND ETHNICITY, CULTURE  
AND IDENTITY, DEVELOPMENT  
AND PROBLEMS OF CHANGE**

8.	Tribes Among Tribes: Progression in Interaction — <i>R. K. Bhattacharya</i>	129
9.	Communities of Modern Times: A Note on the Political Anthropology of Modern Assam — <i>Samir Kumar Das</i>	141
10.	Ethnicity and Social Transformation in North-East India — <i>Ajit K. Danda</i>	157
11.	Ethnic Conflict and Self-Determination: Examples of North-East Indian Tribes — <i>Rajat Kanti Das</i>	169
12.	On the Movements for Autonomy and Statehood in North-East India — <i>Debnarayan Modak</i>	182
13.	All for a Buffalo: Events, Nature and Historiography of a Tribal Insurgency in Colonial India (1982-83) — <i>Sajal Nag</i>	198
14.	Traditional Tribal Self-Governing Institutions of Meghalaya: The Khasi Syiem — <i>C. Reuben Lyngdoh, L.S. Gassah</i>	213
15.	Striking a Dynamic Equilibrium: A Study on Continuity and Change Among The Ahoms of Lakhimpukhuri- Jaikhamdang Village, Sibsagar, Assam — <i>N. K. Gogoi</i>	222
16.	Social Offences and Penalties Imposed on Garo Offenders — <i>Julius L. R. Marak</i>	233
17.	The Purum: Cultural Drift and the Problem of Identity — <i>Manis Kumar Raha</i>	242
18.	A Note on the Cultural Background of Kamtapur Movement in North Bengal — <i>Rajatsubhra Mukhopadhyay</i>	259
19.	Prospects and Problems of Tribal Development: A case Study from Arunachal Pradesh — <i>Geetanjali Baruah</i>	266
	<i>Index</i>	275

## List of Contributors

---

---

- Balgir, R.S.**, Deputy Director (Senior), Regional Medical Research Centre (ICMR), Chandrasekharpur, Nandankanan Road, Bhubaneswar - 751023.
- Baruah, Geetanjali**, Research Associate, Anthropological Survey of India, North East Regional Centre, Madanring, Shillong - 793021
- Baruah, Tiluttoma**, Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, Cotton College, Guwahati, Assam.
- Basu, Debashis**, Research Associate (P), Anthropological Survey of India, North East Regional Centre, Madanring, Shillong - 793021.
- Bhattacharya, R.K.**, Director (Retd.), Anthropological Survey of India and UNESCO Professor, Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts, 1, Janpath, New Delhi -110001.
- Chakravarty, C.S.**, Professor, Department of Zoology, University of Burdwan, Burdwan, West Bengal.
- Danda, Ajit K.**, Professor, "Kadam Kanan", Jhargram, West Midnapore - 721507.
- Das, Rajat K.**, Professor, Department of Anthropology, Vidyasagar University, West Midnapore - 721102.
- Das, Samir K.**, Reader, Department of Political Science, University of Calcutta, Kolkata - 700027.
- Gassah, L.S.**, Professor, Department of Political Science, North Eastern Hill University, Main Campus, Mawlai, Shillong - 793008.
- Gogoi, Nitul**, Reader, Department of Anthropology, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam, - 786004.
- Julius L. Marak**, Museologist, State Central Museum, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong - 793001.
- Kar, Sujata**, Research Fellow, Biological Anthropology Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203, B.T. Road, Kolkata - 700108.
- Kumar, Vikrant**, Research fellow, Anthropology and Human Genetics Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203, B.T. Road, Kolkata - 700108.

- Lalthantluanga, R.**, Professor, Department of Biochemistry, North Eastern Hill University, Main Campus, Mawlai, Shillong - 793024.
- Limbu, D.K.**, Reader, Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Nongthymmy, Shillong - 793014.
- Lyngdoh, C. Reuben**, Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Synod College, Jaiaw, Shillong - 793002.
- Modak, Debnarayan**, Reader, Department of Political Science, Vidyasagar University, Midnapore, West Bengal - 721102.
- Mozumdar, Arupendra**, Research Fellow, Biological Anthropology Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203, B.T. Road, Kolkata - 700108
- Mukhopadhyay, Rajat S.**, Professor, Department of Sociology North Bengal University, Raja Rammohanpur, Darjeeling.
- Nag, Sajal**, Professor, Department of History, Assam University, Silchar, Assam, - 788011.
- Partha P. Majumdar**, Professor, Anthropology and Human Genetics Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203, B.T. Road, Kolkata - 700108
- Raha, M.K.**, Jt. Director (Retd.), Anthropological Survey of India, 10/3, Jamir Lane, Kolkata - 700019.
- Reddy, B. Mohan**, Professor, Anthropology and Human Genetics Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203, B.T. Road Kolkata - 700108.
- Roy, B. Dutta**, Professor, & Secretary, Northeast India Council of Social Science Research, B.T. Hostel, Laitumkhrah, Shillong -793003.
- Roy, M.**, Anthropology and Human Genetics Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203, B.T. Road, Kolkata - 700108.
- Roy, Subrata**, Associate Professor, Biological Anthropology Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, 203, B.T. Road Kolkata - 700108.
- Sengupta, N.K.**, Physician, Juthika Nursing Home, Chaibasa, Singhbhum, Jharkhand.

---

---

PART ONE

INTRODUCING NORTH EAST INDIA

---

---

# 1

## A Profile of North-East India and its Disadvantaged Populations

B. DUTTA ROY

---

For a long time North East India was tagged with the Eastern zone of India. Now it is treated as a separate zone. The bifurcation is significant. It underlies the importance of North East India as a separate entity having a viable social, political and economic representation in the country. The region is potentially rich, though economically and otherwise disadvantaged.

The resource-rich North East India is geopolitically distinguishable. It is bounded by four countries—Bhutan and China on the North, Myanmar on the East and South and Bangladesh on the West and South. The area covers 3,54,000 sq. km. and includes Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura with a total population of 31,547,314 (1991 Census). Sikkim is not included in the list as the main consideration is geographical contiguity. The area contains the unpredictable Brahmaputra, somewhat difficult terrain of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and forested hills of Meghalaya. North East India is connected with the rest of India by a strategic but vulnerable narrow corridor with North Bengal.

A feature of population of North East India is its rapid growth—both in the hills and in the valleys. Another significant feature is that more than 25 percent of its total population are scheduled tribes and about 7 percent are scheduled castes.

#### 4 North East India in Perspective

more than 25 percent of its total population are scheduled tribes and about 7 percent are scheduled castes.

**Table 1.1 State-wise total scheduled caste and scheduled tribe populations of North-East India (1991 census)**  
**Population**

<i>State</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Scheduled castes</i>	<i>Scheduled tribes</i>
Arunachal Pradesh	864,558	4,052 (0.47)	550,351 (63.66)
Assam	22,414,322	1,659,412 (7.40)	2,874,441 (12.82)
Manipur	1,837,149	37,105 (2.02)	632,173 (34.41)
Meghalaya	1,774,778	9,872 (0.51)	1,517,927 (85.53)
Mizoram	689,756	691 (0.1)	653,565 (94.75)
Nagaland	1,209,546	-	1,060,82 (87.7)
Tripura	2,757,205	451,115 (16.48)	853,345 (30.95)
	31,574,314	2,161,448 (6.85)	8,142,624 (25.81)

The tribals constitute 87.70 percent in Nagaland, 85.53 percent in Meghalaya, 30.95 in Tripura and 34.41 percent in Manipur; only 12.82 percent of the population of Assam belong to scheduled tribes. The tribal population in Mizoram is the highest with 94.75 percent, while Arunachal Pradesh tribals constitute 63.66 percent of its population. At least every third citizen of North East India belongs either to a scheduled caste or a scheduled tribe. No other region presents such a variety of tribes and communities as North East India does. Castes and tribes from other parts of India also find a place here.

Major tribes and sub-tribes entered into North East occupying mostly hills and some fringe areas in the plains. They speak different dialects and possess their own distinctive social and cultural traditions which they jealously guard. Two major ethnic strains are found in the tribes

of North East India—that of the Mongoloid and Proto-Australoid. But generally, the bulk of tribal population show strains of Mongoloid features. Linguistically, they speak a form of Tibeto-Burman and Siamese-Chinese, which have affiliation with the Thai language. The Khasis and Pnars speak dialects which belong to the Mon-Khmer linguistic group showing characteristics of Austro-Asiatic linguistic family.

The number of tribal communities, having distinctive cultures, languages, dialects including sub-tribes would be around 200 in North East India as against 460 for the whole of India. In other words, it may be inferred that about 44 percent of the Scheduled Tribes of India live in the North East region of the country, which in terms of percentage comes to 25.81 of the total population of North East India.

All the tribals are not at the same level of social and economic development. Some of them, particularly the Khasis and Mizos, have educationally and economically reached a higher level of attainment than many others. But most of them are poor as underdevelopment or lack of development is widespread and land is appropriated by a few. Industrialisation is almost unknown. Literacy rate among the Mizos is second only to the people of Kerala. Despite the progress made towards amelioration of the lot of the tribals, the impact of the successive Five Year Plans has so far been marginal.

The hill areas of North East India were uniformly administered till 1932 as a backward tract. From April 1937, there was a bifurcation of the administrative pattern. The Mizo Hills (Lushai Hills), Naga Hills, North Cachar Hills and North Eastern Frontier tracts became 'Excluded Areas', excluded from ministerial jurisdiction, and the Garo Hills, the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Mikir Hills (Karbi Anglong) were partially excluded areas. The excluded areas were further protected by the inner lines which prevented the entry of outsiders without permit. The last of such lines was drawn in North Cachar Hills in 1942.

The tribals of hill districts as a result developed a special kind of identity which had remained crucial for subsequent political developments. All the new political units in North East India except in Meghalaya are really old administrative tribal hill districts. Meghalaya is an amalgamation of two tribal districts—Garo Hills and Old Khasi and Jaintia Hill districts plus 25 Khasi Syiemships, which had a nominal status of princely states. Beside these Syiemships, there were two princely states of Manipur and Tripura, which had usual political connections

through the agency of Governor of Assam. There was finally an unadministered Naga tribal area beyond the boundaries of British India but within India and under the executive control of the Governor General of India exercised through the Governor of Assam. Such ethnic pockets had close affinities with neighbouring British India territories. It may be mentioned here that many tribals live along international boundaries and their ethnic and cultural affinities are with other tribes across the frontier. The tribal areas of North East India were not completely integrated with the political and economic system of the country and the Inner Line System still in vogue further reported the tribal region of North East India from the rest of the country.

Admittedly, tribes were not integrated with the political and economic system of the colonial India. After Independence also, the process of integration of the tribals with the mainstream people could never get under way, partly because of the continuation of the British legacy and partly because of the growing political consciousness of the tribal people. On the eve of Independence, the situation in the North East Hills was very fluid. The economic impact of the Second World War, the divisive policy of the colonial administration, the possibility of freedom in near future, the national movement and growing sense of ethnic identity among different ethnic groups, spread of education in the hills by Christian Missionaries and a gradual emergence of a small educated middle class among the tribals of the hills and in the plains contributed to the growth of a sense of political awareness among the different tribal groups. The political movement in these hills surfaced with the coming of Independence. With the transfer of power, the tribes became more conscious of their a political identity. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was an attempt to protect tribal interests in the hill tribes-dominated composite Assam districts in 1952. The Nagas were not impressed with the arrangement and rejected it outright. They eventually got by a hard way a territorial and political entity in 1962-63. The other tribes, the Khasis, the Pnars, the Garos, and Lushias took advantage of this new political instrument in the form of Autonomous District Council to consolidate the authority of the newly emerging liberal middle class leadership and to set about a process of political modernisation. The Lushai hills following the Naga path grew into Mizoram. By 1972, political reorganisation created Meghalaya as an amalgamation of the Garos, Khasis, Pnars, Syntengs, Jaintias among the major tribal groups. Arunachal Pradesh was formed out of the North East Frontier Tracts and Mizoram became a full state in 1986. Likewise,



the two former princely states of Manipur and Tripura were accorded the status of full statehood in 1972 along with Meghalaya.

### **ARUNACHAL PRADESH**

Arunachal Pradesh has 51 tribes and sub-tribes. Out of these, 25 tribes are identified as major tribes. Deori, Kimir, Mishing, Zakhring and Lisu are not declared as scheduled tribes in this state. In Arunachal Pradesh only 0.47% of the total population belongs to schedule caste group. There is no indigenous scheduled caste in the state. However, 16 castes are recognised as scheduled castes in Arunachal Pradesh. There is no specific development scheme for them. No specific tribal sub-plan or special common plan is in operation in Arunachal Pradesh. All the developmental schemes taken up by the state government are directed towards the development of scheduled tribes. There is no separate scheme ensuring social, cultural and economic safeguards to the tribals. But the state has taken up some measures to protect the socio-cultural heritage of the scheduled tribes. Being a tribal state, there is little scope for the non-tribals to exploit the scheduled tribes. But suppression of rights and differentiating women as reflected by the presence of bonded labour and slavery in some tribal societies of Arunachal Pradesh have also to be taken note of. The original settlers of the state, however, resent the settlement of Chakma and Majong tribal refugees in Arunachal Pradesh, who took shelter in the state in the wake of disturbances in Bangladesh in sixties and seventies. If anything, the relationship between the two groups of tribals is not normal.

### **ASSAM**

16.48 percent of the people of India belong to the scheduled castes, while in Assam it is 7.40 percent of the total population. In Assam, there are 16 scheduled castes with 9 synonyms as per Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes list Modification Order, 1976. The literacy rate in Assam is 53.43 percent, while only 43.42 percent of scheduled castes and 39.12 percent of the tribals in Assam are literates. Among the scheduled castes, the Namasudras occupy the predominant position with 32.97 percent of the total scheduled caste population of Assam. They are supposed to belong to the fishing community. In fact, they are an agricultural caste in the Barak Valley. Kaibartas are equally prominent. Fishing is also an avenue for their livelihood. 53.5 percent of the scheduled caste people are agriculturists. Pottery and goldsmithy are important occupations for the Hiras and Banias respectively. Fishing

is no longer an exclusive profession for the Kaibartas. They have almost lost the profession to outsiders. There is no denying the fact that in terms of economic progress the scheduled castes are much behind other people. Their children help the parents in their professional work, denying them the opportunity of schooling. They are never self-sufficient in agricultural production as cultivable land is limited and insufficient. As a result, they are in perpetual indebtedness. There is now a growing trend in them to shift to other occupations. The Assam State Development Corporation for Scheduled Castes, the Assam Plains Tribes Development Corporation and the Assam Tribal Development Authority established in 1983 are important institutions working for overall social and economic development of scheduled castes and plains tribals in Assam. A number of N.G.Os are also working in this field.

### NAGALAND

Nagaland is a predominantly scheduled tribe-inhabited state with a population of 1,209,546. There are many separate tribes and sub-tribes amongst the Nagas, each with their own distinct language and culture. Of the tribes, mention may be made of the Konyak, Angami, Lotha, Chakosang, Chang, Khienungam, Phom-Sangtam, Yimchungre, Zeliang, Khezha, Chakru and Rengma. Ao, Sema, Lotha, Konyak and Angami are the leading Naga tribes. Some of the important Manipur Naga tribes like the Tangkhul, Mao, Maram have their representation in Nagaland. Besides, a small number of Kukis, Garos, Kacharis and Karbis also live here.

In Nagaland, the tribal or village councils control the social life, try minor criminal and civil cases in accordance with customary law, though a limit has been put to avoid harsh and heavy punishment.

There is no tribal sub-plan or special component plan in Nagaland as it is predominantly a tribal state. The state has, therefore, no separate or exclusive scheme for the development of scheduled tribes of the state.

The status of women in Naga society is not that low as the incidence of suppression of woman and apathy towards them are rather uncommon. Women are engaged in handloom and some cottage industries. There is no major industry in Nagaland. The paper mill is now closed. People practise *jhum*, terrace and settled cultivation. But food production is inadequate.

**MANIPUR**

About 10 percent of the total area of Manipur is in the valley, which comes to 223 sq. km. hills account for 90 percent of the area of the state. But about 70 percent of the people of Manipur live in the valley and the rest in the hills. Imphal, Thoubal and Bishnupur areas are mostly inhabited by the Meiteis. 68.46 percent of the population is dependent on agriculture and wet cultivation is widely practised in the valley. Shifting cultivation is still in practice in the hills. The handloom industry keeps about five lakh people engaged, who represent about 28 percent of the total population and comprise mostly women.

Out of a total population of 1,837,149, scheduled castes number 37,105, while the tribal population comes to 6,32,173 according to 1991 Census. There are 29 scheduled tribes and 7 scheduled castes.

The state government is implementing special component plans for the development of scheduled caste people. The Tribal sub-plan is directed towards the development of the tribals. Interestingly, 47.72 percent of the scheduled castes live in the villages and 52.28 percent of them live in urban areas. The literacy rate of the scheduled castes is 56.44 percent against 59.89 percent for the whole state. The population of scheduled castes in Manipur is only 2.02 percent of the total population and 2.14 percent of land belong to them. So, the share of land of the scheduled caste people is slightly more than their population. But the land holding is not equitable.

The 29 major scheduled tribes may be divided into some broad ethnic groups like Naga, Kuki-Chin, Mizo. The literacy percentage of scheduled tribes is 53.63 as against 59.89 percent for the whole state. The incidence of poverty is 56.80 percent among the tribals.

There is a regular interaction between scheduled castes, scheduled tribes with the Meiteis, which is by and large peaceful. But in recent years the relation between the Nagas and the Kuki tribes has been strained mostly because of the dispute over the exercise of control in specific areas.

The tenancy laws of Manipur exclude the hill areas where the scheduled tribes are predominant and the land traditionally belongs to the tribal chiefs. The forest policy is also directed to safeguard the customary rights and interests of the tribals. But in practice the conditions are not always maintained. Illegal felling of trees has reached an alarming proportion and in this act tribals are not always to be blamed. The five

Tribal District Councils under state legislation are ineffective due to unequal land relations.

### MEGHALAYA

Meghalaya is the amalgamation of the two old districts under British rule—that of the Garo Hills and United Khasi Hills and 25 former syiemships under the Sanad relationship during colonial rule. It is now divided into seven districts with Three Autonomous District Council, under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The three leading tribes are Khasi, the Pnar and the Garo. A section of the Rabhas, Boro-Kacharis and Kochs are also permanently staying in Meghalaya with 5 percent government posts being reserved for them. Eighty percent of the posts, are, however, reserved for the main groups of tribals. Interests of the tribals are protected under the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971, the provisions of reservation in services and provision of seat reservation in the Legislative Assembly and in Parliament. Out of a total population of 1,774,778 (1991), 9,072 (0.51 percent) are scheduled castes and scheduled tribes numbering 1,517,927 (85.52 percent). Being a tribal—dominated state, atrocities on scheduled tribes and even scheduled castes are far from a common feature. For the same reason, all the general schemes for economic, cultural and social development are earmarked, in essence, for the tribals.

The Khasi and Garo are recognised matrilineal societies. But even in a typically matrilineal society like the Khasi, the women are not allowed to participate in the traditional village *Durbar* and their representation in Autonomous District Councils is also rare. They are usually dependents on males for management of landed property. There is, however, no child and bonded labourer in Meghalaya. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the people. But the total area under cultivation is only 8.75 percent of the area of the state. Only a few small scale industries exist in the state. In its present form agriculture holds little promise.

### MIZORAM

Mizoram is primarily a landlocked hilly area occupying a strategic frontier. It has an area of 21,081 sq. km, about 62 percent of which is covered by forests and 10 percent of the available land is cultivable. Champhai, North Vanlaiphai and Thezawl practise rice cultivation. Though Chamdun is a plain area, it is covered by forest. The state is

predominantly inhabited by scheduled tribes. Of the 13 tribes, the main tribes are Mizo, Pawi, Lakher and the Chakma. About seventy percent of the tribals depend on agriculture for their living. But it is mainly based on shifting cultivation on 189 thousand hectares accounting for 8.97 percent of the total area of the state. No major industry functions in Mizoram.

The population of Mizoram is 6,86,217 (1991) and the scheduled tribes account for 94.75 percent of the total population. The scheduled caste population is very small with 691 persons who are mostly engaged in agriculture, trade and commerce, service and construction works.

Being a tribal state, there is no special component plan or tribal sub-plan in Mizoram. There is no special scheme for the scheduled caste people also as they represent only 0.10 percent of the total population. The state government has been providing reservation in Government services for the scheduled tribes to the extent of 93.26 percent and 1.83 percent for the scheduled castes. But there is no specific legislation for it. The Government is providing reservation for scheduled tribes in proportion to their population in the state as approved by the Government of India in 1985. The interest of the tribals were protected under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1973 in the form of Inner Line, which used to prohibit Indian citizens from entering Mizoram without a government pass. Now the entry is not that strictly regulated. The China Hills Regulation Act of 1896, made effective from October 1951, empowers the Deputy Commissioner to expel any Indian citizen from Mizoram. The Mizo District Transfer of Land Act 1963 and Mizoram Transfer of Land Amendment Act of 1990 provide protection to the scheduled tribes of the state as regards asserting inalienable rights of the tribal people on land. The Mizoram Trading by Non-Tribal Regulation Act of 1974, 1977 protect the tribals against non-tribals in the field of trade and commerce. In Mizoram there is no municipality or Gram Panchayat. There are Village Councils numbering 671 to look after the general welfare of the people. They are important political and social bodies entrusted with village administration and development work. There are three Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule to protect tribal identity and culture. There is no special scheme as such for the development of the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes, as the state is essentially a tribal society. However, efforts are being made to protect the social and economic interest as well as the cultural identity of the people.

**TRIPURA**

Tripura is a landlocked state, (former princely state) which had merged with India soon after India's Independence. It had, in 1951, 639000 people, a substantial portion of whom were local tribals. The Maharaja himself was a tribal. But due to unabated influx from neighbouring country (the present Bangladesh), the demographic balance was lost and in 1991 the total population rose to 2,757,205 with scheduled tribe population standing at 853,345 persons (30.95 percent). Not unexpectedly, they had lost control over a substantial portion of tribal land. Recent legislations providing for re-transfer of tribal Council under the Sixth Schedule was created to protect the identity and land of the tribals in tribal-dominated areas.

There are 19 tribes and 17 Kuki sub-tribes in Tripura. The three most important tribal communities in Tripura are Tripuri, Reang and Jamatia. The Tripuris are the most important scheduled tribe in Tripura who have been divided into two groups - The Puran Tripuris and the Deshi Tripuris. In the past, the Tripuris mostly depended on *jhum* cultivation. Now-a-days, many of them have settled down in the plains and adopted plough cultivation. In the land previously used for *jhum* cultivation, coffee and rubber cultivation have been introduced in a big way. But *jhum* cultivation still continues in many areas.

It is true that efforts are being made to protect the interests of the tribals by introducing tribal sub-plan. The scheduled castes, mostly immigrants, are also looked after by special component plan. In Tripura the scheduled caste people numbering 451,116 (1991) account for 16.48 percent of the population of the state. They are mostly migrants.

Taking North East India as a whole, one gets the impression that the tribal sub-plans and special component plans for the scheduled tribes and also for the scheduled castes have not brought about significant results. Mostly they remain non-implemented except to an extent in Tripura and Assam. The scheduled castes have almost touched the rock bottom level of existence. They lost ownership of land in many cases and became victims of exploitation as artisans, as labourers and professionals. The scheduled tribes were in a better position with command over their land and forests in their respective areas. But slowly there have been inroads of commercial ventures from outside and moneylenders and money-lending agencies have become more active. Refugees from Bangladesh had encroached upon tribal land in Tripura.

Slowly tribals began to loose command over their resources, land and forests to the emerging elites of their own communities and to the state. The emerging middle class in tribal society is indicative of the growth of an exploitative trend in their set up. The structural transformation of the tribal economy had gone in favour of a small group of tribals, who could get the benefits of political accessibility, economic and educational opportunities.

It has been estimated in 1981 that approximately 52.63 percent of the population in rural areas and 33.37 percent in urban areas in North East India live below the poverty line. The present day position has not substantially changed. In tiny Meghalaya more than 50 percent of the families live below the poverty line. The process of economic deprivation of rural people has adversely affected the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. Ironically, due to the policy of reservation for the scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in services, the emerging middle class in the tribal society corner most of the benefits.

Of the total population of 31,547,314 (1991) , the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, forming 6.85 percent and 25.81 percent respectively of the total population, along with other backward communities are mostly the victims of inequality in the socio-economic field. Inequality has also emerged in the tribal society because the common villagers have lost command over land and forests. At another level, the scheduled castes have lost control over land to the advanced class. There is today a growing number of landless agricultural labourers among both scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. They are getting restive as they suffer from a sense of deprivation. The widening disparity of income within the tribal society has definitely contributed to the growing sense of frustration among the tribals. Unemployment in the sense it is understood in the complex, class-based society has gradually crept into the tribal society as well. This is probably expected. What could not be properly anticipated is the kind of reaction to such deprivations. Their biological background has not always proved to be advantageous to them, but it has at least provided them with a footing to think differently for which they alone cannot be blamed.

#### REFERENCES

- Roy Barman, B.K. 1961. *Demographic and Socio-economic Profiles of North East India. Census of India.*
- Census of India, 1991. Special Tables for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura.*
- Singh, K.S. (ed). 1972. *Tribal Situation in India.* New Delhi: Monohar.

ISBN 81-87606-90-8



9 788187 606901

**AKANSHA PUBLISHING HOUSE**

R-37B, Vani Vihar, Uttam Nagar, New Delhi-110 059

Showroom:

4649-B/21, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj, New Delhi-110 002 (INDIA)

Email: [ektabooks@yahoo.com](mailto:ektabooks@yahoo.com)