

NORTH EAST INDIA – The Land and People

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The article below presents the North East India in nutshell. A highly praiseworthy production by the Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University, Geography.

Editor

Land:

Introduction:

- (i) A part of India bordering 4 foreign countries, connected to the rest of India by a narrow corridor of about 170 km long and at places only about 10 km wide.
- (ii) Latitudinal extension 22° N- 29.5° N
Longitudinal extension 89.70° E – 97.30° E
- (iii) Strategic location – the region has about 4200 km of international boundary:
With Bangladesh – about 1300 km, with Bhutan 500 km, with China (1140km) and with Myanmar 1250 km.
- (iv) Area: 255036 km^2 representing 7% of India's area.
- (v) Population: 38,495,089 (2001) representing 3.5% of India.

Physiography:

The region consists of 3 physiographic parts:

- (i) The plateau- which is geologically a part of the Deccan Plateau covering Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong of Assam, measuring $32,821 \text{ km}^2$ (accounting for 12% of the region's area). Height varies from 300 m to 1800 m.
- (ii) Folded hills and mountains- covering the Arunachal Himalaya, Patkai Range, and Naga, Manipur, North Cachar, Mizoram and Tripura hills, measuring $150,000 \text{ km}^2$ (accounting for 60% of the area). Height varies from 300 m to 6000 m.
- (iii) Plains- Four alluvial plains: (a) Brahmaputra Plain (area $58,910 \text{ km}^2$), Dotted with ox-bow lakes. There are as many as 105 tributaries contributing to the main river. Gradient of the Brahmaputra bed is extremely low being only 13 cm/km.
- (iv) (Barak Plain (6962 km^2): Fluvial characteristics almost same as that of the Brahmaputra.
- (v) Manipur Plain (1843 km^2) – originated from a high altitude lake. Remnant is the present Loktak Lake. Overall gradient is low causing flood after a heavy and continuous rainfall.
- (vi) Tripura Piedmont Plain (4500 km^2): Dotted with 'Tilas'. Rarely flooded.

Climate:

- (i) Essentially tropical monsoon, modified by local condition.
- (ii) Relative humidity very high – always above 60%.

- (iii) Temperature: Over plains- 10^o Celsius to 35^o Celsius, Over hills-0^o Celsius to 25^o Celsius.
- (iv) Rainfall: Normally over 150 cm (av. Annual)
(Extreme cases: Cherrapunji – Mawsynram- 1200cm and Lanka- Luming – 98 cm – 100 cm).

PEOPLE

Total population of the region as per 2001 census is 38,495,089. Important population statistics are given below:

State	Area (Km)	Population (2001)	Growth (1991- 2001)	Density Km- 2001	% Of S.C. Popn (1991)	% Of S. T. Popn (1991)	% Of Urban Popn (2001)
Arunachal	83,743	1,091,117	26.21	13	0.47	63.66	20.41
Assam	78,438	26,638,407	18.85	340	7.40\	12.82	12.72
Manipur	22,327	2,388,634	30.02	107	2.02	34.41	23.88
Meghalaya	22,429	2,306,069	29.94	103	0.51	85.53	19.63
Mizoram	21,081	891,058	29.18	42	0.10	94.75	49.50
Nagaland	16,579	1,988,636	64.41	120	-	87.70	17.74
Tripura	10,486	3,191,168	15.74	304	16.36	30.95	17.02
NE India	255,036	38,495,089	22.64	124	6.00	23.00	16 approx
India	3,278,263	1,027,015,247	21.34	324	16.48	8.08	27.78

Source: Census of India, 1991 and 2001

There were major streams and waves of migration which contributed to the bulk of the present population of North–East India. The migration streams and waves started in the pre-historic period with the coming of the Austro- Asiatic ethno linguistic group of people and continued till the post – independence period with the coming of the Hindu refugees and Muslim immigration from the then East Bengal/ East Pakistan/ Bangladesh and other areas from within and outside India.

Natural Vegetation:

- (i) Most common vegetation is wet deciduous.
- (ii) Limited areas have monsoon evergreen in upper Assam and Lohit, Changlang and Tirap district of Arunachal.
- (iii) Swamps with tall grasses along the large river banks.
- (iv) Short grasses and thickets over hill slopes where jhum cultivation is carried on.
- (v) Coniferous forests over hills and mountains above 1300 m of altitude.
- (vi) Alpine grass over the high Himalayas.

Growth:

- (i) The most important demographic feature of the region is a consistent rapid growth since 1901.
- (ii) No census during the last century recorded a lesser growth rate in N.E. India than that in the country as whole.
- (iii) In 1830 NE India had an estimated population of 1m which rose to 4m in 1901 and further by 9.5 times to 38.5 m in 2001.
- (iv) Highest growth during this period was recorded in Tripura (1736.95%), followed by Nagaland (1175.76%), Mizoram (935.47%), Manipur (715.3%) and Assam (696.67%).

Causes:

- (i) Immigration and infiltration.
- (ii) Natural growth with falling mortality.
- (iii) Better census operation.

Growth of Tribal Population:

- (i) More marked since 1971. Increase from 4.14 m in 1971 to 814 m in 1991 (95% as against 60% of the total population)

Causes:

- (i) Effective enumeration.
- (ii) Declining infant mortality.
- (iii) Increasing longevity
- (iv) Voluntary return as 'Tribe' in place of Hindu or Christian as before in the plains.

Emerging Ethno-linguistic Scene:

The populations of the region are now ethno-linguistically divided into

- (i) Austro- Asiatic – 2 groups
- (ii) Tibeto-Burman- 6 groups
Who are further sub-divided into more than 100 tribes and sub-tribes.
- (iii) Sino-Siamese- 6 groups.
- (iv) Indo-Aryan- 4 linguistic groups.

S.T. Population:

The Khasi-Jaintia group of Austro-Asiatic and almost all the Tibeto-Burman groups are scheduled as tribal. Thus, NE India has more than 100 tribal groups accounting for 23% of the total population of the region.

SC Population:

SC population accounts for about 6% of the total population of the region. Tripura has the highest proportion + (16.34 – 1991), followed by Assam (7.47% - 1991).

Growth of Ethnicity:

1. No ethnic awareness recorded before the Britishers came.
2. Expansion of British administration, education, transport and communication led to exposure and growth of ethnic and ethnic consciousness.
3. Adverse effect of nationalism; as an ideology nationalism is devoid of recognition of ethnic identity. Therefore, rise of nationalism was followed by ethnic awareness.
4. The leaders pointed out backwardness and differences leading to unity and assertion of identity by the members of the group and demand for socio-economic and political rights.
5. Exploitation and deprivation of the smaller groups by the larger groups.
6. Immigration of outsiders, fear of being swamped socially, culturally, economically and politically.
7. Formation of Sanmilan, Sangha, Society, Association, Party, etc, by each ethnic group.
8. Economic backwardness, unemployment, etc lead to frustration.
9. Ethnicity becomes strengthened through above steps-it is powerful and aggressive too.

(Note : This article is reproduced from the book, "Peace Initiative" : A North East India Perspective, edited by Father Thomas Vattathara and Sister Elizabeth George and published by Don Bosco Institute, Center for Human Development, Leadership and Research, Joypur, Guwahati).