

An Analysis of Tribal Demography in North-East India

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ABSTRACT

North-East India is comprising of seven states. These are Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and the Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram. These states all together have an area of 255,037 sq. K.M. It is near about 8 (Eight) percent of the total geographical area of the country. The rate of population growth in North-East India has always been higher than that of national average. But here the migration did play an important role throughout the period in 1951- 1981. The scheduled Tribes in North-East India fall into two broad categories viz, the hill tribes and the plain tribes living in the valley areas of Assam and Brahmaputra valley. The two categories indicate differences in cultural characteristics. Demographically scheduled tribes in the hills form a majority and the plain tribes are in minority. Some intellectual refugees entered into this area and ousted the tribals and the tribals were pushed into inhospitable pockets.

KEY WORDS: Tribal Demography, Population Growth, Migration, Non-Agricultural Land, Inhospitable pockets.

1. INTRODUCTION

Northeast India, comprising the states of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura and the Union Territories of Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram together has an area of 255,037 sq. k.m. which is nearly 8 per cent of the total geographical area of the country. (Bhagawati, 1982) It is inhabited by more than 194.31 lakh people constituting 3.8 per cent of the total population of India in 1981. The rate of population growth in northeast India since 1901 has always been higher than in national average. It was moderate till 1951, but a faster growth has been observed there after. The total population of north-east India increased from 102.61 lakh (Barch, 1977) in 1951 to 259.86 lakh (excluding Arunachal Pradesh) in 1981 representing a rapid growth of 159.86 per cent over the thirty-year period as against an increase of 89.37 percent of India as a whole during the same period. Some scholars tried to explain this growth (with special reference to Assam) being an account of higher birth rate and reduced death rate only. Migration, according to them, contributes only marginally to this rapid growth. However, the figures of birth rate, death rate and migration cast doubts on this conclusion. (Becker, 1980) Migration did play an important role throughout the period in 1951-1981. Had North-East India's population in 1951 increased at the national rate, it would have stood at 194.31 lakh in 1981. Since the figure (excluding Arunachal Pradesh) was 259.86 lakh, the excess of 65.55 lakh persons constituting 25.23 per cent of its 1981 population may be attributed to migrants and their descendants during the post-independence period. Adding the excess population of Arunachal Pradesh should increase the figure still further. No other region in post-independence India underwent such profound demographic changes with concomitant socioeconomic implications. (Downs, 1990)

Census: According to the 1971 census the tribal populations was 22.19 per cent of the total population of the region; the proportion varying from 94.26 per cent in

Mizoram, to 10.99 per cent in Assam. (Dutta, 1983) The Scheduled Tribes in north-east India fall into two broad categories namely the hill tribes living in the hilly areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland and the hill districts of Assam, Manipur and Tripura and the plain tribes living in the valley areas of Assam, mainly the tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley. The two categories indicate differences in cultural characteristics (Fuchs, 1990). Most of the hill tribes remained isolated till the time to the British occupation. The plains tribes however have been living with other non-tribal communities. Since time immemorial and there has been a great amount of cultural "give and take" between the tribes and other neighbouring communities. Demographically Scheduled tribes in the hills form a majority in Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh (Karotemprel, 1980), while in the valley region of Assam, Manipur and Tripura they are a minority. The size of the tribes varies considerably: there are very small tribes with only a few hundred individuals and very large ones comprising several lakh of individuals. More than 55 per cent of the tribal population of the region was in the states of Assam (36.33 percent) and Meghalaya (18.53 per cent in 1971. (Karotemprel, 1981)

2. CONCLUSION

Location quotient gives the highest concentration of the tribal population of district level in relation to the total population of the country in Mizoram. Nagaland and Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh followed by Meghalaya and districts of Siang, Tirap and Qameng of Arunachal Pradesh. (Karotemprel, 1985) These refugees are secluded from man's habitat and are characterised by unattractive features such as rugged terrain, forests and non-agriculture land. The tribals were pushed into these inhospitable pockets by people who had newly come and occupied the better grounds. In districts where the process of urbanisation

has already started such as Goalpara, Lakhimpur, Karbi Anglong, North Cachar and Lohit tribal concentration is low. The urban areas where tribal concentration is least are Kamrup, Darrang, Sibsagar, Nowgong, Cachar and

Imphal. The concentration of the tribal people in the hills and backward areas is of great significance for their cultural orientation and for the formulation of strategies for their social and economic development.

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