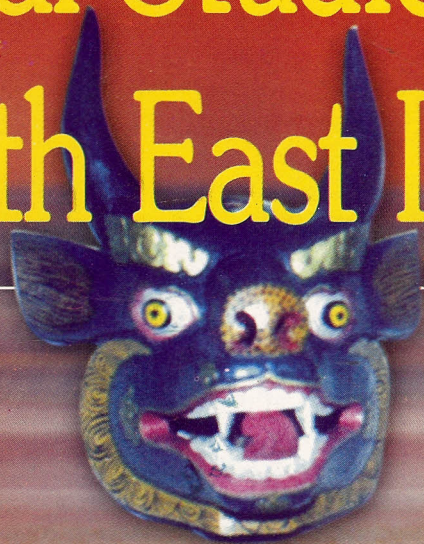


Tribal Studies in North East India



Sarthak Sengupta

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Tribal Studies in North East India



Edited by
Sarthak Sengupta



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Dedicated to

**the sacred memory of the
LATE SUNIL CH. SEN,
my eldest brother-in-law,
whose hallowed life
has been a source of
constant inspiration to my
professional and academic pursuits.**

Acknowledgement

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SARTHAK SENGUPTA

Preface

North East India, the erstwhile greater Assam, presently the land of the seven sister States, is one of the most diverse and colourful places in the world. It covers political unit, namely the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura and is located between latitudes 20° and 22° North and longitudes 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, 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. Because of similarity in geographical features and ethnic composition, States like Sikkim and north extreme of West Bengal can also be included in this region. This remote region is connected with the mainland of India by a narrow corridor as the chicken's neck between Nepal and Bangladesh. Indeed 98 percent of the total land border is with foreign countries and only 2 percent of the land of the North East borders with the other Indian States. This has greatly enhance its strategic importance.

North East India is a great wealth of variation in different respects. There is a rich assembly of tribal culture 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 plain areas. In other words, one third of the total number of listed tribes the whole of India covers are to be found in this region.

In such a region of diversity, at present, in four of the Seven States in North East India, tribes are in majority. Arunachal Pradesh which attained Statehood from Union Territory status in 1984, alone accounts for some twenty four major tribal groups. Tribes living in the States of Assam are categorized into fourteen hill tribes and nine plain tribes. Manipur is the abode of twenty four tribal groups. Meghalaya, which came into being in 1972 is also a tribal dominated State and noted for its matriarchal tribal groups, besides others. Mizoram, the land of the Mizos, which was also born in 1972, is again dominated by the tribes. Nagaland which was made a separate State in 1963 is inhabited by thirteen major tribes and sub-tribes speaking different dialects. Among the Nagas, there are altogether sixteen distinctly recognized tribal groups. Tripura is the home of nineteen different scheduled tribes.

The history of tribal studies in North East India is quite old and started more than one hundred years back from today. The exotic and diversified culture, people and picturesque situation of the region attracted the attention of many anthropologists from different parts of the globe. However, empirical studies on the biology, culture, folklore of the various tribal people of North East India surprisingly remain rarity and neglected. Not much attempt has so far been made to make available the basic information about the tribal people of the region.

The impressive collection of papers accommodated in this volume includes sixteen contributions by eminent anthropologists and social scientists of India. As the title of the book suggests, it encompasses a vast range of tribal studies in anthropology and allied disciplines. The papers which follow are undoubtedly unique in their own way and by and large related to the contemporary issues of tribal world in this land of diversity.

This book opens with a Chapter by B.K. Roy Burman, who introduces in a nutshell the demographic profiles of the hill tribes of the region. The chapter gives an idea about the population dynamics and ethnic processes in North East India.

Saswati Biswas deals with the problems of preservation and protection of tribal culture. The Chapter depicts how

the inner tension and strains of tribal society are effecting tribal culture where non-tribals have had no role to play. The author seeks to bring forth the traditional cordial relationship between the tribes and non-tribes.

Soumen Sen has brought out the importance of rituals and myths in bringing about a group solidarity and identity. The author opines that myths are attributable to factual events or symbolic expressions of a given group and thereby they are useful in understanding intra and inter population similarities and differences.

The next Chapter of this book is by C.J. Sonowal who has highlighted the widespread problems of ethnicity, identity crisis and separatism in the North East region in general and the State of Assam in particular.

Sucheta Sen Choudhury has dealt with the participation of Bodo women in socio-political movements which enables them to enter into the political arena and in decision making process which ultimately strengthen the unity of Bodo women.

Tribal ethnography is a prime concern in anthropology. For taking any measure of the upliftment of the condition, the basic lifestyle of the tribal people must be known. It is fitting that two Chapters in this volume in essence an ethnographic account, one on the Koirang tribe of Manipur (by R.K. Ranjit Singh) and the other on the Mishmi tribe of Arunachal Pradesh (by R.K. Athparia).

Jayanta Sarkar through his contribution has tried to provide information on ecological adaptation among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Chapter discloses that the tribes living in Arunachal Pradesh have been maintaining a balance with the respective ecological settings.

N.K. Gogoi and Farhin Ara Rohman attempt to examine the folksongs and folktales of the Karbis of Assam. The authors have tried to focus the conscious effort of the Karbis to preserve their traditional identity through folk narratives.

The next Chapter is on the population genetics of the Samsa, a completely isolated numerically small tribe of North Cachar hills district of Assam, written by A.K. Ghosh and D.K. Limbu. The Chapter highlight how active operation of

genetic drift and natural selection brings about changes in the genetic make-up of the population.

The chapter eleven, contributed by R. Khongsdier illustrates how maternal age, parity, age at marriage and education particularly female education, regulates the fertility and mortality differentials among the War Khasi of Meghalaya. The findings are quite contrary to the general observation in many Indian Population.

Sumit Mukerjee has presented in chapter twelve, the medical geography of acute respiratory infection diseases and its possible causative factors among the tribal population of Meghalaya. He emphasized an intensive policy approach on management of acute respiratory infection disease in North East India.

Based on empirical data, the concept and cause of disease, the indigenous beliefs, patterns of treatment and curative measures, role of medicine men among the Garos of Assam and Meghalaya have been portrayed by B.K. Medhi and Rameeza Hasan (chapter thirteen). It has been reported that the Garo people resort to more than a single healing tradition in the plural medical setting.

In the next two chapters survival of some prehistoric cultural traditions — Megalithic practices among the Mao and Maram Nagas of Manipur (by Motum Bokul Singh) and the Garos of Meghalaya (by H.C. Mahanta and Anjana Sarmah) have been meticulously described.

Indigenous people knowledge is invaluable for natural resource management and its sustainable development. Due to acculturation and upright tribal extinction, the indigenous knowledge is gradually eroding. Asham Borang in chapter sixteen highlight the vast scope of indigenous knowledge for sustainable development and points out the natural resource management among the tribal communities in North East India.

Through the above sixteen articles, an attempt has been made to focus, within limited scope, the life and activities of a large number of tribal people of varied ethnicity and biogenetic make-up living in North East India. The coverage is as diverse as that of the region. The book in no way claim to cover in details various aspects of life and environment of

the tribal people of the Seven Sister States, but a good cross-section of man, society and culture of the tribes of North Eastern region is here reflected.

Late Sunil Ch. Sen, my eldest brother-in-law, to whom this small treatise is being dedicated was born on 1st March, 1921. He obtained his B.A. (Hons.) degree from Scottish Church College, Calcutta University. He had a very good command over English and Sanskrit language. He started his career in Bharati Vidyalaya, Calcutta (renamed later as Bhabataran Sarkar Vidyalaya, Calcutta) and owing to his sincerity and dedication, he was promoted as Principal, and served this post till he suddenly passes away in 1983 leaving a long track of intellectual tradition behind. This book is dedicated to his memory.

The book being empirical research based work is expected to attract attention from wide range of allied academic disciplines, and will be of extremely useful to scholars and academicians who are interested in tribal studies; as well as administrators, planners, policy makers; voluntary agencies and indeed any one with concern about tribal people of North East India.

SARTHAK SENGUPTA

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Demographic Profile of the Hill Areas of North East India

—B.K. ROY BURMAN

Physiography and Natural Resources

North East India comprises of seven States — Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. The total geographical area of the region is about 25.5 million hectares, that is, about 8 per cent of the total area of the country. Forests occupy about 60 per cent in three States, namely Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur and Tripura; about rd of total area in Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram and 17.4 per cent in Nagaland. Apart from forest wealth, the region is rich in hydel power potential and mineral resources. The principal mineral resources are petroleum, natural gas, coal, lime stone, dolomite, ceramic and refractory raw material. Recent surveys have revealed some deposits of metallic minerals and uranium as well (Agarwal, 1987).

Historical Perspective

Relics of stone age, particularly those belonging to the Neolithic period found in different parts of North East India suggest that this region had close cultural contact with both East and South East Asia through the ages (Sharma, 1978). Linguistic evidences indicate that in the remote past a migration of Austric speaking people came to North East India from further east. Austric speakers are found in Santal Parganas, Chotanagpur plateau and the adjoining areas as well. Speakers of Sino-Tibetan languages - the Bodo, the Garo,

the Tripuri seem to have reached the region after the Austric speakers.

Racially all these peoples are of Mongoloid blend and are described as *Kiratas* by the Indo-Arya speakers who migrated to the region later. In the historic period came a people of Thai origin, the Ahom, through the Shan State of upper Burma. They grappled with the problem of synthesising their culture with the pre-existing cultures, including elite culture strands of the Arya speakers, with varying degrees of success.

While South Asian connection of North East India is well established, Suniti Kr. Chatterjee (1955) is of the opinion that the region was never wholly isolated from the rest of the India and that at times Assam particularly loomed large in India's history and politics. Roy Burman (1990) in several writings has pointed out that the Himalaya and its lateral extensions, which cover along with others almost the whole of North East India, have served as history's oscillating bridge and buffer between South, Central, East and South-East Asia.

Population and the Fallacy of Density

The 1991 census enumerated a population of 3, 15, 47, 315 for North East India as a whole. The density of population per sq. km. in this region is 123 compared to all India average 273. But even in this region Assam with density of 286 per sq. km. has higher than the National average density. Tripura with population density of 263 per sq. km. is close to National average. Arunachal Pradesh with average density of 10 per sq. km. has the lowest density in any State in the country. But there is a fallacy in these figures. Basing on the data available upto 1981 census, I had brought it out in a publication (Roy Burman, 1990). As the situation has not significantly changed, much of what I wrote earlier is likely to hold good even today. I therefore reproduce relevant extract from my earlier writing :

“The density of population in this region is 104, the corresponding density at the all India level is 221. The density is as low as 7 in Arunachal Pradesh and as high as 253 in Assam. But these figures do not represent the whole reality. It should be remembered that in North East India as a whole, particularly in the Union Territory

(now State) of Arunachal Pradesh virtually the entire indigenous population live on agriculture. On the other hand compared to the all India average of 46.8 per cent of net cultivated area to total area in 1977-1978, in this region only 15.9 per cent area was under cultivation. It was only 2.0 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh, 3.7 in Mizoram, 6.3 in Manipur, 7.9 in Meghalaya, 11.0 in Nagaland, 23.5 in Tripura and 34.1 in Assam. What is most interesting is that population per square kilometre of gross cultivated area was much higher in North East India (587) than that in India as a whole (398). The lowest density per square kilometre of cultivated area in this region is in Arunachal Pradesh (483) but even this is much higher than the National average. If the figures for Brahmaputra valley, Imphal valley and Barak valley, where the bulk of the population of the region is concentrated, are separately considered, the density of population per square kilometre of gross cultivated are found to be several times higher than that in the country as a whole. In 1901, the density of population in Assam was only 42, by 1951 it was 102, in 1981 it was 254. The corresponding figures respectively were in Manipur 13, 26 and 64; in Meghalaya 15, 27 and 64; in Nagaland 6, 13 and 47 ; in Tripura 17, 61 and 196. Similarly the figures for Mizoram went up from 4 in 1901 to 9 in 1951 and 23 in 1981. The density of population for India as a whole was 77 in 1901, 117 in 1951 and 221 in 1981. Thus while during the present century the density of population for the country as a whole went up by less than three times, it went up by six to more than ten times in the various States and Union Territories of the region."

The rapidly changing density by itself poses a problem of continuous adaptations in the relationships between man and environment. The problem is further complicated by the changes in the legal status of land and in the composition of the population and by the factors contributing to these changes.

Pattern of Population Growth

For Arunachal Pradesh data earlier than 1961 are not

separately available. For all the other States the growth rate of population has been higher than the all India average in all the decades. However there are some significant features which deserve mention. If rural and urban areas are considered separately it is found that whereas rural growth rate in all the States has been consistently higher than the country average, urban growth rate shows erratic trends of up and down except in Meghalaya. Manipur showed a negative growth rate during 1941-51. When urban population declined by 97 per cent but in the next decades there was a quantum jump. It seems that during the war there was a mass out-migration from the urban to the rural areas and then there was a post-war retrieval. Another significant feature is the massive urban growth rate in Mizoram during all the decades since 1951—1961, and corresponding slowing down of rural growth rate culminating in negative growth rate in during 1981-1991 in the rural areas. If these data are compared (48.55% during 1971-1981 and 39.70% during 1981-1991) it appears that both intra-State rural to urban migration and immigration from outside the State have been contributory factors.

Nagaland shows almost the same pattern as in Mizoram except that while during 1951-1961 Nagaland had a low rural growth (6.91%), during the subsequent decades it has maintained a fairly high rural growth and very high urban growth. At the same time total population growth in Nagaland is much higher than the National average (50.05% during 1971-1981, and 56.08% during 1981-1991 as against country average of 24.46% and 23.85% respectively). Obviously there has been massive immigration of population from outside the State since 1961-1971. For Assam it is difficult to make any firm observation as there was no census in the State in 1981 and the growth figures during 1971-1981 and 1981-1991 are only projections.

Sex Ratio as an Indicator of Population Dynamics

A statement giving sex ratio (female per 1000 males) in 1981 and 1991 is given in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1

Sex Ratio in North East India

	1981	1991
Arunachal Pradesh	862	859
Assam	901	923
Manipur	971	958
Meghalaya	954	955
Mizoram	919	921
Nagaland	863	886
Tripura	946	945
North East India	909	921
All India	933	927

Sex ratio in North East India is lower than the all India average. It may mean either or both of two things : predominance of male migration, higher female death rate. The fact that sex ratio is lowest in two States, namely Arunachal Pradesh (859) and Nagaland (886) where immigration during the past three decades has been high, indicates that predominance of male migration and not whole family migration is a contributing factor. This has several sociological and economic implications. Predominantly male migration increases the hazard of social vulnerability of women.

If the region as a whole is considered there has been considerable improvement during 1981-1991 (909 and 921) though even after the improvement, sex ratio remains lower than the National average, which has registered a decline from 933 in 1981 to 937 in 1991. But sex ratio has declined in Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur and in Nagaland, it is almost stagnant.

Birth Rate

Birth rate (number of birth per 1000 population) obtained through Sample Registration operations carried out by the Registrar General of India show that there has continuous decline during the five years 1988 to 1992. It was 31.5 in 1988 and it came down to 29.2 in 1992. In North East India continuous decline in birth rate is found only in Manipur and Tripura. Other States show an erratic trend. For instance in Arunachal Pradesh birth rate in 1990 came down from

35.6 in 1989 to 30.1 in 1990, and then went upto 30.9 in 1991. It again came down to 26.6 in 1992. In Nagaland birth rate in 1989 was 19.7, it came down to 16.2 in the next year and then shot up to 18.5 in 1991. It was 19.2 in 1992. In Assam birth rate was 29.4 in 1989, it went up to 29.7 in 1990, further went up to 30.9 in 1991, showed a slight decline in 1992 when the figure was 30.8. The implications of these erratic trends are not visible. There are a number of intermediate variables to which require to be looked into. These include apart from sex ratio, literacy, urbanisation, age at marriage, frequency of exposure during risk period, fecundity rate, adoption of birth control measures and so on. Besides there are attitudes and values. In North East India there are large number of small ethnic groups. Rather than reduction in population they would like increase in population. Preference for male child would also be reflected in sex behaviour. Till a male child is born, many couples would not like to adopt population control measures. All these values and attitudes are frequently neglected in folklores and its ascription of status particularly of women in respective communities.

Though year to year variation show erratic trend in most of the States over the length of five years (1988 to 1992) there has been more significant decline in birth rate in the different States of North East India than that of the all India level. This can be seen in the following statement (Table 1.2).

Table 1.2

Birth Per Millions in North East India

	1988	1992
Arunachal Pradesh	40.0	26.6
Assam	32.9	30.8
Manipur	25.8	19.5
Meghalaya	36.4	29.8
Nagaland	22.3	19.2
Tripura	26.6	23.1
All India	31.5	29.2

Spectacular decline in the birth rate in Arunachal Pradesh is particularly to be noted. But for reason which will be explained in the next para the birth rate in Nagaland is of considerable significance. It has considerably been much

lower than the National average, though during 1991 and 1992 it has shown slight upward trend compared to earlier year. It was 22.3 in 1988 when at the country level it was 31.5. It came down to 16.8 in 1989 compared to 30.6 at the country level. It was 19.2 in 1992 compared to 29.2 at the country level.

As expected at the all India level as well as in all the States of North East India, the birth rate in the urban areas were again the lowest death rate in Nagaland (11.3) compared to the all India average (23.1).

Death Rate

Nagaland has not only lower death rate (3.8 in 1992) in North East India, but in the country as a whole (10.1 in 1992). Over years, the only State which has very closely contested with Nagaland in having the lowest death rate is Kerala. This is rather surprising. In Kerala, public health care system is one of the best in the country; on the other hand in Nagaland public health care system is rather ill developed. Naturally the lowest death rate in Nagaland has created lot of interest among the demographers. Some quarters doubt the accuracy of the Sample Registration data. But it would be difficult to ignore the consistent trend over a long period. Besides the fact that birth rate in rural and urban areas is lowest in the region and much lower than the National average gives credence to the death rate data. It is well established demographic fact that there is a direct correlation between death rate and birth rate. Where death rate is high the urge to have more children is also high, so that at least there would be some survival.

Apart from Nagaland where death rate is lowest in the country, death rate in the other three hill States in the region in lower than the National average. To begin with it was much higher in Arunachal Pradesh (17.2) in 1988 compared to the country average (11.0). But by 1992, it came down to 10.94 in Arunachal Pradesh compared to country average of 10.1. Arunachal Pradesh has made a spectacular progress in reducing the death rate. A statement giving Statewise death rate in North East India in 1988 and 1992 is given in Table 1.3.

Two interesting fact came out from the statement. In Assam, where public health care system is fairly good at

Table 1.3

Death Rate in North East India

	1988			1992		
	Total	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban
Arunachal Pradesh	17.2	18.4	5.0	9.4	10.1	2.0
Assam	11.8	12.1	7.9	10.4	10.7	7.4
Manipur	6.8	7.3	5.3	5.6	5.4	6.2
Meghalaya	9.1	10.6	2.7	8.5	9.7	2.7
Nagaland	5.0	5.7	1.7	3.8	4.2	1.4
Tripura	8.7	8.5	4.6	9.6	7.9	4.3
All India	11.0	12.0	7.7	10.1	10.9	7.0

least in the urban areas, the death rate was highest in the region in 1988 and remained highest in 1992. An interesting fact to note is that in Manipur the death rate was higher in urban areas than in the rural areas in 1992.

The fact that the death rate is much lower than the National average in the tribal predominant States and in States like Manipur and Tripura, which are having substantial tribal population is important for any social demographer. When this fact is coupled with the fact mentioned earlier that per square kilometre cultivated area, density of population is much higher in North East India, than the National average, one strikes against an important policy implications. It seems to suggest that the tribal populations drain substantial amount of nutrient from forest products rather than agricultural products. Another possibility that the coarse cereals, millets and other products of shifting cultivation and upland cultivation in tribal predominant areas should not also be ruled out.

Urbanisation Trend

The urban population as per cent of total population in 1981 and 1991 in the different States of North East India is given in Table 1.4.

Urban growth rates in Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram are most spectacular. During the period of a decade the urban population has almost doubled. For gaining an insight into the probable impact of urbanisation it is to be examined

Table 1.4
Urban Population of North East India as Per Cent of Total
Population of India

	1981	1991
Arunachal Pradesh	6.56	12.79
Assam	8.82	11.10
Manipur	26.42	27.52
Meghalaya	18.07	18.60
Mizoram	24.67	46.10
Nagaland	15.52	17.21
Tripura	10.99	15.30

how many towns have newly come up during the decade and how many are old. A statement giving the Statewise number of towns in 1981 and 1991 is given in Table 1.5. for comparison. As regards the number of villages only 1981 census data are available.

Table 1.5
Number of Towns and Villages in North East India

	Number of Towns		Number of Inhabited Villages
	1981	1991	
Arunachal Pradesh	6	10	325
Assam	72	93	21995
Manipur	32	31	2035
Meghalaya	12	12	4874
Mizoram	6	22	722
Nagaland	7	9	963
Tripura	10	18	4727
North East India	145	195	35641

During 1981-1991, as many as 51 new towns have come up in the region and one town in Manipur has been deurbanised. Most spectacular has been the growth of number of towns in Mizoram. It was only six in 1981 and in 1992 it was 22. While the number of towns has gone up more than three times the urban population growth rate is slightly less than double. This means that a number of small towns have come up in the State. In Arunachal Pradesh number of towns has gone up by 66 per cent, but the urban population has almost doubled during the decade. This

means that either the old towns have grown in size or new large towns have come up. The possibility of the first is more. In Tripura the number of towns has gone up by 80 per cent but the urban population growth has been around 50 per cent. It is clear that a number of small towns have come up. Whatever may be the process the urban explosion during the decade would obviously cause problems of adoption of the rural population to the new situation.

Literacy trend data, participation of the population in working force and distribution of the workers by industrial categories would provide more insight.

Table 1.6
Percentage of Literacy in North East India

	1981			1991		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
Arunachal Pradesh	20.79	28.94	11.32	32.87	42.26	23.03
Assam	-	-	-	43.20	50.62	35.18
Manipur	41.35	53.29	29.06	49.00	58.24	39.40
Meghalaya	39.08	37.89	30.08	39.15	41.72	36.45
Mizoram	59.88	64.46	54.91	67.36	70.34	64.74
Nagaland	42.57	50.06	33.89	51.09	56.04	45.52
Tripura	42.12	51.70	32.00	49.86	58.23	41.01

During 1981 to 1991 literacy rate has gone up in all the States. But while the increase is more than 50 per cent in Arunachal Pradesh, in no other State it is more than 20 per cent. Particularly it seems that in Mizoram, after achieving a high literacy in the earlier decades has reached a plateau. In the 70^s, I had drawn attention to the fallacy of high literacy in Mizoram. While it was in the highest literacy bracket in the country, it was found that among the literates persons with effective education, that is, primary and above constituted a low population.

The data on enrolment in educational institutions as on in September, 1992 (Basic Statistics of North Eastern Region, 1995, North Eastern Council) show that inspite of highest literacy, Mizoram provides a dismal picture in educational advancement. This will be obvious from the Table 1.7.

Table 1.7

Students in Class IX and X as Per Cent of Students in Classes I - V (1992)

Arunachal Pradesh	10.32
Assam (relates to 1990-91)	12.70
Manipur	17.85
Meghalaya	19.64
Mizoram	0.17
Nagaland	13.44
Tripura	15.82

Another aspect of progress of education in North East India deserves mention. It is found that compared to the literacy level of the males, that of females was low in 1981 and 1991, but the rate of progress of female literacy was much higher in Arunachal Pradesh followed by Nagaland.

Participation in Working Force

As already mentioned participation in working force is an important dimension of population dynamics. Also it gives an insight into the nature of the political economy. A statement giving the data as in 1981 and 1991 follows (Table 1.8.)

Table 1.8

Main Workers as Per Cent of Total Population

	1981	1991
Arunachal Pradesh	49.61	45.22
Assam	-	31.19
Manipur	44.35	38.55
Meghalaya	43.44	40.32
Mizoram	41.73	42.09
Nagaland	47.53	42.29
Tripura	29.64	29.09

Except in Mizoram participation rate in working force has increased in all the States for which data are available. In Mizoram increase is nominal, similarly decline in Tripura is also nominal. What is more important is that the participation rate in tribal predominant States, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland, is much higher than in the States of Assam and Tripura where the non-tribals

constitute the overwhelming majority. Though in Manipur also the non-tribal peoples are in overwhelming majority, the plains being only $\frac{1}{10}$ th of the geographical area of the State, the political economy is considerably influenced by the nature of the terrain and also there is the question of historically conditional values.

It is to be noted that higher participation rate has two meanings. Where the rate of effective education and level of technology is comparatively simple higher participation rate implies lack of capacity of the economy to maintain many dependants. Decline in rate of participation in such condition would imply augmentation of the capacity of the economy to sustain dependants and provide them opportunity to go in for higher education or acquiring more skill in more sophisticated technologies so that they can later on enter into occupations valued higher by the society. Where higher level of education prevails, decline in participation rate would imply decline in employment opportunity. A comparative study of the data suggests that in many areas of North East India both the processes are taking place simultaneously. Capacity of the primary sector of the economy to sustain more dependants is increasing and at the same time employment opportunity of those who have acquired educational level or skill level is declining. An examination of the workers by industrial categories will give more insight.

Distribution of Workers of Industrial Categories

Distribution of the main workers in three major industrial categories are given in Table 1.9.

Table 1.9.

	Per Cent Distribution of Workers in Major Industrial Categories					
	1981			1991		
	Culti- vators	Agri- labours	Others	Culti- vators	Agri- labours	Others
Arunachal Pradesh	71.20	2.40	26.34	50.36	5.13	44.51
Assam	-	-	-	50.90	12.08	37.02
Manipur	62.60	5.00	32.40	61.77	6.69	31.54
Meghalaya	62.65	10.00	27.35	55.31	12.51	32.18
Mizoram	70.63	2.48	26.89	61.45	3.28	35.27
Nagaland	72.29	0.81	26.90	72.65	1.41	25.94
Tripura	43.28	24.00	32.71	38.09	23.38	38.53

Except Tripura in all the States cultivators are in the majority, and except Tripura, Assam and Meghalaya agricultural labour has nominal presence. It is however important to note that in all the States except Nagaland, there has been decline in the proportion of cultivators among the workers. Simultaneously there has been increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers in all States except Tripura where the proportion of other workers has gone up. The decline in the proportion of cultivators and simultaneous rise in the proportion of agricultural labour is most marked in Arunachal Pradesh. There has been simultaneous rise in the proportion of other workers. But the composition of other workers by industrial categories has not been analysed. Besides migration data of 1991 census have not yet been published. It is difficult to say whether a significant proportion of other workers of socially appropriate category are indigenous peoples of Arunachal Pradesh. If not social tension and conflict can be apprehended. To a lesser extent the census data show the same problem in the other States of North East India.

Given the segmentary character of social formation, particularly in the hill areas of North East India the tension and conflict has to be primarily ethnic conflict. One would have expected that industrialisation would bring new type of solidarity. But this has not happened. First because industrialisation in North East India has been meagre; second because multiplier effect of industrial economy and plantation economy has not been substantial in the region and that because in most cases the industrial labour force and skilled manpower have been from outside the respective State or the region. There is another dimension of the problem. Many of the industries, rather than benefitting the local population have caused environmental degradation as in case of cement factory at Bokajan or some of the alleged operations of Oil and Natural Gas Commission (ONGC). Some of the industries like paper mill in Nagaland are also reported to be insensitive to industrial property relations.

As ethnic issue is currently and at least for the time to come is more likely to be on focus, some data on this line would be provided.

Table 1.10.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as Per Cent to the Total Population of the Respective States in North East India

	1981		1991	
	S.C.	S.T.	S.C.	S.T.
Arunachal Pradesh	0.46	69.82	0.47	63.66
Assam	-	-	7.40	12.82
Manipur	1.25	27.30	2.02	34.91
Meghalaya	0.41	80.58	0.51	85.53
Mizoram	0.03	93.55	0.10	94.75
Nagaland	-	83.99	-	87.70
Tripura	15.12	28.44	16.36	30.95
India	15.81	7.83	16.73	7.95

The statement shows that except in Tripura and to some extent Assam, the Scheduled Castes have negligible existence. In fact no community has been listed in Nagaland when 1981 and 1991 census data are compared, slight increase in the per cent of Scheduled Castes is noticed. As this is an all India phenomenon, this slight increase is more likely to be due to natural higher growth among the Scheduled Castes. Perhaps this may be a feature of demographic transition among the Scheduled Castes characterised by decline in death rate, but no commensurate decline in birth rate. Without a comparative study of the intermediate variables mentioned earlier it will be hazardous to come to definite conclusion.

The Scheduled Tribes are overwhelming majority in Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland. In Manipur and Tripura they constitute around one third of the population. Only in Assam they are only about one eighth of the population. The census operation did not take place in Assam in 1981. In all the other States except Arunachal Pradesh there has been increase in the proportion of Scheduled Tribe population. In Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura the increase is substantial. Migration of tribal peoples from Bangladesh and Myanmar may have been contributory factor. In Tripura it is obvious, but one cannot be too sure without closer examination in the field. In the wake of democracy movement trickles of tribal population moved to Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland. But their number cannot be high enough to affect the demographic pattern.

The case of Tripura deserves special mention at the beginning of the century they were around two third of the population in the State; now they are one third. This is a traumatic experience for them, which has been accentuated by some unimaginative measures of the Government in the post-independence period. One such measure is the removal of tribal reserve.

The sharp decline in the proportion of tribal population in Arunachal Pradesh is also a matter of concern. At the time of independence the indigenous people of Arunachal Pradesh constituted more than 95 per cent of the population. Their proportion has been continuously reduced through massive influx of population from other parts of the country. A fear of being swamped by others in their place has gripped the mind of Arunachalese. This is not a cold demographic fact but a sociological phenomenon.

Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Processes among the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

In North East India as a whole there are 55 entries in the list of Scheduled Castes and 117 entries in the list of Scheduled Tribes, which may overlap. Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Mizoram, and Meghalaya have a common list of the Scheduled Castes. This is because of the fact that this list was notified in undivided Assam. Most of these castes do not exist in the hill States; even in Assam caste system had incomplete penetration. Except for unclean occupations like scavenging and leather work and specialised occupations like priesthood, pottery, carpentry and smithy and fishing was hardly any castewise occupational differentiation. In Manipur also caste was an incomplete system. Occupational differentiation like salt making was more related to political status as war slaves or social outcastes. They were called *fois*. Persons banished to the outlying areas of Imphal Valley were also called *Lei*. Now they are claiming Scheduled Caste status as *Loi*.

Though there are 117 entries as main Scheduled Tribes, this does not reflect the reality. There are a number of names common to several States. Besides several State lists contain names of good number of sub-tribes, some of which are tribes in other States. Number of sub-tribes listed in different States is as follows : Assam, Meghalaya and Mizoram includes 37

common names, while in Tripura 17 names are common. There is also complexity of another order. Assam has 17 tribes and 37 sub-tribes listed for autonomous districts and tribes in the State excluding the autonomous districts. This has created complications. Some of the tribes listed for areas outside autonomous districts, the Lalung, the Bodo. Bodo for instance are found in substantial numbers in autonomous districts. Again some of the tribes listed for autonomous districts only. Garo, Khasi for instance are found outside the autonomous districts. Then there is problem of a third order. In Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, the lists include 'Any Naga Tribe'; again in Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Mizoram one finds mention of 'Any Mizo (Lushai) Tribe'; in these States except in Manipur any Kuki tribe is also included with specification of 37 sub-tribes. The problem is that many names included in the list as sub-tribes of Kuki do not accept their Kuki identity. This has created a piquant situation. Again many tribes, particularly in Manipur, who are currently listed as distinct tribes were earlier considered as sub-tribes of Kuki and now claim to be sub-tribes of Naga. This flux in ethnic boundaries and the concomitant ethnic processes constitute an interesting anthropo-sociological problem.

Ethnic Process and Sociological Insight : A Case Study

The Kuki Naga identity shifts provide an interesting case study.

The tribes like Purum (Chothe), Anal, Aimol, Maring, etc. were in earlier literature described as Kuki, now they claim to be Nagas. This identity shifts seems to have two dimensions. One is strategy of maintaining control over life-supporting resources; the other is locus in political power structure.

Traditionally both Kuki and Naga depend on communal bonds as their main source of livelihood. But at the ideological level there are two different systems of control and management of the communal land in Manipur. According to Kuki system the hereditary chief controls the land, but he is required to allot fair share to each household for cultivation. According to Naga system the traditional village council controls the land, though frequently there is an elected chief who serves as the spokesman of the council, he may or may not be direct heir of preceding chief. During the colonial period the Kuki chiefs were projected almost as owners of the land.

Table 1.11

Distribution of Population According to Religious Affiliation

State	Hindu			Muslim			Christian			Buddhist			Others		
	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%	1981	1991	%
	change 81-91			change 81-91			change 81-91			change 81-91			change 81-91		
Arunachal															
Pradesh	29.2	37.0	73.3	0.8	1.3	135.03	4.3	10.3	226.0	13.7	12.9	28.8	51.6	36.2	-40.0
Assam	-	67.1	-	-	28.4	-	-	3.3	-	-	0.3	-	-	0.6	-
Manipur	60.0	57.1	24.2	7.0	7.1	34.4	29.7	34.1	48.6	0.3	0.9	50.3	2.5	0.8	-60.4
Meghalaya	18.0	14.7	8.1	3.1	4.7	48.3	52.6	64.9	63.1	0.2	0.2	7.1	25.8	16.8	-13.3
Mizoram	7.1	5.1	-1.3	0.5	0.7	105.8	83.8	85.7	42.9	8.2	7.8	33.6	0.3	0.3	15.8
Nagaland	14.4	10.1	10.1	1.5	1.7	74.8	80.2	87.4	72.2	0.1	0.1	12.4	3.6	0.5	-78.9
Tripura	89.3	86.5	30.0	6.8	7.1	41.8	1.2	1.7	86.8	2.7	4.7	134.0	0.01	0.01	-84.5

The Kukis were made to play buffer role between the colonial rulers and the Nagas or other adversaries. Hence, it was in colonial interest to enhance the power of the chiefs. After independence, chief-ship among the Mizo-Kuki group was abolished in Mizoram in the early 1950s. In Manipur in many areas the chiefs were thrown out by the commoners. No legislation for abolition of chiefship was enacted till 1967. In the intervening period two things happened. In 1960 there was a judicial pronouncement recognising communal ownership of land. In the same year Manipur Land and Land Reforms Act was introduced in Manipur, through an Act of the Parliament (at that time Manipur was a Union Territory). The Act did not recognise community as a legal person. One strategy that the tribal peoples thought of was to project the chief as the owner so that the Government would have been required to pay huge compensation which was not so easy. Another strategy was to politically make impossible for the Government to take over land. By that time Naga insurgency was at the peak. Many small tribes which were close to Naga areas, shifted their ethnic self definition to Naga pole. This had another chain reaction. Among the Kuki constellation, the Thadou were numerically predominant. The existence of small tribes within Kuki constellation maintained an inner balance among the Kukis. But with the small tribes going out the balance was disturbed. Thus Thadous tried to take advantage of the same, in cultural matters, particularly in the standardisation of Kuki language for preparation of text books and promotion of literature. Tribes like Paite, Hmar tended to deny their Kuki identity and asserted independent identity. One of the manifestations of the same is proliferation of literature in their respective language.

Creative Literature and Arts as a Dimension of Ethnicity

The numerical strength of Paite tribe is around 50,000. They bring out five daily papers and have published more than 1000 books. In fact in the context of ethnic flux most of the tribes in Manipur have been bringing out creative literature on a large scale. It has however surprising that the Tangkhul, who are politically very active have not brought out much creative literature. The same is true of the Naga tribes of Nagaland and of the tribes of Mizoram. They do not have much of creative literature.

Most prolific in bringing out creative literature are the Bodos and the Khasis. They have published around 2000 books each. Besides Bodo folk song holds an outstanding place in India. For a national L.P. disc of folk songs out of a collection of several thousand from different parts of India, one in Bodo language was evaluated as first.

Ethnic Identities Related to Religious Affiliation

Relevant census data regarding distribution of population according to religious affiliation are furnished in Table 1.11. In North East India, except Assam and Tripura in all the States the Hindus are minority. For Assam 1981 census data being not available it is not possible to indicate the trend. In Tripura the proportion of the Hindus has come down during 1981-1991, though in absolute number there has been 300 per cent growth as against 34.3 per cent for the State. Arunachal Pradesh was the only State where adherents to other religious (obviously indigenous tribal religion) were in majority in 1981, but in 1991 they constituted only 36.2 per cent of the population. In all the States followers of Christianity had a high growth in proportion. The highest was in Arunachal Pradesh (226%) Presumably a large number of followers of indigenous tribal religion have been converted to Christianity during the decade. Proportion of Buddhists has slightly gone up in Tripura, presumably due to migration of Chakmas from Bangladesh.

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