

# Neglected North-East

**Dr. Anuradha Prakash**

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## Preface

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Northeast-India's rising sun is less known to the outside world for its natural wealth and charming beauty. More people know seven sister states of the region for its violence. One fifth of the 50 million population of the northeast live below poverty line. Governance is missing in most parts of the region. The local tribal leaders enjoy their seats without doing much for the people. On the other hand the leaders of northeast complain about the neglect of the region by the centre. In fact both are responsible for the worst socio-economic stagnation in the region. Till the beginning of the nineties the government of India gave step-motherly treatment to the region. The predominant feature of underdevelopment, evident in the conspicuous absence of industrial and production base in the region, has been conveniently ignored in mainstream development debates. Uneven and unequal regimes of exchanges seen so far ironically sub serves the interests of capital elsewhere representing the legacy of underdevelopment of a region considered a frontier in so many ways. Even since the British colonial period, the oil-bearing area in Assam has seen a meticulous exploitation of this precious resource.

Development debates on the Northeast in mainstream Indian intellectual discourse have so far been to show the need for a top-to-bottom approach. Economic backwardness in the region has been seen and analysed through the lens of an a priori integrationist model over zealously and fervently working towards the creation of a monolithic discourse. Insularity has been a characteristic hallmark of these analyses on the region's economic standing as the basic issue of production was conspicuously overlooked. Beyond the stereotyped premises of 'neglect' or massive allocation of funds through central assistance, serious study of the region's productive management

is yet to be seen. The core issue of production engaging different aspects of production sectors and potential has largely remained on the margins of development debates. Economic development sans production issue can only generate haphazard policies which in turn will eventually render multimillion economic packages and central assistance lopsided and meaningless. Underdevelopment of productive forces in the region is something that needs a detailed analysis to understand the failures behind the much hyped economic policies and packages designed in the power corridors of New Delhi. Failure of economic policies and packages in the Northeast can be perceived strikingly clear from a cursory glance at some of the basic indices commonly used to measure the state of economic and social development. The per capita net state domestic product of the constituent states of the region indicates a dismal picture of disparity in comparison with the all India average.

As an example from contemporary Northeast India, while the mainstream Assamese culture speaks of 'Assam: Home of the Brahmaputra' and carves out an inside of northern and southern banks of the river to be called 'Axom', there remains an outside at the periphery, the western bank of Brahmaputra, N.C. Hills and Barak valley. Seemingly, the sense of the self does not stretch beyond the cultural-linguistic domain, giving rise to others who live at the possibility of being assimilated involuntarily. Contrast is the case of Manipur: the five hill districts are claimed to be a part and parcel of an integrated Manipur even though it has vast difference with the culture of the valley. Such contrasts deepen the cleavages that separate the self from the politics of power by rendering it only 'capillary' that makes ethnic solidarity possible—a negative dialectic between development of cross-cultural civil society and solidarity along axis of self-identity.

This book is to meet the needs of academics, research scholars, students pursuing subjects.

—Editor

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# 1

## Introduction

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Northeast-India's rising sun is less known to the outside world for its natural wealth and charming beauty. More people know seven sister states of the region for its violence. One fifth of the 50 million population of the northeast live below poverty line. Governance is missing in most parts of the region. The local tribal leaders enjoy their seats without doing much for the people. On the other hand the leaders of northeast complain about the neglect of the region by the centre. In fact both are responsible for the worst socio-economic stagnation in the region. Till the beginning of the nineties the government of India gave step-motherly treatment to the region.

The coalition politics, neo-liberal economy and the increasing relevance of tourism economy brought a new focus on the region. With 35 parliamentary seats and 8 states, northeast gave a political handle to the emerging BJP. It almost clinched deals with the existing leaders of the region who are frustrated with the Congress politics. In Arunachal Pradesh BJP shrewdly converted a long time congressman Gegong Apong into a BJP man. It also succeeded in capturing two parliamentary seats there and infused a hope to capture the seat in few years time. BJP's fast growth in the region alerted Congress party. When it came to power in 2004 it started the Ministry of NorthEast.

The new liberal economy connected the region with the rest of the India. Mobile phones, satellite television, internet and increase in the number of flights to the region gave a new life to northeast. There is a large-scale migration of the people to



other parts of the country. Delhi boasts a huge northeastern population.

The attitude of rest of India towards the regions people also alienates them. In college hostels, theatres, railways stations, airports, a northeasterner is always asked "which country are you from?" Despite these problems, most of the people of the region to proud to be Indians.

The government should capitalize this sentiments. Before that it should deliver what it promised to the region. In the first step it should talk to all the 12 active and 20 inactive terrorist groups and find a lasting solution to their separatist demands. All of them should be given autonomy package and brought into the political mainstream.

Without finding a solution to the violence northeast is going towards a worst phase in its life. In 2008 alone insurgency has claimed 1,057 lives. This is nearly twice the number of people who were killed in Kashmir violence in the year (. According to the Anthropological Survey of India report, out 635 tribes in India 213 reside in the region. It is no doubt that the region is highly sensitive and needs full time concentration of the central government.

There is no time available for the Central government to relax regarding the development of northeast. It must act on a war footing way and ensure overall progress of the region. More IITs, IIMS, central universities, vocational training centres, super-specialty hospitals, business ventures, industrial units should come up in the region.

These measures will bridge the gap between the region and the rest of the region.

Insurgency claimed 1,057 lives in northeast in 2008, almost twice the number of people killed in Kashmir 539.

Manipur alone accounted for almost 500 deaths; Assam had a body count of 372.

Sharp rise in casualties among both civilians and terrorists while there's a drop in fatalities among security personnel.

Northeast is no stranger to insurgences with all its seven



states having witnessed some form of armed separatism over the last six decades. In the 15 years since 1994, an estimated 16,271 persons have been killed in this volatile region.

A combination of persistent economic backwardness and the presence of several dozen ethnic groups has made this region a crucible of identity politics. Nearly 20% of the 50 million people of the region are below the poverty line. Of the 635 tribal groups identified by the Anthropological Survey of India, 213 reside in the northeast.

Some states have a very low or passive level of separatist activity like Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. In Mizoram, the insurgency ended in 1986 after the accord between the Union government and the Mizo National Front led by Ladenga, Meghalaya too has a relatively lower and declining level of terrorist activity through a number of separatist groups are active in extortion and other criminal activities.

Tripura, which till a decade back was a hotbed of terrorist actions, appears to have overcome the menace through a determined political effort.

But in three states – Assam, Manipur and Nagaland – separatist violence continues with an incendiary mix of ethnic strife. While terrorist actions in Assam still get attention. Manipur, with the second highest number of terrorist related deaths after Kashmir, has remained below the national radar. All 59 police stations in the state have reported terrorist activities and 32 of them have been placed in the high violence category.

ATP estimates that there are at least 15 major militant groups with approximately 10,000 cadre active in the state. The desperate situation is highlighted by the fact that Manipur continues to remain classified as a disturbed area since the 1970s.

It has a higher police-to-population ration than the national average and yet here is no end to violence.

Assam, the biggest state in the northeast, has been the hunting ground of ULFA despite several army operations

against it, including the 2005 sweep in sanctuaries in the Bhutanese foothills.

Decades of Ulfa violence has spawned rival outfits from amongst plains tribals and Muslims, leading to an ever escalating spiral of violence on innocent civilians of every community. Current estimates put active terrorist groups at 12, while inactive groups number over 20. Recent reports suggest that Ulfa has also tied up with some factions of Naga separatist groups, operating in Nagaland and Manipur.

Development debates on the Northeast in mainstream Indian intellectual discourse have so far been to show the need for a top-to-bottom approach. Economic backwardness in the region has been seen and analysed through the lens of an a priori integrationist model over zealously and fervently working towards the creation of a monolithic discourse. Northeast India's rising sun is less known to the outside world for its natural wealth and charming beauty. More people know seven sister states of the region for its violence. One fifth of the 50 million population of the northeast live below poverty line. Governance is missing in most parts of the region. The local tribal leaders enjoy their seats without doing much for the people. On the other hand the leaders of northeast complain about the neglect of the region by the centre. In fact both are responsible for the worst socioeconomic stagnation in the region. This book is to meet the needs of academics, research scholars, students pursuing subjects.

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**Dr. Anuradha Prakash**, b. 1970, is a reputed name in the sphere of Social Science, obtained her B.A. (Hons.) and M.A. in Sociology and Ph.D. from Patna University and at present Associate Professor at J.L.C. College, Manjhi under J.P. University. She possesses a prolong teaching experience of sixteen years and attended and organized several seminars. She is a frequent visitor to N-E regions of India and wrote several articles on the problems of the people of these areas

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