

Paper 603

Unit 1: North-East India

Peopling

The population of N-E India belong to numerous ethno-linguistic groups descending from the people who have immigrated from different directions since time immemorial. If one probes the process of peopling of the region, one can discern eleven major streams and waves of immigration which has built up the present population of north-east India.

It is believed that the first ever group of people to settle in this region in the pre-historic past is the Mon Khmer speaking Austro-Asiatics, whose descendants are today identified as the Khasis and Jaintias. They were followed by the Tibeto-Burman language speaking people of the Sino-Tibetan family of Mongoloids, who immigrated from the north and the east. Most of the tribes of the hills and plains of the region belong to this group.

Thirdly, came the Indo-Aryans from the West. They brought with them Vedic culture, Hindu religion and a higher technology of sedentary agriculture. It is these three groups of people who lived in the region till the beginning of the thirteenth century.

From about 1205 A.D. another group of Indo-Aryans, professing Islam, started settling in this region. They were followed by the immigration of the Tai-Ahom people in 1228 under Sukapha, who established a kingdom in the Brahmaputra Valley that lasted till 1826. In the 17th and 18th centuries there came in 5 small groups of Tai people (Khamti, khamyang, Aiton, Phake and Turung) who are now found to be living in Arunachal Pradesh and eastern Assam.

After 1826 A.D. along with the British there came some Bengalis apart from a few who lived in the Barak valley, some North Indians, some Rajasthanis and some Nepalis, who were engaged in the jobs associated with administration, various crafts trade and commerce and law and order in the British annexed territory. After the annexation of north east India, the British tea companies started tea plantation in the plains of Assam and brought in thousands of labourers from Chotanagpur Plateau.

Another significant stream of immigration took place in the 19th century with the coming of many Kiki-Chin, Naga, and Kachin people from upper Myanmar across the international border to Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and the eastern districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Then again, from about 1880's, there started a migration – stream of the landless Muslim peasants of the then east Bengal (now Bangladesh) who settled

in the islands and the immediate flood plains of the Brahmaputra from Dhubri district to as far east as Lakhimpur district.

The last major wave of immigration came to north east India following refugees, having left their hearth and home in east Pakistan entered and settled in this region. The present population of north east India is essentially made up of the above mentioned streams and waves of migration resulting in a mosaic of socio-cultural patterns.
