Geopolitics and Multi-Ethnic Contexts in North-East India: A Review and Analysis of Developmental Policies and Regional Governance

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Abstract

North-East India stands unique in terms of multiethnic composition and its geopolitical setting of the region. This paper attempts to purview the area from the geo-political scenario, anthropological diversity, historical formation and integration of the states with the Indian union. The discussion varies widely and ranges from genres of issues relating to ethnic identity, disputes, conflicts and unrest demands, to the problems induced by the 'peace and rule' status of neighboring countries. The region is fragile and challenging because of its relative remoteness from the Indian mainland, high immigrant population, and multiple ethnic groups conflicts that impact peace and development. Advancement and harmony of the area require a unique approach. Therefore, the debate covers past developmental strategies to solve intermittent problems. The results of the research and debate help to pinpoint administration policies indicated to solve fundamental issues and enhance the area.

The analysis of the study is based on a series of conflicts and demands that have emerged in North-East India, with a greater intensity in the last decade. The unrest, demand, and conflicts in the North-Eastern region of India were accentuated and reflected in various news reports

and journals, which serve as evidence and witness to the discussion analysis. The study scrutinizes the region grappling with issues of displaced migration, ethnic tensions, and escalating demands for constitutional autonomy and rights, highlighting the ethnic bond that transcends state and national borders. It then suggests ways to make the region more harmonious for governance and progressive for development.

Keywords: Multiethnic, Geopolitical, Issues, Conflicts, Integration, North-East India, Governance, Developmental policies

"Northeast India is the home of numerous ethnic nationalities and is described as "another India, the most diverse part of a most diverse country, very different, relatively little known and certainly not too well understood, once a coy but now turbulent and in transition within the Indian transition" (Verghese, 2004, p. 280).

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The geopolitical importance of North-East India arises from its strategic positioning, as it shares borders with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, rendering it an essential area for national security and foreign policy considerations. The geographical seclusion of this region, linked to mainland India solely through the Siliguri Corridor, presents significant economic and administrative hurdles. The region's intricate tapestry of over 200 distinct ethnic groups has fostered a rich array of cultural identities and ongoing aspirations for autonomy. Ethnic movements such as the Naga insurgency, Bodo agitation, Assam Accord, Tipra Accord underscore the complexities surrounding political representation, migration, and land rights. The complexities of governance are exacerbated by cross-border ethnic affiliations, particularly evident in the impact of Myanmar and Bangladesh on local ethnic communities. Demographic transformations prompted by migration have exacerbated tensions, shaping policies regarding citizenship and the rights of indigenous populations. Striking a harmonious equilibrium between national security and the aspirations of diverse ethnic groups is essential for fostering stability and promoting development within the region.

North-East India is sometimes seen as separated from mainland India, owing to the Siliguri chicken neck corridor that connects it to the mainland, as well as obstacles such as rugged terrain and dense vegetation. The region's physical terrain presents considerable hurdles to a transport connection, resulting in economic disadvantages. The absence of sufficient infrastructure has hampered economic growth, making the region economically poor when compared to other areas of India. Furthermore, the North-East is home to a wide range of ethnic groups, each with its own distinct identity, which has periodically resulted in ethnic tensions and conflicts. These tensions are worsened by insurgency issues, with diverse factions taking up arms to seek more autonomy or independence. Geographic isolation, economic problems, and ethnic and insurgency conflicts all contribute to the region's continuous troubles.

Addressing such challenges would need comprehensive initiatives that include infrastructural development, economic investment, and conflict resolution measures to better integrate the North-East into the national socio-economic fabric. North-East India, located amid multiple

bordering nations, creates very major international challenges and security concerns, disrupting regional stability and rendering the area susceptible to foreign influences and geo-political disputes. The introductory session covers the strategic location, state composition, ethnic variety, and concerns, as well as the historical background, development, and integrity of the North-East Indian states.

1.2 Review of Literature

Particularly in terms of its ethnic conflicts, insurgencies, geopolitics, and development issues, Northeast India has been well investigated. Different academics have looked at how regional autonomy, insurgency, government, and identity politics interact to create the sociopolitical scene of the area. Investigating ethnic strife in Northeast India, Phanjoubam (2016) emphasizes the intricate interaction between insurgency and identity politics. His writings offer a thorough knowledge of how historically motivated ethnic movements impede national integration (Phanjoubam, 2016). Likewise, Das and Chakraborty (2021) contend that often driven by unresolved political demands and past injustices, ethnic divisions endanger India's national unity (Das & Chakraborty, 2021). They underline the need of peace deals, including the Bodo Accord (2020), in calming ethnic discontent, which Goswami (2022) further discusses by evaluating their long-term effect on regional stability (Goswami, 2022).

Additionally, under close examination have been geopolitical features of Northeast India. Lakra (2020) talks on the strategic relevance of the area and underlines the political and security issues affecting its development. He underlines that political restrictions sometimes overwhelm technical and financial elements of regional collaboration, even with economic incentives (Lakra, 2020)). In another research, Sarma (2023) investigates the paradox of development, contending that initiatives like the North Eastern Council and Act East Policy have moulded the region's identity and colonial legacies—including the Inner Line system and Article 371—have shaped its identity. Still, ongoing ethnic strife and political claims impede efforts at development (Sarma, 2023).

Further looking at policy structures, Yumnam (n.d.) contends that in Northeast India, political and strategic concerns have sometimes eclipsed actual development initiatives. His analysis implies that political rivalry compromises the implementation even if policies exist for regional development (Yumnam, n.d.). In line with this, Riamei (2023) looks at how difficult it is to accommodate ethnic variety while emphasising autonomy models and their efficiency in meeting tribal desires. His research concerns if current federal systems sufficiently enable regional autonomy and self-governance (Riamei, 2023). Srikanth and Ngaihte (2011) have investigated ethnic identity and how it affects politics, stressing how demands for autonomy are shaped by ethnic identities and, occasionally, help to cause conflicts. They underline the confusion between tribes and ethnic communities in scholarly debate, implying a necessity of more thorough investigation on the expressions of ethnicity in the area (Srikanth & Ngaihte, 2011). Haokip (2010) meanwhile questions India's Northeast strategy by looking the changes in government after independence. Emphasizing problems including immigration, poverty, and insurgency, he advocates a more complex, region-specific strategy than a consistent national one (Haokip, 2010).

One has also examined comparative viewpoints on geopolitics. Examining Pakistan's domestic strife from a geopolitical perspective, Toqueer (2019) looks at military interventions and ethnic polarisation. Though not immediately relevant to Northeast India, his research offers insightful analysis of how geopolitical orientation could lead to domestic conflict, drawing connections to the insurgency and ethnic problems there (Toqueer, 2019). Lakra (2016) also investigates the development of India's Northeast policy by contrasting Nehru's vision with modern foreign policy decisions of Modi. He emphasizes how important the area is becoming for India's diplomatic and worldwide policy (Lakra, 2016).

These studies taken together show how a mix of historical grievances, ethnic aspirations, governance problems, and geopolitical restrictions shapes the difficulties facing North-East India. Although policies and peace agreements try to solve these problems, sustainable solutions call for a mixed strategy combining inclusive governance, political compromise, and economic growth.

2. Objectives

The main objectives are as follows:

- To analyze the geopolitical, historical, and ethnic dynamics shaping North-East India's integration with the Indian Union.

- To examine key issues of ethnic identity, migration, and conflicts impacting governance and stability.

- To Propose strategic policy recommendations for peace, development, and sustainable progress in the region.

3. Materials & Method

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing secondary data sources such as academic journals, government reports, historical records, and news articles to analyze ethnic conflicts, migration patterns, and geopolitical influences in North-East India. A content examination of policy documents, legislative records, and regional media provides insight into governance difficulties and socio-political processes. Additionally, a comparative review of historical developmental tactics and conflict resolution procedures is undertaken to assess their success. The study also incorporates case studies of key ethnic movements and autonomy demands to highlight recurring patterns and policy implications.

4. Results & Findings

The first section will investigate and study North-East India in terms of Geo Political setting, realm of ethnic diversity, their historical background pre-colonial, and post-colonial, Integration of states and subdivisions of states under Indian union. The second section will present and highlight growing issues and Problems of North-East India and their possible causes linking them with ethnic diversity, conflicts and identity politics and geopolitics of the region. The third section will assess developmental policies and governance strategies in the North-East Region.

4.1 Geopolitical and Realm of Multiethnicity

4.1.1 Geopolitical Setting

North-East India is the most volatile and ethnic conflict-affected zone in the Country. It is in the eastern corner of most of India. There are numerous insurgencies based on ethnicity and their demands for rights, power recognition and identity seem reeling and restless. This region is composed of eight states namely- Meghalaya, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Sikkim. India's Northeast connects with five countries — Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, China and Nepal — by a 4,500 kilometer (2,796 miles) international border; the region, however, connects to India only through a narrow and tenuous land corridor measuring merely 22 kilometers (14 miles) (Shahriar, 2022). In the North-East region, the affinity tribes live across borders and are not confined within a particular State. These close affinities may be within the states of North-east India or away from the borders. Most of the tribes from North-East India have a close affinity with the neighboring countries of Bangladesh and Myanmar. These tribes are also spread across North-East region states. "There is a triangle formed by the hill tracts of Bangladesh, the port city of Chittagong, and the states of Tripura and Mizoram, marking the western end of Asia's longest stretches of tribal population" (Smith, 2010, p. 34) Figure 1 depicts the Geopolitical setting of North-East India amid neighboring countries.
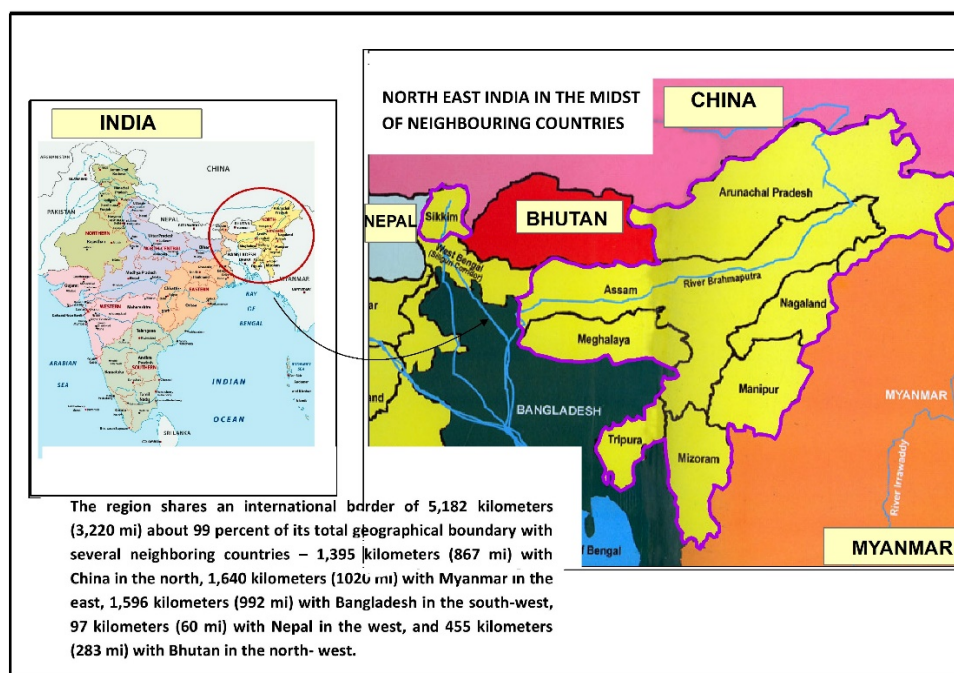

Figure 1. Location and Geopolitical setting of the North-East India

These vast stretches of tribal people are made up of multiple ethnicities that are dispersed and separated into distinct nations and inhabitants of different states in North-East India. The nature of heterogeneous communities spread across different states of India gives rise to ethnic

conflicts among the contesting communities. The region also lies in the most Geo-political sensitive zones of the World. In the North, it is bounded by aggressing Communist China and in the East by Military Junta coup rule in Myanmar; in the West by Bangladesh, an Islamic country. On the other hand, the secular and the world's most populous Democratic nation India stands spectacularly in the region and pleasing home for many ethnic communities.

4.1.2 North-East Region a Realm of Ethnic Diversity

North-East India may be referred to as a 'continent of tribes and multi-ethnicity'. The region is in fact, one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia and each state have its diverse cultures and traditions. North-East India is the home of numerous ethnic nationalities (B.G. Verghese, 2004: 280) describes the region as "another India, the most diverse part of a most diverse country, very different, relatively little known and certainly not too well understood, once a coy but now turbulent and in transition within the Indian transition." (Verghese, 2004). "North-East India is a region of great diversity. More than 200 communities are living in the region, each with its unique language, culture, and history."(Das, 2021, p. 1). The Northeast region of India is home to a diverse range of communities, each with its own distinct culture and heritage." (Wolpert, p. 1). J.B. Fuller wrote in 1909, "The province of Assam at the far northeastern corner of India is a museum of nationalities. "The region is home to over 200 different tribal groups, each with its unique language, culture, and history. These groups are a mix of Tibeto-Burman, Indo-Aryan, and Mon-Khmer peoples" (Fuller, 1909).

4.2 Historical background and Integration of North-East India

4.2.1 Scenario before the advent of the British in North-East India

Before British rule, North East India had distinct ethnic identities and cultural boundaries among its tribes. These tribes had no idea of an Indian realm or culture and recognized only their own identities and those of their immediate neighbors. "At the time of British rule, there were six major Hindu states in the eastern region: Koch, Tripuri, Jaintia, Kachari, Ahom, and Meithei" (Chaube, 1984, p. 35). According to E.F. Sandys (1915) The Tripura Kingdom, a notable Princely Kingdom, had wide boundaries and extended to the Arakan region and present-day Bangladesh. Despite the Burmese occupation by the British, the North-East remained inaccessible due to hilly terrain and dense forests, with numerous tribes thriving independently (Sandys, 1915).

4.2.2 North-East India under British Rule

The British called the North-Eastern section of Bengal Province India. In 1912, Assam took over the territory from Bengal. The First and Second Anglo-Burmese Wars (1824-1826 and 1852) gave the British dominance over northeastern provinces like Assam, Manipur, and parts of Arakan, according to Webster (1998). Assam Province included the Brahmaputra Valley, Barak Valley, and tribal hill territories under British administration. British navigation and administrative control in North-East India were difficult due to hilly terrain, deep forests, and river systems (Baruah, 2005).

According to Hudson (2006), "The Meiteis." Asian Educational Services says the British used highland stations for administration and relief from tropical weather. The varied tribal areas were not always under complete control despite these attempts (Hudson, 2006). Manipur and Tripura were princely states under British suzerainty, whereas other areas were directly ruled. Hilly terrain and various tribal groups in North-East India hindered British colonial growth and authority. East Bengal, now Bangladesh, and South-east Asian countries, particularly Burma (Myanmar), were accessible to the region during colonial control. Burma was ruled by the British from 1824 to 1948, through three Anglo-Burmese wars, a province of British India, and independence.

4.2.3 Integration and state formation of North-East India

The integration of North-East India into the Indian Union has been a complex and challenging process, with the region having a long history of distinct cultures and identities. The Table 1 display the integration and state formation of northeast India in various phases and time.

Table 1. Integration and state formation of North-East India

State	Historic Name	Capital(s)	Statehood
Arunachal Pradesh	North-East Frontier Agency(NEFA)	Itanagar	1987 (earlier a Union Territory of India, constituted in 1971)
Assam	Ahom, Chutia,Sadiya, Koch Hajo, Dimasa, Pragjyotisha, Kamarupa	Shillong(till 1969), Dispur	1947
Manipur	Kangleipak (Princely State) Merged with Indian Union in 1949	Imphal	1971 (earlier a Union Territory of India, constituted in 1956)
Meghalaya	Khasi hills, Jaintia hills and Garo hills (Part of Assam)	Shillong	1971
Mizoram	Lushai Hills district of Assam	Aizawl	1987 (earlier a Union Territory of India, constituted in 1971)
Nagaland	Naga Hills District (Part of Assam)	Kohima	1963
Sikkim	Sikkim (Princely State), Integrated in 1975 to Indian union	Gangtok	1975
Tripura	Hill Tipperah (Princely State) Merged with the Indian Union in 1949	Agartala	1971 (earlier a Union Territory of India, constituted in 1956)

Source: Compiled from various sources, Encyclopedia of North-East India.

After independence in 1947, the Indian government faced the challenge of integrating the region into the national mainstream while respecting its unique character. The Assam province became part of the 'A' Category State under the Indian Union, while the two princely kingdoms Manipur and Tripura became part of the Indian Union on October 15, 1949, through the Merger Agreements. These princely states were integrated as Part C States, giving them some degree of autonomy. They remained as Union territory until 1972 when they were upgraded to full-fledged statehood. Assam is the mother of many states in North-east India, and the desire of tribal peoples for greater autonomy contributed to the carving out of new states from Assam (Shahriar, 2022).

The North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) was a semi-autonomous region in Northeast India that existed from 1950 to 1972, administered by the Indian government to administer tribal areas not considered part of any existing state. Arunachal Pradesh was carved out from NEFA in 1987, and the Lushai District of Assam was carved out as a Union Territory of India from 1972 to 1986. Lushai Hills became Mizoram and was granted statehood on 20 February 1987. Nehru's views on Northeast India as a buffer zone were controversial but proved correct in the long run. His policies towards the region helped protect India from Chinese aggression and laid the foundation for the region's development in the years to come (Bhatt & Bhargava, 2005).

4.3 Issues and problems of North-East India

The trajectory of difficulties in North-East India demonstrates the region's peripheral status within India. The intricate interaction of ethnic variety, insurgency, economic underdevelopment, environmental concerns, and sensitive political issues has created a vicious cycle of marginalization and violence. Addressing these issues necessitates a sophisticated and inclusive strategy that recognizes the region's distinct cultural and sociopolitical characteristics. Here are some of the mentioned factors that had a tremendous impact on the region.

4.3.1 Impact of Partitions on North-East Region

The British exit from North-East India caused boundary line disputes, road and railway disruptions, and population disintegration. Three nations—India and Pakistan (1947) (West & East Pakistan), and Myanmar (Burma) were formed in 1948 after their independence. Bengal, Assam, Tripura, and Manipur were formerly considered independent nations by the British. However, Majority Muslims seized East Bengal province which also hosts innumerable tribes(non-Muslims) and created East Pakistan, the integral part of West Pakistan. Refugees flooded into North-East India after the partition, straining resources and infrastructure. New border lines were set without addressing the region's cultural and historical links, escalating tensions (Baruah, 2005).

The partition and its aftermath profoundly diminished Tripura in boundary size, near the new India-East Pakistan border. Hill and plains tribes, like affinity tribes in North-East India, were affected by partition since their contiguous area constituted a barrier for imposed nationalities. As part of Eastern Bengal Province, Comilla and Chittagong were separated to East Pakistan (Bangladesh). Despite being non-Muslim, many Chittagong Hill tribes were forcibly annexed to East Pakistan. Many illiterate tribes were unaware of the geopolitical situation, but history

shows that well-informed races have always discreetly placed any region under dominion on their maps.

4.3.2 Dilemma on Claim of National Identity on the Eve of Independence

The indigenous peoples of Bangladesh were resentful when East Pakistan seized the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1947. Monirul Hussain discussed about Chakma of Chittagong Hill Tracts with a view on history of ethnicity and conflict. He has also discussed "The CHT Tracts and Accord, the Lost Opportunity for Peace" explore the region's history and strife. Mohanta (2004) describes Tripura's strong nationalist fight against joining the Indian Union (Mohanta, 2004). In "History, Society and Culture", Sharma describes Manipur's attempts to escape joining India (Sharma, 1986). Gandhi wrote to Sir Akbar Hydari, the British Governor of Assam, in 1947 regarding Nagas' freedom to determine their fate. He believed the Nagas should be allowed to develop their own way and choose their own fate while joining the Indian Union on equal terms (South Asia Terrorism Portal, n.d.). The "Sylhet Referendum of 1947" illustrates Sylhet's largely Muslim population's desire to join India for many reasons. Ramachandra Guha's " India after Gandhiji" shows Sylhet's appeal to India's secularism and democracy.

4.3.3 North-East India- 'hot spots' for Immigrants

North-East India, noted for its secular democracy, liberal administration, and constitutional protection for minorities, ethnicities, and tribes, has a diversified population due to its immense resources, forests, and land. The region's antagonism to authority and state promoting particular religions has drawn liberals and democratic-lovers to secular democracy. Central tribes of North-East India have moved from bordering nations and inside limits. In the early 1800s, the British East India Company recruited landless peasants from central India to build tea plantations in Assam. Many of these tribes prospered in the tea gardens and became crucial to the region's economy (Sharma, 2011).

Religious disturbances drove Hindu Bengalis to Tripura and Assam. First significant wave of migration after India's division in 1947: Hindu Bengalis migrated East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) to avoid religious persecution. Following the Bangladesh Liberation War, a second wave of violence and economic disruption followed in the 1970s. Hindu Bengalis' migration to Tripura and Assam has changed their demographics (Chakrabarty, 2012). In Tripura, the Hindu population rose from 58% in 1951 to 85% in 2011, and in Assam, from 61% to 68%. Bengali Muslims from Bangladesh have also moved to North-East India for economic prospects. A long-standing Buddhist ethnic minority in Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, the Chakma, were exiled in the 1970s owing to political and religious persecution. Nepalis have migrated to North-East India for generations for work and economic reasons, constituting a sizable community.

4.3.4 North-East India-Sensitive and Fragile Zones in Terms of Conflicts Genres

North-East India has seen many ethnic wars due to historical, social, cultural, and political issues. These disputes generally stem from resource competitiveness, identity difficulties, and marginalisation. The influx of Hindu-Bengalis to Assam produced conflicts between Bengali

and non-Bengali communities, and Bengali Muslims in southern and upper Assam caused violence and economic disruption. (Baruah, 100; Jayal, 150). The politics of identity in India generally revolve around religion and ethnicity. Bengali Muslims' rise in southern and upper Assam has also strained relations with the Assamese, Bodos, and other tribes. After 1971, Muslims from Bangladesh went to the Indian Territory for economic security and sustenance, while most Hindus and Buddhists did. Nepalis in North-East India have been accused of snatching employment and resources from indigenous people and being foreigners who don't belong. Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Naga and Kuki, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland have several ethnic conflicts.

Diversity of ethnicities, faiths, and races in the North-East leads to differing perspectives and disputes between communities. Tribals vs. Non-Tribals, Mongoloid vs. Indo-Aryans, Native Indigenous vs. Migrant Non-Indigenous, religious disputes between Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Animists, and tribe conflicts are all types of conflicts. Ethnic conflicts abound. Ethnic battles in Assam include those between Assamese and Bengali since 1960, Bodo and Bengali Muslim riots in 2014, and Bengali-Indigenous tribe clashes in Tripura (1980). The large Bihari community in Brahmaputra Valley and other regions of North-East India and other migratory tea tribes from Central India who want to be considered natives also cause conflict with locals. Khasis, Bengalis, Nepalis, and Karbi in Meghalaya (Shillong,1979). Conflict between Mizos and Non-Mizos is common in Mizoram. Mizo-Bru-Reang conflict caused a huge exodus in Tripura (1997). In Manipur, communal conflict is constant and ongoing. The notable among them are Meithei-Kuki (2023) is ongoing, and the Kuki-Naga conflicts in 1992. In Nagaland, the Naga-non-Naga conflict can turn ugly due to presence of powerful ethnic insurgence. The labelling of Chakmas and Hajongs as non-indigenous causes strife in Arunachal Pradesh. Since several tribes are scattered across states, and are not confined to a particular state, there are tendencies of the ethnic tribes to re-unite under one geographic unity, or arising conflicts between majority ethnic and minority ethnic groups in terms of nativity of the region.

4.3.5 Unrest Demands and Rights of Identity

North-east India includes 382 culturally and regionally unique communities of varied sizes and development. These societies' leaders have identified universal principles and interests, which often contrast with those of other communities, causing strife. Community movements to claim a new identity or safeguard their ethnic identity against assimilation are the most important components of North-east India's sociopolitical realities. In North-East India, autonomy demands seem to never end till every ethnic community receives their real demand (Singh, 2008). With Sikkim, the area has 8 full-fledged states and 10 autonomous district councils to protect tribal territory rights. Figure 2 shows North-East Indian State integration and Sixth Schedule Autonomous District Council regions.
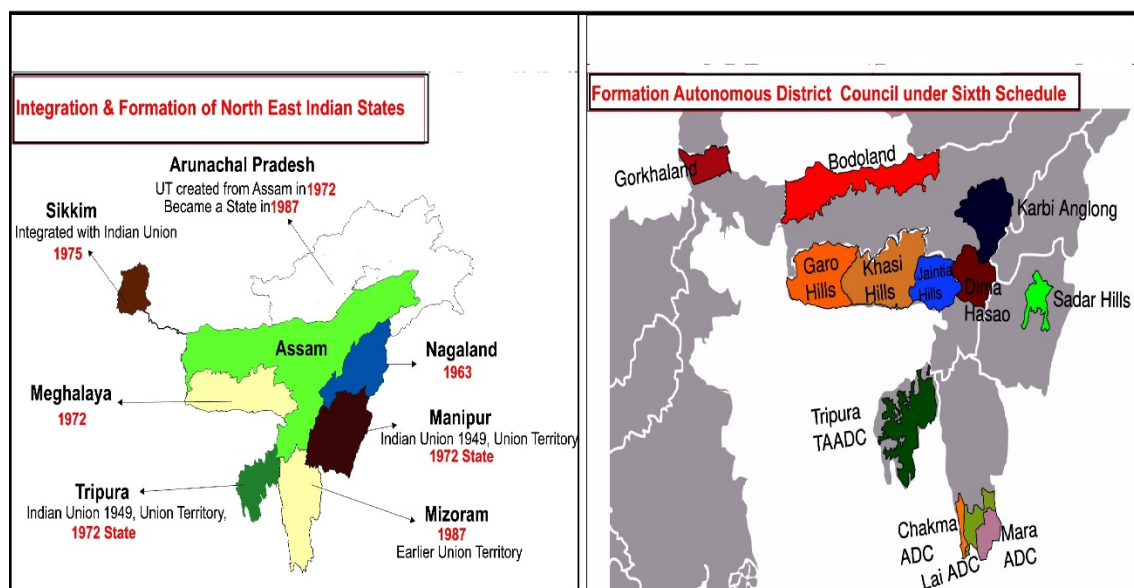
Figure 2. Formation of North-East Indian States and Autonomous District Councils

Note: Modified and edited Map by authors, maps from news articles, Wikipedia and Encyclopedia of North-East India.

Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in North-East India are established to provide a certain degree of self-governance to tribal communities in the region. They are created under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, which provides for the administration of tribal areas in the states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. The primary aim of ADCs is to enable tribal communities to preserve their cultural identities and to administer local affairs with a degree of autonomy. Table 2 charts the formation of autonomous districts and territorial councils created especially for safeguarding the ethnic tribal population from the interference of non-tribal communities.

Table 2. Formation of Autonomous District/Territorial Councils in North-East India

State	Key Autonomous District/ Territorial Councils in North-East India
Assam	1. Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC): Established in 1952 (originally as the Karbi Anglong District Council), it governs the Karbi Anglong district.
	2. North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC): Established in 1952, it administers the Dima Hasao district.
	3. Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), 1993, now Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) from 2003
Meghalaya	4. Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC): Established in 1952, it administers the Khasi Hills region.
	5. Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC): Also established in 1952, it governs the Jaintia Hills region.
	6. Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC): Established in 1952, it governs the Garo Hills region.
Tripura	7. Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC): Established in 1982, it covers areas predominantly inhabited by the tribal communities of Tripura.
Mizoram	8. Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC)
	9. Lai Autonomous District Council (LADC): Also established in 1972, it governs the Lai areas within Mizoram.
	10. Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC): Established in 1972, it governs the Mara areas within Mizoram.

Source. Compiled by authors from different sources and designated websites of councils.

There is affinity tribe communal bonding. The 1997 Mizoram ethnic riots between Mizos and Bru-Reangs displaced roughly 40,000 Bru-Reangs in Tripura. The Tripura natives, who claim to have been overrun by migrants from across the border, are astonishingly willing to accept the Bru-Reangs from Mizoram and join their fight for permanent resident acceptance, requiring

centre intervention in 2020 for permanent resettlement. However, Mizoram Mizos sympathise with Kukis from Manipur, Kuki-Chin from Bangladesh, and Myanmar and help them in emergencies. Arunachal Pradesh residents argue that Chakmas and Hajong aren't native to their state and shouldn't receive the same benefits as native tribes, leading to unofficial rumours that some have moved to other states. Some Kukis have fled to Mizoram due to incidents between the Manipuri Meitei and the Kuki tribe. Many tribes exist and are distributed over North-East India's Border States without clear-cut limits of their habitation zones, therefore dominant ethnic groups prefer to claim that outsiders are illegitimate. According to article published in Hindu (2018) there are demands of Bengali population in Cachar seeking a separate state for better political representation." (The New Indian Express, 2018).

4.3.6 Unrest beyond the Border and Driving Influx in the North-East Region

Refugees in North-East cause trouble across the border. As "The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has exacerbated political instability, leading to increased violence, displacement, and a worsening humanitarian situation". Mizoram has received more Kuki-Chin refugees from Bangladesh since November 2022 (Al Jazeera, 2021). The Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) is cracking down on the Kuki National Army (KNA), a Kuki-Chin militant group. RAB operations against the KNA have been charged of human rights abuses, and refugees worry for their safety. Kuki-Chin refugees, also known as Chin-Kuki-Mizo or Zomi, from Myanmar have caused socio-political, humanitarian, and security concerns in Mizoram. Refugees from Myanmar are seeking sanctuary and protection in adjacent Indian states, particularly Mizoram due to ethnic and cultural ties. According to NUG estimates given by The Hindu, at least 50,000 Kuki-Chin from Myanmar have fled to Mizoram since the 2021 coup. "The Mizoram government has urged the central government to provide additional support and to clarify the legal status of the Kuki-Chin refugees" (Hindustan Times, 2021). Conflicts over Rohingya refugees entering North-East India have raised security, demographic, and humanitarian concerns. Myanmar's persecuted Rohingya have fled to India, notably the North-East, sparking varied reactions from locals and officials. "Local communities in North-East India fear that the influx of Rohingya refugees could alter the region's demographic balance, leading to social and ethnic tensions" (Times of India, 2020).

4.4 Developmental Policies and Governance Strategies in the North-East Region

Developmental policies and governance in Northeast India have evolved to address the region's unique challenges and leverage its potential. The central and state governments, along with various stakeholders, have implemented several initiatives aimed at improving infrastructure, economic development, and social welfare. Here are some key aspects of these policies and governance effort that have been implemented for North-East India in the recent past.

4.4.1 Policies Creating Intense Conflicts and Policies Harmonizing North-East India

The 'Look East Policy' and 'Act East Policy' addressed ethnic concerns through development initiatives. In 1991, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao announced the Look East Policy (LEP) to strengthen India's economic and geopolitical ties with Southeast Asia through trade, diplomacy,

and culture. In 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi renamed it the Act East Policy (AEP), emphasizing action-oriented engagement through enhanced connectivity, security cooperation, and commercial connections beyond ASEAN to the Indo-Pacific region (Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, 2011). Highway development, border trade, and energy cooperation have improved, but insurgency, inadequate connection, and delays in crucial projects like the Kaladan Transit Route continue. The projects focus on external money rather than grassroots growth; therefore, they have not empowered local economies. India must prioritize speedy infrastructure implementation, local economic inclusion, and long-term prosperity for Act East to succeed. The 'Look East Policy' and 'Act East Policy' used development projects to address ethnic issues (Nath & Kumar, 2017). Haokip (2010) examines India's Northeast policy during its transition from the Look East Policy to a broader development strategy. Insurgency and underdevelopment remain despite infrastructure and regional connectivity advances. Although policy continuity exists, local participation is minimal, limiting its impact on policy. While Sarma (2023) in 'Paradox of Development in India's Northeast and Beyond" critically evaluates the status and impact of Act East Policy since it rebranded in 2014.

The North-East India issue is more about ethnicity and native rule rather than developmental policies. The region still has ethnic violence despite many changes. Untreated cases may multiply. To inform the centre's policy, Indigenous rights and autonomy interlocutors have studied the North-east's ethnic, geopolitical, and historical backdrop. More states are in North-East India, with 2% of the population (2011) (Sarma, 2019). North-East India needs special attention. All policies framed for Mainland India policies do not suitably apply for North East region. No other Indian region has such ethnic diversity and border movement issues. To preserve tribal identity, protect the region. Past approaches like state partitions and autonomous territories have been beneficial. Most regional insurgency and agitation concern ethnic group rights and development. Similar to Mizoram, which has high literacy and is known for peace and development, numerous insurgents were disbanded and given autonomy, CAB, and CAA policy caused North-East problems. Policy impacts are listed below. The Assam NRC update affects society, law, and politics. Over 1.9 million persons were removed from the August 2019 NRC list of illegal immigrants. This exclusion makes many fears statelessness and detention. Legal concerns arise when excluded people must prove their citizenship in expensive Foreigners' Tribunals. Minorities including Bengali Hindus, Muslims, and indigenous tribes were disproportionately harmed by poor documentation (Misra, 2019).

Violence and riots have increased due to the NRC update's ethnic and sectarian tensions, particularly between Assamese-speaking people and Bengali-speaking Muslims. In December 2019, Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAB) became CAA, sparking protests in North-East India (Singh, 2020). Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan who entered India before December 31, 2014, and suffered persecution can become Indian citizens under the CAA. Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Manipur held rallies against the CAA. Political leaders and organisations across the North-East have vocally opposed the CAA, arguing that it threatens the rights and existence of indigenous communities. Along with them, several Indigenous communities, civil society, and students

also protested.

4.4.2 Historical Background Ground Policies that have Harmonized the Region to Some Extent

The tribes perform and secure them under separate autonomy rather than in a heterogeneous population. There have been several policies since Independence. The bifurcation of Assam states into many states. The protection of merger agreements of Tripura and Manipur and Naga agreements strengthened integration with the Indian union. The 1972 grant of full-fledged states to Manipur, Tripura and Meghalaya all solved the regional aspirations and the native rule. The creation of Arunachal Pradesh from NEFA (North Eastern Frontier Agency) and transforming the Lushai district of Assam to a full-fledged state of Mizoram established peace with the insurgence stricken of the district (Das, 2013). Today, Mizoram is one of the most peaceful and progressive states in India. The grant of the District Council to tribal areas Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC), Bodo, Karbi-Anglong, Chakma, Lai, and Mara all proved to be beneficial for the states of the North-East region. The grant of these rights and autonomy has reduced many insurgents' problems in North-East India.

The Indian government has signed several peace accords with insurgent groups in North-East India to bring stability to the region. These accords aim to address political, economic, and cultural grievances while integrating insurgent groups into mainstream society (Baruah, 2020). Some of the historic accords as follows are the Shillong Accord (1975) between Government of India and the Naga National Council (NNC). Mizo Accord (1986)**: Government of India and the Mizo National Front (MNF). Bodo Accord (1993, 2003, 2020)**, Tripura National Volunteer Accord (1988), Khamrang (2015) and the recent Tipras Accord of March 2024.

5. Discussion and Suggestive Measures

Northeast India requires separate policies to address its unique issues due to several distinct factors. These include its ethnic diversity, geo-political significance, socio-economic challenges, environmental concerns, and historical context. North-East India requires special attention in terms of governance due to its unique characteristics and numerous challenges. The region's geographical isolation, economic underdevelopment, and diverse ethnic composition create a complex landscape that demands tailored policy approaches (Sarma, 2019). The rugged terrain and dense vegetation further complicate infrastructure development and transport connectivity, exacerbating economic difficulties (Bhattacharjee, 2020). Additionally, ethnic tensions and insurgency problems contribute to instability, making effective governance even more critical (Baruah, 2018).

Effective governance in Northeast India must address these multifaceted issues through comprehensive strategies that include infrastructure development, economic investment, and conflict resolution. Such an approach can help integrate the region more fully into the nation's socio-economic framework, fostering stability and growth (Das, 2021). Here's an overview of these factors and the reasons necessitating specialized policies.

5.1 Clubbing and Integration of Related Ethnic Tribes and Restructuring State Boundary Formation

There may be provision to the club and integrate all ethnic-related tribes scattered in different parts of North-East India. The policy of Greater Unification areas may be supported where affinity tribes inhabited areas. On the other hand, the ethnic inhabited pockets may be ruled by their associated greater tribes without disturbing any state boundaries, like the cases of Union territory Pondicherry areas distributed in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Andhra Pradesh. The sharing of land areas by states may be difficult and non-comprising. However, some maintenance of equal proportion of land by all States must be reserved, if all states apply terms to integrate their affinity tribes scattered other than their states.

5.2 The Refuge Immigrants May Be Assembled to Give a New Recognition of the State

North-East India, surrounded by numerous bordering nations, has experienced a historical and ongoing influx of immigrants since India's independence. This migration has led to increased inter-ethnic violence and upheaval, disrupting regional peace. The Indian government has the right to sympathize with immigrants and provide asylum, as they are victims of civil unrest and intolerance caused by governance and political instability in surrounding countries. Immigrants have historically contributed to the nation's growth but face the risk of being labelled as refugees. To address these concerns, an effort could be made to establish a "separate state of all immigrants" at the cost of surrendering certain areas from other North Eastern Region (NER) states or parts of India. Migrants from across the border may be deported or designated regions for immigrants, allowing them self-government and administration without interfering the native state authority.

5.3 India's External Policies for Retaining Secular, Democracy and Ethnic Safeguards in the Neighboring Countries

North-East India's strategic location in the region has led to ethnic migration from various countries, primarily due to economic, religious, political, and cultural reasons. The Islamic country Bangladesh and the military coup in Myanmar have exacerbated political instability, leading to religious persecution and political oppression. This has led to citizens seeking refuge in India, a democratic and secular country. The porous border between Bhutan and Nepal also encourages infiltration for economic reasons. The 2021 military coup in Myanmar has worsened political instability, leading to increased violence, displacement, and a worsening humanitarian situation. Persecution in Bangladesh has driven ethnic and religious minorities to seek refuge in India, while Islamist extremist persecution has led to increased cross-border migration. The ongoing trend of immigration infiltration must eventually end, as democracy aims to achieve a majority, leading to widespread migration from across the border or within Indian states.

5.4 Constitutional and Special Status for North-East Region

North-East India's governance must address complex issues through infrastructure development, economic investment, and conflict resolution. This approach can integrate the region into the nation's socio-economic framework, fostering stability and growth. Manikya,

the royal scion of Tripura Kingdom, has urged the Central Govt. to address the economic and political impact of migrants on Indigenous tribes. He has advocated for constitutional solutions to safeguard land territory rights and governance power. The region faces multiethnic societal unrest, international migration hotspots, interethnic conflicts, and refugee and migrants' havens. The region is surrounded by China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal, making it insecure from international interference. A holistic approach is needed to provide a secure and progressive life for Indigenous-native communities and victims of international migrants, requiring recognition through constitutional measures.

5.5 Separate Administration Region within a State Province or Comprising Multiple Autonomy Regions within a State Province

Some countries allow indigenous peoples to self-govern in specific areas. Bolivian autonomous indigenous territory and US tribal self-government are examples. Indian autonomous territories are partially self-governed by indigenous people. Considering that India is home to the biggest democracy in the world, it's surprising to learn that the country only has 28 states plus 8 union territories, whereas the United States boasts 50 states—more than twice as many as India. There are calls for more states and for state division in India. If the state opposes further divisions for its integrity, forming various autonomous regions inside a state with their own jurisdiction and administrative authorities may be a preferable response to its growing demands and divides. A dual state is an authors produced notion where regional autonomy authority for an ethnic identification community that desires to protect their rights and powers with unique administration power within an existing regional state to avoid further separation or construction of state. There has to be a better solution to the Kuki-Meitei conflict in Manipur because the majority Meitei population rejects the idea of a separate state or separate administration which has led to riots, chaos, and a breakdown in government administration. As a result, the president rule has taken over implying military rule in the state of Manipur. In Tripura, the indigenous tribes wanted a separate state from the Bengali dominant for governing and separation of the state. There are several difficulties to creating a new state or separating the existing one, and the Indian central government does not support it. The community demanding for separate administration or division of states based on ethnic lines within a state, could suitably accept regional autonomy with power of governance, but it is still tied to the same state. This is true in states where multi-ethnic populations have long protested for statehood. This approach will mirror regional state unions, similar to how states joined the Indian Union nationally.

6. Conclusion

The examination of North-East India in terms of multiethnic reveals a very heterogeneous demographic makeup, distinguishing the region from the rest of India. It indicates that "Nowhere in India is there such a bewildering mosaic of humanity with varying racial ancestry, ethnic background, religious persuasions, and speaking different languages and dialects, as in North-East India" (Dikshit & Dikshit, 2013). The existence of a much-diversified multiethnic population raises numerous challenges of ethno-nationalism and ambitions among ethnic communities to protect their rights and secure their own identity in the region. In reality, the

primary reason for ethnic conflicts and the existence of numerous rebels in the region is the struggle for identity and the protection of different ethnic community rights. Aside from monetary incentives and development initiatives, the North East's underlying ethnic concerns may be addressed first. The government may adopt several developmental plans and economic packages, but they remain ineffectual, much like milk thrown on a rock will flow off. Whatever strategies the central government pursued to develop and harmonize the area; ethnic tensions must be prioritized.

The discussion's conclusions prompt us to reconsider whether the North-East requires another phase of state restructuring and reformation in terms of ethnic composition, which is dispersed and not limited to a single state boundary. Whether current constitutional clauses relating to ethnic protections for tribes and non-tribes should be amended to provide the region more authority during the parliament session? The topic of discussion and decision was at disposal to the parliament's house members. The integration of North-East India into the Indian Union has been a complicated process. North-East India is a sensitive and fragile zone in terms of conflict genres. Good international relations with surrounding nations, as well as the protection of ethnic minorities outside borders, will continue to be a priority for Indian foreign affairs. The multiethnic settings of the North-East area may be honored with nation-richness of people resources, rather than being viewed as challenges, problems, and burdens on states. In this setting, the national policy dealing with the North-East area becomes critical for national integration.

In concluding statement, the regional perception may be best understood with the given by Fabian Lyngdoh (2017) in Shillong Times "The Indian nation can be built on political maturity in democracy, not on racial, cultural or religious ground. It would be futile to delve into the mythical Ramayana or Mahabharata in an attempt to invent a cultural context of linking the tribes of this region with the mainland because it is a glaring fact that they are very much closer to China and Myanmar than India on that count" (Lyngdoh, F. (2017). Indeed, when it comes to governance and development strategy, the North-East Region demands a specific and distinct approach that differs from the rest of India.

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evidence and facts. However, if the facts are misinterpreted or disinformation is conveyed, the author will humbly accept or justify the concerns raised.

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