POPULATION OF THE NORTH-ESTERN STATES OF INDIA

North-East India, comprising the seven states, has a population of over 45 million, which is 3.76 % of India’s population. The overall density of population is 159 persons /km2, though Assam, the principal state of the region, has a population density of 397 persons to a km2. In contrast, the state of Arunachal Pradesh, occupying the foothills of the Himalayas, has an average density of 17 persons to a km2. The distribution of population is highly irregular that reﬂects the sequent of occupancy, the agricultural potential of a state and the ruggedness and accessibility of the terrain. The most densely populated parts of the region are the plains of Brahmaputra and Barak, the Imphal plain in Manipur and the western part of Tripura. The mid-twentieth century was a demographic watershed in the population growth of Assam, as much as for the rest of India. While the population of Assam grew by just 55 % over a period of half a century between 1901 and 1951, the accelerated growth after 1951 resulted in a population growth of 288 % between 1951 and 2001. During the same period, the population of North-Eastern region as a whole grew four and a half times showing an increase of 350 %. The region has around 27 % indigenous people in its population, recognised by the Indian constitution as Scheduled Tribes or STs. The sex ratio of the region is 954 females per 1,000 males, slightly above the national average of 940 females per 1,000 males. The literacy rate in different states is variable, the highest being in Mizoram which has enumerated 93 % of its population as literate in contrast to Arunachal Pradesh which has recorded only 67 % of its population as literate. During the last four decades, birth as well as death rate has declined. A steep decline in birth rate has led to a decline in growth rate, despite the decrease in death rate. The highest decadal growth rate was between 1971 and 1981, but it has come down to 1.7 % in 2011, a ﬁgure that corresponds to the population growth rate for India.

Table 1 Area and population of North-Eastern states in comparison with India (2011)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Administrative units | Area (km2) | Area as % of the area of India | Population (2011) | As % of the population of India | Density/km2 2011 |
| India | 3,287,263 | 100 | 1,210,193,422 | 100 | 382 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 83,743 | 2.547 | 1,382,611 | 0.114 | 17 |
| Assam | 78,483 | 2.386 | 31,169,611 | 2,576 | 397 |
| Manipur | 22,327 | 0.670 | 2,721,756 | 0.225 | 122 |
| Meghalaya | 22,429 | 0.682 | 2,964,067 | 0.245 | 132 |
| Mizoram | 21,081 | 0.641 | 1,091,014 | 0.090 | 52 |
| Nagaland | 16,579 | 0.504 | 1,980,602 | 0.164 | 119 |
| Sikkim | 7,006 | 0.213 | 607,688 | 0.050 | 86 |
| Tripura | 10,486 | 0.318 | 3,671,032 | 0.303 | 350 |
| NE Region | 263,179 | 8.006 | 45,588,381 | 3.767 | 159 |

Source: Census of India ( 2011 )

Table 2 Population distribution in North-East India in relation to the area (2011)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| States | Area of the state (km2) | Area of the state in% of the area of the North East | Population of the region 2011 | Population of the state as % of the population of the NE region |
| North-East region | 263,179 | 100 | 45,588,381 | 100 |
| Arunachal Pradesh | 83,743 | 31.80 | 1,382,611  | 3.03 |
| Assam | 78,438 | 29.80 | 31,169,611  | 68.37 |
| Manipur | 22,327 | 8.48 | 2,721,756  | 5.97 |
| Meghalaya | 22,429 | 8.52 | 2,964,067  | 6.50 |
| Mizoram | 21,081 | 8.01 | 1,091,014  | 2.39 |
| Nagaland | 16,579 | 6.29 | 1,980,602  | 4.35 |
| Sikkim | 7,006 | 2.66 | 607,688  | 1.33 |
| Tripura | 10,468 | 3.97 | 3,671,032  | 8.05 |

 Source: Census of India (2011)

The population of North-East India or, for that matter, any other state is essentially the picture of the numerical strength of the people in a speciﬁc area, as it varied over time and space, in density, growth, composition and several other attributes, which, in a large measure, determine the qualitative strength of the population. The North- Eastern states of India (Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura – the original seven states – to which Sikkim was added in 1975, making it a conglomerate of eight states) have a total population of 45,588,381 that accounts for 3.77 % of the population of India. The region as a whole is sparsely populated and shows wide contrasts in its ethnic composition and density pattern as reﬂected in the population density of Assam and Tripura, which show a density of population comparable to the country as a whole. The North-Eastern region, taken as a block of eight states, has a population density (159 persons /km2) that is even less than half the national average of 382 persons/ km 2. The picture is understandably deceptive as some individual units (states) show extremes of higher and lower density of population, related to their resource endowment and historical antecedents. The overall density of 159 persons/km2 for the North-East region is one of the lowest in India and comparable to Uttarakhand (189 persons/km2), Jammu and Kashmir (124 persons/km2), Himachal Pradesh (123 persons/km2) or the forested regions of Chhattisgarh with a population density of 189 persons/km2. A population density of 159 pales into insigniﬁcance when compared with high-density areas of India like Bihar, W. Bengal and Kerala with a population density of 1,102, 1,029 and 859 persons/km2, respectively. Arunachal Pradesh, a very sparsely populated state, with a density of 17 persons /km2 occupies one extreme of population density with Assam having a population density of 397 persons /km2 at the other end. An intra-regional contrast in population distribution in relation to the area gives a better picture. The two riverine states Assam and Tripura together, account for more than three-fourths of the total population of the North-East region with only 33.7 % of the area. The former is formed largely by the Brahmaputra and Barak river plains, and the latter is partially an eastward extension of the Bengal delta. The hilly and dissected terrain of Arunachal occupying almost one-third of the territory of the North-East region, extending from 20 to 50 km north of the Brahmaputra, reaching the Himalayan heights and forming the main Indo-Tibetan boundary, is the most sparsely peopled part of the country. Mizoram with hardly any plain to support a larger population and Sikkim with its mountains and severe winters have not proved congenial to the growth of population. Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur and Nagaland are other states besides Arunachal Pradesh that have remained sparsely populated.