Northeast India’s Multi-Ethnicities:

Every state of Northeast India is itself an abode of multiple ethnicities with a bulk of people converted to Christianity by the European Christian Missionaries. There are around 220 ethnic communities in the Northeast India alone and more than 220 dialects. The hills states in the region like Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland are predominantly inhabited by native ethnic communities with a degree of diversity even within the ethnic groups. The region's population results from ancient and continuous flows of migrations from Tibet, Indo-Gangetic India, the Himalayas, present Bangladesh and Myanmar. Adivasi, Assamese, Bhutia, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Biate, Bodo, Chakma, Chhetri, Dimasa, Garo, Gurung, Hajong, Hmar, Hrankhwl, Jamatia , Karbi, Khasi, Khampti, Koch, Kom, Kuki, Paite, Vaiphei, Zou, Teddim, Simte, Gangte Lepcha, Lushai, Meitei, Mishing, Mizo, Poumai, Mao, Maram, Tangkhul, Anal, Monsang, Naga, Nepali, Noatia , Paite, Pnar, Purvottar maithili, Rabha, Reang, Rongmei, Singpho, Sylheti, various Tibetan tribes, Tamang, Tiwa, Tripuri, Zeme Naga, Chorei and Limbu are different ethnic groups inhabiting the region.

Population of North East India: Peopling Process

The peopling process to North East India started quite a millennium before Christ. Among the different ethno-linguistic groups, the Austro-Asiatic speaking people from the east were the earliest settlers of this region. On the basis of different opinion it can be argued that they came from Pacific area perhaps from the Philippines and Indonesian area. This Austro-Asiatics are now represented by Mon-Khmer speaking Khasis (Syntengs and Pnars taken together). The present distribution of this group of people is in Meghalaya and some parts of south Assam and they constitute about 2 percent of the total population of Assam.

The tea gradens and ex-tea garden population from Central India (Munda etc) have settled following the opening of tea plantations in Assam in 1835, and now constitute about 7 percent of the population of Noth East India.

The people speaking Tibeto-Chinese family of language have various branches and wide distribution over the hills and plains of this region. The main two sub-families of this branch are Tibeto-Burman and Siamese Chinese. Most of them came after the intrusion of the Aryans from the west and it was after their distribution and occupation of particular areas that they came to be known as Nagas, Bodos etc. and the areas of their occupation were known by their tribal names. The Tibeto Burmans were the early settlers and represented in the region by six major language groups, namely, Himalayan (Bhotia, Sherdukpen etc.), Arunachali (Adi, Apatani etc.), Bodo, Naga, Kuki-Chin and Kachin. These six groups of languages are again divided into about 145 sub-languages and dialect. They altogether represent 19 percent of the population of this region. The Upper course of the Yangtse and the Hoang-ho in North West China were the original home of the Tibeto-Burman races and they entered Assam through the courses of the rivers Brahmaputra, Chindwin, Irrawaddy, Salween, Mekong and Menem and the mountain passes of Assam and Burma through the north-east and south-east. Some of them travelled to Nepal and Tibet, some occupied the foot of the Himalayas from Sadiya to the Punjab in the west, and the rest occupied the hills of Assam (erstwhile), such as the Garo Hills, Lushai Hills and Manipur, Mikir Hills, Cachar and the Naga Hills and gradually spread over the plains in both Upper and Lower Assam along the courses of the Brahmaputra on both its banks.

The Siamese Chinese are represented by the Ahoms (who no onger retain their linguistic and religious identity) and entered Assam in 1228 A.D. and was followed by the Khmatis, Khamayanga Bailungs, Phakials etc. They came in the current millennium from Upper Burma and were Buddhist by religious pursuit. This group constitutes about 3.5 percent of the total population of the region and present distribution is in Upper Brahmaputra valley. They came through the Phangsan pass crossing the Ptkai range and first settled in the area between the Burhi-Dihing and Dikho river.

The Indo-Aryans entered India through the north-western route, and the date of their first footing in India may roughly be set about the second millennium B.C. and another branch might have passed towards the east and became the ancestors of the non-mongoloid bracycephales of Eastern India, speaking language of the outer band, such as Bihari, Odiya, Bengali and Assamese. According to Prof. Taher, the settlement of speaking Indo-Aryan languages, perhaps started around the first few centuries of the Christian era and has continued ever after. They are mainly divided into Assamese, Bengali, Eastern Hindi (Bhojpuri, Magadhi and Maithel), Western Hindi and Nepali speaking groups. They live mostly on the plains and account for about 68.5 percent of the population of the region. They spread out in the Brahmaputra, Barak valley and Tripura and in small numbers in the hilly states of North East India.