

Tribes of North-East India

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Introduction

India is known for its valuable heritage. The country has been hailed as one of the most complex amalgamation of various cultural identities. North-East India is very well known for its natural beauty and diversity. It comprises the states of Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Sikkim, Tripura, Assam, Mizoram, and Nagaland. The North-Eastern region of India shares its boundaries with Bhutan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. According to the 2011 census, 8.6% of India's population consists of tribes. There are altogether 427 tribal communities all over India. North-east India is a land inhabited by more than 200 tribes, with each community having its own unique way of living. This makes North-East India one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. Anthropologists and even we Psychologists have started taking keen interest in the area. The Indian Government is focusing on developing the life and tourism among the tribal occupied states.

The entire area of Northeast India is full of lush green valleys, mountains, springs and green vegetation. The land with its natural beauty and cultural heritage has always topped the list of an ideal destination for travellers from India and World. Vast research and studies are also done by scholars and research groups who wish to learn about the life, food habits, culture, tradition, language and source of living among the tribes. The Indian Government has also started taking keen interest in developing the living standards and

tourism among these tribal occupied states. Different ethnic groups and tribal groups inhabit the region of northeast India. They all have their own culture and tribal tradition and all speak their own tribal languages. This has made Northeast India one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. The cuisines and attires also vary among the tribes. Each tribal community has their unique way of living. Tribal people mostly live and earn through the hills and forest areas.

A Tribe

Tribes are primarily seen as a stage and type of society. A tribe is a group of people who live and work together in a shared geographical area. A tribe has a common culture, dialect and religion. They also have a strong sense of unity. The tribe is usually headed by a chief. A tribal society is a group of tribes organized around kinships. Tribes represent a part in social evolution between bands and nations. A tribe can be a collection of families or of families and individual people living together. A tribe usually divides up the jobs that need to be done among themselves. Most tribes have special customs or traditions. Humans lived in tribes before they started living in cities and nations. There are still tribal groups all over the world. Their numbers are getting smaller and smaller. Many tribes live as hunter-gatherer.

Origin of The Tribes

North East Indian tribes have originated from the ethnic groups of Tibeto Burmese, proto Austrioloids and some groups of Indo Mongoloids. The trend can be seen in the looks, traditions that are visibly followed by these communities. They also show a cultural bridging with the neighbouring countries. And India has tilled now provided them with a safe haven compared to living in neighbouring communist nations of China and Burma.

Types of North-East Indian Tribes

North-East tribes constitute a major part of Indian tribal community. They are all scattered over all the states of North East. Arunachal Pradesh consists of around 25 types of tribes. Nagaland has around more than 16 major tribes even. Some examples of prominent tribes are Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Adi, Nyishi, Angami, Bhutia, Kuki, Rengma, Bodo and Deori. They are scattered

throughout the region. Christian-ism is followed among many of the tribes and some also follow Hinduism and Buddhism. The rest still have their indigenous beliefs and Practice animism.

Some Major Tribes of North Eastern India Are:

Bodos Tribe

The Bodo Tribe is a vast tribe and shares a good number of populations in Assam. The tribal people have also migrated to other parts of India as well as to neighbouring countries. It's said that Bodo tribes have introduced rice cultivation, tea plantation, poultry farming, and silkworm rearing in the North Eastern parts of India. Bodos are non vegetarians and rice is considered a staple food, and the traditional favourite drink of the Bodos is Zu Mai (rice wine). Rice is usually accompanied by a non vegetarian dish such as fish, meat or pork. Weaving and silkworm rearing is another part of Bodo culture. Many families rear their own silkworms. The cocoons of the silkworms are spun into silk. Bodo women teach their girls the art of weaving from a young age. One can always find a Bodo courtyard with a loom. Women weave and wear their own Dokhnas, which is the traditional dress of the Bodo women with shawls. The Bodos are also expert in making beautiful crafts from bamboo.

Kuki Tribe

Kuki Tribe or the migrant ones can be found all over the north-eastern states. The language of the tribe varies but is all similar in a way, and can broadly be termed as the Kuki Language. They prefer to live on hilltops. The villages of Kuki tribes are a cluster of closely constructed houses. The tribe cultivates dwarf cotton and spun yarns. Using vegetable dye, beautiful and intricate designs are woven which are mostly geometric in nature. Kuki men wear colourful Sangkhol, a jacket and a 'Pheichawm' (short dhoti). Sometimes a Chaddar or a wrap is used. They also wear Tuhpah (head cover). Women wear anih-san underneath a pon've or a wraparound. The dress is worn from above the chest. Ornaments include earrings, bracelets, bangles, necklace and a typical ring shaped earring to stretch the ear lobe.

Smoking is enjoyed among these people. Extensively crafted pipes are used for this purpose and are made up of stone and brass-

metal. They prefer cross-cousin marriage. Mimkuut Festival is the major festival celebrated by Kukis and falls in the month of January.

Adi Tribe

Adi Tribe (have two divisions namely Bogums and Bomis) are found in Arunachal Pradesh. They live on the hills and have their own village council. This group is again divided into various small sub tribes. The dress for women and men are naturally weaved by the women folk of the tribes. Men wear helmets made from cane, bear and deer skin, depending on the region older women wear yellow necklaces and spiral earrings. Beyop is worn by unmarried girls (ornament consisting of five to six brass plates fixed under their petticoats). Tattooing of hands, arms and face is very popular among the older women of the neighbouring Apatani Tribe. Rice cultivation is practiced by this community and rice serves as the staple foods for the Adi. Trapping and hunting is also popular and the Adi people keep pigs, chickens and grow vegetables in their home.

Garo Tribe of Meghalaya

They are located in the western segment of state and belong to the Tibeto-Burman family race. They practice shifting cultivation or jhum culture. It is also matrilineal society. The major difference from the Khasi matrilineal system is that in this tribe the daughter which the Parent's selects gets the ancestral home and perform the rituals. Usually parents select the daughter which is obedient, well-mannered and married to the father's nephew. The daughter who is selected by parents is known as nokama and her husband is known as nokarom (acts as headman of village). Other customary laws are same as in the Khasi tribe.

Jaintia Tribe

They are believed to be originated from the population movement of Indo- China in India. The language they speak is mon-khmer. It celebrates nature, balance and harmony among its people. It is a matrilineal society where mothers have the property and her surname is Passed on to the children. The interesting custom that makes it different from both Khasi and Garo tribe culture is that the husband lives with his mother and sister and the wife lives in their ancestral home. The husband is allowed to meet his wife during

night time. This custom is followed to maintain a good relation between the mother and son.

Angami Tribe

They are one of the major Naga ethnical groups. They are found in Kohima and Dimapur district and celebrate Sekrenyi. They are the warriors. The land is most important form of property among them because of labour intensive cultivation. They are known for the Terrace wet rice cultivation.

Nyishi tribe

These are the largest group of people located near the Subansiri District. The men of this tribe usually have a long hair tied over their head. They also have the attire of wearing cane bands on their wrists. They believe in sprits and re-birth. Polygamy is practised in this tribe and Their language belongs to Sino-Tibetan family.

Bhutia Tribe

Bhutia Tribe are the prominent tribal community of Sikkim and have migrated from Tibet. The residing places for the tribes are the Lachen and Lachung areas of North Sikkim. They speak Bhutia (a dialect of Tibetan language). They are counted among the most developed tribes and earn their livelihood through agriculture, government jobs and local business.

The dressing culture of the Bhutia tribes is unique compared to other tribes. Women wear heavy jewelry of pure gold with full sleeve blouses. The main garment is a loose gown. Males wear Bakhu, which is a loose traditional full sleeved dress. These tribal people live in a rectangular shaped house called Khin and follow Tantric Buddhism. The remarkable feature about the tribe is their legal framework, termed as Dzumsa. Agriculture and breeding of sheep and yaks are the main source of occupation. Bhutia tribes are mainly rice eaters. They also eat animal fat and beef. Bhutia tribes in India are famous for preparing awesome food. Some examples are Momos, Ningro with Churpi, Sidra KO Achar, Phulaurah Gundruk, Phagshapa, and Sael Roti. They are very fond of Chaang or the millet beer and serve it in a special bamboo container called Tongba which has a hollow pipe made up of Bamboo.

Khasi Tribe

Khasi Tribe are one of the major tribal communities and occupies almost half of the total population of Meghalaya. They reside in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya and follow the matriarchal society. Their language is known as Mon-Khmer which belongs to the Austro-Asiatic Family. This tribe, Women are given more importance than men. The youngest daughter inherits the property from her mother. Men wear Jymphong, which is a long sleeveless coat without collar. They also wear turbans. Women are very fond of wearing jewelry and earrings. They have a tradition of wearing silver chains around their waist. U Blei Nong-thaw, Ulei Longspah (god of wealth), Shnongand many other gods are worshiped by this tribe. Rice is the staple food and they also consume fish and meat. Rice beer is used as liquor. Nongkrem is a famous festival celebrated amongst the Khasi tribes. This festival falls in the month of November and is celebrated for five days.

Deori Tribe

Historically, the Deoris have been known to live in the upper plains of the Brahmaputra Valley. The Deoris belong to the Sino-Tibetan family of Mongoloid stock. In the ancient times of Ahom and Sutiya kingdoms, the Deoris used to serve as priests in the temples of their kingdoms and therefore the origin of the name 'Deori' - that means 'Priest' in the local dialect. The Deori Tribal people of Assam have maintained their racial traits, languages, religion and folk tales, beliefs through centuries. The word 'Deori' comes from the word 'Deu' meaning Great, Wise and O and R meaning Male and Female respectively. The term 'Deori' thus refers to a 'Great' or 'Wise' male/female human being! The Deori people are expert craftsmen who make exclusive bamboo handicrafts and their handlooms are well renowned across the State of Assam in North East India.

Conclusion

North-East India has a very rich cultural heritage and it will be a great opportunity to know about the indigenous tribes that are dwelling in this area. There is so much one can learn about Indian cultural traditions, life-style patterns, language, customs, festivals, social life, family structure, occupations along with their precious

natural habitat and mountains that have so much to offer. A visit to the North-east would not only be a treat to the eyes but a great source of knowledge for the soul.

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