

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEGAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES [IJLSSS]

ISSN: 2584-1513 (Online)

Volume 2 | Issue 2 [2024] | Page 227 - 232

© 2024 International Journal of Legal Studies and Social Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: <https://www.ijlsss.com/>

In case of any queries or suggestions, kindly contact editor@ijlsss.com

STEREOTYPES VS. HUMAN RIGHTS: NORTH EAST INDIA'S STRUGGLE

- Gutta Eekshitha¹

ABSTRACT

North East India, comprising eight states, is a region rich in historical and cultural diversity, yet it faces persistent stereotypes and misconceptions that lead to significant social and economic challenges. These stereotypes include perceptions of homogeneity, primitiveness, violence, and unusual culinary habits, which result in discrimination, marginalization, and human rights violations. Such biases have led to social exclusion, limited economic opportunities, and inadequate access to education and healthcare for North Easterners. The region's complex history, marked by tribal societies, colonial rule, and post-independence political movements, further complicates its current socio-political landscape. Human rights abuses, exacerbated by the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) and ethnic conflicts, highlight the urgent need for legal and policy reforms. The Indian Constitution, the Human Rights Protection Act, and other legal frameworks provide some protection, but enforcement remains inconsistent. This study underscores the necessity for comprehensive measures, including education, awareness campaigns, and media representation, to challenge stereotypes and safeguard the rights of North East Indians. Addressing these issues is crucial not only for the region's development but also for promoting a more inclusive and equitable society in India, reflecting broader global human rights struggles.

INTRODUCTION

A territory of tremendous historical and cultural richness, North East India comprises eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura. This region, tucked away in the eastern Himalayas and surrounded by Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, and Myanmar, has long been a melting pot of many racial and cultural backgrounds. North East India's history is characterized by its numerous, separate tribal societies, many of which have persisted in their identities for generations. These communities are unique from the rest of India because they have rich oral traditions, folklore, and cultural activities. Among the strong states that once

¹ 3rd Year Student, B.A LL.B. (Hons.), Lovely Professional University.

governed this area were the Tripuri dynasty, the Kingdom of Manipur, and the Ahom dynasty in Assam, which lasted for about 600 years. Significant changes were brought about during the British colonial era, including the adoption of new economic and administrative procedures as well as a new social structure that frequently upended long-standing customs. The area has witnessed the emergence of several movements for ethnic identity recognition and autonomy since independence, resulting in new states and a complicated political environment. Events that highlight the people's colorful customs and way of life, such as the Sangai Festival in Manipur, the Hornbill Festival in Nagaland, and the Bihu Festival in Assam, weave the cultural tapestry of the Northeast.

IMPORTANCE OF NORTHEAST REGION

Regarding culture and strategy, North East India is very important to India. Because it shares international boundaries with several neighboring nations, it is an important frontier region from a geopolitical standpoint. Because of its location, it is a key area for both foreign policy and national security. The area's proximity to Southeast Asia is also essential to India's "Act East Policy," which aims to strengthen the nation's geopolitical and economic ties with Southeast Asian nations. Natural resource wealth is North East India's economic asset. Large amounts of coal, natural gas, oil, and hydroelectric potential are all present, and these resources are essential to India's energy security. Furthermore, the region's biodiversity presents substantial chances for ecotourism and sustainable development due to its distinctive flora and fauna.

The North East contributes to India's cultural variety. Numerous indigenous populations call it home, and they all add to the nation's rich cultural diversity. The North East's musical, dance, craft, and culinary traditions enrich the diverse fabric of Indian culture. The area offers important insights into environmental protection because of its emphasis on sustainable methods and traditional ecological knowledge. Notwithstanding these benefits, North East India nevertheless suffers several difficulties, such as underdevelopment, insurgency, and negative perceptions that further marginalize the region. Not only is it imperative to address these concerns for the prosperity of the area, but also for the unity and growth of India as a whole. It is essential to comprehend and value North East India's historical and cultural heritage to challenge misconceptions and guarantee that the rights and identities of its people are upheld.

STEREOTYPES AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT NORTH EAST INDIA

Despite its vast ethnic and cultural variety, people from other parts of the nation frequently spread false impressions and preconceptions about North East India. Due to these misconceptions, which are the result of ignorance and insufficient knowledge, people's perceptions of the area and its residents are skewed. Among the most common stereotypes are Homogeneity, Exoticization and Primitiveness, Appearance-based Assumptions, Violence and Insurgency, and Culinary Preferences. It's a prevalent misperception that North East India is one cohesive region with a single ethnic group and culture. There are more than 200 different ethnic groups living in the area, each with its language, traditions, and customs. North East Indians are sometimes stereotyped as primitives and their traditional methods of living as exoteric. This misconception ignores the region's vibrant and contemporary features, such as its contributions to academics, athletics, and the arts. Because of their unique physical characteristics, people in the North East usually mistake North Easterners for foreigners, which results in prejudiced comments and actions. They are frequently referred to as "outsiders" in their nation, which contributes to their feeling of isolation. Unfairly, the area is frequently described as a combat zone where rebellion and bloodshed are commonplace. This cliché oversimplifies the complex socio-political challenges and misses the dynamic and tranquil parts of life in the North East, even though certain places have witnessed political instability. Many times, traditional cuisines from the North East are regarded as being weird or unappealing. This stereotype shows a lack of respect and knowledge of cooking in addition to misrepresenting the variety of culinary activities.

IMPACT OF STEREOTYPES ON THEIR LIVES

Considerable social exclusion and prejudice have resulted from the widespread misconceptions about North East India. People from the Northeast often experience discrimination and racial profiling, particularly in mainland India's cities. They frequently experience physical abuse, verbal abuse, and social exclusion. Racial abuse incidents, both physical and verbal, are disturbingly frequent. Disparaging terms such as "chinky" or "Chinese" are used, which betrays a deep lack of understanding and consideration for the identities of people from the North East. In metropolitan areas, a large number of North Easterners report having trouble locating rental housing. Due to preconceived notions about their food preferences or way of life, landlords frequently decline to rent to them, which makes them feel excluded and marginalized. North Easterners frequently

experience prejudice and discrimination in the workplace. Stereotypes about them imply that they are only suitable for positions in the hospitality sector, undermining their ability in other industries. Their options for professional advancement are so limited.

North East India has not developed as economically well as other regions, in part because of historical neglect and prejudices that depict the area as being in the past. Due to the lack of work prospects in the area, many have been forced to travel to other regions of India, where they encounter prejudice. Many parts of the Northeast still lack suitable educational facilities, despite attempts to upgrade the infrastructure. Stereotypes hinder North Eastern students' access to high-quality education and scholarships by undervaluing their intellectual capacity. Students from the Northeast are frequently underrepresented in elite colleges and challenging tests. Systemic prejudices and a dearth of support systems that can guide students through the unfamiliar educational system are also to blame for this.

Self-worth and self-esteem can be undermined by persistently unfavorable stereotypes and exclusion. These prejudices might be internalized by North Easterners, which would reduce their feeling of self-worth and community. It might be difficult to reconcile the demand to maintain their individuality while adhering to popular cultural norms. Many people from the North East struggle with identity issues since they don't feel completely accepted in either their own region or the larger Indian community. Anxiety, despair, and a feeling of loneliness are among the mental health issues that can arise from the stress and trauma brought on by prejudice and exclusion. These problems are made worse by a dearth of culturally competent mental health services, which forces many people to suffer in silence. North Easterners frequently repress their cultural manifestations and customs out of a desire to fit in and avoid prejudice. This can eventually lead to the loss of linguistic and cultural traditions, endangering the region's unique legacy.

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Human rights breaches have been common in North East India, where they have been made worse by insurgencies, ethnic conflicts, and strict government regulations. The application of AFSPA, which gives the military forces enormous authority, is one of the most divisive topics in the area. Under this statute, there have been several claims of rape, extrajudicial executions, torture, and arbitrary incarceration. A notable instance is the 2000 Malom Massacre in Manipur, where paramilitary troops massacred 10 people. This incident sparked extensive demonstrations and hunger strikes, the most prominent of which was led by Irom Sharmila. Serious ethnic conflicts

have occurred in the area, such as the Naga-Kuki conflicts in Manipur and the Bodo-Muslim war in Assam. Human rights are seriously threatened by the large number of lives lost, the people uprooted, and the property destroyed as a result of these wars. Thousands of residents have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the ongoing insurgency and counterinsurgency operations. People who are internally displaced (IDPs) sometimes live in appalling conditions with no access to essential services, healthcare, or education. There are frighteningly many reports of abuse and fatalities in custody caused by security personnel. The 2004 murder and rape of Thangjam Manorama by Assam Rifles troops provoked widespread demonstrations and brought attention to the grave mistreatment that occurs in detention.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

1. **The Indian Constitution:** All people are guaranteed fundamental rights under the Constitution, which include the freedom of speech and expression (Article 19), the right to equality (Article 14), protection from arbitrary arrest and imprisonment (Article 22), and the preservation of life and personal liberty (Article 21). In India, the protection of human rights is based on these rights.
2. **The Human Rights Protection Act of 1993:** The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and State Human Rights Commissions (SHRCs) were established as a result of this Act, and their duties include looking into human rights abuses, raising awareness of human rights issues, and suggesting corrective action.
3. **Act of 1989 Concerning Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes (Prevention of Atrocities):** This Act establishes special courts and harsh penalties for offenders to stop crimes against people of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.
4. **Act of 1958 Concerning the Armed Forces (Special Powers):** AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act) has measures meant to guarantee accountability, such as the need for prior authorization from the central government before prosecuting members of the armed services, even though it is frequently criticized for permitting violations of human rights.

CONCLUSION

The persistent misconceptions that the people of North East India must deal with are more than just a social annoyance; they are a serious violation of their human rights. The lives of people and communities in this area are negatively impacted by these prejudices, which support marginalization and discrimination. This study emphasizes the sharp difference between the rich,

varied cultures of Northeast India and the generalized, frequently biased views that are prevalent across the rest of the nation. The results highlight the critical need for all-encompassing approaches to challenge these prejudices and protect North East Indians' human rights. Campaigns for education and awareness are essential to dismantling the damaging myths that have endured for many years. In addition, policy interventions need to remove institutionalized systemic prejudices and guarantee the protection and advancement of North East Indians' rights.

Furthermore, the media and popular culture must take the initiative to fairly and truthfully portray North East Indians. The promotion of a more inclusive and equitable society may be achieved by exhibiting the region's rich legacy and modern accomplishments. In North East India, the fight against stereotypes is a microcosm of the global struggle for human rights. It serves as a reminder that real equality necessitates a significant transformation in cultural attitudes in addition to improvements in the law and institutions. The knowledge gained from North East India's experience may direct future efforts to combat stereotypes and guarantee that each person's rights are upheld and honored.

REFERENCES

1. North-east Indians and Others: Discrimination, Prejudice, and Textbooks, *available at:* <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24480188> (Last Visited on June 8, 2024).
2. Do People in India's Northeast feel Alienated? *Available at:* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43252434> (Last Visited on June 8, 2024).
3. From 'Chinky' to 'Coronavirus': Racism against Northeast Indians during the COVID-19 pandemic, *available at:* <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/> (Last Visited on June 8, 2024).
4. 'You people have brought the virus here': Othering experience of northeastern people amid COVID-19 in Delhi, India, *available at:* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9349438/> (Last Visited on June 8, 2024).
5. Why Northeast India faces Racism in its own Country, *available at:* <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/wakeup-india/why-northeast-india-face-racism-in-its-own-country-20390/> (Last Visited on June 8, 2024).
6. Stereotyping Northeast Indians in mainstream media: An unfair and harmful representation, *available at:* <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/if-only-i-can-speak/stereotyping-northeast-indians-in-mainstream-media-an-unfair-and-harmful-representation-51594/> (Last Visited on June 8, 2024).