



Linguistic Diversity and its impact on the Development of North East India

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ABSTRACT

North East India is a home to a diverse range of languages and a rich cultural legacy. It's a home to over 200 languages. It's a region that includes eight Indian states, including seven sisters- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura and Sikkim as the brother state. The linguistic and cultural diversity of the region contribute its uniqueness and cultural heritage which significantly contribute for preserving diverse identity of the region. The paper examines the difficulties in maintaining the region's distinct linguistic environment as well as the effects of linguistic diversity on the growth of the Northeast.

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Introduction:

The ethnic and linguistic diversity of North East India is noteworthy. There are eight North-Eastern states and though the region holds only less than 8% of India's population; it is however the most diverse when it comes to linguistic diversity. The area is unique among India in that it has a wide variety of languages and dialects. The abundance of indigenous tribes and groups in the area is primarily responsible for its remarkable diversity. The languages spoken in the northeastern region are members of the following language families: Dravidian, Tai-Kadai, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman and Indo-



Aryan. They share a lot of common cultures and ways of living between themselves with a lot to tell them apart from each other.

Objectives:

1. The first objective is to learn about the linguistic and cultural diversity of the eight states that make up Northeast India.
2. To learn about the characteristics and other types of diversity, including people's lifestyles, customs, eating habits etc.
3. To determine how language diversity affects the region's growth.
4. To identify challenges and opportunities of linguistic diversity in the region.

Methodology:

Secondary data gathered from several journals, book chapters and articles about the northeastern region of India are used in this study.

Linguistic diversity in North East India:

North East India's linguistic diversity is a result of the region's numerous ethnic and cultural populations, each of which has its own unique dialect, language, culture and traditions. The official languages of northeastern states also vary from one another due to the great diversity of languages.

Table1: Languages with official status in North East India

States	Official languages
Arunachal Pradesh	English
Assam	Assamese (Brahmaputra Valley), Bengali (Barak Valley), Bodo (Bodoland)
Manipur	Meitei
Meghalaya	Khasi, Garo, English
Mizoram	Mizo, English
Nagaland	Nagamese, English
Tripura	Tripuri, Bengali
Sikkim	Sikkimese, Nepali, English



Numerous languages are spoken by the Tibeto-Burman group, which is widely distributed throughout the area. The Austric group of languages, which include Khasi, Kol, Munda, Santal and others, are primarily spoken in Assam and Meghalaya. The Tai-Kadai group of languages include Ahom, Phake, Turung, Kamyang and others. They are primarily spoken in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. More than 200 different tribes can be found in Northeast India and there is some variation even among them. Northeast India is a diverse region because of the people who belong to several ethnic groups. According to the table 1, English is the most widely used official language in the majority of the Northeastern Indian states. However, some other languages, such as Assamese, Bodo and Bengali of Assam, Meitei of Manipur, Khasi and Garo of Meghalaya, Mizo of Mizoram, Nagamese of Nagaland, Tripuri and Bengali of Tripura, Sikkimese and Nepali of Sikkim, are also recognized as official languages.

The three most widely spoken indigenous languages in Arunachal Pradesh are Nishi, Adi and Monpa. The state is linguistically rich and diverse. The native language of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, Adi, can be divided into two groups: Abor and Lhoba, even though they utilize Hindi as a link language. Besides these, a few other tribes are- Galong, Khampti, Mishmi, Sighpho etc.

Assam, a region renowned for its linguistic diversity, has numerous dialectal variations existing alongside the standard Assamese Language.

Meitei or Manipuri is the official language of Manipur. The vast majority of people in Manipur speak this Tibeto-Burman language. Manipur is a home to a number of different tribes, including Angami, Gangte, Tangkhul, Thadou and Hmar.

The principal languages of Meghalaya are Khasi and Garo. Boro, Kacharis, Chakma, Hajong, Jayanti, Pnar, Mikir etc are some of the tribes residing in the state of Meghalaya.

The Tibeto-Burman language known as Mizo is primarily spoken in Mizoram. Mizoram is a home to several tribes, including Chakma, Dimasa, Pawi, Synteng and Riyang.

The tribes residing in Nagaland include- Angami, Ao, Chang, Konyak, Kuki, Lotha, Rengma, Sangtam etc.

Bengali and Kokborok are the two official languages of Tripura. Since Bengalis make up a sizable portion of the population, the Bengali language has always had a strong effect in Tripura. The Tipra, Reang, Jamatia, Kaipeng, Noatia, Koloï and other tribes are also found in Tripura.



The people of Sikkim consist of several ethnic groups- Lepcha, Bhutia, Limbu, Tamang etc.

People of many different religions call the Northeast home. Northeast Indians celebrate a wide range of holidays and customs that are strongly related to dancing, music and agriculture. Despite their independence, the states' lifestyles vary greatly depending on the area, caste and clan. The two main jobs in the northeast are weaving and agriculture. Herbs and other organically grown items are abundant in the cuisines.

Indigenous languages in Northeast India are frequently ignored and threatened due to the dominance of more widely spoken languages. The youth's views toward their mother tongue play a major role in the survival of the indigenous languages. These viewpoints can affect social relationships, communication and even more general societal issues like language preservation and policy. Whether a language is preserved, revived or eventually lost depends heavily on attitudes.

While negative attitudes cause language decline, positive attitudes can promote language maintenance, revitalization and transmission. Language endangerment occurs when essential components of the language are lost, which reduces the language's communication value in a particular field. Since language and culture are intertwined and mutually influential, it is widely accepted that any alternation to one will inevitably have an impact on the language of the specific community. Any language that goes extinct or becomes endangered should be viewed as a loss to all of humanity.

Impact of the linguistic diversity on the development of North East India:

The linguistic diversity of the region has both positive and negative impacts on the development of the region.

Positive impact of linguistic diversity in the region:

1. Linguistic diversity is a sign of greatness of thought and culture. The multiplicity of language has brought out the best in the people living in that particular region.
2. The diversity has had a profound impact on the development of the region influencing cultural identity, social cohesion, education, governance and economic opportunities.
3. The particular language of the region embodies its unique culture, tradition fostering a strong sense of identity among its speaker.



4. North Eastern region's linguistic diversity is a source of strength promoting tolerance and co-existence among various communities.
5. Proficiency in regional languages can enhance job opportunities.
6. Regions with rich linguistic and cultural heritage attract tourists contributing to local economy.

Negative impact of linguistic diversity in the region:

Besides being a valuable asset, linguistic diversity also showcases several challenges in North East India.

1. It might be challenging for people with various linguistic background to communicate. The presence of several languages can lead to communication hurdles that prevent people who speak different languages from effectively interacting and understanding one another.
2. The non-native speakers of a dominant language may have limited access to information, education and government.
3. Language diversity leads to social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination and thereby contributing to social divisions and conflict within societies.
4. Language barriers can hinder economic development and create economic disparities.
5. Language diversity creates administrative challenges and also creates barrier to participation in the democratic process.
6. Linguistic diversity makes it difficult for educational systems to give speakers of many languages fair access to high quality instruction.

Initiatives that promote linguistic diversity while also offering assistance for language growth, preservation and inclusive language policy are necessary to overcome these challenges caused by linguistic variation.

Key Findings:

The diversity of the region plays a major role in shaping the cultural heritage and identity of the people residing in the region. The paper finds the significant role a language possesses in preserving cultural heritage and traditions and that effective language policy, language planning, community participation and engagement are essential for promoting linguistic variety and diversity in North East India. The paper also finds the challenges and opportunities posed by linguistic diversity such as language and cultural differences along with cultural exchange, understanding and economic growth. Community



based initiatives are important for promoting linguistic diversity and cultural heritage in North East India.

Conclusion:

The vast cultural diversity of North East India is reflected in its languages, each of which is essential to the region's legacy. Promoting inclusion and cultural interchange require an understanding and commitment to the northeastern languages. 'Unity in diversity' is aptly embodied in North East India. However, as civilization develops and human needs change, many tribes are losing their customs and their languages and dialects are in danger of being extinct. Therefore, the government and the local population must adopt and put into practice the essential measures to preserve the rich linguistic and cultural history of North East India.

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