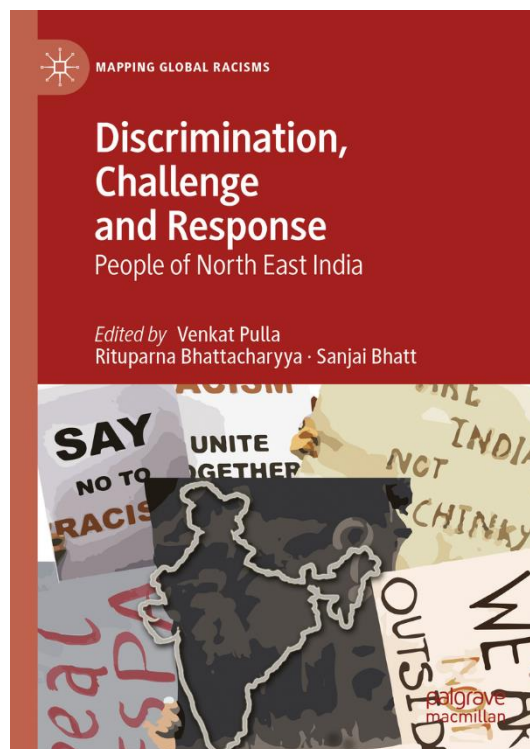


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Nested in nature, North East India enchants the world with its serene landscapes painted across diverse topography, with its majestic rivers and falls, and with tales of warmth and bravery which echoes from its hills and valleys. A land to many tribes, home to a diverse population, North East India with its eight states and over 50 million inhabitants, remains an exotic gateway to the mainland Indians but hardly a conceived part of an 'Inclusive India'. This book, 'Discrimination, Challenge and Response- People of North East India' edited by V. Pulla, R. Bhattacharyya, and S. Bhatt, which forms a part of the 'Mapping Global Racisms' series edited by Ian Law and published by Palgrave Macmillan, traces through its ten

chapters the discrimination and racism meted out to the North East Indians in their stay in other parts of what they call the "mainland India", the challenges in their own land, the North Eastern women's role in peace-keeping as well as the North East Indians' contribution to the rich literature of India. The authors also delve into the opportunities and concerns of the Act East Policy with respect to North East India and also try to understand and acknowledge the ills of racism in the country. This book adds to the already existing notions of the plights of the North East Indians, a better comprehension of the bigotries, prejudices and provocations they are a victim of and the steps to be adhered to

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attenuate racism in all forms in India. This book—running across 203 pages with a foreword by Sanjoy Hazarika, International Director at the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, New Delhi, India, is based on primary research undertaken in metropolitan cities and other parts of India.

In the first chapter “Discrimination, Challenge and Response in India: It’s Time for Truth Telling”, the authors argue how India being portrayed as a raceless society is nothing but a fallacy as the ‘North East Indians’ targeted by the ‘mainstream Indians’ in the metropolitan cities of the country despite having a legal framework to promote racial equality amongst its citizens, is the very proof of it. An overview of the subsequent chapters of the book wherein the trajectories of the racialised and dehumanised behaviours against the north-easterners and their ‘othering’ is elaborated. The authors acknowledge racism as being deeply ingrained in the global and local fabric and initiate a truth-telling episode through the chapters which will usher in a needed social change in India.

The second chapter, titled “At the Intersections of Discrimination of Caste and Beyond” deals with the permeation of racism and discrimination in the caste hierarchy and sub-nationalism. India with more than 2000 ethnic groups, 1652 mother tongues, and 22 official regional languages in 29 states and seven union territories, guarantees through its Constitution, liberty, equality and fraternity to promote unity in diversity and harmony. India has been one of the more prosperous countries as regards multiculturalism irrespective of the sub-nationalistic uprisings. Unfortunately, despite the three principles safeguarded by the Constitution of India, discrimination on account of caste, creed, race and regionalism is still predominant in the society. An attempt to answer the queries as to why North East Indians are being persecuted on perceived grounds of social, physical and cultural differences, how slurs are hurled at them, and how and where the North Easterners becoming the target of discrimination and racism started, is being made. The recommendations of the Bezbaruah

Committee for the legislation to criminalise racism in India, the efforts of the federal government to connect North East with the mainstream India and the understanding of the development of India’s social identity and of how India’s colonial history has a part to play in promoting discrimination and racism against the north-easterners, helps to comprehend and alleviate the existing prejudices with a greater significance attached to the role of individuals.

In the third chapter, titled “Viewing Racism through Gendered Lenses” the authors portray racism as being culturally provoked and gendered. North East Indians are dissimilar with the rest of India on the grounds of allocating a higher status to women in the society, and culture. The constant racism against the North East women, the constant abuse and targeting of them due to their values being in contradiction with that of the narrowed down values and lesser status of women in the societies in other parts of India, and the racial attacks carried upon the entire north eastern community outside the native place, do not discourage the stakeholders from moving into those places but emphasises the need to educate the greater Indian society about the idea of an ethnically diverse India. The examples of movies and of influencers who have tried to draw attention to women’s status in general and North Eastern women in particular, foregrounds the role of non-racist individuals in building a better society.

The fourth chapter “Understanding Ethnic Violence in North East India” sketches the history and incidences of ethnic conflicts in the North Eastern part of India and examines the causes and backgrounds of the inter-ethnic conflicts in the region. These conflicts result in political instability and force people to migrate to other parts out of risks due to militants and security forces. These incidences of ethnic conflicts have also caused an increased awareness of human rights in India and world, and an active role of the media, non-government organisations and civil society groups in countering the conflicts.

The fifth chapter, titled “Women’s Collective Action for Peace in the North Eastern Region”,

elucidates women activism in peace-keeping in the region, in reforms and welfare, in social movements for awareness and empowerment in the pre and post-independent India. The making of the icon of the heroic Irom Chanu Sharmila, and Binalakshmi Nepram as the 'Face and Voice' of North East India, the authors track the history of the origin of women's organisation in this region and their active part in the freedom movement and social reforms since the colonial era till continuity. The atrocities meted out to the North Eastern women at the hands of the security personals and militants, the evils of the AFSPA, the molestation, shame and suicide, the resistance movements, necessitates the importance of the need to promote equal participation of women in conflict resolution at all decision-making levels.

In the sixth chapter "North East Indians and Their Contribution to Indian Literature", the authors review the contribution of the North Eastern Indians to the Indian literary heritage in the context of the idea of marginalisation concerning the relationship between North East Indians and mainstream Indian culture through the medium of literary expressions in a temporal framework. The works of literature of the region flourished with the ideas of patriotism, frontiers, regionalism and reforms, and tried to regain the lost prestige of the Assamese mother-tongue. With literature ranging from oral to folk to written and spanning across Pre-Vaishnavite, Vaishnavite, Ahom and modern times, the literary heritage is a fusion of past, present, fiction and realities. The idea of marginalisation embedded in real-life situations and its expression continues to echo through contemporary prose and poetries, but there is the need to apply new and emergent theoretical perspectives in the literature to study the changes in the balance between the centre and periphery and the adoption of a multidisciplinary approach to ascertain the standard of literature and its characteristics.

The seventh chapter, titled "Nagas: A Bitter Past – From British Period to Nehru" addresses the tumultuous struggle of Nagas. The chapter starts with the proud history of Naga people. Then it

gradually familiarises the reader with continuously growing struggle to connect with mainstream India. The British rulers ignored the Nagamese people as much as possible. The policies of Nehru Government did not make it easy for the Nagamese either. Nagamese people too share some of the blames with their rigid demands that no sovereign nation can comply fully. This resulted in armed conflict in Nehru reign. Nehru was unapologetic. Of course, Nagas were also up on arms and escalated the situation beyond control. This chapter portrays the dark times quite rightly. However, Nehru managed to turn the situation around somewhat and started the peace talks. Unfortunately, according to the chapter, the linguistic criteria for creating states was very much ignored in the case of Nagaland.

Chapter VIII, "The Nagas Saga and an Uncertain Future? Nagas after Nehru to Modi" take on the situation of Nagas after Nehru reign. Nehru was unapologetic for quashing the Naga rebellion with the army. However, at a later stage, he started peace talks with Nagamese leaders. It is virtually correct that his successors did not introduce any significant changes to Nagamese policy of India. The dialogues continued without yielding any result to show off. The chapter further enlightens that a section of NNC/ NFG/ NFA members decided for an amicable and peaceful solution to the existing conflict. They accepted the supremacy of the Constitution of India, resulting in Shillong accord. The chapter further discusses effect of Narendra Modi on Naga conflict. He visited North-East India, including Nagaland and assured to bring a solution to the issue. While the political field is ripe for Nagamese solution, the authors discuss whether it is culturally possible to attain a Nagalim Geographical Utopia.

Chapter IX, titled "Look/ Act East Policy and North East India: Issues, Concerns and Opportunities" enlightens the readers about the policy taken by Indian Government in the wake of post-cold war strategic reorientation. Look East policy was launched in the 1990s. Integration of NER in LEP added the domestic dimension to this policy. The strategic importance of the region cannot be stressed

enough as it shares major boundaries with foreign countries, that is, Bangladesh, China, Myanmar etc. The chapter also discusses the issues, concerns and opportunities regarding Look/ Act East Policy. The feasibility of the initiatives implemented is also discussed here. The authors tried to be cautiously optimistic regarding the positive change in policies of the Government of India stating it will be a massive boon for North-East states and may usher a new era of development in the region.

In the last chapter "Recognising, Understanding and Responding to Racism in India", the authors highlight the importance of acknowledging the existence of racism in one's identity, potential biases, one's thought process, and one's own understanding of and outlook on the world. The critical race theory provides insight into the oppressive aspects of the society to facilitate a needed social and individual change in thoughts, words and actions to counter discrimination and racism. 'Freedom of speech' is guaranteed by the Constitution of India but is used to normalise racism and discrimination through hate speeches which weakens the delicate fabric of a heterogeneous but united Indian society. There arises the need to create social interactions and actions to promote equality, equity, unity, institutional integrity, and awareness and acceptance, and also the need of a national anti-racism campaign to lessen racism and ignorance, and to promote liberty, equality and fraternity as

the principles of life which cannot be estranged from each other. India being a melting pot of people of different races, cultures, castes, creed, and regions, promotes equality, unity and liberty, and prohibits discrimination via the fundamental rights guaranteed by its Constitution. Now is the high time to refurbish the pluralistic image of India and to promote unity in diversity.

After much deliberation, it can be concluded that the book catches the essence of racism and discrimination at the very heart of the Indians. It demolishes the myth of Indian people being tolerable and raceless. The horrid treatment of North-East Indians due to their cultural differences, appearances and social norms further disapprove the notion of Indians as discrimination-free and racism abhorring people. Obviously, being far off from the main Indian land does not help much in the case of North East Indians. However, to discriminate because of that is just petty if nothing else. The book discusses the struggles and sufferings of North East Indians during and after British era. The Government also criminally neglected them. However, the authors are optimistic about the future. The Government is taking an active role in development of the North-East India and to bind it with the rest. Racism has no place in the world. The book goes along with the thought and sought to prove that.