

Governance and Recognition Struggle in Assam: Exploring the Dynamics of Ethnic Identity Formation in Northeast India

Hare Krishna Doley

Abstract

This paper examines how imperial governance practices shaped ethnic subjectivities during the colonial period in Assam. Embedded within this practice was the classification of various ethnic groups into different administrative categories. Therefore, the paper attempts to examine how diverse groups are entangled in framing distinct ethnic identities while making claims for Scheduled Tribes status under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. For many groups in this region, tribal identity has become the last resort to protect their socio-cultural and political rights within a multi-ethnic society. As a result, the region has become a significant site for contestations, negotiations, and interactions of various ethnic groups. Due to such conditions, overlapping and hybrid identities have emerged among groups. Therefore, we can see claims and assertions for recognition as a tribe by marking their distinctiveness from one another. Such strategies can be traced alongside the introduction of affirmative policies; a product of both the colonial and the post-colonial churning in India. Considering such imperatives, the paper argues that the current struggle for recognition as tribal identity has changed the nature of collective attachments in the region structured by the state to legitimize power relations.

Keywords: Ethnic, Governance, Identity, Recognition, Scheduled Tribe

Introduction

The contemporary social and political processes of Northeast in general and Assam in particular regarding ethnic assertions and claims cannot be isolated from the British colonial policies. The policy of separation and isolation as a protective measure for the diverse ethnic groups of the region was crucial for the imperial government's project to rule and administer the region. Given the