
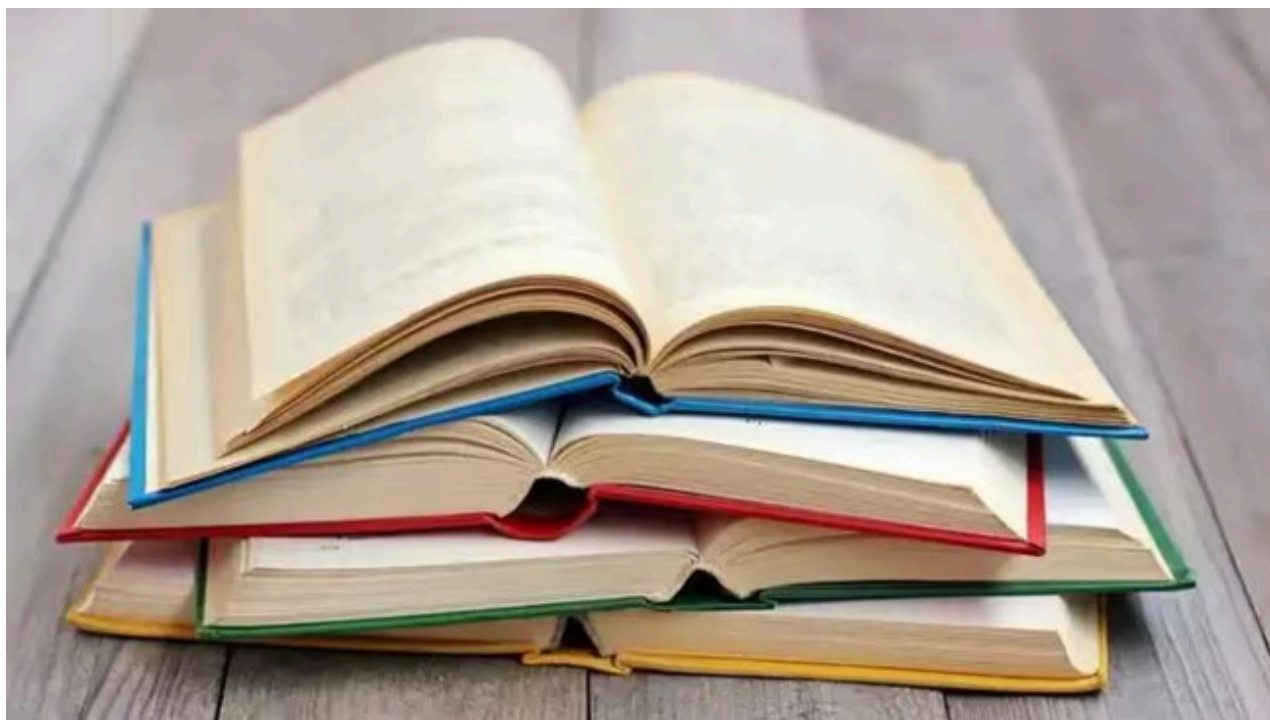


Northeast India is not only magnificent but also strategically crucial. Our textbooks must reflect that

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Students in Gujarat will receive their test results soon (File Photo)

A close examination of NCERT school textbooks reveals a persistent exclusion of Northeast India from the socio-cultural and historical narratives around India. The region struggles to find recognition within the broader conception of the nation. The glaring omission of Northeast India's history, society and culture from NCERT textbooks suggests that the people of this region are not acknowledged as sharing common elements — collective memory, identity, historical territory, myths of origin and symbols — with the rest of India. This exclusion, including in the latest revisions of the textbooks, renders them invisible.

A particularly concerning example is the social science textbook for class VII students titled Exploring Society: India and Beyond. Although Chapter 8 of the book, "How the Land Becomes Sacred", discusses India's sacred geography, the minimal representation of the Northeast remains a matter of concern, implying to young students that it is regarded as profane rather than sacred — an unsettling perspective that marginalises its rich heritage.

Northeast India is an ecological marvel, characterised by towering blue mountain ranges and intricate hilly terrain interwoven with rivers, streams, rivulets, meadows, and woodlands. The northernmost reaches are home to the impenetrable Eastern Himalayas,

where diverse communities have long resided. Local myths, legends, folklore, customs, beliefs, and traditions are deeply rooted in this sacred landscape.

The mighty Brahmaputra River, entering the Assam plains as the Lohit River, meets the Siang River to the west, merging near Pasighat, famously known as the land of hanging bridges in Arunachal Pradesh. Encircled by hills and mountains, the Brahmaputra Valley is a thriving cultural hub, hosting an array of rituals, fairs, and festivals. Nestled on Nilachal Hill along its banks is the world-renowned Kamakhya Temple, believed to house 51 sacred Shakti Peethas. The valley itself reflects a deep-rooted cultural continuity with the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Above the Brahmaputra Valley lies Arunachal Pradesh — known as the Land of the Dawn-lit Mountains or Land of the Rising Sun — primarily inhabited by indigenous tribes, including Buddhist communities practising Mahayana and Hinayana traditions. The people of Arunachal Pradesh regard their landscape as being inhabited by spirits, embedding spirituality within their way of life.

To the south of the Brahmaputra Valley lie the rugged mountain tracts of Nagaland: The Land of Festivals; Meghalaya: The Abode of Clouds; and Mizoram: The Land of Blue Mountains, adjacent to one another. Tripura extends into the hills and the plains of the larger Brahmaputra basin, forming a crucial part of this diverse ecological and cultural fabric. These states are distinguished by their varied topography — rugged hills, blue mountains, and networks of streams, rivers, and gentle rivulets. Manipur, often called the Switzerland of India, is a hilly and mountainous state with a small oval-shaped valley at its centre. The Northeast also houses numerous sacred groves — over 280 in Assam, more than 100 in Arunachal Pradesh, and 166 in Manipur, locally known as Umanglais.

The region has innumerable water bodies too. The famous Loktak Lake, nestled in the Manipur Valley, is a unique freshwater body where floating houses thrive. The fisherfolk who inhabit the lake have a deep spiritual connection with its cosmology, believing it to be under the protection of Goddess Ima Lairambi. For these communities, their sacred ecology holds immense emancipatory power, sustaining their exuberant existence and cultural continuity.

The Northeast is home to 45 million people and stands as India's most ethnically diverse region, with over 400 languages and dialects. It embodies more than half of India's experiential diversity — including ethnicity, customs, traditions, languages, beliefs, attire, and cuisine. A vital crossroads of cultures, it serves as India's gateway to trade, commerce, and cultural exchange with East and Southeast Asia. Northeast India's culture and geographical position, therefore, can play a crucial role in shaping India's Act East Policy.

Therefore, incorporating Northeast India's socio-cultural traditions in NCERT textbooks isn't just about representation, fairness, inclusivity, and educating young minds with a well-rounded understanding of their country's heritage. It's time the education system

embraces the Northeast's rich legacy, ensuring that its history and traditions are given the space and attention they deserve.

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