

Immigrants and the Natives: Understanding Right to Self-determination on Social Media Discourse in Northeast India

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The Northeast has been seen as the problem child since the very inception of the Indian republic. It is home to more than 200 varied ethnic tribes with a distinct history, ethnicity, language, and culture. Constituting about 7.9 % of India's total geographical area and sharing 98 % of its borders with foreign countries namely China, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Bhutan, and Nepal, immigration has been the most critical and enduring issue in Northeast India's political talk for decades. The issue has gained prominence in recent times particularly with the enactment of two controversial citizenship laws- National Registrar of Citizens and Citizenship (Amendment Act 2019) by the Union Government of India. The purpose of this present paper is to unravel the manner in which popular online news media in Northeast India represent this problem of immigration. The inductive framing analysis, based on the Social Constructionism approach, of 69 political commentaries published between 1st September 2018 and 31st March 2020 on five popular Facebook news pages reveals four frames through which the subject is portrayed. They are the Immigrant Takeover frame, Flawed narrative frame, Policy Failure frame, Hindutva frame. The Immigrant Takeover frame is the most dominant frame on the discourse on immigration accounting for 40.3 percent of the total frame reference. The paper presents the framing analysis of the Immigrant Takeover frame which defines, promotes, evaluates, and recommends solutions to the issue of immigration in Northeast India. Threat to natives frame sees immigrants as encroaching on the identity, culture, and scarce land and economic resources of the region. It raises the concern and apprehension of indigenous tribal communities of Northeast India regarding their 'right to self-determination' This discussion directs our attention towards understanding the use of communication in empowering voices. The people of Northeast India often express their grievances against mainstream media for not being adequately represented in the national discourse. The paper explores the use of new media technologies by marginalized communities as an alternative media.