

Two Day National Seminar on ‘North East India’ since 1947: Society, Polity and Economy

Jointly organized by

Department of History, Sikkim University, Gangtok

And

OKD Institute of Social Change and Development, Guwahati

At Gangtok, February 24-25, 2017

Concept Note

‘North East India’ as we understand today geographically covers eight states, each with its unique history. The colonial administration played an important role in the making of the region, marking it as a geographical area to the ‘north east’ of the Bengal province, covering mainly the then Assam, princely state of Manipur, hill Tippera and the tribal states in the hills. This colonial demarcation of the region, however, remained tagged for ever, even after India attained its independence from the British rule in 1947. And Sikkim, located north of West Bengal was added to this region since its merger into the Indian Union in May 1975; however, Sikkim became part of the part of the North Eastern Region, officially, only in 1990s.

Quite understandably, the society, polity and economy of the region – so demarcated – underwent significant transformations consequent to the colonial interventions. The colonial administration intervened in the region with distinctly different approaches in the plains and the hills, epitomized in the idea and practice of the ‘inner line regulation’ in 1873, which unleashed a diverse set of processes and tendencies in the hills and the valleys. Instruments of colonial administrations – both in the plains and in the hills not only, therefore, defined the contours of the society, polity and economy of the region but also continued to cast significant influence on the way the region has evolved over time even during the post-colonial period.

In fact, the geneses of many of the contemporary processes and trends witnessed in the society, polity and economy of the region can be located in its colonial past, which is why it becomes almost imperative to look at these trends and tendencies– social, political, economic or otherwise – in a deep and penetrative historical perspective.

The post-colonial process of integration of the region with India presents before us a more peculiar case, challenging the idea of the region as a unique entity with a shared history. Manipur and Tripura were princely states before joining the Indian Union in 1949; Sikkim, meanwhile, followed a slightly different trajectory since then – as a protectorate of the Indian Union while remaining a kingdom and yet undergoing changes in the realm of representative institutions emerging and the merger with the Union in May 1975. Other states like that of Mizoram and Meghalaya were carved out of Assam much later. Arunachal Pradesh, on the other hand, before becoming a Union Territory of India, was known as North East Frontier Agency inheriting the name from North East Frontier Tract given by the British. Nagaland was a district of Assam before attaining the statehood in 1963.

It is also well-known that in pursuance of the Government of India Act of 1935, the areas falling in the North East Frontier Tract, the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District i.e. present state of Mizoram and North Cachar Hills division of the Cachar District were declared as 'excluded areas' in 1936. The integration of these excluded areas into the Union of India during post-colonial period was fraught with serious challenges, which continues to have severe implications on contemporary society, polity and economy in the region.

These challenges were attempted at through the mechanism of the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution and provisions like 371A, 371B, 371C, 371F, 371G, 371H facilitating the process of political integration of the region with Union of India. Thus, numerous accessions, accords, partitions, divisions, exclusion and integration mark the region's history and shape its society, polity and economy. Historiography of this region, thus, lends itself to various strands.

Evidently, the region's colonial past and processes leading to its integration to the Union of India are two important lines of enquiry to understand the contemporary society, polity and economy of the region. However, since the integration of various political units of the region with the Union of India at different points of time, many significant changes have been taking place which merit looking beyond these two perspectives. The integration has brought about 'democracy' politically and 'development' socio-economically. Many of the changes witnessed today emanates from the way the region has been trying to negotiate with the political democracy and socio-economic development brought about by the integration.

Looking at the myriad processes of these negotiations in itself, therefore, can prove to be a meaningful line to enquiry in understanding contemporary society, polity and economy of the region. The processes of the negotiation can be well extended to all other forces – global, national or even local. Most importantly these negotiations often throw up contradictions acting as the catalytic factor in ushering in observed changes and reflections of which can be found not only in academic engagements but also in other forms of artistic expressions including art and literature. Naturally, this line of enquiry needs to accommodate all such sources to comprehend the changes occurring in the society, polity and economy.

The proposed seminar 'Sikkim: Society, Polity and Economy' is part of a series of seminar to be organized in all eight states of the North East. Sikkim is distinct from the other states in the region as this was the youngest addition to the Indian Union and Sikkim became the eighth North East Council (NEC) only in 2002. This tiny Himalayan Kingdom of Namgyals was integrated to the Indian Union in May 1975 on popular demand. In that sense, perhaps, Sikkim is the youngest democracy too. However, it has a long tradition of people's movement for democracy and constitutional rule which dates back from the 1940s. The transition from monarchy to democracy while protecting the interests of the ethnic groups in the legislature through the parity system makes its democratic experience *sui generis*.

The proposed seminar series will lead to a concluding seminar in March 2017 which will attempt to draw the larger narrative from these seminars on the society, polity and economy of the region afresh from this extended perspective without undermining the region's colonial past and the peculiar processes of its integration to India post 1947. It is expected that the discussions at the

seminar will be able to shed new lights on understanding the society, polity and economy of the region post 1947 about which not much literature is available compared to its colonial past.

The broad themes for the Seminar will include

- **Sikkim as a Historical Category**
 1. Social Formations in Sikkim -- Nomadism/Pastoralism, Settled Agriculture
 2. Religion, the people and their culture – Migration and Amalgamation of Cultures
 3. The making of the boundaries since 1642
 4. Sikkim and the Colonial Regime – British India's relations with Sikkim

- **Sikkim and Post-Colonial India**
 1. Monarchy and Legislative Reforms
 2. Movement for Democracy – 1949-1975
 3. Transition from Monarchy to Constitutional Democracy
 4. Ethnic representation in the institutions of democracy

- **Social, Economic and Political Integration of Sikkim -- Problems and Prospects**
 1. Constitutional and Legislative measures
 2. Transition from Feudal/Semi Feudal mode to Modernity
 3. Industrial Development, Environment and Human Development Indices
 4. Literature, Arts and Architecture post Integration

While the themes mentioned above are indicative, they are not exhaustive

Seminar Calendar

*Submission of Abstracts: Abstracts, typed in Times New Roman may be submitted (by e mail as file attachments with name, institutional affiliation and contact details to vkananth@cus.ac.in) until **January 15, 2017**. Abstracts shall not exceed 400 words.*

*Acceptance of abstracts will be notified on **January 18, 2017** by e mail.*

*Draft papers shall be submitted until **February 12, 2017**. The format for submission will be notified along with the acceptance.*

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