

UGC-SAP Seminar on

Land Questions in Northeast India

30th March, 2017

**Department of Sociology,
Tezpur University, Assam**

Concept Note

Land has been the central issue concerning the evolution and dynamics of any agrarian society. As the societies of Northeast India are primarily agrarian in nature, land questions occupy the central place to comprehend various socio-economic and cultural processes in the region. Northeast India, being a hub of diverse socio-cultural and ethnic groups, characterises a complex land system. The diversity is to be examined in relation to plains and hills, tribes and non-tribes, caste and ethnicity, and so on.

Historically castes have played a major role in land holding patterns in the plains and the upper castes, especially the Brahmins who emerged to be the landowning castes. In the hills, community land ownership pattern prevails, though there have been differentiations in terms of land holding patterns within a community (at individual and clan level and between the clans) and among the communities (tribes). This challenges the pre-conceived knowledge of a tribal society as an egalitarian community.

The major changes in the land relations in Northeast India were brought about by the British. The British introduced new land settlements in the region to suit their main objective, i.e., to earn more and more revenue. In the plains, they introduced Ryotwari System (except Goalpara and Karimganj, where there were Permanent Settlement). Monetisation, Wasteland Rules and the consequent plantation economy, Opium Policy, frequent enhancement of land taxes crippled the peasant economy in the Brahmaputra Valley. During the second half of the Nineteenth century, revolt against the draconian

British land policies had emerged in the Brahmaputra valley as well as the Hill areas. Though initially the British adopted a 'non-interference' regarding their land revenue administration towards the hills and they were classified as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded area', there has been remarkable changes in the traditional land relations in these societies during the colonial and post-colonial period. The penetration of market forces, the practice of settled cultivation and urbanisation has had tremendous impact on the land tenure pattern in the hills. Emergence of individual holdings and consequent rise of agrarian classes in the hills have been a significant phenomenon. For example, as per the report of agricultural census, in Nagaland, as far back as 1976-1977, 86 % of the holdings covering 89 % of the area under terrace cultivation were wholly owned and self operated.

With the advent of post-colonial period the government's land reform policies, urbanisation, industrialisation, market forces and developmental programmes have led to land alienation, de-peasantisation, de-tribalisation and emergence of new structures both in the hills and the plains. The emergence of ethnic movement and politics of identity in the region has also transformed people's conception of land. Land has emerged not only as economic source, but also as an integral aspect of community's identity.

In the proposed seminar, the following sub-themes will be included but not restricted to:

- a. The evolution of land tenure system
- b. Caste and agrarian relations
- c. Urbanisation, industrialisation and land alienation
- d. Land and identity
- e. Land reforms and its social impact
- f. Gender and land questions
- g. Market economy and emerging land relations in tribal societies

Organising Committee