

Reading and writing about lives in Northeast India

How do we make sense of an area and the lives of people inhabiting it? The question has been raised time and again not only by scholars of varied disciplinary orientations, but also by the administrators, policy makers, political activists and analysts. Life in the Northeast India has always been subjected to such inquiries culminating in the production of a vast corpus of literature, old and new, which need to be revisited. The dominant narratives in such literature often privileged the perspective of the State over that of people. Many of these were framed from security perspective, thereby construing the region as a frontier, and/or as a disturbed and conflict-prone area. Alternatively, the development imperative of the state prevailed in creating the narrative of a resource-rich-region of strategic importance. Representations of people of the region were also in conformity with these concerns. People often appear only as members of discrete communities with exclusive cultural traits produced by the classificatory mechanisms of the colonial state. Such exclusivist representations of people continued in the post-independent state, in an era of competitive politics among discrete groups, both as beneficiaries as well as the claimants of state distributed resources. In more recent years, however, the concerns about the 'voice' and 'representation' of people in the margins have redirected many of the scholarly works to focus more on life as it is lived in these areas. Specific concerns are being raised about eschewing colonial modes of inquiry and examining the intersections of class, community, caste, race, gender, sexuality and nationality in ways that can address issues of power and inequality at multiple levels.

The program plans to bring together younger scholars with more experienced ones towards a collective re-examination of the dominant ways of reading and writing about the northeastern region and its people. The workshop intends to contribute towards de-colonising the existing frames of reading and writing about the region at two levels- a) to engage in critical reading that will involve exploring and drawing insights beyond the 'common sense' account and narratives of the region. b) to develop an approach towards writing that is sensitive to the power relations embedded in the research process and to the ethics of doing research. We welcome contributions from young researchers and professionals engaged in exploring various aspects of life in the region. It is intended to be a multidisciplinary exercise and we look forward to receiving papers from different academic disciplines. Although we have identified following sub-themes for reference, the list is not exhaustive and participants are encouraged to apply with fresh ideas and insights.

Issues of livelihood and human mobility

Articulations of identity

Ecological concerns

'Indigenous' people and knowledge systems

Religiosity and the sense of sacred

People's account of the security regime

Governance and Welfare

Practices of health and education

About the workshop: The program intends to provide a platform for the researchers to discuss, develop, and present their work before an engaged audience. It would consist of interactive sessions between young and experienced researchers to guide them through articulation of their ideas, writing style, and the political-ethical concerns of research. Interested participants are invited to send an abstract of 500 words to the conveners at readingandwriting2019@gmail.com. The shortlisted participants are expected to develop their ideas in the form of full papers. The final selection of participants would be on the basis of submission of their full papers. The selected papers will be brought out in an edited volume as a follow up activity of the workshop.

Important Dates:

Submission of Abstract of 500 words: 25th September, 2019

Acceptance of Abstracts: 1st October, 2019

Full Draft Submission: 15th November, 2019

Program dates: 12th and 13th December, 2019

Local Hospitality The seminar cum workshop is being organized and hosted by the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University. Local hospitality, including reading material, food and stay will be provided by the organisers. Reimbursement of TA would depend on the availability of funds.

Conveners

Dr. Nirmali Goswami

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

nirmalig@gmail.com

Dr. Sarmistha Das

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

sharmishtha.k@gmail.com

Ms. Pamidi Hagjer

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

pamihagjer@gmail.com

All queries and correspondence regarding the event should be sent to the readingandwriting2019@gmail.com.