"Tribes and the Indian neo-liberal state: Unravelling context, reimagining realities"

Organised by
Department of Political Science (UG)
Synod College, Shillong
in collaboration with
Tribal Intellectual Collective India

Main Speakers
Prof. Virginius Xaxa
Dr. bodhi s.r.
In India, there are 705 ethnic groups officially recognized as ‘Scheduled Tribes’ constituting about 8.6 percent (10.43 crores) of the total population of India (121.08 crores) spreading across different parts of the country. More than two-thirds of the total tribal population are concentrated in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. However, the share of tribal population to the total Union territory/State population is very high in Lakshadweep (95 percent), Mizoram (95 percent), Meghalaya (86 percent), Nagaland (86 percent), and Arunachal Pradesh (69 percent). However, the tribal population in the country is in actual more than the official figures as there are tribal communities that are non-scheduled and also treated as non-tribes in states they are not notified.

The term ‘tribe’ is a colonial construct carrying a pejorative connotation of backwardness and primitiveness. In spite of this, the tribal communities over a period of time especially in North East India, have positively used the label, according to Virginius Xasa, as their identity and has been a source of self-esteem and pride. As the term tribe assumes and provides a distinct identity and certain benefits from the state, more and more tribal communities struggled and have been struggling over a period to be notified as the Scheduled Tribe and, therefore, the number of such Scheduled Tribes keeps on increasing.

There is no direct answer to the question whether tribal communities are indigenous peoples. It may be recalled that India voted in favour of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which the UN adopted in 2007 on the condition that after independence all Indians are indigenous. Therefore, the Indian state does not consider the tribal communities as indigenous people, thereby, negating the applicability of the UNDRIP in India. However, tribal communities in India assert themselves as indigenous peoples where they other than those in North Eastern Region (NER) prefer to be identified as adivasis implying ‘original inhabitants’. In states in NER there has always an assertion for self-identification by the tribal communities as indigenous peoples by using a prefix ‘indigenous’ before the word tribal. It is interesting to note that the UN has identified self identification as one of the important criteria for a community to be considered as indigenous peoples.

The tribal communities have always been the disadvantaged, dispossessed and vulnerable communities living mostly in remote and interior villages depending to a large extent on forests as their collective means of livelihood and other basic amenities of life. Using different variable such as per capita income, literacy, health status, and access to other basic amenities, the tribes have been always at the disadvantaged position. This has been in spite of a number of measures and provisions made from time to time for the advancement of such communities and for the fact that India had been a welfare state. However, the conditions of tribal communities in NER are relatively better than their counterparts in other regions of India.
Departed from its socialist agenda of the welfare state, the Government of India, pursues the policy of neo-liberalism with the adoption in 1991 New Economic Policy which stresses on liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation of the Indian economy where the state’s role shrinks and that the market forces are expected dominate. A neo-liberal state is expected to initiate reforms enabling the globalized market economy to enter to hitherto inaccessible and limited sectors. Post liberalization, the Indian economy has been able to attract huge foreign investments and to push for private domestic investments driving the Indian economy till the recent times as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. However, on the other hand, India witnesses the decline of agriculture, farmers’ suicide, lack of job creation and displacement of people. The negative impact of the policy of neo-liberalism would have possibly been more acute for the tribal communities as more than 90 percent of their total population live in the rural areas and 80 percent of them depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Counteracting the dark side of neo-liberalism, the Indian Government have adopted certain schemes as safety nets for the poor such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNREGA), National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) and other welfare oriented educational programmes.

**Research Questions:**

It is in this context, that it is pertinent to look into how the neo-liberal policies followed by the Indian state have impacted tribal communities across the country. How far the policies of the Indian neo-liberal state have brought about improvement in the lives of the tribal or have they worsened? What is the impact of the policy of neo-liberalism which stresses on privatisation of resources on tribal cultures and ethos which are based on community identity and ownership? Should a different tribal-centric development paradigm be followed to improve upon the socio-economic life of the tribal people? What is the response of the tribal communities to the neo-liberal policies and the consequences to the tribal societies and also the response of the Indian state to such a response? What is the position of tribal women as a category in the neo-liberal environment? Whether there is a need to revisit the stand taken by the Indian State on the UNDRIP so as to improve the conditions of tribals in India?
Objectives:

The seminar tries to achieve the following objectives:
1. To examine the impact of India’s policy of liberalization on the tribes in India.
2. To explore the alternative model of development in tribal areas.

Sub themes:

The following are the sub-themes for consideration in the seminar. However, abstracts are also invited for other sub-themes that are closely related to the research questions and objectives of the seminar.
1. Tribes, agriculture and poverty eradication measures.
2. Tribes, education and health care.
3. Small scale and cottage industries in tribal areas.
4. Investment, displacement and migration in tribal areas.
5. Tribes and Forest rights.
7. Infrastructural development in tribal areas.
8. Tribal movements.
10. Alternative model for tribal development.
11. Making sense the indigeneity of tribal communities.

Abstract and full paper submission and paper presentation

1. An abstract should be written in not more than 300 words indicating clearly the objectives, methodology and data sources.
2. While writing the full paper APA 6th Edition style sheet should be strictly adhered for its quick processing for final publication. However, only papers duly recommended by the reviewing committee will be published.
3. Each paper will be given a time of 20 minutes for presentation and 10 minutes for discussion.
4. Only those who submit full paper will be finally called for presentation in the seminar.
5. Abstract and full paper should be submitted to bmyrboh2018@gmail.com

Important dates:
Submission of abstract : 31st January, 2020
Notification of acceptance of abstract : 5th February, 2020
Submission of confirmation for participation : 10th February, 2020
Submission of full paper : 31st July, 2020

Travel and Lodging

1. Participants’ travel expenses will be reimbursed @ the rate of 3AC/Bus fare/Tourist Taxi tickets on sharing basis and shortest route.
2. Local hospitality including food and lodging will be provided by the organisers from the evening of October 28, 2020 to the morning of October 31, 2020.
About Synod College

Established in 1965, Synod College is a premier co-educational institution located in Shillong with a mission to “[s]haping the lives of students particularly the economically disadvantaged, by providing education par-excellence, so as to produce well informed, equipped and responsible citizens”. Reaccredited with ‘A’ grade (3rd cycle) by NAAC, the College has consistently been committed towards knowledge production by regularly organising seminars/conferences/workshops and engaged in publications.

About TICI

Headed by Dr. bodhi s.r. as the National Convener, the Tribal Intellectual Collective India (TICI) is a knowledge producing community constituted by academics from across the globe engaged in Tribal/Adivasi/indigenous people’s studies. It is a wholly self-sustaining collective and takes no funds from any agency nor individual. It has three key projects – video lectures, book and journal publication. TICI currently runs three academic journals which are double blind, open-access, peer reviewed engaging with multiple intersecting realities, with a definitive focus on tribes/Adivasi and Dalit episteme. These journals include *Journal of Tribal Intellectual Collective India*, *Indian Journal of Dalit and Tribal Studies and Action* and the *Indian Journal of Dalit and Tribal Social Work*.

Advisory Committee

1. Dr. R.M. Lyngdoh
   Principal, Synod College, Shillong.

2. Prof. Virginius Xaxa
   Former Professor,
   Delhi School of Economics, New Delhi
   and Former Deputy Director, Tata Institute of Social Science, Guwahati.

3. Shri. S. Jyrwa
   Vice Principal, Synod College, Shillong.

4. Dr. bodhi s.r.
   Assistant Professor
   Centre for Social Justice and Governance,
   School of Social Work - Mumbai Campus
   & National Convener, TICI.

5. Dr. M. Rani,
   Coordinator, Internal Quality Assurance Cell,
   Synod College, Shillong.
Organising Committee

1. **Convener:**
   Dr. Batskhem Myrboh, Assistant professor, Department of Political Science (UG), Synod College, Shillong and Academic Convener of Indigenous Political System, TICI.

2. **Organising Secretary:**
   Mr. Airpeace Well Rani, Assistant professor, Department of Political Science (UG), Synod College, Shillong.

3. **Members:**

   (i) Ms. Pynsukmon Myliemngap, Head
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   (v) Mr. Kerl'ihok Lyngdoh Buam
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   (vi) Ms. Careenia Kharylntiew
        Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Synod College, Shillong.