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CTD: 13PC - PEOPLES, CULTURES AND COMMUNITIES

SUB-DOMAIN: 2. CULTURE: RELIGION, KINSHIP, GENDER, UNDERSTANDING CULTURE IN ANCIENT TEXTS, SACRED COMPLEX, CULTURAL SYMBOLISM

PANEL TITLE:

UNDERSTANDING THE BIOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY OF NORTHEAST INDIA: TRADITION AND TRANSITION

CONVENOR: DR SOMENATH BHATTACHARJEE

ABSTRACT

Northeast India forms a distinctive transitional zone between the Indian, Indo-Malayan and Indo-Chinese bio-geographical realms. This region is the homeland of many ethnic groups who came from different geographies at varied periods. They are associated with various ethnic identities, and are polyglots speaking diverse languages, dialects. These multicultural and polyethnic communities have sustained traditional customs and practices. For centuries they had self-sufficient economies creating a multicultural constellation. It is in this context that Northeast India is used here as a term to denote the region not merely as a geographical entity, but also as a mega-cultural sphere. The main ethnic stalk of the region is the Mongoloid. Many of the tribal groups have their counterparts across neighbouring international boundaries. They now inhabit diverse habitats and ecological settings. Some scholars have argued that cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of region gives them a unique distinction of representing a 'living museum'. Resilience of these communities is witnessed in the continuation of traditional economic practices and sustenance of the indigenous knowledge systems. They continue to practise shifting cultivation. Bamboo plantation and its widespread usage has led to recent declaration of bamboo as a grass to facilitate its trade. This entire region also has diverse landscapes and biodiversity hotspots. It has unique physiographic landscapes characterised by hills, plateaus and flood plains and shares Himalayan and Indo-Burmese biodiversity hotspots. More than 60 percent of the geographical area is under forest cover, which plays a very crucial role in their traditional economic organization and religious belief system. The proposed panel is pursuing to document age old indigenous practises and impact of recent changes both from the emic and etic perspective as well as through synchronic and diachronic approaches, to conceptualize Northeast India in the contemporary period.

Keywords: Northeast India, Culture, Ethnicity, Biological diversity, Tradition

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