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GENDERED LANDSCAPES
COMMONALITIES, DIVERSITIES, AND GLOBAL FUTURES



GENDER-DOMAIN
NEWSLETTER

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VOL-2

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UIAF/WAC-23

GENDERED LANDSCAPES COMMONALITIES, DIVERSITIES, AND GLOBAL FUTURES

In preparation for WAC-2023 to be held at KISS from 9th-14th August, 2023

United Indian Anthropology Forum (UIAF)

organizes

GENDER DIALOGUE SERIES - II

on

GENDER & POLITICS: NARRATIVES FROM THE NORTHEAST OF INDIA

RESOURCE PERSONS



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Join us

Date & Time: 30th April, 2022 at 6:30 pm
Link: <https://meet.google.com/ggd-yjas-agk>

GENDER AND POLITICS: NARRATIVES FROM THE NORTH-EAST

Gender is acknowledged as a discriminated entity in political discourse from the beginning of civilizational history. Early efforts to reform modes of governance brought in Universal suffrage but for decades, it remained only universal manhood suffrage. Women had to struggle even to get the right to vote. It was only after the feminist movements gained momentum that gradually women started getting the right to vote in the 19th century. New Zealand was the first country to allow women to vote in the year 1893. United States claiming to be the World leader in granting liberal rights gave women the right to vote only in 1920.

India emerging out of the colonial rule in 1947 made universal suffrage a constitutional right in 1950 for every citizen of India. But having the right to vote did not ensure women's equal participation in all forms of political activity and decision making. In a report published by the UIN on 1st September 2021, it was brought to the fore that only 25 percentage of "all national parliamentarians" across the World are women. Given this evident lack of political representation, UIN Predicts that gender parity in national legislations may not be possible before 2063. As of now there are only four countries in the world having more than 50% women in their constituent assemblies.

Some of the names of these countries may surprise politically ignorant among us as these include Rwanda (61%); Cuba (53%); Bolivia (53%); United Arab Emirates (50%). India must walk many miles to achieve gender parity in political participation. Women's participation has marginally gone up in the 17th Lok Sabha to 78 which is dismal 14% only. Women's participation in state assemblies is ironically only 9%. Perception argues that higher human development Index will encourage women to play greater role in decision making bodies.

But statistical evaluation of empirical data shows that is not the case. Another alternative is to give women reservations in local bodies and political parties. In 1992, with the promulgation of article 73 and 74, women were given 33% reservation in elected local Panchayats. Some progressive states have taken this to 50%. There were teething issues in the beginning but gradually women's proactive participation in local bodies is becoming visible. Even after decades, we have failed to grant women reservations in state assemblies and in the Parliament. But what worries students of gender studies is absence of women in active politics from states with high literacy and active participation in economic activities.

Cultural practises and autonomous administrative councils have impacted near absence of women in electoral politics in particular for the states in the North-east. In the 2nd Gender dialogue on Gender and politics: Narratives from the North-East, scholars, academics and activist were invited to present insider's perspective on this anomaly under the stewardship of Prof. Anungla Aier, former Director of Higher Education, Govt. of Nagaland. These dialogues encourage cross-cultural communication and are a platform for generating awareness of human fundamental rights and need for addressing these adversities.

FROM EDITOR'S DESK:



PIC-I: WOMEN DISPLAYING SIGN OF HAVING VOTED

PIC- 2: PROTEST MARCH FOR REMOVAL OF AFSPA

PIC-3: WOMEN WAITING TO VOTE IN MEGHALAYA.

Hoping to make history in Nagaland are four women candidates.

In 14 Assembly elections the state has seen, a woman has never won. These four, all formidable candidates, are seeking to change that!

Written by

Sukrita Baruah | Dimapur, Kohima

Updated: February 19, 2023, 06:56 IST.



Hekani Jakhalu speaks with voters in Dimapur-III constituency. (NDPP)



Just 2 women MPs, no MLAs since 1963: Why women's representation in Nagaland continues to lag (The print, 30th March 2022).

Northeast India sends 3 women to Lok Sabha, one more than 2014.

Northeast India, comprising eight states, is sending three women to the Lok Sabha -- one more than the 2014 general election. (India Today, 25th May 2019)

Women as unwitting supporters of patriarchy

(Editor, Shillong Times, 26th April, 2022)

Referendum call by KHADC on voting Rights of Khasi Women

(Toki Blah, 18th April, 2022)

Election 2023: Is Nagaland ready to elect its first woman MLA?

While the state has never had a female member of the Legislative Assembly since its formation in 1963, this 14th election could be a year where we can witness history.

(East Mojo, 21st February 2023.)

Only 4 Women Among 183 Candidates

For 59 Seats In Nagaland Elections

In poll-bound Nagaland, where nearly half of registered voters (49.79 per cent) are women, only four out of 184 candidates in the fray this time are women

(WWW.deccanherald.com)



Women Contestants for the 2023 Nagaland Assembly
Elections

PROCEEDINGS OF THE 2ND WEBINAR

UIAF. CRD IO/WAC-23:
ANTHROPOLOGY OF GENDER AND WOMEN'S
STUDIES

2nd Dialogue of the Series held on
30th April 26, 2022, at 6.30pm.

THEME:
**GENDER AND POLITICS: NARRATIVES FROM THE
NORTHEAST INDIA**



CONCEPT NOTE

Politics is not just about power but about relationships among the members of any social institution. The focus on politics is seen as a process of continuous interaction engaging with a significant category of the members of the society. Though Politics in its basic philosophical sense is examined through the scrutiny of ideologies; with the prominence of feminism, gender relations have emerged as an extremely important aspect of this scrutiny and feminist debate is a crucial aspect towards the understanding of the play of power and politics that impacts not only individual lives but also determines the direction of societal growth and development. One of the most motivating and fundamental force in social life is the interpersonal power. The institutional politics that represents the contextual and behavioural manifestations of the interpersonal power frames, the most fundamental of political power relationships. Equal participation of women and men in politics is therefore an important condition for effective democracy and good governance. Apart from strengthening the democratic system, the participation of women in political decision making has many positive effects on society that can help improve the lives of men and women.

This Gender dialogue on Gender and politics: Narratives from the Northeast explores the corridors of power and politics through the lens of gender. The gender dialogue will focus on, but not necessarily restricted to explore gender-based restrictions for political participation in decision making. There are culture and gender stereotypes that enhance or inhibit women in politics. Focus here is on Feminist movement in the Northeast for gender equality in politics, emerging trends, and new developments in politics and gender.

Dialogue Co-Ordinator:



PROF. ANUNGLA AIER (RETD.)

DIRECTOR OF HIGHER EDUCATION
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Bio-note

Dr Anungla Aier - M.A, Ph.D. Anthropology, retired as the Director of Higher Education Govt of Nagaland; taught Anthropology in Kohima Science College (Autonomous P.G College) and served as the principal of the same college. She also worked as the first Director of Women Study Centre, Nagaland University. She has carried out extensive field research among the Nagas and has published two books on cultural studies and several research articles on women's lives in Naga society. She was conferred prestigious Dr. Panchanan Mitra award for 2019 given by the The Asiatic Society, Kolkatta. Her major research areas are Folklore, Customary Laws, and Gender studies

Bio-note

Chandana Sarma is Associate Professor in Anthropology, Cotton University, Assam. She completed her Masters from Gauhati University, did M.Phil from Delhi University and attained her PhD from Gauhati University. She started her teaching career in erstwhile Cotton College, which later became a university. She is teaching for almost 20 years in the same institution. Her areas of interest include Indigenous knowledge, fishing communities and caste studies. Four students have obtained PhD under her supervision. She has a dozen publications in both national and international journals to her credit. She has authored the book The Kaibartas on the fishing community of Assam.

Moderator



DR. CHANDANA SARMA

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RESOURCE PERSONS



DR. QUEENBALA MARAK

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Bio-note

DR. QUEENBALA MARAK is an anthropologist by training and experience and has worked extensively in Northeast Indian issues, specifically in the areas of prehistoric archaeology, cultural heritage, and food. She is a gold medallist in BA (with Honours in Anthropology) from Cotton College, where she was also the Best Graduate, and a gold medallist in MA in Anthropology from Gauhati University. She has received several academic awards as well as UGC-JRF, ICSSR Post-doctoral initiation award, and IIAS Associateship. She is a member of several advisory as well as governing bodies of several colleges. She is also member of several editorial boards of reputed journals, and reviewed papers for several journals. She has so far successfully guided 8 students on their doctoral theses.

Dr. Marak has 5 books to her credit, and over 60 research papers in peer-reviewed journals, as well as over 40 contributions to edited volumes. She has completed 7 research projects funded by National agencies, and at present, she is involved with an NEC-funded project on Verrier Elwin. She is currently serving as Professor in the Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

ABSTRACT

TITLE: WHO IS THE “NOKMA”? A DISCOURSE ON TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE GAROS

Amongst the matrilineal Garos, the nokma (headman/chieftain) controlled people’s behaviour, resource utilization and the general political and religious domains. They regulated behaviour by laying down norms, distributed land (for cultivation) and usage of other resources, tried cases of dispute, and played a ceremonial role in various rituals connected to the village. The village leader (i.e., the nokma) is usually seen to be a man; however, it is by virtue of his marriage to the inheritress that he “wields” power. This paper will shed light on the discourses surrounding the gendered question of leadership, how leadership is attained and maintained, who holds the decision-making power and finally the status that women hold in such a system.



A GARO WOMAN IMAGE

SOURCE - WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Bio-note

Linda Chhakchhuak is an independent journalist and public researcher, based in Shillong, Meghalaya. She did her MA in Social Anthropology, from North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. She hails from Mizoram but now works from Shillong. She is one of the Founders of Grassroots Options, a magazine on people, environment and development, published from Shillong since 1994. (GO is currently being restructured)

Worked and wrote at various points of time for several media houses, over the last 26 years starting from Northeast Post, Pateng Mynta (Khasi), Mawphor (Khasi), Senhri (Mizo), Meghalaya Guardian, The Northeast Times, The Telegraph, The Times of India, The Sentinel, The Assam Tribune, etc. as well as freelanced for several news agencies and other media organizations and written/write for several online news-sites.

Consultancy studies and works done for several organizations over the years including OXFAM, ICIMOD, Asian Institute of Technology, Human Rights Watch, Zurich University etc and for several organizations in the north eastern region.



MS. LINDA CHAKCHAUK

FREELANCE JOURNALIST
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ABSTRACT**TITLE -TRADITIONALISM ENTRENCHED IN 'MODERNITY'**

Women in the tribes of North east India have struggled over the past decades to overcome the highly restrictive traditions they were born into. There have been some successful movements such as in Mizoram where collectives of women succeeded in gaining some rights of inheritance for women among other gains. In Nagaland it has taken a Supreme Court ruling to give women their right to participate in the local municipal councils. In other states like matrilineal Meghalaya women are challenged by the move to strip them of their age-old matrilineal lineage rights.





DR. TOPI BASAR

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Bio-note

Dr. Topi Basar (HoD), Associate Professor, Department of Law, Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh, received her Ph.D. from Delhi University in 2011 and also completed her graduation and postgraduation from Delhi University. Her professional career also started from the Department of Laws, Delhi University in 2005 as Assistant Lecturer and served there till the end of April 2015. She then moved to Rajiv Gandhi National University and is serving there currently as Associate Professor. She was the first person to receive degrees of LL.M and Ph.D. in Law from Arunachal Pradesh. In 2020, she was given Pushpangadan Access and benefit sharing award field of IPR, biological diversity and tribal welfare.

She was Nominated Observer / Representative of Indigenous local Communities (TK issues) of Arunachal Pradesh by the former Hon'ble Chief Minister Dorjee Khandu. She has vast administrative experience and has served on several regional and national committees.

ABSTRACT**TITLE – STATUS OF WOMEN IN POLITICS IN NORTHEAST INDIA**

The states of North East India have always experienced some or the other kinds of discrimination as compared to the rest of India. The women of North East India play a crucial role in various domains of life, from being in the workforce, to land cultivators and producers, house makers, running small scale businesses, and so on. Still the respect, autonomy, freedom, and value of women are a grey area and very questionable. Government Policies and shift in patriarchal trends give some hope for a better future of women of North East. Is it adequate? The presentation aims to explore the status of women in North East India. Argument exclusion of women from political power is a big hindrance to women's empowerment.

Bio-note

P.hD from Delhi University In Prehistoric archaeology. Serving as Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Nagaland University. Current research: Influence of culture on economy, etymology of Ao Naga language.



DR. TIASUNEP

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DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY, NAGALAND
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ABSTRACT

TITLE - ROOTED IN CULTURE: REFLECTION ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NAGALAND.

The common opinion of the people of Nagaland is that women's participation in matters related to politics is minuscule. In line with the opinion is the statistics of male: female (100%: 0%) distribution in Nagaland's Members of Legislative Assembly. It is argued that three elements i.e., Circle of identity, Village polity and the role of Government in Nagaland explain the why of such disparity in representation.



DR. VALERIE DKHAR

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Bio-note

Dr. Valerie Dkhar, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology, Pondicherry University. She is a cultural anthropologist specializing in ecological anthropology with a Ph.D. from North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, India. With over 15 years of teaching and research experience, she has several publications to her credentials and is a member of various professional bodies. She has participated and presented papers in many conferences and seminars. Her research interest lies in understanding the dynamics between culture, ecology, and economics, natural resource management, sacred natural sites, and traditional ecological knowledge.

ABSTRACT

TITLE - GENDER, MATRILINY AND TRADITIONAL KHASI POLITY: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

The Khasi society, renowned for its matriline, is perhaps in the cusp of change. Age-old traditions are being questioned and contested on grounds of gender equity. Oddly enough, especially in the context of a society that inherently traces its lineage and inheritance from the matriline, women have no active role or participation in traditional polity. And therefore, today they are questioning the very pillars that have shouldered the society for centuries. This is evident from the latest debates and on-going discussions on the absence of women's voices in the 'durbar', the sacrosanct village council of the khasis. This paper explores the traditional khasi polity and the question of women's representation therein.

ABSTRACT

TITLE - ROOTED IN CULTURE: REFLECTION ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN NAGALAND.

The common opinion of the people of Nagaland is that women's participation in matters related to politics is minuscule. In line with the opinion is the statistics of male: female (100%: 0%) distribution in Nagaland's Members of Legislative Assembly. It is argued that three elements i.e., Circle of identity, Village polity and the role of Government in Nagaland explain the why of such disparity in representation.

ABSTRACT

TITLE - ROLE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS AND ECONOMY: NARRATIVES FROM KARBI ANGLONG, ASSAM

This presentation is part of an ongoing PhD research titled Indigenous Narratives on Land, Autonomy, and Development from Karbi Anglong, Assam. It will focus on field narratives on the role of Karbi women in subsistence economy and impact of development on gendered occupational relationships in the region i.e., shifts in traditional roles to new emerging workplaces.

It will also focus on the various ways in which a Karbi woman or sangpi is either involved in or excluded from decision-making processes within the household, and community pertaining livelihood activities, sharing of responsibilities, aspirations for land ownership, development, political involvement, and everyday lives. This is an empirical, qualitative, exploratory open-ended presentation which examines the factors affecting gendered sharing of power in household, community, and polity by documenting qualitative narratives from women across six administrative (development blocks) of West and East Karbi Anglong in 2017, 2020, 2021, 2022 wherein they recount their experiences.



JASODHRA BORTHAKUR

RESEARCH FELLOW
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REFLECTIONS**PROF. SHALINA MEHTA
CHAIR- GENDER DOMAIN**

Agency of women in the political arena demands a cogent and comprehensive understanding of factors that have restrained upfront recognition of women's contributions to processes of political negotiations.

In this dialogue, we attempt to evolve a perspective on effective role that agency of women has played and the space that is culturally denied to them in a politically, socially, and highly diverse and complex region of the Northeast India. There is a large body of evidence to suggest that agency of women in all the northeast states has shown immense capability for manoeuvring political negotiations. But these efforts have not been well documented except for Manipur. Significant contributions made by women's agency in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya are rarely acknowledged or debated in the mainstream media.

Historic role-played by women's organizations of the Northeast in the fight against the colonial rule from 1891 to 1947 and women's war against colonial repression and exploitation in 1904 and 1938 in Manipur are part of the national history. Similarly, agency of women represented by Rano M. Shazia founder of NMA (national mothers association) in the 1960's in Nagaland, is representative of the momentous role played by a woman activist from the state in bringing about Naga Peace accord.

Agency of women in the political arena demands a cogent and comprehensive understanding of factors that have restrained upfront recognition of women's contributions to processes of political negotiations. In this dialogue, we attempt to evolve a perspective on effective role that agency of women has played and the space that is culturally denied to them in a politically, socially, and highly diverse and complex region of the Northeast India. There is a large body of evidence to suggest that agency of women in all the northeast states has shown immense capability for manoeuvring political negotiations. But these efforts have not been well documented except for Manipur.

**RANO M. SHAZIA**

(PHOTOGRAPH CREDIT WIKIPEDIA)

Significant contributions made by women's agency in Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya are rarely acknowledged or debated in the mainstream media. Historic role-played by women's organizations of the Northeast in the fight against the colonial rule from 1891 to 1947 and women's war against colonial repression and exploitation in 1904 and 1938 in Manipur are part of the national history. Similarly, agency of women represented by Rano M. Shazia founder of NMA (national mothers association) in the 1960's in Nagaland, is representative of the momentous role played by a woman activist from the state in bringing about Naga Peace accord.

**IROM SHARMILA**

She remained on fast for the removal of AFSPA for nearly sixteen years. But the day she broke her fast, and decided to have a family and contest elections, she faded from public memory. If I recall, not only that she lost the elections, but also lost her security deposit. The state keeps assuring about the removal of AFSPA from the Northeast, but no one mentioned a word about the woman who spearheaded this campaign.

There are sporadic references to women's engagement in politics from other states of the Northeast, but I am yet to trace any extensive study that presents a comprehensive account of the role played by women's agency in postcolonial northeast India.

However, tumult history of political unrest in northeast India after independence and attention that women's participation brought to it has received some attention.

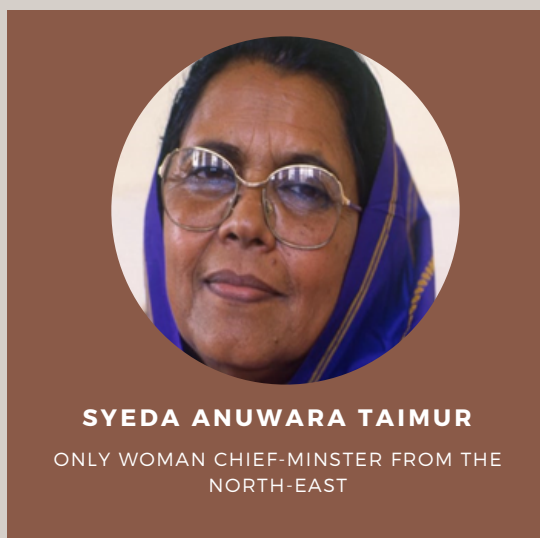
A quick glance at the political landscape suggests that equality in gender representation in this region has remained a far cry. This is indeed surprising as both gender and literacy ratio in some of these states is either at par or even better than men. Meghalaya has more women than men, but it was only in 2008, Agatha Sangma became the first woman member of the Lok Sabha. In 2013, Wansuk Syiem was the first woman from the state to become a member of the Rajya Sabha. There are now three women ministers out of five elected women members in a 60-member current assembly.

In 2016, there were only 28 women legislatures out of a total of 518 legislatures from eight north-eastern states and there are only two women representatives out of 25 from the region in the present Lok Sabha and only three in the current Rajya Sabha (The wire.in accessed on 21.03.18).

In 2016, there were only 28 women legislatures out of a total of 518 legislatures from eight north-eastern states and there are only two women representatives out of 25 from the region in the present Lok Sabha and only three in the current Rajya Sabha (The wire.in accessed on 21.03.18).

Results from three assembly elections held in February 2018 from the region are also not encouraging. Five women contested in 2018 assembly elections from Nagaland, and they all lost. These results continue to paint a stark picture of women's marginalization in the electoral politics in the northeast. Well documented statistical report on the website scroll.in documents women's desire to become active participants in electoral processes but are visibly constrained.

Assam remains the only state in the region that ever had a woman Chief minister Syeda Anuwara Taimur way back in 1980.

**SYEDA ANUWARA TAIMUR**

ONLY WOMAN CHIEF-MINSTER FROM THE
NORTH-EAST

On my last visit to Meghalaya on (25th February 2018), I heard local women academics and activists debating vociferously that this time they may have a woman Chief minister but after the results were declared, long time politician Agatha Sangma of the NPPP was elected MLA from the matrilineal state of Meghalaya but her brother Conard Sangma was made the chief Minister. Complexities of legislations, customary laws of different communities in various states add to the intricacies of comprehending political agency of the women in the region. It is this diabolical state of affair that was discussed by various participants in the 2nd webinar.

WEBINAR SUMMARY

COMPILED BY THE MODERATOR
DR. CHANDANA SAMRA

State of alienation of women in the politics of the Northeast is striking. Discussants participating in the 2nd Gender dialogue endorsed these observations. Topi Basar (Professor of Law) from Arunachal Pradesh argued, "Northeast could boast of treating women better than other states. They play a key role in every aspect of society in economy in culture and as activist but are not visible in the arena of politics".

Linda, Journalist, activist anthropologist, in her comments discussed how women in Mizoram started talking about their sufferings after Christianity came to the state. She highlighted: "In 1946, women formed an organization that could change customary laws and in 2014 succeeded in bringing women's inheritance and divorce law. They also managed to get 33% reservation for women in local bodies, but women were made to contest from constituencies against other women defeating the purpose of the reform. Women in the northeast are not willing to face the challenge of being in the politics because of lack of capital".

Dr. Tiasunep, from Nagaland focused on absence of women members in the state legislature. He regretted that there is not a single woman in the Nagaland State assembly. Complex linkage between village and identity that is heavily invested in winning every electoral battle would not allow women to participate in the decision-making process for selecting a candidate to contest. People who have moved out of their villages for professional commitments would return to the villages to participate in deciding the candidates but women living in the villages are not allowed to participate in these meetings. Everyone knows about women's alienation, but no one is willing to talk about it.

Professor Queenbala in a fascinating study of traditional institution of Nokma that hypothetically grants power to a woman in a traditional Garo matrilineal social set up is Gender neutral. Traditional meaning of Nokma is house and epistemologically speaking it belongs to a woman, but the power remains with the man. Cultural presence of these ambiguities facilitates marginalization of women in contemporary politics.

Dr. Valerie Dkhar also discussed cultural marginalization of women in matrilineal traditional Khasi polity. She elaborated how absence of women's voices from Khasi Darbar are being contested today. Political domain remains exclusive to men. Chief is king and even in the Harvest festival, Chief's sister's role is only advisory. Autonomous Village council (Darbar) is vested with all the powers. It has freedom to solve cases according to customary practices. But women are banned from attending any Darbar. Women's opinion is taken by men and is taken as the decision of the matriline.

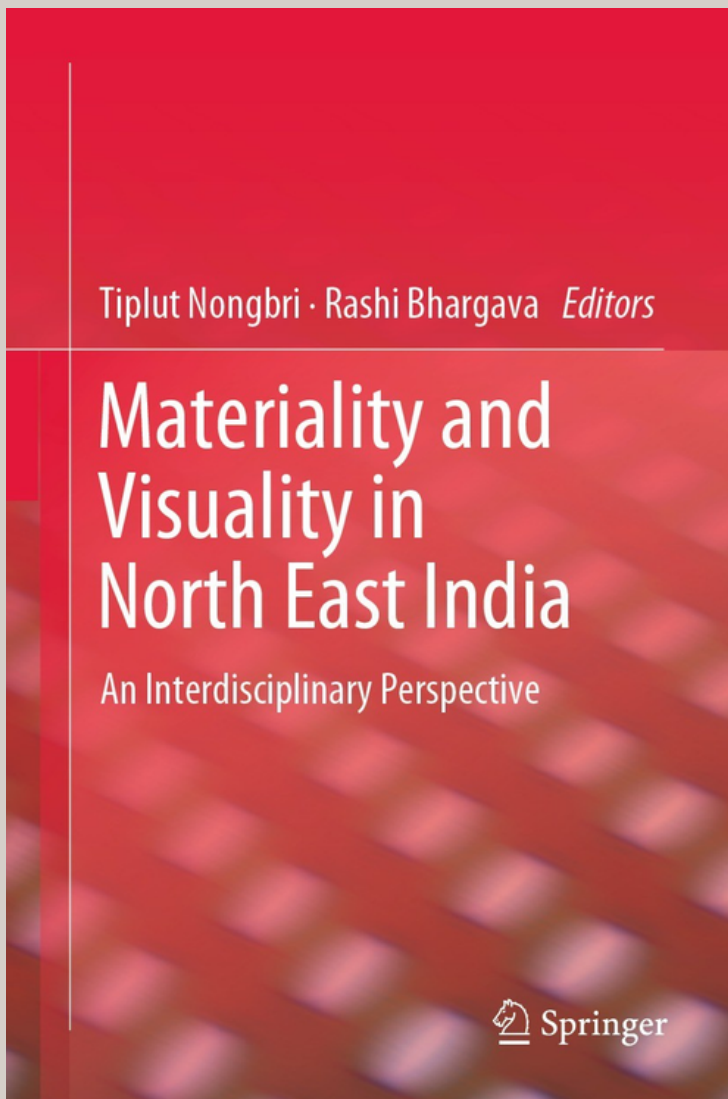
In the last presentation research fellow **Yashodhra** also talked about relative invisibility of women in active politics in a state that had a woman Chief-Minister in the past. She cited narratives from her research study among the Karbi Anglong-indigenous community residing in Assam. Some of her woman study participants were active in politics earlier but had to give it up because of primary responsibility of family and involvement with agricultural activity.

Dr. Anungula Aier, Co-Ordinator and spirit behind organising this 2nd dialogue on Gender and Politics: Narratives from the North-east in her concept note and statement aptly summarised the problematic to be power and social relations among members of any institution. She asserted importance of “Equal participation of women and men in politics as an important condition for effective democracy and good governance. Apart from strengthening the democratic system, the participation of women in political decision making has many positive effects on society that can help improve the lives of men and women”. Through this dialogue we attempt to “explore the corridors of power and politics through the lens of gender. The gender dialogue will focus on, but not necessarily restricted to explore gender-based restrictions for political participation in decision making. There are culture and gender stereotypes that enhance or inhibit women in politics. **Focus here is on Feminist movement in the Northeast for gender equality in politics, emerging trends, and new developments in politics and gender.**”

Prof. Aier’s vision in hosting this dialogue familiarised us with subtle though slow transformations that are impacting political landscape of the North-east. We understand that cultural embargoes are major deterrents to women’s participation. High levels of literacy and equity in gender ratio has not empowered women to have substantive political representation in electoral politics. Reservations and legislations have also not been able to give desired momentum. The only effective instrumentality is strengthening of women’s agency and to ensure better political and social support to break rooted hegemonies.



BOOKS OF THE MONTH



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Brulé Rachel. Women, Power and Property-The paradox of Gender Equality Laws in India

Bora, P. 2017. Assam and Politics of Nationality: Durable Disorder: Understanding Northeast.