

**INDIAN COUNCIL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
(ICSSR)**

Sponsored Seminar

On the Occasion of 22nd Conference of NEIPSA

Concept Note:

Theme:

“Ethnic Homelands, Emerging Middle Class and Demand for Separate States in Northeast India”

Ethnic homelands have set a new trend of politics in Northeast India which is increasingly marked by obsession, exclusion and intolerance. Autonomous Councils granted under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was envisaged to guarantee the preservation and promotion of unique social and cultural resources of the tribal ethnic communities, primarily of the hill tribes in the region, which however was extended to the Bodos too- the largest plain tribes in the region in 2003. The experimentation of the ethnic autonomous councils has had different implications- both positive and negative. First of all, the autonomy granted to these tribes has uplifted the political status of the respective tribes, provided avenues of self-representation and limited power to determine the development process. However, the most important implication has been the emergence of a middle class -- the educated political elites within those communities who have developed the skill of political articulation, competition and maneuvering. A set of bureaucracy, contractors and a pretty business class has also emerged from within these communities. With the flow of funds both from the Union and State governments, the tribal economy- which was more of self-subsistence and communitarian in nature has undergone changes. Dynamics of the state have penetrated into the tribal domains inviting distortion of the much talked about egalitarian and communitarian ethos of those communities. This important dimension of politics of ethnic homelands is yet to receive comprehensive focus.

Demand for separate statehood in the region has primarily emerged from this historical and political context. The issue has generated enormous political debates and conflicts. The ethnic homelands have been marked by competitions and conflicts due to representational deficit. The homelands either under the sixth schedule or outside have been granted primarily to the dominant ethnic community but the territory granted is inhabited by other communities too. The representation to the councils are given in such a manner that the numerical majority does not get due opportunity of representation. It has created gross discontent resulting in ethnic clashes in different forms.

It is in this context that the whole issue of ethnic homelands and the demand for separate statehood needs serious and comprehensive academic debates. The policy makers need to be interrogated and intervened by such discourses and debates. Whereas in Northeast India the ethnic homelands were perceived as a milestone towards democratization the recent clashes have put question marks with regard to the ability of these homelands to promote democracy.

It is expected that the proposed conference would take these issues for debate and would come up with suggestions and recommendations that might help the policy makers to develop a new approach both to the existing homelands and separate statehood to ensure the democratic representations and fulfillment of rights across communities.

Sub Themes

1. Framework of Ethnic Homelands: Issue of rights and representation across communities
2. Sixth Schedule: A Solution or a Problem in itself?
3. The Ethno-Tribal Middle Class in Northeast India: Understanding the Changing Pattern of Political Competition
4. Demand for Separate States in Northeast India: Issues of sustainability, representation and governance