

Report

The Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research (CNESPR), Jamia Millia Islamia, in collaboration with ICSSR, successfully organized a two-day National Seminar on "Re-imagining Indigenous Knowledge in North East India" on March 5-6, 2025. The inaugural session of the seminar was chaired by Prof. Mazhar Asif, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Jamia Millia Islamia, who emphasized the importance of 'mother-tongue' in preserving the Indigenous Knowledge in an age of rapid modernisation. His profound scholarship in the NE region along with his prominent translations to languages of the North East such as Manipuri and Assamese is an asset in itself.

In her welcome address, Prof. Manisha Tripathy Pandey, Hony. Director of CNESPR & Convener of the seminar highlighted the growing relevance of indigenous knowledge in tackling contemporary global challenges. She spoke about the ways IKS have been a bedrock and lifeworld to the indigenous communities of the Northeast and to preserve and promote it is essential for maintaining biodiversity, cultural diversity and sustainable development in the region.

Special guest Prof. Mohd Muslim Khan, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at JMI, spoke about the growing disassociation of the younger generation with the knowledge of elders and ancestors and the relevance of the theme.

The distinguished keynote speaker, Prof. Bhagat Oinam was then introduced to the gathering. Prof. Oinam critiqued the Western approach to studying indigenous cultures, particularly in Northeast India. He emphasized that "Indigenous" should encompass anything non-Western or non-modern, challenging conventional academic categorizations. Using examples from the region, he demonstrated how indigenous knowledge systems could provide alternative frameworks for understanding society and culture. He cautioned against viewing Northeast India as a "tabula rasa" before British arrival, noting that British colonialism obscured tribal values like community and tolerance. Finally, he advocated for a hermeneutic approach to studying indigenous knowledge, emphasizing personal interpretation, and avoiding rigid Western

frameworks in favor of understanding indigenous cultures on their own terms. Dr. K. Kokho, Assistant Professor & Co-convenor of the seminar proposed the Vote of Thanks.

The seminar featured six academic sessions over two days. The first day included sessions on "Perspective on Indigenous Knowledge System" chaired by Prof. M. Amarjeet Singh, "Indigenous Social and Governance Systems" chaired by Prof. Komol Singha, and "Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Gender" chaired by Dr. Gomati Bodra Hembrom.

The first day of the seminar concluded with an '*Iftar*' party hosted by CNESPR at the Nehru Guest House, marking the celebration of the Holy month of Ramzan. The informal gathering also provided an opportunity for participants to network and discuss their research.

The second day featured sessions on "Environmental Conservation and Justice" chaired by Prof. Shafique Ahmad, "Indigenous Ecological Practices" chaired by Prof. Archana Dassi, and "Health and Healing" chaired by Dr. Nemthianngai Guite. The esteemed presenters highlighted the need for recognizing indigenous knowledge as a valid epistemological framework with important implications for contemporary challenges.

The seminar was illuminating and insightful with diverse opinions and ideas that promised cerebral enrichment to the audience. The seminar successfully concluded with the valedictory session chaired by Prof. Md Mahtab Alam Rizvi, Registrar, JMI, and a valedictory address by Prof. Vimal Khawas from JNU's Special Centre for the Study of North East India. Prof. Rizvi talked about the significance of local language and the importance of understanding ancient thoughts and traditions with modernism in relational terms. Prof. Khawas in his valedictory address recognised the complexity of the theme and focuses on the significance of problematising the concept of "indigenous". He emphasised on the Sendai Framework and shed light on the persisting literary gap in the domain of indigenous knowledge with regard to disaster risk reduction in North East India.

Prof. Manisha T. Pandey put forth the concluding remarks and emphasised that scholars must be careful to not to exoticize or eulogize these systems uncritically. Prof. Pandey drawing from Prof. Bhagat Oinam, emphasized on recovery and documentation of oral traditions. She expressed her gratitude to ICSSR and all faculty members, Prof. M. Amarjeet Singh, Dr. Kokho

and Shilpi Phukan, the scholars and office staff for making the event a success. The seminar helped foster meaningful dialogue on the importance of preserving, re-imagining and recovery of the indigenous knowledge systems in India.







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Lat 28.558278 Long 77.282223

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