

Interdisciplinary National Conference on *Materiality and Visuality in North East India*

Concept Note

In the 1980s, it was established that material things shape the social world as much as it is shaped by it, thereby giving us a theory on materiality. The study of material culture is not new in the discipline of anthropology since major ethnographic works beginning from the mid-19th century focused on the object world of the societies under study. However, most of these studies looked at artifacts, commodities, aesthetic forms, etc., as mere appendage to the studies on social organisation, order and conflict within the societies under study. The debates/discussions on material culture in the 1970s and 1980s, led to the idea that instead of considering objects as mere representation(s), one should consider them as a complex of diverse meanings, social relations and power dynamics, in other words, as active agent in creating perceptions, bodily practices, discourses and perceptions of our social world (for instance, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1961; Bourdieu, 1977). A similar twist can be seen in the 'visual turn' in the 1980s, whereby it was established that the visual is constitutive of the social world and not merely illustrative or reflective of it and visual images are extremely powerful in transforming the world it inhabits or it comes to circulate in. Thus, the idea of visuality described as the "regimes of seeing and being seen" (Ramaswamy, 2003: xiv) or "the power to see and the power to make visible is the power to control" (Levin, 1993) incorporates history, culture and politics bringing into play the role of apparatus, institutions, discourses, bodies, and figurality.

Set against the background of these new ways of understanding the material and the visual, the conference on *Materiality and Visuality in North East India* focuses on an integrated approach towards the issues of symbols, meanings, representations, social implications of materiality and visuality and the dynamics between power, social reproduction, ideological dominance and knowledge production. It seeks to answer the question why some things matter more than the others, or what happens when certain things are made more visible than the others. Material culture of the communities in the North East of India has been the subject matter of many studies in the fields of history, anthropology, geography, ethnology, ethnography, museology, culture studies, etc. starting from the colonial to the post-colonial period. Most of these narratives have been textually represented, with few focusing on visuality as a conceptual tool or visual representations, as vital in understanding the production of knowledge about the communities by self, as well as, the others. Consequently, there is much to interrogate about the contemporary materiality and visuality in Northeast India, highlighting the dialogic relationship between colonial textual and visual representations and contemporary understandings including the ones that demonstrate local agency tracing the continuities and discontinuities in the understanding of themselves and the world they live in. In the light of this, the

conference aims to emphasise both the cognitive dimensions and the affective and stylistic ones of materiality and visuality.

The conference seeks to bring to the fore questions like, can one talk about the agency of the material and that of the visual as active agents in producing knowledge, social relations, practices and ideologies? If so, how does this agency manifest itself in the context of Northeast India? Do material objects, and visual images perform a pedagogic task of training our eyes to see in particular ways, produce specific forms of knowledge and create a complex of knowledge, ideology, perception and practice? Can there be an inter visual/intraocular as well as an inter-material field? Can materiality and visuality help us approach the question of politics of representation? Has globalisation and liberalisation, created a (new?) site where material objects, materiality, visual images, visuality and the market are in a dialogical relationship revealing an embodied and the discursive framework in which these operate? How the application of visual theory and analysis to the understandings of materiality are altered, interpretation reworked and its representation (re)constructed.

This two-day interdisciplinary national conference seeks to explore some of these issues and concerns, with special focus on North East India and its neighboring areas. Papers are invited on any of the following themes, though related ones are also welcome:

- Theories and methodologies in materiality and visuality
- Materiality and visuality in colonial and post-colonial era
- Materiality and visuality in liberal and Neo-liberal era
- Materiality, visuality and everyday life
- Materiality, visuality, multimedia and technology
- Religion and religious practices
- Myths, memories, narratives and histories
- Genealogies and geographies
- Power, domination, resistance and violence
- Self and the other
- Politics and geo-politics
- Gender and gender dynamics
- Ethnic identity and conflict
- Ecology and community
- Commodities, commodification and fetishism
- Exchange, trade and market

Date: 28 Feb-1 March 2019

Venue: Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi-110025

Last date for submission of Abstract: 30 October 2018

Last date for submission of full paper: 30 December 2018

Papers/Abstract can be sent via email to cnespr.conference@gmail.com

In case of any query, following persons can be contacted via e-mail.

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