

**Many Patriarchies, Many Positionalities: Re-interrogating Gender in Narratives from North-East
India**

**National Conference by the Department of English, Shivaji College
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It is still not passé to regard women from North-East India as *empowered* (inadvertently in comparison to women from the rest of India). The idea of a more abled and liberated womanhood in the North-East is rooted in the cultural imagination of the people not only outside this region but also within it. If hackneyed images of a more sexually-liberated, free, and *modern* women from North-East India still (mis)guide the perception of a large section of the more *conservative* men and women from other parts of India, the deep-seated myth of an undaunted womanhood forms the paradigm for many women in this part of the country.

This being said, increasing interests in gender studies in India at large have provided insights into the position of women and gender relations in North-East India. Scholars from within this region as well as outside have engaged with the positionality-specific issues confronting women in this region. This conference aims to take forward, re-engage, and re-interrogate issues that have been central to the discourse on gender studies specific to this region. We invite papers that unsettle, challenge, and dispel accepted and established knowledge production of gender among the many communities of India's North-East.

Even as the nomenclature "North-East" invites criticism of being homogenising, we repeatedly use this term as a matter of convenience to refer to the states that are nestled in the far east of the country. Beneath this umbrella term are the regions with their specificities that betray any illusion of oneness. Even as differences and particularities mark not only each state to be distinctive in its own right, these marks of distinctiveness also characterise the diverse communities within each state. Each state is home to multiple communities with multiple languages and customs. These communities are divided along the lines of ethnicity, religion, region, caste, and class. Further still, the politics of location, education, family status, and

bloodlines multiply the differential realities in the North-East. These specificities and particularities then occasion many positionalities for women. From this perspective, a study of either the nomenclature “North-East” or the category “women” cannot be complete without bringing into purview the many subject-positions of women in this region.

Interestingly, what captures the attention of the national media and the popular imagination is what is apparently representative of women-power in the public space. Be it the Meira Paibi or the Naga Mothers Association, and be it Irom Sharmila or Mary Kom, accounts of exemplary struggles and resistance fan the flame of the icon of perseverant (and indomitable) women of the North-East. What also add to the myth of the *empowered* women of the North-East are the tradition of matriliney in Meghalaya, the prominence of women in socio-political activism and in economic production in Manipur and Nagaland, and elsewhere in this region. However, one matrilineal community does not make the entire North-East women rich and powerful; one Meira Paibi does not make all women activists; or, one Ima Market does not make them economically empowered in any sense!

But undermining the much-celebrated status of womanhood in the North-East are the disparate struggles of women ensnared in the web of gender, caste, class, tribe, regionalism, religion, and so on. These individual and therefore *unimportant* lives of struggle and resistance form the more dominant and yet unaccounted realities of women in many communities in the North-East India. What is therefore called forth is a nuanced study of these many positionalities that determine the lives of women in this part of the country. For, located within the interstices of these positionalities are the hierarchies that are fundamentally patriarchal in nature. We aim to bring together papers that explore the patriarchies that are implicit in myriad power dynamics hence subjecting women to shifting positions within various social relations. We are particularly interested in proposals that bring forth a critique of existing literary and other cultural narratives, be it in oral, written, performative, or even material forms. We invite papers that probe creative expressions of the conflicting realities in communities that apparently uphold the supremacy of women and yet undermine the status of women. Papers that examine the masculinities in matrilineal communities and in other traditional communities will also complement the nature of discourse this platform seeks to bring together.

As one attempts to write a concept note, locating women within the ambit of gender

studies, trying to funnel their diverse experiences, we are further confronted by their positionalities, one intersecting the other. At this point, we can only suggest a few areas within which specific questions can be raised and examined.

Papers are therefore invited on the following areas:

- Gender, economy, and cultural productions
- Gender, religion, and narrativity
- Gender, politics of space/location, and narrativity
- Gender, class/caste, and cultural productions
- Gender and masculinities.
- Gender and folklore
- Gender, history, and narrativity
- Gender and theatre/cinema

An abstract of 500 words is to be submitted latest by 16 October 2016. Confirmation of acceptance will be notified within 10 days from the last date of submission. The full-length paper is to be submitted by 31 December 2016. The word limit for the full-length paper is 5000 words, and the time limit allotted to each presenter will be 15 mins. Presenters may refer to the latest edition of MLA for referencing.

All correspondence regarding abstract and full-length paper are to be addressed to englishconference.shivaji@gmail.com