



A. B. N. Seal College
Cooch Behar, West Bengal - 73101
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
With financial assistance from ICSSR

Brief Concept Note of International Conference

Working Title:

Negotiations between the 'Local' and the 'Global' in 'Cultural Bengal': Community, Society and Politics

Tentative Dates:

13-14 February, 2019

Concept Note:

Since the emergence of postcolonial discourse, the ideas of 'space', 'territory', 'habitus' or 'cultural landscape' have been facing myriad paradigm-shifts, which found a new turn after the recognition of globalisation as a determining factor in the critical understanding of society, politics and culture. However, within the neoliberal economy, which continuously and expediently obscures the relationship of commodity with culture, community with identity, popular with the traditional, power with the structure, ownership with the corporation and the nature with the beings; the notions of 'global' and 'local' have become intertwined and often problematic. If one tries to understand the relationship between 'global' and 'local' with the concept of whole and part, as was done by George Modelski, we would observe severe shortcomings in the praxis. On the other hand, for Anthony Giddens 'global' systematically resurfaces within the 'local' in consonance with the political-economical mechanisms of the state/nation. Also a quasi-Marxist understanding would delineate this understanding within the questions of class and modalities of economic production, which would essentialise the relationship between 'local' and 'global' as a hegemonic one. Hence it is better to proceed with no theoretical affinity associating the notions of the 'local' and the 'global'. For us¹, 'global' and 'local' are more than just territories with spatiotemporal specifications. We can conceive 'local' as a sociocultural space that can dynamically evolve and emerge within a given geopolitical area, but is also imbued with a historical sense of belonging. We conceive 'Cultural Bengal' as one such space, which is continuously renegotiating with the 'global' or the broader matrix of (post)-human society that is in direct consonance with the neoliberal political market-economy and its ideological paraphernalia.

The critical understanding of history has shown us that the structures are failing the people. The nuanced enforcing of state apparatuses to manufacture a docile homogeneity within the 'imagined nation' has also depredated them. Similarly, vehement stigmatisation of the 'other' in both political and social sphere has culminated in rapid marginalisation, leaving certain communities vulnerable and certain identities fragile. Manufacturing of truth and consent, production of knowledge through power and thus marketing that knowledge commodity, the postmodern 'incredulity towards meta-narratives' and the emergence of a post-truth politics: all of these have been effective in incessantly renegotiating the economic, social and political relations between the global and the local. At this juncture, we are trying to understand how such factors have redefined our epistemic

¹ In this write-up, 'us' or 'we' has been used to denote the primary perspectives of the International Conference Organising Sub-Committee or simply, the 'house'. We believe our perspectives are certainly going to alter after the conference.

and pragmatic, in general perceptual quest towards Cultural Bengal, which is more than a geopolitical territory. To that end, the conference will be essentially multidisciplinary, incorporating social and political sciences, humanities, arts and contemporary systems of critical social thought.

Research Questions:

1. How the local and global traits of knowledge are negotiating in the study of social science? Is there a hegemonic relationship evident, or is it a complementary one? What is the role of power in this dynamics of knowledge?
2. In this neo-liberal economy, how are the notions of identity, community and society are being redefined, and broadly politicized? How are the issues of growth, development and sustainably are changing their significance from the regional to national to global level?
3. What is nature of the representation of the society, culture and politics of 'Cultural Bengal' in the oeuvre of South Asian Studies in Social Science and Humanities? Can the 'Cultural Bengal' really speak?
4. To find out new dimensions of social science research in Cultural Bengal, to find out unaddressed aspects of Religion, Language, Society and Environment visible in the periphery.

Possible Contribution of the Seminar Outcome to the Existing Body of Social Science Research:

The initial objective of the seminar is to understand the relationship between the 'Global' and the 'Local' in the contemporary social science research focused on cultural Bengal. Being a multidisciplinary conference, we shall have a chance to explore the topic through different methodological approaches and manifold theoretical frameworks.

Being situated in the North Eastern corner of Bengal, as well as near the border of Bangladesh, we observe a diverse settlement of communities, assaying to survive within the political economy of the structural destruction of indigenous niches and different aspects of diasporic identity formation along with 'reterritorialisation'. The conflict between the autochthonous and the popular needs to be understood in a broader context. It is evident that the true spirit of contemporary South-Asian studies lies at the 'fringe', away from the capital/mega cities (e.g., Kolkata or Dhaka), which function as the pre-established epicentre of academic matrix. It is essential that a discursive dynamics of ideas should start flowing between the 'global' and 'local' / 'central' and 'marginal' of the academia.

The conference would also provide a platform to social scientists and anthropologists working on North Eastern India to present their unique findings within this diverse social landscape. For example, we shall have a special plenary session to be presented by Australian Anthropologist and Linguistic Toby Anderson and an indigenous researcher Dhaniram Toto, belonging to an almost extinct Himalayan tribal community, who has been researching over the *Toto* language, which does not have an official script yet. They have developed a script of the language with very unique signs having intricate connotations to the society and culture of the *Totos*. Similarly our plenary speaker Prof. Makoto Kitada has been doing researches on the musical patterns of *Newāri* Buddhist Hymns still prevalent in some parts of North Eastern Bengal and Nepal. In a nutshell, the conference would propose newer dimensions of social science research based in Cultural Bengal.

Plan of Publications:

The selected proceedings of the conference will be published in two books by reputed international publishers, one in Bengali and the other in English. The books would positively contribute to the current social science discourses, inciting new debates and advocating new possibilities in the academic discourse.

Sub-Themes (Not limited to):

1. Religion and Religiosity in Cultural Bengal: Understandings beyond Structuraility.
2. Languages and Language politics of Cultural Bengal: Identity and Sociocultural Habitus.
3. Media, Culture and Society in the age of Bricollage.
4. Literature in Cultural Bengal and Literature of Cultural Bengal: Genealogy, Dynamics and Politics.
5. Understanding Gender and Sexuality in Cultural Bengal and Beyond: Conflicts and Emergence.
6. Migration and Diaspora Studies: Sociopolitical and Economic Analysis.
7. Social-Environmental Concerns: Growth and Sustainability, Tradition and Trends.
8. Local and Regional Development and Geopolitics: Current Events and Future Projections.
9. Decolonising the History of Bengal Delta: Genealogy, Episteme, Doxa and other Fragments of Knowledge.
10. Understanding Cultural Bengal from Critical Theories and Social Thoughts.

Language of the Conference:

English and Bengali

Submission of Abstract:

Deadline: 1st October, 2018. IST.

Word Limit: 500 (Including footnotes and endnotes)

Language: Bengali or English

Format: MS Word 97-2003 document; for Bengali, use only Avro Keyboard (Unicode)

Style: MLA 8 (Without header or footer). Please mention the name, current position and institutional affiliation of the author in the upper-left corner of the abstract.

Subject of the email: Surname.Name (of the author)_Abstract for Local-Global_Language (of the abstract)

Please submit the Abstract to : abnsc.localglobal2019@gmail.com (for any other queries as well)

Other Relevant Information:

The abstracts will be blindly peer reviewed by an expert committee formed by the Conference Organising Sub-Committee. The selected authors will be informed by 10th October, 2018. Registration for the seminar will begin shortly after that. Please note, we shall not be able to conduct a spot registration. The Sub-Committee has to be informed earlier about the possible presence of a participant.

For international applicants: As per the rules by Home Ministry of India, an international applicant need not require any specific document for the conference VISA, the letter of selection of abstract proposal will suffice. However, if they wish to visit protected border states of India (please see the website of Ministry of Home Affairs, Foreigners Division (<https://conference.mha.gov.in/FAQ.aspx>) for further details) during the conference visit, they have to inform the Indian Mission prior to their VISA application.