Seminar Announcement
March 9-10, 2017

‘North East India’ since 1947: Society, Polity and Economy
With Special Reference to the State of Arunachal Pradesh

‘North East India’ as we understand today geographically covers eight states each with its unique history. The colonial administration played an important role in the making of the region, marking it as a geographical area to the ‘north east’ of the Bengal province, covering mainly the then Assam, princely state of Manipur, hill Tippera and the tribal states in the hills. This colonial demarcation of the region, however, remained tagged for ever, even after India attained its independence from the British rule in 1947.

Quite understandably, the society, polity and economy of the region – so demarcated – underwent significant transformations consequent to the colonial interventions. The colonial administration intervened the region with distinctly different approaches in the plains and the hills, epitomized in the idea and practice of the ‘inner line regulation’ in 1873, which unleashed a diverse set of processes and tendencies in the hills and the valleys. Instruments of colonial administrations – both in the plains and in the hills not only, therefore, defined the contours of the society, polity and economy of the region but also continued to cast significant influence on the way the region has evolved over time even during the postcolonial period. In fact, the geneses of many of the contemporary processes and trends witnessed in the society, polity and economy of the region can be located in its colonial past, which is why it becomes almost imperative to look at these trends and tendencies – social, political, economic or otherwise – in a deep and penetrative historical perspective.

Notwithstanding, the postcolonial process of integration of the region with India presents before us a more peculiar case, challenging the idea of the region as a unique entity with a shared history. Manipur and Tripura were princely states before joining the Indian Union in 1949; other states like that of Mizoram and Meghalaya were carved out of Assam much later. Arunachal Pradesh, on the other hand, before becoming a Union Territory of India, was known as North East Frontier Agency inheriting the name from North East Frontier Tract given by the British. Nagaland was a district of Assam before attaining the statehood in 1963. Sikkim, on the other hand, became a part of official North Eastern Region only in 1990s. It is also well-known that in pursuance of the Government of India Act of 1935, the areas falling in the North East Frontier Tract, the Naga Hills District, the Lushai Hills District i.e. present state of Mizoram and North Cachar Hills division of the Cachar District were declared as ‘excluded areas’ in 1936. The integration of these excluded areas into the Union of India during postcolonial period was fraught with serious challenges, which continues to have severe implications on contemporary society, polity and economy in the region. These challenges were attempted at through the mechanism of the Sixth Schedule in the Constitution and provisions like 371A, 371B, 371C, 371F, 371G, 371H facilitating the process of political integration of the region with Union of India. Thus, numerous accession, accords, partition, division, exclusion and integration mark the region’s historiography and shape its society, polity and economy.
Evidently, the region’s colonial past and processes leading to its integration to the Union of India are two important lines of enquiry to understand the contemporary society, polity and economy of the region. However, since the integration of various political units of the region with the Union of India – at different points of time – many significant changes have been taking place which merit looking beyond these two perspectives. The integration has brought about ‘democracy’ politically and ‘development’ socio-economically. Many of the changes witnessed today emanates from the way the region has been trying to negotiate with the political democracy and socio-economic development brought about by the integration. Looking at the myriad processes of these negotiations in itself, therefore, can prove to be a meaningful line to enquiry in understanding contemporary society, polity and economy of the region. The processes of the negotiation can be well extended to all other forces – global, national or even local. Most importantly these negotiations often throw up contradictions acting as the catalytic factor in ushering in observed changes and reflections of which can be found not only in academic engagements but also in other forms of artistic expressions including art and literature. Naturally, this line of enquiry needs to accommodate all such sources to comprehend the changes occurring in the society, polity and economy.

The proposed seminar on Arunachal intends to look at the society, polity and economy of the state afresh from an extended perspective without undermining the colonial past and the processes of its integration to India. It is expected that the discussions at the seminar will be able to shed new lights on understanding the society, polity and economy of the state post 1947.

The Institute invites full papers of about 5000-6000 words. Last date for submission is 24th February, 2017. Papers may be mailed at dkdscd@yahoo.co.in

The venue of the seminar will be informed at a later date.

Director