

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON

SHAMANISTIC PRACTICES AND NARRATIVES AMONG THE TRIBES OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH

18TH & 19TH SEPTEMBER 2023
RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY, DOIMUKH

IMPORTANT DATES

Last Date for Submission of Abstracts:
31st August 2023

Announcement of Selected Abstracts for Presentation:
5th September 2023

Seminar Date:
**18th (Monday) &
19th (Tuesday) September 2023**

Submission of Full-Length Papers:
31st October 2023

Seminar Venue:
AITS Conference Hall, RGU



Organised by:
AITS / DGII / CFEI / DGII / DIHATCH / NFC

The Theme/Concept Note

In the religious world of the tribal people, there are always some persons who act as mediators between individuals and supernatural beings. They are known as “shamans,” and they are important members of this community whose counsel is frequently sought. One of the main important factors constituting a shaman is the societal approval of their special skills in divinity which empowers them to conduct rituals on behalf of the community. They hold the highest authority in society and have a distinctive and dignified position as caretakers of the physical, spiritual, and ecological well-being of the tribe. They enter a trance state and being possessed, they communicate with spiritual beings. They wear typical costumes while performing rituals for treatments or healing. Shamanic chanting along with music and sometimes shamanic dance and animal sacrifices are part of these rituals. They are divinely ordained with indicating signs as they grow. Every shaman has a guiding spirit as well as ancestral spirits who act as a source of knowledge, power, and skills. The role of the shaman spans from the birth of a child to the death with innumerable ritual performances. They are sacred specialists, custodians, protectors, repositories of belief, sacred oral literature, and faith. The shamanic narratives deal with interactions with spirits and origin myths of the universe; earth, nature & man, the evolution of animals, man-spirit relations, souls, and their abodes, survival stories, beginnings of agriculture, migration, history, etc.

Thus, the institution of the shaman is undoubtedly an important Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) or “living heritage” of tribal communities across the globe and they remain significant in present-day cultures. They provide these communities with a sense of identity and continuity while adding an immense understanding of the sustainable way of life and many other cultural-specific phenomena.

In the context of tribal communities of India, the institution of Shaman is vibrant and people have a strong faith and belief system in meeting their spiritual and physical necessities. In case of the Arunachal Pradesh, societies are mostly represented by tribal communities and most of them reflect a very strong shamanic tradition. There are more than 25 tribes in the state, each having its own nomenclature for their religious specialists, for example, Nyibu, Miri, Kambreng, Goak, Igu, etc. They are inevitable as they play an important role in every aspect of tribal life, be it, the economy, the polity, the socio-cultural, and most importantly religious life and they hold the highest authority, cutting across the institutional boundaries in the society.

However, society is never static, and so are its institutions. Change is a reality that brings with it new challenges and opportunities. There are multiple agents and varied processes of change which are well reflected not only in socio-cultural, economic, political, and religious spheres but in the overall outlook of the society. This is true with the institution of shamans. This fascinating, but fast-disappearing intangible cultural heritage is currently under great threat of extinction. The situation calls for an urgent academic exercise and documentation and, as a result, would offer corrective actions, both at society and policy levels.

The scope and importance of shamanic study as a field of research spans, but is not limited to conceptual and theoretical perspectives; structural and functional aspects; religious worldview; rites and rituals; healing practices; sacred oral texts; indigenous knowledge system; performing arts; gender; economy; political dimensions; various facets of tangible and intangible cultural heritage; transcription and translation of the archaic shamanic chant; identification of factors leading to transitions and change; identification of herbal medicinal plants; neo-shamanic attributes; policy dialogue; creation of resource base for promoting future research, and various other aspects from multiple disciplinary backgrounds. Thus, the broad sub-themes outlined for discussion in the seminar include the following:

Sub-Themes

- Shamanism and Indigenous Religion: Conceptual and Theoretical Discourses
- Shamanism and Religious Worldview
- Shamanistic Rites, Rituals, and Healing Practices
- Sacred Oral Texts and Material Culture Related to Shamanistic Tradition
- Shamanism and Indigenous Knowledge System
- Shamanism and Performing Arts
- Shamanism and Natural Resource Management
- Shamanism and Gender Dimension
- Shamanism and Religious Reform Movements
- Shaman and Contemporary Issues

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Instructions for submission of abstract:

The abstracts of the seminar papers are invited for oral presentations on the themes mentioned above. Interested participants are requested to send their abstract (max. 300 words) in MS Word, Times New Roman, font size 12, line spacing 1.5. The information to be incorporated are: (a) title of the paper, (b) name of the author(s) underlining the speaker, (c) designations, (d) institutional affiliation, and (e) contact details, which should be submitted by 31 August 2023 in soft copy to: seminar.aits2023@gmail.com

All submitted abstracts will be reviewed by a screening committee, and only selected papers will be invited for oral presentations. No abstracts will be accepted after the deadline, which is August 31, 2023.

The author/s of select abstracts are also requested to write a full-length paper that will be published as an edited book by a reputed publisher as a final output of the seminar.

Instructions for Outstation Participants

Travel Support: All outstation paper presenters will be provided travel support on the condition that they take the public transportation facility/shared vehicle only and submission of the fare tickets.

Accommodation: Modest food and accommodation in the RGU Guest House/Hotels will be provided only to outstation paper presenters.

About AITS

Considering the state's vast diversity of cultures and languages and in protecting, promoting, and disseminating the priceless cultural legacy, amazing indigenous knowledge system, etc., through academic engagements and research, the Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS), the erstwhile Department of Tribal Studies, came into being on 22nd November 2005. Since its inception, the institute has conducted numerous research projects of national and regional relevance and has offered standard degree programmes like PhD, M.Phil., Certificate Courses, and most recently, MA Degree in Tribal Studies. This proposed national seminar is one of the many academic engagements supported by the North Eastern Council (NEC), Shillong, Government of India under its sponsored project on the "Documentation of Endangered Languages, Oral Narratives, and Cultures of the Lesser-Known Tribal Communities of Arunachal Pradesh", currently being undertaken by the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL), Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS), RGU.

The Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL) under AITS, RGU aims to revitalize the indigenous and endangered languages of Arunachal Pradesh through training, resource development, research, documentation, and community-based awareness programmes. Since its inception in 2016, the Centre successfully carried out several field studies and documentation on Tangam, Kaasik, Meyor, Khamba, Monpa, Olo, Ashing, Nah, and Brokpa communities and brought out research outputs.

About RIWATCH

RIWATCH is a leading and upcoming cultural research institute of Northeast India, based at Khinji, Roing, Lower Dibang Valley district of Arunachal Pradesh. It is an affiliate unit of the International Centre for Cultural Studies, USA (ICCS, US). Established in 2009, it has been making remarkable contributions to promote a culture of ecological sustainability and economic development by hand-holding with research institutions, universities and community organizations. It is also a qualitative facilitation centre for various universities to execute field studies in different disciplines related to the ethnic life of the local communities for awarding M.A., M.Phil., and PhD degrees. Since 2013, every alternative year, RIWATCH executes Study Abroad Program for the students of the University of South Florida, Tampa, USA. Its Herbal Garden, an Ethnographic Museum, and the Documentation Centre have become popular destinations for academicians, research scholars, and the general public. Supported by the North Eastern Council (NEC), Shillong, Govt. of India, RIWATCH has recently established a RIWATCH Centre for Mother Languages (RCML) on its campus.

THE TEAM

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