

**Symposium-cum-Workshop on  
Significance of Bamboo in Socio-Cultural and Economic Development  
of North East India  
(10-16 March 2016)**

***Concept note***

Bamboo, a giant woody grass, is the fastest growing plant in the world. Although different species of bamboo are found in diverse climatic conditions, it is mainly grown in tropical regions. Bamboo has tremendous potential and relevance for a variety of people in different parts of the world, especially in East Asia, South Asia, and South-East Asia. In India, bamboo can be found in South, Central, Eastern and North-eastern regions of India and forms an integral part of the social, cultural and economic life of the people. In North East region of India, bamboo grows in abundance in the plains as well as in the hilly areas. Bamboo as matter of fact figures as a vital component of biodiversity of North East India. It is a rich natural treasure which is bountiful in this region.

North East India, comprising of the eight states namely- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim (popularly known by the sobriquet 'eight sisters'), is the home to a large number of tribal and non tribal communities. Geographically, it consists of the Eastern Himalayan ranges in the North, Brahmaputra valley at the center, southern hilly tracts and the Barak valley. In addition to the major non tribal communities such as the Assamese, Bengalis, Nepalis and Meiteis, some 100 tribal communities or so inhabit the region. These communities not only speak different languages and dialects but also follow diverse socio-cultural practices.

Bamboo plays an important role in the lifestyles of the people of the North East India. In fact, bamboo is inextricably related to the lives of all the communities from birth to death. At every stage of life, bamboo and its products are intimately connected. Bamboo has tremendous economic and commercial value for the people of North East India as it serves as an important source of livelihood especially for the crafts-men and artisans. Various species of bamboo are used by the inhabitants for a variety of purposes and needs, such as architecture, household objects, agricultural implements, domestic utility items, weapons, musical instruments, textile, traditional cuisine, ethno-medicine, healing practices, rituals so on and so forth . At times it also serves as animal fodder. The Khasi people of Meghalaya as well as other ethnic groups have deep knowledge about the utility of bamboo, which is unique and scientifically relevant.

Bamboo finds a notable place in the folklore, especially in oral tradition. Several myths, legends and narratives are woven around various aspects of bamboo since time immemorial. Bamboo flowering is a very rare phenomenon. It has its manifestations in local stories and tales. Symbolic and metaphoric expressions are associated with bamboo among diverse communities.

The significance of bamboo in respect of both traditional and contemporary economy and technology cannot be denied. Bamboo plays a holistic role in repertoire activities and thus presents a valuable dimension in the socio-cultural and economic development of the people of North East India.

Accordingly, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi, Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, North East Hill University, Shillong and Riti Academy of Visual Arts, Shillong has taken the initiative to organise a weeklong celebration of Bamboo culture. An integrated programme consisting of symposium, workshop, exhibitions and cultural events has been chalked out for the dissemination of knowledge and to create awareness about bamboo culture.

**Objective and scope:** The primary objective of this symposium-cum-workshop is to relook at the importance of bamboo in the socio-cultural and economic development of the people of North East India and its problems and prospects. The basic aim of this programme is to motivate public participation and to create awareness and ensure promotion and preservation of bamboo products and associated beliefs and knowledge system for the posterity. The celebration of Bamboo culture thus integrates and synergises the bamboo and its multi-pronged traditions of North East India in a common platform.

**Sub-Themes for discussion:**

In view of the objective and scope of the symposium-cum-workshop, the following major sub-themes have been identified for deliberation:

- Ecology, ethnography and scientific knowledge on bamboo and their various usages in human society. Ethno-botanical parameters of bamboo and its preservation, conservation and propagation.
- Ethnography (art and crafts) and aesthetics connected with bamboo and its integrated expression in the regional cultural history.
- Significance of bamboo in socio-cultural development with special emphasis on material culture of tribal and nontribal people.
- Folkloristic expressions (myths, legends, ballads, songs etc) on bamboo with emphasis on continuity of the bamboo culture in a changing human situation.

- Beliefs, practices, traditions associated with bamboo in different societies including totemism and taboo and its meaning.
- Socio-economic and technological parameters of bamboo and their problems and prospects in sustainable development (industry and commerce)