Title of proposed optional course: Law and Governance in India’s North East
Proposed Optional Course: Winter Semester
Proposed by: Thongkholal Haokip

About the Course:

India’s Northeast is not only a remote periphery in the imagination of the Indian nation-state, distinct laws were framed to govern this region since the colonial period. This course will look into the historical context of how colonial and post-colonial laws emerged for the northeastern region to bring about certain form of governance. It will critically examine how ‘exceptional’ laws were framed specifically for the ‘non-state peoples’ who settle in ‘illegible spaces’ and the politics of governance thereof. This will be looked through the lens of certain contemporary social theories and approaches of James C. Scott, Agamben, Foucault, Mamdani, etc.

Course Outline

I. Introducing India’s Northeast
   i) Emergence of the ‘Northeast Frontier’
   ii) From Frontier to Region
   iii) Debate on conceptualization of the region: diversity, pan-northeast identity and solidarity

II. Major themes in understanding the Northeast
   i) Willem van Schendel; James C. Scott (Illegible space, non-state people)
   ii) Giorgio Agamben (State of exception)
   iii) Michel Foucault (Governmentality)
   iv) Mahmood Mamdani
   v) Legal pluralism (Sally E. Merry; Bouventura Sousa Santos, etc.)

II. Colonial Law and Governance
   i) Bengal Frontier Regulation Act, 1873
      a) Inner Line Permit
   ii) Scheduled District Act, 1874
      a) Backward Tracts
   iii) The Chin Hills Regulation Act, 1896
   iv) The Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation, 1880
   v) The Constitution Act of 1935
      a) Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas Order 1936

III. Post-independence Law and Governance
   i) Sixth Schedule
ii) Article 371 (a), (b), and (c)
iii) Armed Forces Special Powers Act, 1958

IV. Contemporary Challenges to Law and Governance
i) Political Integration
ii) Alienation
iii) Immigration
iv) Insurgency

Reading List


Cederlöf, Gunnel (2014). *Founding an empire on India's North-Eastern frontiers, 1790–1840: Climate, Commerce, Polity*. New Delhi, Oxford University Press,

Chakraborty, Gorky & Asok Kumar Ray (2015), *Understanding Northeast India through a ‘Spatial’ Lens* IDSK Occasional Paper 48,


Mackenzie, Alexander. The North-East Frontier of India. Mittal Publications, 1995 (Originally published as History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal)


Prakash, Ved. Encyclopaedia of North-East India, Volume 1

Rao, V. Venkata. A century of Government and Politics in North-East India, New Delhi, S. Chand and Co.


