



Martin Luther Christian University

Regional Seminar

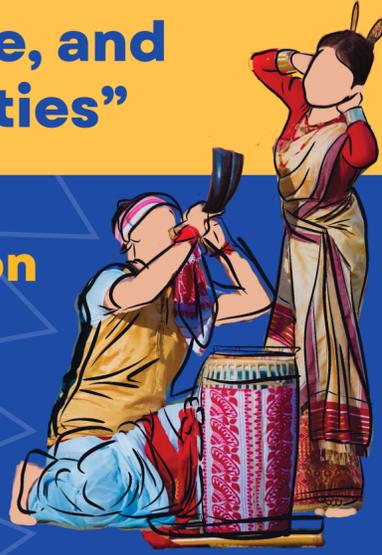
on

“English as Empowerment: Language, Resistance, and Identity in Underrepresented Indian Communities”

Organised by
School of Languages and Cultural Communication

Date: March 13, 2026

Venue: Umsawli Hall, Umsawli Campus



About Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU)

Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU), Shillong is a university in pioneering research and innovation, committed to academic excellence, social responsibility, and inclusive education. Rooted in the values of justice, dignity, and service, MLCU fosters critical inquiry and interdisciplinary learning while engaging deeply with the cultural, linguistic, and social realities of Northeast India. The University seeks to nurture socially conscious scholars and professionals equipped to address local and global challenges.

About School of Languages and Cultural Communication (SLCC)

The School of Languages and Cultural Communication at MLCU is dedicated to the study of language, literature, and cultural expression in multilingual and multicultural contexts. With a strong focus on English studies, indigenous literatures, translation, and language pedagogy, the School encourages critical engagement with issues of identity, power, marginality, and representation. It actively promotes research and dialogue that foreground underrepresented voices and regional narratives, particularly from Northeast India.



Concept Note

Overview

This seminar aims to critically explore the role of the English language as a dynamic tool for self-preservation, expression, and resistance among the tribal communities of Northeast India and other underrepresented groups across the country. While English has often been viewed as a colonial imposition, it has also emerged as a powerful medium for articulating indigenous identities, resisting erasure, and engaging with the global community on equal terms. Recent events, such as the ethnic clashes in Manipur or the sensationalized murder of a tourist in Meghalaya, have only gone to prove that not much has changed over the years and reiterates the need for discourses on representation, solidarity and empowerment and the crucial role played by the English language to disseminate information and understanding amongst the NE and to the rest of the country.



Context and Rationale

India's multilingual landscape is marked by the tension between dominant and underrepresented languages and cultures. For many tribal and underrepresented communities, indigenous languages are rapidly declining due to assimilation pressures, lack of institutional support, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. In this context, English—ironically a colonial legacy—has become an unexpected ally.

In the Northeast, for instance, English serves not only as a lingua franca across diverse linguistic groups but also as a means for young people to access education, employment, and political discourse. More importantly, it allows for the articulation of identity, cultural heritage, and socio-political concerns on national and international platforms, often in ways that regional or tribal languages cannot. This appropriation of English subverts its colonial history and reclaims it as a means of self-definition and survival.

India's literary landscape has been historically dominated by voices from the socio-political and cultural mainstream, often centered around metropolitan or "mainland" narratives. This dominance has led to the silencing or sidelining of diverse experiences, particularly those of communities from the North-East, Adivasis, and other underrepresented social and regional groups. The lived realities of these communities—marked by structural inequalities, cultural erasure, political neglect, and in many cases, militarization—are rarely reflected in mainstream Indian English literature.

However, over the past few decades, a compelling body of literature in English has emerged from the margins, giving voice to these communities' unique histories, identities, and resistances. Writers from the North-East and other historically oppressed groups are using English—a language once seen as a colonial imposition—as a strategic tool to challenge internal colonization, reclaim agency, and assert complex identities.

This seminar aims to bring together scholars, writers, and students to critically engage with this emerging archive. By exploring how English language and literature becomes a platform for articulating resistance, memory, and identity, the seminar will interrogate the power dynamics within India and question what constitutes the "mainstream" in postcolonial India.

Objectives

- To examine the transformative role of the English language in the self-expression and self-preservation of tribal and underrepresented communities in India.
- To analyse how English serves as a medium for articulating marginal voices and resisting cultural homogenization.
- To explore the paradox of using a colonial language as a form of decolonial resistance through educational policies, media representations, and literary productions.
- To foster dialogue between educators, writers, activists, and scholars on inclusive language practices.

Resource Persons



Dr Theyiesinuo Keditso
Poet, Academician, and Educator



Mr Saleng Sangma
MP Lok Sabha, Meghalaya



Prof. Jyotirmoy Prodhani
Professor, NEHU

Organising Committee

Convenor:

- Dr Chelmelyne Dhar (8837414125)

Co-convenor:

- Dr Evarisha M Syiem

Organising Secretary:

- Dr Clarissa Jane Rajee (9774108847)

Seminar Committee Members:

- Dr Ruth Rymbai (9774286044)
- Dr Nunchawii Hatlei (8837346190)
- Dr Lalnunsanga Ralte (9774162001)

Key Themes

- English and Identity: Negotiating identity through English among tribal youth and writers.
- Language as Resistance: Case studies of English writings by underrepresented authors.
- Decolonizing English: Reclaiming English for indigenous narratives.
- Educational Access and Equity: The role of English in upward mobility for tribal and rural students.
- Media and Digital Expression: How digital platforms in English amplify tribal and marginal voices.
- Indigenous Languages and the NEP: Examining the NEP and the medium of promotion of indigenous languages
- North-East India and the Politics of Place in Literature: Exploring how literature from the North-East asserts' regional identity and resists marginalization through the lens of geography and belonging.

Expected Outcomes

- A deeper understanding of the dual role of English as both a colonial and a liberating force.
- Policy recommendations for inclusive and context-sensitive language education.
- Strengthening of cross-regional and inter-disciplinary networks for linguistic justice.
- A deepened understanding of underrepresented voices in Indian English literature
- Critical reflection on power, voice, and representation in literary discourse
- Scholarly collaboration and networking across disciplines and geographies
- Publication of proceedings for academic and policy reference and to further the conversation
- Suggestions for the inclusion of underrepresented literatures in academic curricula

Conclusion

The seminar seeks to highlight English not as a threat to indigenous identities, but as a strategic resource—a language that, when repurposed and re-appropriated, becomes a site of resistance, dignity, and global visibility for India's most silenced voices.

Registration

All participants are required to register for free.



Location



<https://forms.gle/j93iQE59GtD2GToU8>