



NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY  
School of Social Sciences,  
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**Report on the UGC-DEB sponsored National Seminar on IDENTITY AND RECOGNITION: POST-COLONIAL INDIAN PERSPECTIVES held on 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.**

## INTRODUCTION

The UGC-DEB sponsored National Seminar on *Identity and Recognition: Post-Colonial Indian Perspectives* was held on 25th March, 2014. It was organized by the School of Social Sciences, Netaji Subhas Open University. The theme of the present seminar was '**Identity and Recognition: Post-Colonial Indian Perspectives**'. The aim of the seminar was to understand the role of 'identity' and 'recognition' – two important elements in the political perspectives of contemporary post-colonial India. The historical transformation of the colonial and post-colonial Indian history has long been influenced by several ideas like 'western impact', 'colonial domination', 'renaissance', 'nationalism', 'extremism', 'class struggle', 'class-caste correlations', 'subaltern autonomy', 'dominance and resistance' etc. All these ideas are related to theoretical plane and ideological justification of a colonized population. In the post-colonial era, some new concepts, like 'welfare state,' 'development planning,' and 'gender equality,' emerged in political-ideological superstructure of the newly liberated nation-state of India. With the passing of the time, the old concepts or ideas freed the space for the new one to corroborate with the demands of the changing situation. The old concepts seemed to be inadequate in explaining the reality; cracks or fissures appeared in the body of explanations. This is the theoretical justification of the addressing the concepts like 'identity' and 'recognition' in today's national seminar.

### **The Thematic Trajectory of the Seminar**

The concept of 'identity' and 'recognition' played a significant role in the understanding of the social, political and cultural relations, state policies, strategy of the subaltern groups, assertion of collective self, development of new literary discourses and articulation of women as an agency. The struggle for identity in an uneven society like India was equated with the creation of an autonomous space, if not liberation, for the marginal social groups. The interplay of 'identity' and 'recognition' shaped the contours of aspiration of ethnic groups, proclamation of caste status, establishment of women rights, struggle against sexual exploitation, equal rights in the workplace and the other issues related to civil or political society. These two concepts are also related to the issues of self-determination of nationalities in different peripheral areas of the Indian state. So the issues of 'Identity' and 'Recognition' are multi-dimensional, complex and diverse; it is historically evolved, politically shaped and culturally determined. The issues involved the non-violent social movement to violent armed resistance against the state; all such movements express the dissatisfaction of the civil society or socially marginal groups or distinct ethnic communities or aspirant caste groups. But it is not simply a story of certain amount of dissatisfaction; it is also struggle to achieve recognition



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of identity of multiple social groups in uneven social structure and cultural heterogeneity of India.

The aim of the present seminar is to explore these multiple issues of movements related to 'identity' and 'recognition' - as elements of social change, cultural transformation and political upheavals - in various levels of the post-colonial Indian perspectives in a comprehensive way. It addresses the caste question, ethnic crisis, discourse analysis and other related issues through the prism of 'identity' and 'recognition' as explanatory categories. It tries to highlight the inherent tension of the social reality and political condition of the nation state of India within the limits of the popular aspiration and militant consciousness of the subaltern population. The seminar also tries to ask whether such movements have challenged the legitimacy of the state or not.

### **The Delegation of the Seminar**

The Inaugural Session was presided over by Professor Subhasankar Sarkar, Vice Chancellor, NSOU. Professor Debnarayan Modak, Director, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, NSOU, introduced the theme before us.

The Keynote address was delivered by Professor Samir Kumar Das, Former Vice Chancellor, NBU and Professor of Political Science, University of Calcutta. The Guest of Honour for the seminar was Professor Indrajit Ray, Vice Chancellor, Coochbehar Panchanan Barma University. The Presidential address was rendered by Professor Subhasankar Sarkar, the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor, NSOU. Finally, the vote of thanks was proposed by Dr Chandan Basu, Organizing Secretary, Seminar Committee.

Immediately after the Tea Break, the Technical Session – I followed which was graced by scholars like Smt. Aditi Bhunia Chakraborty, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities, Heritage Institute of Technology, Kolkata who presented her valued ideas. Such scholastics like Professor Pradip Basu, CSSSC, Kolkata and Professor Indrajit Ray, Vice Chancellor, Coochbehar Panchanan Barma University presented their lectures. The session was chaired by Professor Sobhanlal Datta Gupta, Former Surendranath Banerjee Professor of Political Science, University of Calcutta.

The session was succeeded by lunch, soon after which Technical Session – II was initiated. The speakers for the session were distinguished speakers like Professor Swaraj Basu, School of Social Sciences, IGNOU and Dr Rupkumar Barman, Department of History, Jadavpur University. The session was smoothly conducted under the chairmanship of Professor Pradip Basu, CSSSC, Kolkata.

### **The Takeaway from the Seminar**

The present seminar explored the multiple issues of movements related to 'identity' and 'recognition' - as elements of social change, cultural transformation and political upheavals - in



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various levels of the post-independent Indian perspectives in a comprehensive way. It addressed the caste question, ethnic crisis, hegemonic issue and other related issues through

the twin prism of 'identity' and 'recognition' as explanatory categories. It tried to showcase the inherent friction of the social reality and political condition of the nation state of India within the jurisdiction of the popular aspiration and militant consciousness of the depressed population.

**A few questions thrown by the seminar which can invite discursive interactions in the future are:**

1. Whether such movements have challenged the legitimacy of the state or not?
2. How are identity and recognition perennially engaged in a recurrent tension in the modern times?
3. Is it possible to address the aspirations of the depressed men through the state propagated prisms of the current times?
4. Is cordial co-existence possible in the current regime under the twin canopies of identity and recognition?

Herein lied the justification of the stated seminar, which we think will go a long way in creating interpolative ripples that shall show the path for further ameliorations and peace building in Bengal and beyond.

(The Report is prepared by Dr Srabanti Choudhuri, Assistant Professor of Sociology, School of Social Sciences, NSOU.)