

Indigenous People and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures

Department of Anthropology, Sikkim University celebrated the International Day of Indigenous Peoples 2025 on 8th August 2025 at Barad Sadan Conference Hall, 5th Mile, Sikkim University. The theme for this year was “Indigenous People and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures”.

The program started with the inaugural session welcoming Prof. Satyananda Panda, Dean, School of Human Sciences. It was followed by the welcome speech by Dr. Nitish Mondal who briefly highlighted about the significance of the day and the department’s commitment to celebrating Indigenous Peoples’ day every year. He also touched on this year’s theme and mentioned the challenges faced by Indigenous people in modern days where the world is emerging towards the new era of Latest Technologies/AI. Thereafter, Prof. Satyananda Panda, addressed the house regarding the rights and protection of Indigenous people. He briefly talked about the Indigenous people in India and also discussed the healthcare inequalities they face. He also congratulated the department for hosting the events and appreciated the efforts to highlight the plight of Indigenous people.

The program was followed by the reading of United Nations charter on International day of the World’s Indigenous peoples by Ms. Enamlu Durai, M.A. 3rd semester. The inaugural session concluded with a Vote of Thanks delivered by Ms. Temsutola Pongen, PhD scholar.

The second session included seven speakers from the Department of Anthropology discussing various topics related to Indigenous people.

The first speaker Mr. Deepansh Pandit, MA 3rd Semester who started with the question, “What happens when the ancient Indigenous knowledge system collides with cutting edge technology?” as highlighted the importance and implementation of AI among Indigenous population. He gave examples from studies conducted in different sectors like environment, health and language revitalization where it could be implemented. But he emphasized on the fact that implementation of AI in these sectors also need to ensure that there is proper data control, data ownership and data sovereignty among so as to not exploit these communities.

The next presentation was titled “Living on the Edge: Indigenous Himalayan Communities in the face of Climate Change” by Miss Ayushi Nirola, Ph.D Scholar who spoke on the impact of climate Change/flood on Indigenous communities in the Himalayas. She also highlighted the challenges faced by the Lepcha community of Mangan district in Sikkim during the Teesta

flood 2023. She also highlighted the impact of flood faced by the Majhi Community in Nepal and brought up the recent issue of Uttarkashi Flood 2025.

The Third presentation was titled, “Whispers of the Ancestors: Indigenous Paths to Climate Justice” by Mr. Soumyajit Singha Roy, Ph.D Scholar who spoke on climate injustice and climate inequality. He talked about how Indigenous communities are at the receiving end and though they may not leave as many carbon footprints, they are at the receiving end.

The fourth speaker was Miss. Monila Limboo, Ph.D Scholar who presented on “Shamanism and Spiritual Healing in Indigenous Cultures of Sikkim” highlighting on Muns, Bongthings and Phedangmas. She mentioned how the spiritual healing process by the Shamans is an age-old practice of restoring the ecological balance by the Indigenous communities. She highlighted how shamanism is not superstitious but the supernatural beliefs are a logical way of understanding the environment around us.

The fifth speaker was Miss Rebaka Rai, Ph.D Scholar who presented on “Indigenous People and Health and Culture” where she highlighted the fact that it is not just a biological factor but a cultural construct. Indigenous communities have traditional medicinal knowledge system and are thus architects of their own healing. She talked about how indigenous

The sixth speaker was Miss Sushma Gurung, Ph.D Scholar who spoke on the “Health of Indigenous People: Conceptualization and Challenges”. She began with a conceptual clarification of the term Indigenous and how it has been politicized across the country. As a scholar studying tuberculosis in Sikkim, she shared fresh perspectives from the field and highlighted how the burden of tuberculosis falls mostly on Indigenous communities.

Last but not least, Miss Temsutola Pongener Ph.D Scholar talked on Solastalgia among the Lachungpas and Lachenpas. She mentioned how the snow coverage in this region has been hampered or altered resulting in cascading effect on their rituals and daily sustenance. She also highlighted how the Teesta flood was not just a disaster that led to physical damage but it led to spiritual ruptures and spiritual dislocation for the Lachenpas and Lachungpas. She ended by saying that it was important to define climate change, climate equity on their own terms.

The third session began with a debate on the topic “Indigenous People and AI: Defending Rights, Shaping Futures” where two teams participated. Team A was represented by Miss Pradipta Roy and Mr. Deepansh Pandit who spoke for the motion. Team B was represented by Miss Monila Limboo and Miss Ayushi Nirola who spoke against the motion as they brought

out important points regarding digital colonization and digital cooperation. The winner for the debate competition was Team B (Miss Monila Limboo and Miss Ayushi Nirola) with Team A (Miss Pradipta Roy and Mr. Deepansh Pandit) as runners up for the day.

The last session was a quiz competition on Indigenous people and issues hosted by Dr. James V. Haokip. There were five 5 teams with 2 participants in each group. It was an open quiz with participants from Tourism, Hindi, Peace and Conflict departments along with anthropology students. The quiz was divided into 3 rounds. The first round was rapid fire round followed by (MCQ) objectives question round and passing round.6

The winner for the quiz was Mr Soumyajit Singha Roy and Anuragh Rai followed by first runner up Mr. Deepansh Pandit and Enamlu Durai and the consolation prize was distributed to all the quiz participants. The program concluded with a group photo .



Prof. Nitish Mondal and Prof. Satyananda Panda.



Participants for the debate competition.



Prof. Nitish handing out runners up prize.



Participants of the Indigenous Day Celebration.