

The Zubaan-Sasakawa Peace Foundation Grants for Young Researchers from the Northeast (2021-22)

It is a rare moment in time when upheaval is felt across cultures and geographies. With COVID-19 classified as a pandemic in early 2020, its impact on our lives in all its different forms — increased authoritarianism and State apathy, heightened inequalities and vulnerabilities, job precarity and strained labour relations, gender violence and inequity, etc. — has been one such moment.

If any human experience can be said to capture the complex consequences, it is loss. Loss is everywhere: loss of loved ones, of certainties, of faith and trust in the State. Human beings have always lived with loss, just as much as they do with hope, but collective and sustained losses over such a long period of time are something difficult to grasp.

And yet, if this time has been marked by loss, it has also shown us human resilience, the ability and determination to survive. Individuals/community centres have set up oxygen camps, or worked to provide medicines to the homeless. Trans activists have worked out ration schemes for their community, while social media groups have provided verified information to those who need it. People have paused their lives to offer support and solidarity however they can. However, as the pandemic rages on, there is inadequate media representation of the healthcare and ecological crises, and the structures of support and solidarity across communities in the Northeast region, apart from the tireless documentation done by feminist and local on-ground groups.

In the years that this grant has been in existence, its focus on knowledge creation and documentation by communities in the Northeastern states has generated a rich seam of writing and thinking on the diverse histories and stories of the region. In its final year, we want to offer support to **young writers, researchers, photographers and scholars** in capturing this tumultuous time through the lens of their own experiences — to provide multiple narratives of how the pandemic was lived and experienced in the Northeastern region. This is also particularly important as the media's fragmented focus on the impact of COVID-19 in the Northeast has often failed to capture marginalizations of gender, ethnicity, class, caste, etc. within the region.

We encourage proposals set against the broad framework/themes mentioned below, examined through the lens of gender in the Northeast:

- Dealing with the loss of lived time, and the loss of an understanding or knowledge of the future.
- Navigating and adapting to loss — of education, jobs, human contact, friendships, physical spaces, community, compassion and mental health — and human resilience in the face of collective grief.
- How individuals and communities have been/are trying to support each other and build resources during this time — stories of success as well as of failure.
- Envisioning a future and building our communities in the face of pervasive uncertainty

To support this work, Zubaan Publishers and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation are offering research grants for the year 2021 to young researchers from the eight northeastern states and the eastern Himalayan region. The grants provide a modest fund to prepare a research paper/essay/oral history on the themes detailed above.

Background

As a geographical category, the term 'Northeast India' can be used to refer to the territory beyond the chicken neck bordering Myanmar and Bangladesh, which comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. In mainstream discourse, the region has been continually defined, described and constrained within a particular identity that in many

ways deprives it of its internal richness and variety. What exactly do we mean when we speak of ‘the Northeast’? This region is home to many peoples, religions, customs, ethnicities, practices, languages and histories. Their collective grouping, the brainchild of colonial administrative practices that have been carried on by the present state, has also become a sort of marker of their ‘separateness’ as an entity, despite the wide internal variety. The cultures, communities, geographies of this region are similar in many ways to those of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and the eastern Himalayan region. An argument that is often used to hold the category of ‘the Northeast’ together is ethnic identity — and yet, not only are these states ethnically very diverse, but ethnicity often extends beyond state and national borders into other, neighbouring territories.

The debate around #AChapterforNE under the CBSE curriculum in recent months has also underscored the need for multiple sites of knowledge production — with indigenous people arguing against a single chapter for the whole of Northeast, which may whitewash the region’s troubled history with the colonial mainland as well as further the exoticization and fetishization of the population. The rupture in this discourse has been important in understanding how different groups of people within the region relate to each other against a backdrop of peace and conflict and building of solidarities to preserve their own histories and reclaim knowledge.

Details of the Research Grant

This research grant, in its fourth and final year, hopes to encourage young writers and researchers to contribute in the diversification of knowledge production.

We are looking for applications under the theme of loss, as detailed above. Please feel free to explore the theme through academic research papers, long-form journalistic essays or long interviews, visual essays, graphic stories on a particular subject, thematically aligned with the call and a gendered lens. Hybrid or creative forms are welcome.

The papers will be written in English. All papers written with the support of the grant will be published electronically by Zubaan Publishers on various digital platforms. They may also be compiled in print form and made widely available. Mentors will be assigned to all the grant recipients for research and writing support during the grant duration.

Eligibility criteria

1. If you are from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura and are **less than 40 years of age**, you are eligible to apply. The research grant is also open for applicants from hill regions of districts Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong.

[Note: Preference will be given to candidates currently based in the physical location of research, keeping in consideration travel restrictions within the region due to the COVID-19 pandemic.]

2. You must be fluent in reading and writing English.
3. You must commit to researching and writing a 10,000 words (minimum) essay. The grant also allows for you to develop graphic narratives, or do extended interviews, or produce creative works such as a story, in lieu of the essay, all within a specified timeline.

*[Note: Since we have a limited number of grants available, we would like to encourage applicants who can **commit to submitting the first drafts of their work within the specified time (four months from selection)**. Please apply **ONLY** if you feel you can fulfil this criterion so as to not deprive other deserving applicants.]*

To apply:

1. Send in a grant proposal (maximum two pages) which clearly describes what you wish to do, what sources you will tap (primary and secondary), the subject of your research and a timeline.
2. Submit a writing sample of roughly 500 words OR a two-page spread of a graphic story OR an extract from the transcript of an interview conducted by you.
3. Submit your CV and any other relevant information about yourself that you think is necessary, including proof of age.
4. Include two names of referees, ideally people you have worked with, along with their contact information.

Shortlist and selection of grantees

All grant proposals will be screened by a selection committee. The committee will prepare a shortlist based on pre-decided criteria and may wish to interview some candidates. Interviews can take place by Zoom or phone. The committee will then decide and the candidate will be informed. The committee's decision will be final.

Duration: The first draft of the selected papers is expected in four months after the methodology workshop/webinar, details of which are mentioned below. Papers may need to be revised after the first draft depending on the feedback. Depending on the extent of the feedback, up to a month may be given for the required revisions.

Grant

The fellowship carries a grant of **Rs 35,000** less applicable taxes.

Payments will be made in two instalments: 25 per cent on approval of the project and signature of contract, and the remainder on submission of the final draft.

Methodology workshops/webinars

All successful candidates will be required to attend a preliminary methodology workshop/webinar, as well as a midterm online review where they will present a draft of their work in order to get feedback from peers and resource people. In the time remaining for the grant, candidates will be required to take the feedback on board and to finalize their papers.

Interested people can send in their applications to projects@zubaanbooks.com. **The last date of submission of application is 15 July 2021.**

Shortlisted candidates will be informed by the first week of August 2021.

FAQs:

Q: *Can I submit my PHD proposal/proposal linked to my PHD thesis for this grant?*

A: *Papers which are a part of an ongoing or recently completed PhD thesis will not be covered by this grant.*

Q: *My proposal/idea fits into the grant requirements but I'm not sure of how to write it in English. How do I put a proposal together?*

A: *If you feel that you fit into the eligibility criteria and have an interesting proposal to discuss, which may not be in English but has the scope of being translated/adapted, please write to us at projects@zubaanbooks.com before submitting your proposal.]*

Q: *Is there a format for writing the proposal?*

A: *Grant proposals may be creative and do not need to be written in academic language. If you are unsure about the format of the research proposal, please write to us at projects@zubaanbooks.com for a sample research format.]*