

REPORT

DEMOCRACY, CITIZENSHIP, AND BELONGING IN THE HIMALAYAS

Seminar held at the IIC, New Delhi, 20th-21nd March 2007

In collaboration with the French Centre de Sciences Humaines (CSH), New Delhi

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On the 20th and 21st of March 2007, we carried out a seminar entitled “Democracy, Citizenship, and Belonging in the Himalayas” that took place at the International Indian Centre (IIC) in New Delhi. This workshop was the first one in a series of meetings and exchanges carried out within an international and interdisciplinary team of scholars working in the Himalayan region. The entire project endeavour, called “The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas” is planned for a three-year’s time-period during which our knowledge on the thematic complex of belonging will be expanded through mutual academic debates and through collaborative projects. The first meeting, held in New Delhi, was dedicated to exploring the complex concepts and ties of belonging in the Nepalese, Bhutanese, Chinese and the Indian Himalayas.

During this first seminar, emphasis was put on the interaction between local, indigenous forms of belonging, and new modes of classification and ordering imposed through national integration and governmental modes of politics. The objective was to broaden our understanding of the social, cultural and political processes that have shaped the Himalayan societies and states in the past and to explore how the Himalayan people have experienced their sense of identity and belonging in new, changing contexts.

We focused on four interrelated topics.

The parameters of belonging in local societies

The Himalayan societies have always conceived of their belonging in multi-faceted ways. Every person has experienced, lived through and formed diverse dimensions of belonging: in particular, the membership in kinship groups, in households, in localities, in religious communities, in castes and in ethnic communities. These diverse parameters have evolved over long spans of time. The attachments could shift during a person’s

life-course (especially in the case of most Himalayan women). Collectivities have positioned themselves time and again by selecting from diverse repertoires of membership criteria. Similarly, individual identity markers have been gaining and losing their salience in the course of time. The first session was geared towards exploring these diverse parameters of belonging in the Himalayan life-worlds. Against the backdrop of empirical examples, the dynamic dimensions of belonging and identity formation were explored. We also attempted to strengthen our understanding of the concept of “belonging”. In particular, it was important to capture the specificity of this term vis-à-vis the concept of “identity”.

State building, belonging, and identity

For many centuries, the local Himalayan societies have been subjected to external interference and to externally imposed categorisations and division lines. Subsequent rulers have incorporated the local political systems, by ordering, managing, and imposing rules and regulations. In particular, local society members have been subjected through land-ownership patterns and diverse mechanisms of revenue extraction. For instance, in the course of its formation in the 18th and 19th century, the Nepalese state has included many small political units into a broader political space. State expansion has also induced processes of ethnogenesis and ethnic differentiation, and it has instigated status differentials within and between ethnic minorities in the case of a number of groups. The modalities imposed by the rulers to define the subjects’ rights and duties have increasingly been imposed and reinforced in manifold encounters and contestations.

Production of new regional identities

Since the mid-20th century, the state administrations and political bodies have decisively expanded their fields of influence over the Himalayan societies and increased their control throughout the territory. The modern understanding of citizenship has come to impinge upon peoples’ lives, to draw or shift social boundaries, and partly to challenge the pre-existing categories of belonging and the derived concepts of (mutual) rights and duties. New spatial orders – such as administrative units – have been introduced. The processes of construction of these new regional territories and their impact on the social organisation have not yet been sufficiently documented. How did drawing of new boundaries and regionalisation come to intersect with ethnicity, locality, and with others forms of “boundedness”? We were especially interested in local reactions to such processes and in local perceptions of these dynamics.

Changing notions of citizenship and governance.

New categories such as “scheduled caste” and “scheduled tribe”, as well as the policy of quotas (e.g. within the *Panchayati Raj*, in India), have also deeply affected peoples’ sense of collective entitlements. They had an effect on the popular perceptions of the social fabric – for instance, of the increasing scales of social organisation, of translocalisation, and the juxtaposition of diverse social orders, in general. This workshop’s inquiry sought to capture the impact of these new notions, related to good governance and democracy, on the diverse forms of belonging. From a more general point of view, we wanted to explore the relations between *the citizens* and *the others* (i.e. *who – in the perceptions of the mainstream – do not belong*). How are these relations presently defined, contested and negotiated? How are the boundaries between *us* and *them* actually drawn and questioned? What kinds of struggles surround the sense of “ownership” and entitlement? Are there particularly efficient modalities for reaching consensus across collective boundary lines? Are the means of negotiation and compromising as well as rhetoric rather those used in previous periods of history (e.g. customary law)? Or do people nowadays tend to rather deploy new democratic devices and arguments (e.g. modern law, new notions of justice) in their negotiations?

We were thus interested in mapping out the emerging uncertainties and contestations observed throughout the Himalayan region and in seeing where the broad and polysemic notion of “belonging” comes into place. We expected to reveal important divisive lines and possible conflict potentials looming in the Himalayan societies. But another perspective led us to suggest that the sense of belonging significantly buttresses peoples’ sense of immediacy and urgency. As a matter of fact, it seems that the stronger the sense of belonging vis-à-vis a collectivity or locality, the higher is the peoples’ readiness to engage in creating collective goods and a readiness to strive for a collective’s well-being. New modalities of belonging that come together with particular rights and entitlements may instigate new forms civic engagement and participation. It was therefore relevant to find out which dimensions of belonging are acquiring nowadays the highest potential of legitimacy and of mobilisation. Does still engagement for the sake of own community prevail? Can we perceive of more engagement for a larger common good? Are there many contestations against aspirations of collectivities considered “alien” or “not deserving”? It was also of interest to see how diverse dimensions of belonging intersect, or challenge each other, and with what implications.

By reflecting upon these and related questions, we intended:

- To gain a better understanding of the notion of belonging, in general, to see how this notion is understood by Himalayan people, and to generally reflect upon its analytical merits;
- to document a number of cases of identity constructions when new parameters of belonging were established by rulers' and state policies, in the 19th and 20th century;
- to inquire into the tensions between "old" and "new" dimensions of belonging;
- to map out the contemporary dynamics, engaging in comparison across the Himalayan region;
- to inquire into boundary mechanisms (boundary drawing, maintaining, challenging, transgressing, shifting), particularly into conflict potentials as well as modes of peaceful co-existence;
- to capture peoples' sense of social justice when diverse categories of belonging intersect and / or contest each other;
- to gain a deeper understanding which political means are particularly likely to reconcile diverse dimensions of belonging in pluralist societies, and
- to grasp the understanding of difference, common concerns and mutuality in the Himalayan societies in previous moments of their history and in present-day perspective.

PROGRAMME

Day 1: Monday March 19th, 2007

Opening Session

Welcome Address by Gérard Toffin (CNRS)

Joanna Pfaff (University Bielefeld), On the Notion of Belonging.

Session I Modes of Belonging in the Indian Himalayas

Chair: Balveer Arora (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

William Sax (University of Heidelberg): *Ethnicity, Belonging and Statehood: the Case of Uttaranchal.*

Philippe Ramirez (CNRS): *Choosing between Hills and Plains: the Complexity of Identities in the Assamese foothills.*

Discussant: Balveer Arora (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Day 2: Tuesday March 20th, 2007

Session II Production of Ethnic and Regional Identities

Part 1 Chair: Ravinder Kaur (Indian Institute of Technology)

David Gellner (University of Oxford): *Belonging, Ritual and Caste: Two Newar Intellectuals.*

Krishna Hacchethu (CENAS, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu): *Regional Politics in Discourse of Restructuring the Nepalese State: a case Study of Danusha District.* (read by Kanak Dixit)

Discussant: Ravinder Kaur (Indian Institute of Technology)

Part 2 Chair: Andre Gingrich (Vienna University)

Sanjay Pandey (Jawaharlal Nehru University): *The Naga Identity and State Formation.*

Maheshwar Joshi (Almora University): *Geocultural Identities and Belongingness in the Ethnohistory of Central Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India.*

Discussant: Andre Gingrich (Vienna University)

Session III Religious Identities, State and Nationalism

Part 1 Chair: Ravina Aggarwal (Ford Foundation)

Axel Michaels (University of Heidelberg): *To whom belongs the Pashupati Temple Area of Nepal?*

G rard Toffin (CNRS): *Being a Member of a Hindu Reformist Sect in the Himalayas; the case of the Krishna Pranami.*

Discussant: Ravina Aggarwal (Ford Foundation)

Part 2 Chair: Nirmal Tuladhar (CENAS, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu)

Jessamine Dana (University of Oxford): *You Don't Belong here Sister; the Politics of Belonging at a Pilgrimage Site (Muktinath).*

Martin Gaenzle (Vienna University): *Emergent Nationalism, Citizenship and Belonging: Nepalis in Banaras.*

Charles Ramble (University of Oxford): *What it Means to be an Insider: the Manufacture of Community Identity among the Bhotes of Nepal.*

Discussant: Surinder Singh Jodhka (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Day 3: Wednesday March 21st, 2007

Session IV Local Ties

Chair: Patricia Uberoi (Institute of Economic Growth)

Gis le Krauskopff (CNRS): *The weight of places. Houses, villages and belonging in Dang valley (Nepal).*

Anne de Sales (CNRS): *Hamro Gaon. Imagination and Reality.*
Discussant: Patricia Uberoi (Institute of Economic Growth)

Session V Conflict, Democracy and Citizenship

Chair: Niraja Gopal Jayal (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

Daniela Berti (CNRS): *Trials, Witnesses and Local Stakes in a District Court of Himachal Pradesh.*

Chaitanya Mishra (Tribhuvan University): *Who do we belong with? Shifting Relationships in Nepal*

Judith Pettigrew (Lancashire School of Health and Postgraduate Medicine, UK): *Identity, Belonging and the People's War in Western Nepal.*

Discussant: Bishnu Narayan Mohapatra (Ford Foundation)

Session VI Belonging and the Politics of Territory and Environment

Chair: Amita Baviskar (Institute of Economic Growth)

Joëlle Smadja (CNRS): *Belonging and Protected Areas, the participatory Management Dilemma.*

Ben Campbell (University of Manchester, UK): *Pathways of Place Relation.*

Discussant: Amita Baviskar (Institute of Economic Growth)

Concluding Session