



HIMALAYA, the Journal of the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

Volume 21
Number 1 *Himalayan Research Bulletin; Nepal
After the Revolution*

Article 8

2001

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Recommended Citation

Hangen, Susan and Kunreuther, Laura. 2001. Introduction to the Panel: A Decade of "Democracy": Assessing Activism after the 1990 People's Movement in Nepal. *HIMALAYA* 21(1).
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol21/iss1/8>

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Panel: A Decade of “Democracy”: Assessing Activism after the 1990 People’s Movement in Nepal

Organizers: Susan Hangen and Laura Kunreuther

**Panel Presented at the 29th Annual Conference on South Asia, October 13-15, 2000 at
Madison, Wisconsin**

Introduction to the Panel **Susan Hangen and Laura Kunreuther**

April 2000 marked the tenth anniversary of the restoration of “democracy” in Nepal, brought about by the People’s Movement in 1990. With this transition to “democracy”, many people in Nepal say that “finally now it is possible speak”. This panel seeks to critically describe the various forms of activism, defined broadly as efforts to create social change, that have publicly emerged after this political shift. We ask several questions about the promises of democracy and the kinds of social activism it has produced in Nepal. What kinds of action and speech are enabled by this political change? How are activists speaking about their expectations of the democratic system? Who gets to speak and whose voices are eclipsed? More broadly, who benefits from the ostensible changes brought on by democracy? Many of the papers consider the social identities that have emerged around these new opportunities to speak. Some papers ask, for example, how the activism organized around particular groups of people has rearranged social hierarchies and how it has reproduced existing structures. Focusing on diverse forms of activism forwarded by ethnic minorities, women, youths, NGOs, and political parties, these papers grapple with the possibilities and limits of social change in the new political system.

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