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## Kathmandu Social Science Baha Conference

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In all, though it was a conference about boundaries, *Articulating Ethnicity: Language and the Boundaries of the Himalayas* was characterized by a distinct feeling of community, in which junior and senior scholars with diverse research areas and theoretical backgrounds exchanged ideas to help further each another's work. While the papers were excellent, the conversations were even better. Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the presenters, chairs, attendees, the Humanities Institute at the University at Buffalo, and everyone else who helped to make this conference a reality. Also, I give special thanks to Walt Hakala for his tireless work as the organizer of the Foundations of South Asian Studies Research Workshop at the University at Buffalo and for his guidance in the planning of this conference.

Joseph R. Stadler  
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### **17th International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) Conference Report**

#### **Kargil, Ladakh**

#### **26-29 July 2015**

The 17th Conference of the International Association for Ladakh Studies (IALS) was held July 26-29, 2015 at the Tourist Facilitation Centre in Kargil, Ladakh. The conference was organised by IALS in collaboration with LAHDC, Kargil and J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Kargil. A total of around 90 scholars, scientists, and students from different parts of the world registered for the conference and attended various sessions, demonstrating a great interest to learn and share knowledge. Forty-six

papers, including five in Urdu, were presented, and three documentary films were screened during the conference. The participants and presenters were of diverse backgrounds from within and outside of Ladakh. Unfortunately, some participants, including research students from Jammu University, could not make it to Kargil due to heavy rain fall and road blockage at Sonamarg.

The inaugural session took place at the Syed Mehdi Memorial Auditorium Hall in Kargil on July 26, 2015. The Chairman of the J&K Legislative Council, Hajji Anayat Ali, was the Chief Guest and Chief Executive Councilor LAHDC, Kargil, Hajji Hanifa Jan, was the Guest of Honor for the inaugural session. This session started with a welcome speech by Gulzar Husain Munshi, the conference convener. This was followed by introductory speeches by IALS President John Bray and an insightful address from the keynote speaker, Prof. P. Stobdan, former Indian Ambassador. Executive Councilors Syed Abass Razvi and Tsering Angdus were also present on the occasion.

The sessions on Climate Change and Water Management, Folk Art, Ethnography and Material Culture, and Governance and Political Change were successfully covered in three sessions on the first day. On the second day, there were sessions on Development, Religion and History, Agriculture, and Heritage Conservation. Two documentary films were screened on the second day: "In the Lap of the Mountains: The Irrigation Systems of Ladakh's Farming Communities" by Joe Hill and "Buddhist Art: a Fragile Inheritance" by Prof. David Park. The Biennial General Meeting of the Association took place after the final session. The conference dinner was held at Tourist Facilitation Centre on the same day.

Day Three included sessions on Folk Art, Ethnography and Material Culture, Art and Architecture, Urdu Papers, Biodiversity Conservation, Heritage Conservation, Contemporary Society and Contemporary History. The election results for the posts of President, Ladakh Liaison Officer, and eight members in the advisory committee were also announced. Sonam Wangchok was elected President, Konchok Paldan was elected as secretary, and Tashi Morup was elected the Ladakh Liaison Officer. The elected members in the advisory committee include Tashi Ldawa Tsangspa, Kacho Mumtaz Khan, Iqbal Ahmed, John Bray, Amjad Ali, Monisha Ahmed, Gulzar Husain Munshi, and Tsewang Rigzin. The day ended with the screening of the documentary film "Hajira: The Story of a Woman Journalist in Ladakh" by Tashi Morup and Mabel Disket from LAMO, Leh.

An excursion tour to Kartse Khar and Hunderman village were organized on July 29, 2015. This was followed by a dinner hosted by the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council, Kargil at the Tourist Facilitation Centre. Shri Hassan Khan, former member of Parliament, Hajji Hanifa Jan, CEC Kargil, Brigadier V.P.S. Kaushik, Commander 121 Brig., Lt. Col. K. Swaminathan, AAG, 121 Brigade, and executive councillors were also present at the dinner.

The conference would not have been possible without the support of LAHDC, Kargil, J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, Kargil Development Authority, Tourism Department, Kargil, and many individuals from Kargil, especially conference convener Mr Gulzar Hussain Munshi and Deputy Secretary/Special Officer for Culture (Grade 1), Nazir Hussain, and their team of volunteers. The Association is grateful to all the organisations and individuals who

contributed to the success of the 17th IALS conference.

To end on a personal note, I am honoured to be the first Ladakhi to become President of IALS in the association's thirty-five years. I take this as an opportunity more than a challenge to continue my aspirations for the success of the Association and look forward to working with executive and advisory committees and the larger membership of the Association.

Sonam Wangchok

## *Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya*

### **Kathmandu, Nepal**

**22-24 July 2015**

The Fourth Annual Kathmandu Conference on Nepal and the Himalaya took place at the Shankar Hotel in Kathmandu 22-24 July 2015. The conference was organized by the Kathmandu-based Social Science Baha, in partnership with the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies, Britain-Nepal Academic Council, and the Centre for Himalayan Studies-CNRS, making the conference a truly international endeavor. Coordinating a successful event just three months after the April 25 earthquake was an impressive accomplishment on the part of the organizers. The conference was notable for bringing together researchers based in Nepal and around the world, including many Nepali scholars, with presentations from a range of social science disciplines. Abstracts from the papers are available on Social Science Baha's website at <<http://soscbaha.org/activities/conferences-and-workshops/conference.html>>.

Over the three days of the conference, 67 papers covered a range of disciplinary approaches, including anthropology, sociology, political science, history, geography, religious studies, ethnomusicology, environmental studies, and peace and conflict studies. While panels covered a wide range of topics, some common themes included migration, indigeneity and other forms of identity, the meaning and importance of land and place, and many ways of investigating politics and the state. Several panels addressed topics related to women and gender, especially in relation to the forthcoming constitution and federal system. Another strand of papers focused on the environment, with papers on topics such as food and security, climate change, and livelihoods.

In addition to three full days of paper presentations, each evening featured a timely and relevant keynote or panel. Tanka Subba, Vice-Chancellor of Sikkim University, discussed "Nepalis without Nepal: Migration, Livelihood and Identity." Kanak Mani Dixit, while introducing Subba's presentation, argued that looking at Nepal from the view of an Indian-born Nepali speaker would provide an important perspective on India-Nepal relations, especially on the 1950 Indo-Nepal treaty. Subba traced the history of migration from Nepal to Darjeeling and beyond in India. In Subba's history, early migrants, who were mostly Dalit and Janajati (or indigenous ethnicities), were not attached to a Hindu Nepali identity until later waves of Tagadhari (upper-caste) migrants initiated a religious revivalism that caused a decline in these Nepalis' relations with their neighbors. In many cases, this has led to exile, beginning with evictions of Nepalis from Northeast India and later Lhotsampas from Bhutan. Subba painted a bleak picture of the

situation of Nepalis outside of Nepal, who are treated poorly by Indian neighbors but hesitate to claim affiliation with Nepal, which they view as not powerful enough to be worth affiliating with.

The second evening brought together four panelists to discuss "Earthquake 2015 and Social Scientists: Reflections from the Field and Afar." Panelists Bhaskar Gautam (Martin Chautari), Mallika Shakya (South Asian University), Austin Lord (Yale University), and Jeevan Baniya (Social Science Baha) reflected on prompts from moderator David Gellner (University of Oxford) about what social science has done since the earthquake, and what social scientists should be doing about the earthquake. Gautam discussed some themes emerging from his observations of earthquake response, such as the need to be critical of the popular tendency to laud Nepalis' "resilience" and to continue to keep a critical eye on how reconstruction will be undertaken to be eco-friendly and inclusive. Shakya talked about a much-discussed op-ed essay published in the Kathmandu Post, which she co-authored with Gaurav KC, and also discussed dimensions of belonging, locality, and nationality in written responses to the earthquake. Lord emphasized the social media response to the earthquake and raised the question of the relationship between social sciences and advocacy. Baniya contributed findings from post-earthquake research, which revealed that woman-headed households, children, and the elderly were facing the greatest difficulty in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and later response. He discussed additional problems in the delivery of relief materials, such as partisan interests in tailoring relief efforts, and a lack of resources to distribute necessary materials to all affected people.