

2014

**The 12th British-Nepal Academic Council (BNAC) Nepal Study Days, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, UK 24-25 April 2014**

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**Recommended Citation**

Bhandari, Kalyan. 2014. The 12th British-Nepal Academic Council (BNAC) Nepal Study Days, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, UK 24-25 April 2014. *HIMALAYA* 34(2). Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/himalaya/vol34/iss2/16>



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curricular organization and content. Experiences of colleagues teaching about this part of the world were of great interest.

It was not possible for participants to attend all the panel discussions due to concurrent sessions. However, I would note that presentations by Jim Fisher, Ken Bauer, Alton Byers, and Pasang Sherpa in the panel in honor of Barbara Brower were very interesting, as were those in the panel on constructing communities organized by Mary Cameron and the panel on people and the environment organized by Geoff Childs and Teri Allendorf. A session on photography in the field with presentations by David Zurick, Marcus Nusser, and Clare Harris featured papers on critical studies of photographic practices in the Himalaya.

The presentations and discussions on panels focused on sacred landscapes and bio-medicine in Nepal were wide ranging both in terms of the empirical material used and the theoretical constructs underpinning the papers. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that Himalayan Studies is a diverse enterprise that engages both the natural, social and behavioral sciences and the humanities.

By far the most memorable and impressive session was the one that brought together the past and present editors of the journal HIMALAYA, organized by John Metz of Northern Kentucky University, a longtime member of ANHS. Former editors David Holmberg, Kathryn March, William Fisher, Barbara Brower and Arjun Guneratne commented upon the history of the journal, the profound changes that the Himalayas have witnessed over the past several decades, and the painstaking care with which Himalayan scholars have recorded and interpreted these changes in

the pages of the journal. The present editors, Sienna Craig and Mark Turin, remarked on the challenges facing the journal and there was a lively discussion about how HIMALAYA should move forward.

Luce Hall served as the Conference venue, and sessions were held in the attractive rooms of the building. A large hall in this building offered ample opportunity for the meetings and mingling, and the exchange of news and views that form such an important part of an international gathering. The weather obligingly cooperated; throughout the Conference it was sunny and dry. In addition to Himalayan scholars, participants included undergraduates, graduate and post-graduate students, researchers, a publisher (the Director of the University Press of Kentucky), and a few academics from outside the field of Himalayan studies who are interested in mountain regions of the world.

The whole conference was live blogged on Twitter, with scholars and colleagues all over the Himalayan region reading, responding and asking questions about panels and discussions in live time through social media. If the New Haven meeting is an indicator of what is happening in Himalayan studies world-wide, then we should bet on an exciting future. The buzz at the conference was very much about opening up new spaces amongst the different perspectives, specialties and disciplines available to and used by Himalayan scholars. Participants were definitely energized. Altogether it was a very successful conference.

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### *The 12<sup>th</sup> British-Nepal Academic Council (BNAC) Nepal Study Days*

#### **School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, University of Oxford, UK 24-25 April 2014**

The 12<sup>th</sup> BNAC Nepal Study Days took place on 24-25 April 2014 in Oxford, England. The yearly event is organized by the Britain-Nepal Academic Council and moves to different institutions in the UK each year. The School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford hosted this year's event with funding from All Souls College. The primary aim of the event is to bring together both the established scholars and early career researchers working on diverse subject areas on Nepal or the Nepali cultural world. The event occurred over two days. Scholars from different institutions in the UK and EU member states presented a total of twenty papers.

On the first day, nine papers were presented on three themes: Gurkha identity, religion, and labor and capital. The first session started with a very topical discussion on the British Government's Gurkha pension policies. Presenting a synopsis of a review document prepared by the Centre for Nepal Studies UK (CNSUK), Chandra Laksamba and Lokendra P. Dhakal (CNSUK, Reading) put forth the view that there is a need for the UK Government to review the Gurkha pension policy because most of the former Gurkhas have now moved to the UK; the UK government's point, that the pension is fair as it is pegged to the cost of living in Nepal, makes little sense. The Gurkha pension is an overarching issue for thousands of Nepali ex-Gurkhas and the CNSUK's review document sheds light on this historically impending case.

The recent political changes in Nepal have great implications for Nepal's socio-cultural life and one such case is its religious identity. Though changing from a Hindu state to a secular one has not made visible changes to the way people have been practicing their religious faith in Nepal, the discussions at the Study Days showed that there has been a diverse religious discourse taking place since this change. A total of six authors presented papers on the theme of religion: Zsoka Gelle (Vienna University) on the sacred geography of Yolmo Gangra, Florence Gurung (University of Oxford) on Gurung religious identity, Krishna Adhikari (University of Oxford) on Bahun and Chhetri *kul puja*, Ian Gibson (University of Oxford) on religious divinity in Bhaktapur, Ole Kirchheiner (Middlesex University) on the Christian belief system in Nepali culture, and Marilena Frisone (University of Cambridge) on leadership and charisma in a Japanese new religion in Kathmandu. These papers showed the variability of the forms of both old and new religious practices in Nepal and also indicated a shift in scholarly interest from Hinduism and Buddhism to other less-studied forms of religious practices in Nepal.

The second day's themes were much more varied and ranged from gender, nature, and environment to tourism, health, and diaspora. The gender topics covered in the session were: mobility and local politics (Marina Korzenevica, University of Copenhagen), gender and citizenship (Kumud Rana, Institute of Social Sciences, the Hague), and gender discourse (Sara Parker and Kay Standing, Liverpool John Moores University). Particularly notable was the presentation by Korzenevica, who argued that while the post-conflict socio-political changes, together with the increased labor mobility of men, have given

women capital and capabilities, this has not helped women's social mobility. She argued that there are still significant obstacles to women's participation in the local politics. This is an interesting finding and something that warrants further study.

Presentations on the topic on nature, environment, and health included fern conservation (Sangeeta Rajbhandary, M. Watson, and C. Pendry, Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh), environmental media communication (Sangita Shrestha, University of Surrey/CNSUK), air pollution and the risk of cataract (Om Kurmi et al., various institutions) and community resilience after an earthquake (Hanna Ruzsczyk, Durham University). On the tourism theme, Ken Ishikawa (University of Oxford) presented a very interesting paper in which he explored the material culture of touristic souvenir embroidery in Kathmandu from the perspective of contemporary archaeology.

The main observations Ishikawa made during the two day event were that: 1) existing Nepali scholarship is largely a post-conflict study and 2) both Nepali and Western scholars are complementing each other's work in the field of Nepal studies. A very noticeable change witnessed in post-conflict Nepal has been the articulation of various forms of identities - be it religious identity, gender identity, or ethnic identity - and the way in which they are expressed; most of the conference's papers were strongly linked to this theme. Out of the total 29 paper presenters, including co-presenters, 11 were Nepali and 18 were Western scholars. The good mix of these two groups is important as it brings Nepali and Western scholars together and also provides a good opportunity for research partnerships and knowledge exchange. However, it

would be beneficial for new scholars if the program was less intensive and more time was made available for networking. The organizers could consider allowing poster presentations for early stage Ph.D. students that would help allocate more time for networking.

Overall, the two-day event was an excellent platform for scholars to present their research in a friendly and less formal environment and as such it should not lose this focus. The papers presented covered a wide range of topics that came predominantly from the social science disciplines. However, it would be beneficial to engage more scholars from various other disciplines to widen the scope of Nepal studies in future.

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*For more information, photos and abstracts, please visit: <<http://bnac.ac.uk/activities/12nsd-2014-oxford/>>.*