

The Creation of Public Meaning during Nepal's Democratic Transition

A Call for Papers

Nepal has experienced a series of radical political changes over the past 20 years. These have included the establishment of a multi-party parliamentary system in 1990, a ten-year Maoist insurgency from 1996-2006, a 'royal coup' in 2005, and a second, more broadly based movement for democracy in the spring of 2006. In April 2008, an interim government oversaw elections to a 601 member Constituent Assembly, and the monarchy was finally abolished by the Constituent Assembly in May 2008. A new constitution is due to be completed in May 2010.

These political changes have been accompanied by equally radical sociocultural changes, including an enormous growth in literacy, the emergence of a public discourse on human rights, and the vigorous reassertion of linguistic, ethnic and regional identities. The Nepali print and broadcast media and civil society organizations have become important as intermediate institutions that construct and distribute the meaning of political and social changes in Nepal, and have increasingly challenged the traditional roles of family and caste associations in this regard. Since the late 1990s, the Nepali understanding of transitions at the public level has been primarily constructed by the content of the Nepali language media, but films, songs, dramas, popular literature and poetry have also played their part.

Cultural and sociopolitical production in these genres has been largely omitted from academic considerations of the immense changes Nepal is undergoing as it emerges from a period of armed conflict and begins to construct the framework for a more representative non-monarchical state. This research project therefore represents an attempt to draw more attention to the Nepali media and these popular genres in an effort to understand their contribution to the construction of public understandings of sociopolitical change in Nepal. The project is also intended to foster increased collaboration between UK- and Nepal-based researchers in these fields, and increase the level of non-Nepali engagement with indigenous Nepali scholarship.

We now call for research papers that will document and analyse the ways in which the meanings of significant events and social developments have been constructed, broadcast and consumed through the Nepali print media, FM radio, film, theatre, TV, poetry and popular song. Papers may discuss and analyse the construction and meaning of events in post-1990 Nepal in any one or more of the genres mentioned above.

Topics for investigation could include the death of Madan Bhandari; the 'Hritik Roshan riots'; the emergence and growth of the Maoist insurgency; the Narayanhiti massacre; the actions of King Gyanendra during 2002-06; the anti-royal regime movement of 2005-06; the Jana Andolan II of 2006; the public emergence of the erstwhile underground Maoists; the declaration of the end of the Hindu Kingdom in 2006; the Madhes Andolan of 2007; the selection of a new Nepali national anthem in 2007; the twice-postponed election of the Constituent Assembly; the 2008 abolition of the monarchy; the

death of Girija Prasad Koirala and its impact on the 'peace process', etc.

Proposals of up to 500 words in length, written in either English or Nepali, should be sent to either Michael Hutt (mh8@soas.ac.uk) or Pratyoush Onta (sinhas@mos.com.np), the two convenors of this project, by 31 May 2010. Those whose proposals have been selected will be asked to submit a final draft paper by 1 June 2011. A meeting of those whose proposals are accepted and who can travel to Kathmandu on their own will be scheduled in late summer 2010 where further details of the project will be discussed.

The resulting research papers will be presented in workshops in Kathmandu (in late 2011) and in London (in late 2012). The costs of attending these workshops will be met by the project for a limited number of participants. Unfortunately, the project does not currently have funds to cover research costs.

The workshops are supported by a three-year grant from the International Partnerships Scheme of the British Academy. The UK partner is the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS, London) and the Nepali partner is Martin Chautari (MC, Kathmandu).

We look forward to hearing from you.

Michael Hutt (SOAS)
Pratyoush Onta (MC)

London/Kathmandu,
16 April 2010