Session I

Modes of Belonging in the Indian Himalayas

Ethnicity, Belonging and Statehood: the case of Uttaranchal, North India

William SAX
University of Heidelberg

Political units are sometimes based upon ethnicity. An ethnic group makes claims to political autonomy based on its shared language or descent or residence, and these claims result (or fail to result) in the creation of a corresponding district, province, or nation-state. This has no doubt been the case with many of the states of India. But history offers numerous examples of new ethnicities that developed after the creation of a political unit, and the North Indian state of Uttarakhand seems to correspond to this pattern. The movement for the creation of Uttaranchand was not based on ethnic considerations, but rather on feelings of economic and political exclusion. But given the logic of the Indian situation, since the Uttarakhand have their state, they now require an ethnicity to match. At the very least, they require new modes of belonging that are able to transcend older rivalries, especially the rivalry between the former kingdoms of Garhwal and Kumaon. This paper examines these new "modes of belonging", and asks whether it is useful to regard them as forms of "ethnicity."

Choosing between hills and plains: the complexity of identities in the Assamese foothills

Philippe RAMIREZ
CNRS, Paris

This contribution will focus on the relationships between belonging and identity among a series of populations in the southern foothills of the Brahmaputra valley. All of them can be considered typical cases of the buffer-bridge tribes as described by Roy-Burman. However, similar ecological and political interfaces (hill/plains, Assam State/Khasi states...) have led to very contrasted social apparatuses and to very contrasted processes of identity formation. This draws attention to the extension of the possible choices available to a society when building its identity. Cultural similarities and differences, territorial locations, political belongings are either selected or not to discriminate between We and They. Furthermore, the level of openness of such defined entities, i.e. the conditions of ethnic adoption, vary from one group to another. Here, we will more particularly consider the case of the Tiwa. The particular interest of the Tiwa for understanding the relationships between
belonging and identity is that a single identity — under the label “Tiwa” — encompasses a series of clear cultural oppositions. To take only the most striking, matrilineal Tiwa-speaking hill dwellers apparently share very few traits with the patrilineal Assamese-speaking plain dwellers. Nevertheless their interaction is permanent, they share the same descent groups, a fairly integrated territorial system, some rituals, and allegiance to a confederation of “frontier kings”. It seems that from one time to the other, the idealized components of Tiwa identity has shifted up and down between hill and plains life patterns, and that it is today hesitating in between. This in a certain way echoes the Kachin-Shan interface modelized by E. Leach, which will require some reconsideration (Leach did not use “identity” as a concept), as well as some situations commonly experienced on the larger scale of Nation-States. The pattern of cultural and political relationships is different, however, as it does not involves a mere centre-periphery configuration but a marginal and intermediary position between two dominant poles. Political and trade history will be solicited in order to understand the complex rules of identity genesis in this area. The present communal/ethnic politics (reservations, autonomy…) in Assam will be considered but only in terms of informing social and cultural processes in the long run.

Session II
Production of Ethnic and Regional Identities

Belonging, Ritual, and Caste: Two Newar Intellectuals

David N. GELLNER
University of Oxford

Modern forms of national identity are often in tension between a legal conception of citizenship, in which all are equal, on the one hand, and a cultural sense of belonging, on the other. This notion of belonging, which or may not receive official and/or legal recognition, usually implies that there are degrees of attachment to the national territory and consequently that some people are more entitled to belong than others. I intend to explore this tension through the case of Newar ethnic identity, and in particular by focusing on two local intellectuals, one Brahman, one Jyapu, who have wrestled with the questions, who counts as a Newar? What makes them a Newar? and Are some more Newar than others?

Regional Politics in Discourse of Restructuring the Nepalese State: a case Study of Danusha District.

Krishna HACHHETHU
CNAS, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

No abstract for now.
The Naga Identity and State Formation

Sanjay PANDEY
CSH & Jawaharlal Nehru University

The Naga separatist/national movement is the oldest resistance movement in India. The Nagas are indigenous people settled at the junction of India and Burma. There are various theories about the origin of the word Naga. It is generally believed that the various tribes who are called Nagas have something in common with each other which distinguishes them from many other tribes in the adjoining areas. The Nagas have complex linguistic diversity and there is no common language of all the Nagas. They never had a territorial political formation above the village level before the conquest of the area by the British. But there is belief among most of them that “Nagaland was never a part of India either by conquest by India or by consent of the Nagas”. They insist on their “unique” history and identity and believe that any solution to the Naga issue depends on the recognition of this uniqueness.

The paper tries to ascertain the impact of various factors, particularly the role of the Naga movement, of leadership and elites, of Christianity, of economic developments, and above all of the state and institution building under the British and Independent India on the formation of Naga identity and their sense of belongingness.

Geocultural identities and belongingness in the Ethnohistory of Central Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India

Maheshwar JOSHI
Almora University

The notion of belongingness to certain geocultural areas has played central role in power relations in the body politic of Central Himalaya. It is interesting to note that the burden of modern ethnohistorical account of the Central Himalaya, which began to appear from the first quarter of the nineteenth century and still continue to be written, is invariably emigration of successive waves of peoples to this area from the pre Vedic times to pre British times. Based on traditions these accounts represent the Doms as the aborigines of this region, who were subjugated by the Khasas, the early wave of the Indo-Aryans who immigrated to the Central Himalaya in the remote past. The latter in turn were subdued by the Brahmanically cultured high caste Aryans of Brahmin and Kshatriya varnas who started emigrating to the Central Himalaya from about the 7th century AD onwards.

The various lists of different Central Himalayan castes compiled from time to time during the British rule show that an overwhelmingly large number of them proclaimed their geocultural identity with such places as lay beyond the traditional bounds of Kumaon-Garhwal, and expressed vague belongingness to those purportedly superior geocultural seats from where their ancestors were supposed to have emigrated. Apparently, these claims were considered as good qualifications in power relations.

If this emigration is accepted, it would appear as if the Central Himalaya was extremely sparsely populated, and that these original inhabitants were “completely uncivilized, and wholly ignorant of agriculture and of the common arts of life” to quote Traill (1824). However, literary and archaeological evidences unfold an
altogether different state of life.

Since the scope of this essay is exceedingly vast I will confine present study to a few cases of the claims of geocultural identities and belongingness in the context of power relations during pre-Independence regimes in Kumaon. I will explain as to how history was invented to negotiate power to the advantage of those families who claimed belongingness to such geocultural entities as were represented as superior to the rest. It is interesting to note that the advent of the British rule in the Central Himalaya in the 19th century gave a fillip to the invention of history.

There will be three sections in this essay. The first section will give a summary account of the Central Himalayan ethnohistory which will serve as the background to build on the second section explaining the notion of belongingness to certain geocultural entities in the context of power relations during pre-British regimes. The last section will explore as to how in the pre-Independence era power was manipulated using the notion of geocultural identities and belongingness.

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Session III

Religious Identities, State and Nationalism

To whom belongs the Pashupati Temple Area of Nepal?

Axel MICHAELS
University of Heidelberg

Deopatan, the City of (all) Gods, and the Paśupatiksetra, the “Field of Shiva/Pashupati”, have noticeably changed in the past two decades. Not only have several temples been renovated and restored but many houses and monuments have also been destroyed, shifted or displaced. The consequences of these urban and social alterations influence the ritual structure of the city and its festivals to an extent that many citizens and pilgrims – worried about the future of their deities and its processions – ask themselves: to whom belongs Pashupati and its vicinity?

The conflicts that arouse after the changes had been implemented are a continuous part of public debates and concern. Discussions evolved around whether the changes should be reversed, the Indian Bhatta priests substituted by priests from Nepal, the income of the temple and other institutions put under government supervision, the influence of the palace minimised. Since Paśupati is the tutelary deity of Nepal and his temple a national sacred monument, such discussions reach far beyond the limits of Deopatan. At times it is even alleged that the future of Nepal depends on the solution of these problems since the gods have to be pacified and live in peace if men also want the same.

In the proposed paper, I want to ask, to whom Deopatan or more specifically the “Field” of Pasupati, a UNESCO Monument of World Heritage, belongs. As a matter of fact, many claims have been laid on this site, depending on various social and religious groups that attempt to dominate and gain influence over it. This is particularly an ethnic problem (local Newars vs. Parbatiyas), insiders and outsiders (inhabitants of Deopatan and pilgrims from Nepal or India; South Indian priests vs. Newar temple assistants), local and trans-local deities, state and local community
(Pashupati Area Development Trust vs. various Guthis). However, given the political changes in Nepal, it is also a problem of new means of maintaining or creating new identities by approaching new political or social authorities: new media, Maoists, political parties, etc.

Based on fieldwork carried out during the past months and earlier, I will discuss three recent cases in order to illustrate the above mentioned issues:

1. The gaining and vanishing influence of the Pashupati Area Development Trust in restructuring the site into a “Indian” tourist and pilgrim’s place at the coast of traditional Newar culture;
2. the role of the South Indian Bhatta temple priests in the light of political changes;
3. the claims of Ramanandi ascetics on the Rama temple area as a site belonging to them though it has been recently occupied by Dashanami ascetics.

The first and the third case are based on legal material since the cases have been brought to the Supreme Court. In the third case, the Maobadis were also addressed by the Ramanandis to support their claims.

Being a Member of a Hindu Reformist Sect in the Himalayas: the case of the Krishna Pranamis

Gérard TOFFIN
CNRS, Paris

The Krishna Pranami (Nijnand) sampraday is a non-caste Hindu sect which has so far hardly been studied. This religious movement, which originated in Gujarat in the 17th century, is now sparsely distributed in western and northern India, as well as in Nepal. It clearly derives from nirguna ("without attributes") bhakti and north Indian medieval sant tradition. Like the religious movements founded by Kabir (1440-1518) and then by Nanak (1469-1539), the Pranami sect arose at a time when Islamic rule was enforced on Hindus. The founder of the movement, Dev Chandra (1581-1655), was born in Sindh, to a rich merchant family (Mehta). The central figure of the Pranamis, however, is Dev Chandra’s disciple: Prannath (1618-1694), born in Saurashtra to an affluent Thakur family (Kshatriya) which fulfilled diwan ministry function. This saint propagated an eclectic religious doctrine intended to transcend Hinduism and Islam. In the same manner as Kabir and Nanak, Prannath strongly rejected the caste system and denounced Brahman’s ritualism.

The devotees of the sect (called sundersath) often recall that Gandhiji’s mother belonged to this sect. It is likely that the Mahatma’s ideas related to religious tolerance and ahimsa non-violence were influenced in one way or another by the Pranamis’ religious discourse. Very few people, however, know that this sect has spread over the course of history in Nepal, especially in the Kathmandu Valley and the eastern regions of the country, as well as in the eastern Himalayas. Even fewer know that the present Maharaj of the sect, who spends most of his time in the religious centre of the sampraday (Jamnagar, Gujarat), is originally from Nepal (Ilam district).

This paper focuses on the politics and the anthropology of the movement both in the past and the present. Three issues will be addressed. First: the origins of the movement, its universalistic message, beyond the Muslim and Hindu faiths, and its evolution over time towards a more aligned Hindu movement. Secondly: the
difficulty the sect had in integrating the orthodox and authoritarian Hindu kingdom of Nepal from the end of the 18th century until 1950. The sampradaya encounters the same difficulties as the Arya Samaj, another reformist movement, introduced much later in Nepal, in being accepted in the Himalayan kingdom. Pranamis were particularly suspected by the Ranas of clandestinely propagating the religion of the Koran. The third aspect to be discussed is the impact of being a Pranami in the present ethnic and religious identity context. How can one at the same time be a vegetarian, teetotaller, and belong to the Newar ethnic group? How can one be a sacred book-worshipper, rejecting any veneration of deity images and a number of Hindu rituals, and belong to an upper Hindu Parbatiya caste?

These various circles of belonging, which have to be studied in relation to each other, and at different periods in history, define the position of the individual in terms of shifting and negotiated identities.

You Don’t Belong Here Sister: the Politics of Belonging at a Pilgrimage Site

Jessamine DANA
University of Oxford

In this paper I will focus on the way in which people construct and identify each other’s belonging within the context of the Nepalese multi-faith pilgrimage site, Muktinath. I will explore belonging as a set of non-static relationships between an individual and real or imagined entities that render the individual ‘suited to’ or ‘claimed by’ the context in which they may be said to belong. Over the past 50 years, the influx of policemen stationed at the site, Tibetan refugees, Indian Hindu pilgrims, and Western and East Asian tourists, have intensified its multi-cultural and multi-faith properties, and are related to wider processes of globalization and democratisation in Nepal. These provide opportunities for multiple, often contradictory forms of belonging in Muktinath, that are negotiated and constrained by the community of participants at any given time. Such a context begs the question of whether belonging ‘happens’ differently at a pilgrimage site than elsewhere. Departing from Arjun Appadurai’s 1981 article, ‘The Past as a Scarce Resource’, this paper suggests that it is useful and interesting to consider the connection between claiming authority over a sacred site and asserting another’s belonging within a sacred context. Additionally, this paper concludes that they are both political acts. The paper looks at how the life trajectories of participants in Muktinath are also evaluated according to ‘regulatory norms’, while highlighting issues like gender, ethnicity, and ‘techniques of the body’. In an ancient and international site such as Muktinath, the politics of these designations are in part constituted by participants’ ritual access and authority and in turn affect them. These relations, ties, and perspectives will be outlined in the paper.

Emergent Nationalism, Citizenship and Belonging: Nepalis in Banaras

Martin GAENSZLE
Vienna University

The city of Banaras, or Kashi – the city of light, since long has a special importance for the people of Nepal. In premodern times, before the formation of nation states, Kashi was often perceived as a focal sacred place by the inhabitants of the central Himalayan region, located not “outside” of it but at its margin. For pilgrims from the
hills, it has been one of the most cherished fīrtha. For Brahmans the city was also a centre of Sanskrit studies, a place to get a solid education and training as a pandit. For kings it was a sacred space requiring royal patronage (and useful for political exile). In the course of time an increasing number of Nepalis began to settle down and often stay in the city.

The present paper looks at the historical transformation of Kashi as a place in the Nepali perspective. In particular, it will deal with the changing ways in which the Nepali residents have viewed and experienced the city in the course of the last two centuries. In the late 19th century Banaras became the centre of Nepali linguistic nationalism. However, while in those days citizenship was not a problematic issue, it has increasingly become one in the last decades. The compulsory decision to opt either for Indian or Nepali citizenship is crucial, but reflects only one aspect of the complexities of belonging in Banaras.

What it Means to be an Insider: the Manufacture of Community Identity among the Bhotes of Nepal

Charles RAMBLE
University of Oxford

In an earlier article (1997) I proposed that the Bhote – the Tibetan-speaking population of Nepal – lacked a collective ethnic identity. The article suggested that one of the reasons for the failure of such an identity to crystallise was the strong sense of attachment among members of this ethnic category to the particular communities – or, at most, enclaves – in which they live. Association with a particular locality is epitomised by the cult of the yul-lha, the territorial divinity, that forms such an important part of the religious life of each of these communities. The paper proposed here undertakes a closer examination of the way in which this powerful sense of local belonging is manufactured and maintained. The mechanisms used include rituals, economy, songs and jokes, as well as legal and fiscal measures. Examples will be taken from the communities of Baragaon, in southern Mustang district. Recourse to local archives will make it possible to see how the construction and understanding of community membership has changed over the course of time. Incorporation into full membership of a community may be a gradual affair that extends over several years; an individual may be granted ‘row’ – the right to sit in an age-ranked line of peers – but not ‘mouth’ – the right to share the cup; presence at major festivals is enforced by fines for absenteeism. In another case, people might be ‘suspended’ from full membership for a year if they failed to receive a share of meat from a sacrificed yak. Songs and legal formulae promote the notion of the unity and indivisibility of the community. Individuals who are absent for most of the year may also formally belong to the community through surrogates who farm their land and pay their taxes. Finally, the paper will examine the measures that are currently being taken by these communities to deal with the new problem of permanent out-migration. Several villages have introduced laws designed to make prospective émigrés think twice about leaving; people who withdraw from full membership may thereafter return to their villages only for short stays, and may reintegrate into the community only on payment of substantial indemnities.
The weight of locality. Houses, villages and territorial belongings in Dang valley (Nepal)

Gisèle KRAUSKOPFF
CNRS, Paris

My contribution is centred on a very specific case, the units of belonging and their web as I observed them in the 1980 in the lowland valley of Dang in Western Nepal, in a broaden perspective to pave the way for a comparative approach on the forms of belonging in the central Himalayas. The local configuration I explore emphasises units such as houses, villages and « territories » at different levels of inclusion (as they were conceived and practised). This configuration put forward the agrarian and religious relations which have instituted such « territorial » units. These material is exposed in order to question the peripheral role of filiation or clan structure compare for instance with other Himalayan communities. Another point that will be only briefly touched here is to measure the radical breaks, which have occurred in the 1990s, reshaping the forms of belonging along new channels, at new levels and through other types of relationships. These changes raise questions and open the ways to new trends of comparison in the context of modernity, globalization and new political and international agenda. However, the very local configuration and institutionalisation of belonging described in this paper as functioning before these changes, must not be understood as if political and economical changes and external pressure had not already occurred to mould them.

Hamro Gaon: Imagination and Reality

Anne DE SALES
CNRS, Paris

The expression of attachment to the village is part of the Nepalese folklore. Many modern lyrics take up this theme, combined with a rather conventional vision of traditional and bucolic life. This paper will explore on the one hand how this sentiment has been partly historically constructed and on the other hand how it is nowadays animating groups of interest around projects of local development on the emerging mode of share holding. This mode of participation allows non-residents in the village to remain somehow active members through donations. The reference to the village is no less omnipresent in the politics of belonging. It rather assumes a more competitive dimension in the race to development fundings. The material for this study is drawn from recent filedwork in the Kham-Magar speaking area of Western Nepal (Rukum district).
Trials, Witnesses and Local Stakes in a District Court of Himachal Pradesh

Daniela BERTI
CNRS, Paris

The paper analyses how a specific form of village solidarity takes shape within the urban- and State-centred context of a district court of justice. Ethnographic observations of a Session court in Mandi, a small town in Himachal Pradesh, throw light on the various ways in which the court system, due to its very judicial procedures and its legal interpretation of facts, is constantly confronted with, and sometimes hindered by village-based forms of belonging. I will take as example a criminal case registered under section 20 of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act. Whilst setting the case in a wider cultural context at regional level, I will concentrate my analyses on the court proceedings in order to see how village dynamics of this kind are expressed during the trial, and how far the judge manages to disregard them in his search for the judicial truth.

Who do we belong with? Shifting relationships in Nepal

Chaitanya MISHRA
Tribhuvan University

No abstract for now.

Identity, Belonging and the ‘People’s War’ in Western Nepal

Judith PETTIGREW
University of Central Lancashire

This paper examines how Tamu (Gurung) villager’s sense of belonging and identity has changed as a result of the Maoist insurgency. Central to the Tamu notion of place and belonging is the concept of multiple landscapes in which past and present interact in different and overlapping temporal frameworks. Tamu geography is overlaid and intertwined with other landscapes especially the political and national geographies of the state of Nepal. In recent years the spatial order of the state has been unimportant. In contrast villages were subject to a Maoist re-ordering of political and social space. Villagers perceived themselves to be “under Maoist rule” in an area apparently designated as “Tamuwan” within which new rights and entitlements were to be provided. Most villagers, however, had limited knowledge of the Maoist concept, or proposed boundaries and entitlements of autonomous ethnic regions. This paper explores villager’s ideas about and reactions to Maoist landscapes and spatial order and the manner in which they impacted on locally contested ideas about ownership, belonging and identity.
Belonging and protected areas, the participatory management dilemma
Joëlle SMADJA
CNRS, Paris

Protected areas in the Himalayas have increased in number since the 1970s. With their borders, some of which are controled by the army, and their own legislation drawn up alongside or fully by international organisations, they are real enclaves, new administrative territories, new strata of spatial identity, which overlie or clash with old (State, district, village community…) administrative structures. These spaces, however, are having difficulties in becoming real territories, in terms of "spaces appropriated by a population" or "milieus with which a population identifies", and the development of which closely depends on the feeling of citizenship and belonging they evoke. This is the problem that participatory management and proper governance policies are facing.

Indeed, these protected areas are hybrid spaces, shared by actors whose expectations may differ: on the one hand, tourists and guides (not counting administrative personnel employed in nature conservation) and on the other hand local populations. These are spaces that the former consider to be natural, whereas for a long time now peasants have socialised them.

For tourists, these protected areas are territories where they find their bearings, if one considers that certain symbols attest to belonging to a territory: images of an imposing and preserved nature, the same lodges and menus throughout the world, a folklore, that of autochthon populations. The tourist, "citizen of the world", accustomed to these recreational spaces finds an exceptional space here where he comes to spend his foreign currency.

Situated somewhere between tourists and peasants, guides recreate a "professional territory and a place with new practices and identities associated with carrying on the job of guide" which links them up to the rest of the modern world. For them, these are territories of social progress and promotion.

On the contrary, for peasants who are requested to manage and protect these milieus, it is another situation altogether. How can they appropriate or feel that they belong to milieus when they have been excluded from them and when they no longer control the resources? When the link with nature has been severed? When they have to obey regulations issued by bodies that are neither local nor state, but international, and which they have not contributed to? When, as far as their identity is concerned, they are asked to only retain certain traits of their own folklore, "the proper customs", (housing, costumes, dances, songs…) while getting rid of what would be prejudicial to "nature" (animal sacrifices, for example, or slash and burn farming practices)? When, determined to implement sustainable development, one takes into account the present and the future, but not memory and thus the knowledge recorded in a territory and in resource management? When environmental protection, for which they are requested to take on the responsibility, has devastating effects on their crops and their herds due to the proliferation of wildlife? In a word, how can one talk of a feeling of belonging if they have to reject
their own identity to conform to the wish of a dominant globalised trend which has as its emblematic representative - the tourist.

Since these parks have been imposed on them and are not a result of any social construct, peasants cannot build their own identity; so one can understand the numerous setbacks in participative management which encourages citizenship, valorization and populations to take on resource management while the latter lose their spatial (from village to world) and temporal (memory of the milieu, of its usages and practices) bearings and their relation to the milieu, which is the basis of their survival and their identity.

This shall be explored in our paper using some examples taken from the Nepalese and Indian Himalayas.

Pathways of Place Relation

Ben CAMPBELL
University of Durham

This paper will explore the theme through debates and struggles for environmental entitlement in the Himalayan region. It will compare how discourses of belonging interact with varied influences of devolutionary administration, and global ecological ethics and visibility. As always Himalayan society resists generalisation, but there is a notable ‘democratic’ contrast in studies of social forestry in the Indian Himalayan (Pernille Gooch on the Van Gujjars, Arun Agrawal’s ‘environmentality’) as opposed to those emerging from Nepal. Ethnography from central Nepal (Tamang areas) will be discussed to understand current tensions between the ecological dimension of cultural and political exclusion over history, and the consequences of participation in contemporary policies to spread conservation through communities taking responsibility for forests. Modes of relating to place have ever been on the move, but there are new ways and contexts for configuring (and making analysis of) subjectivity, place and collective rights.