

Democratic Values and Political Practices in South Asia.

The Nordic Summer University held its first workshop on South Asia in the 21st Century at NIAS in Copenhagen from March 13-15, 2009. The theme of the conference was: Democratic Values and Political Practices in South Asia.

The following papers were presented at the workshop:

Walter Andersen, SAIS, Washington DC
Domestic Roots of Indian Foreign Policy

Kenneth Nielsen, University of Oslo
Political Leadership and Factional Politics in West Bengal's Congress Parties

Farhat Taj Andersen, University of Oslo
Democracy, Religion, Greed and the Code of Pakhtunwali

Arild Engelsen Ruud, University of Oslo
Electoral Behaviour in South Asia: An Anthropological Perspective

Aksel Sundström, University of Göteborg
Leaving the 'proxy woman or politician' dichotomy: A qualitative study of the possibilities and obstacles for elected women's participation in Indian local governance

Geoffrey Gardella, ACE, University of Lund
How Like the Taliban: frames of discourse in South Asian media

Jørgen Dige Pedersen, University of Aarhus
Explaining Democracy in South Asia

Pamela Price, University of Oslo
Assembly elections in South India: A focus on 'party workers'

Uwe Skoda, Aarhus University
Raja instead of Rama?

Stig Toft Madsen, SASNET, Lund University
Defaitistic/Defeatist Cynicism

Lodve A. Svare, University of Tromsø
Legitimacy and representation in peacemaking processes in Sri Lanka

Trine Brox, University of Copenhagen
Tibetans Translating Democracy

Nilani Ljunggren-De Silva, University of Stockholm
Photoshow and comments on the recent elections in Bangladesh

Igor Kotin, University of St. Petersburg
The smile of democracy. The 'cartoon' coverage of the 2004 general elections in India

Manuela Ciotti, University of Edinburgh/Camp Germany
Gendering Indian political modernity: Low-caste women's political participation in contemporary India

Jenny Hedström, ACE, Lund University
Gender and Politics on the Burmese Borders, Jenny Hedström, ACE, Lund University

After the workshop, a committee consisting of Kenneth B Nielsen, Uwe Skoda and Stig Toft Madsen was formed to explore the possibility of publishing a selection of these, and other, papers.

CALL FOR PAPERS
for the Inaugural Seminar of the Nordic Summer University Cluster
on South Asia in the 21st Century

Democratic Values and Political Practices *in South Asia*

13-15 March 2009, Tampere, Finland (preliminary)

The Nordic Summer University cluster **South Asia in the 21st Century** will hold two seminars a year for the coming three years. The common aim of all the six seminars is *to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the subcontinent in the 21st century by exploring multidisciplinary methodologies.*

The theme of the first seminar is **Democratic Values and Political Practices in South Asia**. The seminar is organized in collaboration with the **International School of Social Sciences (ISSS)**, University of Tampere.

Academic coordinators: **Stig Toft Madsen**, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University, **Arild Engelsen Ruud**, Oslo University and **Kenneth B Nielsen**, Oslo University (with logistical support from NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies).

The seminar is open to **researchers, postgraduate students** (as well as qualified MA students) and **professionals**. All participants are expected to present a paper and all papers will be given ample time for discussion in the open and engaged forum that is the tradition of the Nordic Summer University.

SOUTH ASIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Over the last few decades, the interest in South Asian societies and cultures has grown dramatically. Against this backdrop, there has been a notable growth in Nordic South Asia related research, both within specific disciplines and within South Asian area studies.

European theories of human action and meaning, encompassed in distinct disciplines, are developed out of historical experiences particular to European areas and cultures. Scholars working on South Asia have achieved some explanatory success in applying analytic concepts from conventional academic disciplines. Often scholars find that they have to rework some analytic concepts and develop new ones appropriate to social and political structures indigenous to the subcontinent.

Doing research on South Asia can thus be frustrating, because one cannot rely easily on conventional European canons of thought, but at the same time rewarding as scholars are truly pushing the intellectual frontiers. On its own, no academic discipline is equipped to take all of these variables into account, and hence to better

explain and comprehend the ongoing transformation we need the disciplines to inform each other. Economic, social, political, historical, ecological, geographical and cultural analysis contributes important aspects to our knowledge of South Asia, but no single discipline can claim to tell the full story of the region. Only a multidisciplinary approach and methodology can generate a more comprehensive understanding and unlock the intellectual challenges of South Asia in the 21st century.

DEMOCRATIC VALUES AND POLITICAL PRACTICES IN SOUTH ASIA

Democracy has considerable temporal depth in South Asia. The British Empire in the region initiated elections to town and district boards at the end of the 19th century, while Independence brought opportunities for universal suffrage.¹ India receives attention as the largest democracy in the world and as the developing country with one of the best record, since its independence, in carrying out regular elections to state and national assemblies. Sri Lanka has a comparable record of electoral politics, while the tryst with democracy in Pakistan and Bangladesh has been repeatedly interrupted by periods of military dictatorship. In February 2008, Pakistan reverted to democracy after eight years of military tutelage. Recently, the experiment of democracy has been extended to Bhutan under royal tutelage, while in Nepal the outcome of civil war and spells of autocratic rule has been the abolition of monarchy and a turn to a rustic broad-based democracy. While democracy has mostly followed monarchy in the *longue durée*, in Afghanistan kingship has reemerged together with a severely challenged form of democracy.

With several crucial elections taking place in 2008-9, elections still signify democracy. However, Europeans and North Americans enter into epistemological issues of a complicated nature when they try to unravel elections in South Asia. It has long been dawning on many scholars of South Asia that pursuing an understanding of political rationality in this part of the world requires strenuous efforts of multidisciplinary cooperation. Here, the sphere of the religious seemingly seamlessly overlaps with the political, the political cannot be separated from the social, and boundaries between state and society are blurred. These observations began to emerge in the field of the cultural anthropology of South Asia in the 1970s², moved into historical studies of the area and have recently been employed in studies of contemporary politics, on local and state levels.³

The political practices of democracy appear tied to values, concepts, meanings and symbols of power, authority and status as these are historically and culturally formed in South Asia's political cultures. Insight into processes and meaning of domination and control can be gained from studies of elections, party politics and local political leaders. Insight also comes from exploring gender relations, group relations in local society and in numerous other settings. Explaining dynamics of conflict and competition at the state level, for example, can be facilitated with an understanding of notions of rank and status in local societies, and electoral campaigning and symbolism with an understanding of notions of honor and shame in family contexts.

¹ John M. Richardson Jr. and S.W.R. de A. Samarasinghe, eds., *Decmocratisation in South Asia: The First Fifty Years*, Candy, 1998.

² Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge, "The South Indian Temple: Authority, Honor and Redistribution", in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (NS), Vol. 10, No. 2, 1976, pp. 187-211.

³ As in C.J. Fuller and Véronique Bénéï, eds., *The Everyday State and Society in Modern India*, New Delhi, 2000; Arild Engelsen Ruud, *Poetics of Village Politics: The Making of West Bengal's Rural Communism*, New Delhi, 2003; and Pamela Price, "Changing Meanings of Authority in Contemporary Rural India", in *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, pp. 301-316.

Hence, this workshop will discuss institutions and values which appear as salient in understanding political practices during elections time and in everyday South Asian politics.

ACADEMIC COORDINATORS

Stig Toft Madsen, Centre for East and South-East Asian Studies, Lund University

Kenneth B. Nielsen, SUM, University of Oslo

Arild E. Ruud, IKOS, University of Oslo

With logistical assistance from NIAS – Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.



NORDIC SUMMER UNIVERSITY PRACTICALITIES

1. Abstract with tentative title of presentation should be submitted by **1 December 2008** to Stig Toft Madsen at stm@ruc.dk
2. A participant fee of 350 SEK is to be paid before the symposium. Additional information in this regard will be given upon submission of abstract
3. Participants should indicate if they have specific wishes with regard to diet
4. The coordinators will arrange for accommodation in double rooms. If you want a single room, please let us know.
5. We hope to be able to cover the expenses for travel, boarding and lodging (shared room) within the Nordic region. The coordinators will try their best to make room in the budget for reimbursement of travel expenses, but as the budget is dependant on the number of participants, we cannot say whether this will be possible.
6. Tenured staff and others who are able to fund their participation through their respective employers are kindly asked to inform us.