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Unfolding Central Himalaya: The Cradle of Culture, Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand, India, 11-14 December 2015

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The 2015 Annual Meeting of the AAR offered an interesting and insightful variety of panels and other events for the many students and scholars of Religious Studies in attendance. The conference's four specifically Himalayan panels – as well as its many other more generally South Asian panels situated on the periphery of this region – successfully drew attention to content that was multidisciplinary (textual, art historical, and media studies), transregional (Hindu and Buddhist Tantric traditions in India, royal rituals in Nepal, Western popular culture), and diverse in its cultural and historical approaches (female saints and teachers throughout multiple eras of Tibetan history). These well-attended panels speak to the importance of attending to the rich religious cultures of the Himalayan region.

1. <<https://www.aarweb.org/annual-meeting/2015-annual-meeting-survey-results>>

2. This quotation, and all other quotations, are taken directly from the panel or paper abstracts. All of these abstracts can be found on the conference app, which can be downloaded at AARSBLAM15.

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Unfolding Central Himalaya: The Cradle of Culture

Dehra Dun, Uttarakhand, India

11-14 December 2015

The conference *Unfolding Central Himalaya: The Cradle of Culture* took place at the beautiful Songtsen Library near Dehra Dun, December 11-14, 2015. It was organized and hosted by the Doon Library

and Research Center (<www.doonlibrary.org>) in collaboration with Far Western University, Mahendranagar, Nepal. A second part to this conference was to be held in Mahendranagar, but was postponed due to the ongoing disputes along the Nepal-India border.

The conference was successful both in attracting a broad range of scholars from eight countries as well as in providing a venue for fruitful cross-disciplinary discussion. Over the four days of the conference, twenty papers were presented by scholars from India, Nepal, Germany, Israel, USA, UK, Poland, and Norway, with diverse academic backgrounds such as linguistics, sociology, ethno-history, archaeology, history, political science, and film studies. Contact information for presenters and full abstracts of their papers may be obtained from the Doon Library and Research Center <doonlib@yahoo.co.in>. The papers will also appear in published format later this year.

The conference began with B. K. Joshi (Hon. Director, Doon Library and Research Centre) extending a warm welcome to the participants and a special welcome to researchers from Nepal, who enthusiastically participated in the conference even amidst tensions between the two countries. He established the tone of the conference on the Central Himalayas by noting that December 11th was International Mountain Day and that the year 2015 marked the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Sugauli, which laid the foundation for the modern state system in this part of the world. The conference represented a true unfolding both in terms of the material – namely, the intersections of language and culture across political/geographical boundaries – as well as in the cross-disciplinary exchanges among the

presenters. M. P. Joshi reinforced the importance of participation of researchers from Nepal in the hope that it would be the beginning of more fruitful cross-border research collaborations in the future.

This theme of cross-border collaboration was also foregrounded in the inaugural speeches delivered by Claus Peter Zoller (University of Oslo) and Chura Mani Bandhu (Tribhuvan University). Zoller drew attention to linguistics and observed that the region has been a true cradle of various crosscurrents in dialects, branches, and internal transformations parallel to the crosscurrents in cultural dynamics. Bandhu further noted that the conference was a significant step in cross-border research both in terms of geographical and disciplinary borders.

The presentations were organized into three broad themes: language, culture, and history. Studies based on linguistic analysis of languages in the Central Himalayan region formed a major part of the conference. While some scholars looked at the development of Indo-Aryan languages, others looked at the languages of the Raute and Rajis, two dwindling tribes in the Central Himalayas. Under the theme of culture, diverse topics such as religious cults of Kumaon, the intersections of religion and state power in the Shimla hills, environmental policies, legal order and customs in Uttarakhand, accommodation and resistance in Indo-Tibet borderlands, and mural art in Dehradun were covered. Different aspects of the history of the Gorkha empire and Gorkha martial identity were brought forward for discussion under the theme of history. Other areas of discussion in this theme included a critical reevaluation of the

representation of Kumaon-Garhwal in Mughal sources, interactions and connections at the borders of empires in both the Terai and the high Himalayas, and implications for the Central Himalayas of the revival of a modern silk route.

The conference provided a much needed common platform for scholars engaging with the Central Himalayas from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to broaden and enrich their understanding of the same. It was also commendable that in line with the thematic objective of the conference, besides English, some papers were also presented in Nepali. B. K. Joshi provided a final reflection on how the conference opened new doors of knowledge and cross-fertilization of ideas, especially between the liberal arts and sciences that supports a new focus on a region that naturally crosses borders. Dr. Zoller responded with appreciation on behalf of the presenters.

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Nepal Earthquake Summit

Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH

18-20 February 2016

This year, Dartmouth College's John Sloane Dickey Center devoted its annual *Leila and Melville Straus 1960 Family Symposium* to the Nepal earthquakes of 2015. A remarkably broad spectrum of panelists and participants converged in Hanover for this event to discuss what they have done individually and as organizations in response to the earthquakes; to make connections

and discover new ideas for Nepal's (re)development; and to re-engage the global community and re-focus attention on the long-term challenges the Himalayan country faces in rebuilding.

The earthquake of April 2015 killed more than 8,000 people, injured tens of thousands, and damaged or destroyed 500,000 homes. The long-term challenges of rebuilding and development in Nepal will require many talents and multiple perspectives. Thus, one objective of the Summit was to bring together multiple disciplines to tackle this complex human development problem. Representatives from the worlds of technology innovation and design, medicine, anthropology, engineering, and the visual arts, along with members of the Nepali government, grassroots practitioners, students, and community members participated in three days of engaging and dynamic events.

The Summit featured a series of panel discussions that were free and open to the public, as described below. In addition to the Straus Symposium, the Summit engaged stakeholders across Dartmouth's campus and was co-sponsored by the Hood Museum of Art, the Departments of Anthropology and Linguistics, the Asian and Middle Eastern Studies Program, and the Office of the Provost.

The opening night of the Summit featured an exhibition and public discussion on 'Representing Disaster,' with photojournalists James Nachtwey (Dartmouth '70) and Kevin Bubriski (Green Mountain College). Award-winning Nachtwey flew to Nepal three days after the earthquake to document the event for TIME Magazine, while Bubriski arrived there five weeks after the initial

devastation. The two photographers gave presentations of their images of the aftermath at different stages and then answered questions about the role of photojournalists as first responders, the visual medium of photography as a means of communication, and the relationship between photographers and their subjects. They discussed the ethics of representation and the power of visual media to spread awareness about human disasters. In its main gallery, the Hood Museum featured images by Nachtwey and Bubriski as well as a revolving digital slideshow of images taken by Nepalis themselves. During and after the Summit, the Dickey Center displayed a series of Austin Lord's (Dartmouth '06 and Director of Rasuwa Relief) photos of the Langtang Valley, which was devastated by a massive landslide.

The Summit also hosted two film screenings: 'Himalayan Megaquake' (NOVA) and 'Natural Event, Manmade Disaster' (Himal South Asia). The film screenings were followed by Skype-based conversations with Director Lisel Clark and well-known Nepali journalist Kunda Dixit, respectively.

The panel 'Narrating Disaster: Calibrating Causality and Response to the 2015 Earthquakes in Nepal' featured anthropological and linguistic research, funded by the National Science Foundation, that focused on local lived experiences of the earthquakes in three differently-impacted, contiguous districts: Mustang, Manang, and Gorkha. Panelists Sienna Craig (Dartmouth College), Geoff Childs (Washington University-St. Louis), and Kristine Hildebrandt (Southern Illinois University) described the ways that Nepali society is processing loss and beginning to rebuild, physically and mentally. Nepalis have resorted