

Call for Occasional Seminar Series in Kathmandu

As part of its ongoing collaboration, the Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies (ANHS) and the Social Science Baha (SSB) would like to invite scholars associated with ANHS to conduct short workshops/seminars for Nepali students, researchers, scholars and the public in general on topics of their choice during their visits to Nepal.

As has been well documented, and which would be well known to all ANHS members, the education system in Nepal churns out graduates with various degrees though sometimes with rather untested abilities. This is true mainly for the social sciences, since those coming out of the pure science programmes in Nepal perform well, even when they undertake higher studies in universities in the west. And, although there is the tendency to be dismissive of the level of knowledge of social science graduates coming out of Nepali university programs, that so many students display these deficiencies means that this is a systemic problem with Nepal's educational system rather than personal failure of the students themselves.

Despite these drawbacks, many Nepalis hunger for knowledge that they cannot satiate either within the existing educational institutions or through self-study (since the resources they would require are not available in Nepal). The Occasional Seminar Series is being conceived of as a process which would make up, in a very small way, for the lack of alternative opportunities for Nepali scholars and graduate students to immerse themselves into a topic for a few days. Apart from providing the experience of taking a class in a seminar setting, which itself would be quite novel for most people, it is hoped that the seminars will spark the interest of the participants to explore the subject in greater depth as well as lead to informed engagement with it.

As an exploratory effort, a seminar on 'Ethnicity and Identity in South Asia' was conducted by Arjun Guneratne in early December 2009 (*see programme below*). This was a two-day event, consisting of four three-hour sessions. As anticipated, the response to the notice was quite overwhelming. We received a total of 60 applicants for the 20 available seats. In addition to the genuine interest in knowledge, the administrative fee of Rs 300 made the opportunity affordable to everyone. The goal was to organise an academic seminar which cost attendees only a nominal amount. Lunch and other accoutrements associated with funded events were dispensed with altogether. From all accounts, everyone, including Prof Guneratne, enjoyed the seminar thoroughly and requests have been made for more of such events to be held in the future.

ANHS and SSB believe such seminars would be a way in which ANHS members can 'give back' intellectually to Nepal, a desire which many foreign-based scholars have expressed in the past, but have not had an appropriate venue for doing so. The seminar series can serve as one such outlet.

The seminars need not be rigidly structured. While the two- or three-day model is one that might work best for working people who would not be able to absent themselves from work for longer, there is also the possibility of stretching these to morning or evening sessions over more days, depending on the preference of those leading the seminars. SSB will provide all the logistical support required to run the seminars.

Please contact Mahendra Lawoti <mlawoti@hotmail.com> or Deepak Thapa <dthapa@soscbaha.org> if you are interested to lead a seminar.

Ethnicity and Identity in South Asia: A Comparative Perspective

a seminar by

Arjun Guneratne

organised by

Social Science Baha and Association for Nepal and Himalayan Studies

3 & 4 December, 2009, Kathmandu

Session 1

Theoretical framework

Benedict Anderson, 'Census, Map and Museum'

Arjun Guneratne, 'Introduction' to *Many Tongues, One People*

Session 2

Identity and the State in Nepal

Nancy Levine, 'Caste, State and Ethnic Boundaries in Nepal'

Arjun Guneratne, 'Modernization, the State, and the Construction of a Tharu Identity in Nepal'

Session 3

Identity and the Nation in India

Susan Bayly, 'Caste and 'Race' in the Colonial Ethnography of India.'

Susan Rudolph and Lloyd Rudolph, 'Modern Hate: How ancient animosities get invented.'

Session 4

The Historical Context of the Sri Lankan civil war

Arjun Guneratne, 'What's in a name? Aryans and Dravidians in the making of Sri Lankan identities.'

Jack Eller, 'Sri Lanka: The politics of history.'