



## Abstracts zu Workshop 42

### **Local Modernities? Articulating transnational ideas in South Asia**

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*Ursula Münster, München*

#### **Green Imperialism?**

#### **Environmental conservation and resistance in Kerala, South India**

"We are now on the threshold of the third phase of colonization, in which the white man's burden is to protect the environment " (Mies and Shiva 1993: 265)

This paper explores how transnational concepts of environmental conservation are perceived, received, negotiated and/or rejected among local communities living inside or close to forest areas in the Wyanad-District of Northern Kerala, South India. The "urgent need" to protect the local biosphere of this region — Wyanad is located in the biodiversity-rich mountain range of the Western Ghats — is articulated by state authorities (Indian Forest Department officials), nonstate actors including International Conservation Organisations (ICOs) such as the WWF and the IUCN (International Union of the Conservation of Nature), as well as national (Asian Nature Conservation Foundation, India) and local NGOs.

Yet, as thorough control of the region's Reserved Forest Areas and Wildlife Sanctuaries is exercised mainly through the Forest Department's own armed forces, massive protests erupt from the nearby farmers and the local forest dwelling population. Social movements arise that are resisting the conservationist agendas of the international agencies and the Indian state. Protected sites are illegally encroached upon by Adivasis and landless labourers, forest fires are deliberately set, yearly destroying vast areas of forest land, and wildlife is killed through electrification with manipulated power lines. Conflicts are generated as multiple groups lay claim to natural resources. The aim of this paper is to examine the divergent approaches to perceiving "nature", "conservation" and "entitlement". It is a story of a possibly violent outcome of the "global flow of transnational ideas".

*Prasanna Kumar Nayak, Bhubaneswar*

### **New forms of Communal Tensions in Kondhmal Orissa, India**

Communal violence broke out in Kondhmal district of Orissa in 2008, which affected thousands of Kondh and Pano families. Houses were burnt down, people of both the communities were rendered homeless and were deprived of basic subsistence needs. A rupture in their social fabric took place. The quantum of human misery resulting from the unabated communal violence in spite of Government interventions over the last several months was such that the tension-ravaged villages are yet to limp back to normalcy. Kondhmal turmoil became the talking-point of national and international media, and several foreign governments have voiced their concern about it.

In public perception, the tensions involved Hindu and the Christian groups. The ruling Congress party at the centre tacitly attributed the communal flare-up to the callousness of the non-Congress BJD-BJP Government in Orissa. But the crux of the problem relating to the communal flare-up in Kondhmal in 2008 has to be understood from a broad perspective of cultural appropriation in recent and contemporary history. The order of Kondh and Pano cultural role-relationship has undergone a total transformation. The global flow of ideas of liberty, equality, citizens' rights and economic liberalization has indeed exacerbated the situation.

*Sandra Bärnreuther, Heidelberg*

### **Home or Hospital? Negotiating childbirth in rural Ladakh**

Biomedical concepts, practices and technologies, as well as policies fostering the biomedicalization of various parts of life have for long constituted an important aspect of health care in South Asia. In this paper, I will focus on the transnational idea of "hospital birth" (as propagated by the World Health Organization) and its articulation and negotiation in Ladakh, India. In Ladakh, the number of hospital births has increased significantly since the 1980s, biomedical Medical Aid Centres are established in rural areas and the central government is pushing biomedical interventions with public campaigns and financial bonuses. One might conclude that a loss of local concepts and practices and a uni-directional progression towards a biomedical future resembling the 'Western world' is occurring. But such universalistic, teleological approaches have long been criticized as theoretically and empirically inadequate.

In this paper, I will illustrate how biomedical treatments of childbirth are perceived and used in a village in rural Ladakh: do women use biomedical facilities for deliveries? Why do people decide to deliver at home or at the hospital? How do they experience their deliveries and assess their treatment at biomedical facilities? And how are 'local' and biomedical practices intermingled and negotiated in this particular setting?

I will argue that the decision about where to deliver is not based on a conflict between biomedical and 'local' methods, but is rather reached by considering various factors that will be outlined in the presentation. Women usually move between different positions and combine various treatments in pragmatic and creative ways. Furthermore, women who deliver at the hospital do not necessarily adopt biomedical interpretations of this event, since biomedical practices and technologies are re-interpreted, actively transformed and integrated into specific contexts. Biomedical and 'local' methods are, therefore, neither understood as opposed entities, nor as mutually exclusive practices; however, they are linked, intertwined and thereby constantly reshaped in manifold ways.

*Miriam Benteler, Berlin*

### **In Search of Cross Cousin Marriage: The kinship system of the Latin Catholics in Central Kerala as an example of cultural appropriation**

The issue of cultural appropriation is without doubt of special interest and importance in the age of globalisation. Despite the modern development of global networks and the celebration of connected 'hybrid societies' and 'ethnoscapes', cultural contacts, and thus cultural appropriation, should in no way only be considered a recent phenomenon. Far reaching changes in the kinship system of the Latin Catholics of Kerala, who converted to Christianity in the 16th century, for example show that it already occurred long before the term globalisation had been invented.

The kinship system under consideration differs considerably from the so-called Dravidian system typical for South India: the characteristic positive marriage rule prescribing a marriage partner (someone from the category of 'cross cousins') is replaced among the Catholics by the negative marriage rules of the Catholic Church, forbidding marriage with certain categories of relatives (among others with 'cross cousins'). On the level of practice, cross cousin marriage is entirely substituted by marriage with strangers and even the terminology shows important derivations and thus misses the usual implication of this characteristic type of marriage: the search of cross cousin marriage remains without success on all levels of the kinship system. The presentation focuses on the development of the deviating kinship system of the Latin Catholics. The assumption that it was the exterior factor of Catholicism which caused the change and brought about the generation of the specific kinship system of the Latin Catholics, is supported by comparison with kinship systems of other castes and communities in Kerala, as well as with the evolution of kinship systems in Europe.

*Phillip Zehmisch, München*

### **Andaman Loves: Establishing alternative “modernities” and “traditions” on an island**

In the last decade, the Andaman Indian settlers' perception of inhabiting a rather remote space outside the 'world' (more than a thousand kilometers from the Indian 'motherland') has transformed into a feeling of residing in a place within the globalized world. Caused by the recent arrival of mass media, transport and communication facilities, especially after the tsunami, an increasing exchange of ideas and values with the mainland and the transnational global sphere has been taking place. Referring to these changes, I will focus my presentation on the islanders' cultural appropriations of ideas, values and discourses from transnational as well as Indian 'Metropolitan' contexts. Picking the example of 'love marriage' from my ethnographic data, I intend to demonstrate how differing 'modern' ideas about love, sexual and social liberty are negotiated between several social groups in Andaman society:

Many migrants who have recently come to the islands from rural areas on the Indian mainland uphold their various cultural belongings through 'modern' media, communication and transport. Thereby they are emphasizing their 'tradition' of 'arranged marriage' inside their caste and oppose this to 'loose morals' of the Andamans' old inhabitants. In turn, the 'local-born' community, made up of the descendants of marriages between ex-convict settlers from different regions and religions of colonial India, has evolved into a 'traditionally' casteless society. Facing less connubial and social restrictions, love marriages and premarital affairs have become widespread among the young generation of 'local-born' people. By valuing 'love marriage' as a symbol of personal liberty in accordance with the 'metro' culture of the Indian upper middle class, they claim an alternative 'Island modernity'.

*Christiane Brosius, Heidelberg*

### **Un/Dressing Valentine: Negotiating romantic love and morality in urban India**

In English-speaking countries, Valentine's Day, celebrated on 14 February of every year, has become an established ritual through which unmarried and married lovers express their sentiments for each other by sending greeting cards, chocolate and flowers. While the sending of Valentines became a fashion in Great Britain in the 19th century, the celebration of romantic love and longing by means of this ritual entered non-western countries much later: Japan (1960s) was followed by China, South Korea, Latin American countries and the Middle East. In India, it arrived around 2000 where it immediately clashed with conservative religio-orthodox and nationalist forces. Reasons of conflict were manifold: there was the accusation that romantic love, and in particular, their public declaration in public spaces and mass media, was 'un-Indian' because

Indian culture respected the choice of parents and astrologers in arranging marriages. Furthermore, for heterosexuals to hold hands, and for anyone to kiss in public was coined as ‚abnormal‘, subversive and ‚immoral‘. Another aspect criticised by a variety of groups (not just Hindu nationalists!) was that Valentine Day signified another wave of cultural colonisation and means of introducing hedonistic ideologies and consumer cultures to the Indian market.

In 2001, romantic couples were verbally and physically attacked in public in Mumbai, by workers of the Hindu chauvinist Shiv Sena (Army of Lord Shiva). In 2009, Valentine’s Day became the locus of a highly emotional and yet again physically aggressive debate around values and norms of ‘Indian society’ versus ‘western society’. The presentation will explore the dynamics of Valentine’s Day in the context of discussions around westernisation, heritage and media representations

*Luisa Steur, Central European University, Budapest*

### **Traveling models of indigenism and Kerala’s emergent adivasi politics**

The rise of “adivasi” movements in India also raises the specter of the colonial imaginary of “tribal isolation” and “noble savagedom” and some observers worry that powerful transnational forces within global indigenism today, such as the treaty-based “sovereign” politics of Native Americans or the eco-indigenism promoted by Western NGOs in the Third World, will only reinforce such alienating colonial notions of indigenous identity. One strategy of countering such a process, however, is by paying closer attention to “subaltern” models of indigenous voice as articulated by local activists.

In my presentation I will distinguish four such “subaltern” interpretations of adivasi politics in Kerala that defy the globally-circulating stereotypes of indigenous identity but are nevertheless themselves also part of (alternative) transnational indigenist spheres of influence. By presenting some of the protagonists of these different currents of indigenist politics, I try to give a glimpse into the embedded yet transnationally influenced alternative articulations of indigenous identity politics in Kerala.

*Christoph Gabler, Berlin*

**Understanding the real thing:  
The process of identification among Indian football fans in times of  
global imagination industries**

1911 was a special year for Indian football. After years of being excluded, Mohun Bagan from Calcutta was the first Indian team to take part in the IFA Shield, the football championship that was organized by the British colonizers. Mohun Bagan won the tournament, a victory that is today seen as one of the first steps to celebrate a distinct Indian identity in opposition to the white occupying force.

A hundred years later new tournaments are starting to take place in India, but this time it is on countless TVs all around the country. European club football as part of global imagination industries have become a mass product consumed via media networks all around the world. Fans of traditional clubs such as Manchester United, Real Madrid or FC Liverpool today live as much in Manchester or Madrid as they do in Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur or Calcutta.

My field study in Calcutta, the centre of Indian football, was intended to deliver answers to the following questions: What happens if a fan lives in Bengal and "his" club plays football in Manchester? What "binds" him or her to the event? How does a team from the other side of the world move to the centre of attention?

Long TV nights showing matches of European club teams and many discussions with rapidly found football friends led to the thesis that the growing globalization of the European football industry has been followed by a noticeable change in the identification process among young Indian football fans in Calcutta. Football, as part of the global media landscape, leads to changing "images of the world". The consumption of European club football is used to put into context self identity within the local environment in Calcutta. Wearing a Manchester United jersey or discussing last night's results in the college canteen become symbols for being part of a social elite.

*Katja Rieck, Frankfurt am Main*

**'Appropriating' progress?  
Radhakamal Mukherjee's vision of post-colonial India as village-writ-  
large**

Indian engagements with modernity are far from recent and extend well back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century when Indian intellectuals began to debate Britain's policy for bringing "moral and material improvement" to the sub-continent. Such debates eventually coalesced into proposals as to how best to effect India's progress. Some Indian intellectuals asserted this was best done by continuing an asserted indigenous manufacturing tradition. However, the Indian sociologist, economist

and activist Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968) was the vocal proponent of a very different vision. Critical of the consequences of self-interested individualism, urbanization and industrialization that the implementation of policies based on modern (western) economic thinking had brought about, he looked to 'the Indian village' as the embodiment of alternative social and economic principles, which promised to bring true "progress" to India, perhaps even serving as an example for Europe as well. Drawing on fieldwork conducted in Bengali villages by both himself and his students, Mukherjee presents alternative "economic" principles centering on caste and the "joint-family" who in the spirit of self-denial pursue spiritual fulfillment. Closer examination of Mukherjee's ideas, however, shows that his 'Indian village' is the product not simply of 'local social facts', but rather just as much the result of his engagements with Tolstoy, Ruskin and the arts and crafts movement, Marx, Irish nationalism and German Romanticism, just to name a few of the influences explicitly mentioned in his work. Moreover, his vision reproduces many of the tropes of late 18<sup>th</sup>-century British Orientalism. By sketching the genealogy of Mukherjee's conception of the local that served as the cornerstone for his vision for a post-colonial, post-capitalist society the paper argues that conceptions of self and other underlying the "appropriation of modernity" perspective are the products of entangled histories and therefore defy the dichotomies of "local" versus "western" from which they claim inspiration.

*Bärbel Högner, Frankfurt am Main*

### **From Dhobi Gath to Laundromat: Ideas on modernization and "westernization" within a washerman community in North India**

In January 2008 the Chandigarh administration opened the city's first so-called "Modern Dhobi Gath." A solid brick building replaced the open-air wash basins that had been used by the washermen to clean the laundry of their customers since the founding of the planned city fifty years before. Not only were two large industrial washing machines and two impressive dryers installed, but also – according to the media – India's first public coin-operated washing machine. The installation of this machine, available to everybody, occurred right at the beginning of my field study. I started to visit the new dhobi gath every two weeks to do my laundry and quickly became interested in the washermen's appropriation of this new technical equipment, as well as the concurrent transformation of their profession.

While some of the dhobis consider the change from manual to machine-operated washing a necessary step towards modernization, allowing them to better serve their customers and hence advance their own prosperity, others argue that specific Indian circumstances will always demand manual cleaning. They consider the new laundromat a useless product of "westernization". At the same time, the discussion among my other local informants regarding the introduction of a public washing machine was deeply marked by their notions of purity and impurity. However, the city administration and the dhobis' societies attempt to upgrade the profession in order to keep the washermen alive as a social group. The change from dhobi gath to laundromat thus represents India's ongoing confrontation with modernity as it is negotiated, adapted and co-opted "on the ground".

