

Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS), South Asian University

Call for papers:

The Poetic Imagining(s) of Southasia: Borders and Nations

22-23 April 2019, Delhi

The proposed international conference will bring together poets, fiction writers and literary scholars working on topics related to border and nation to converse with sociologists, anthropologists and social historians.

Despite today's familiar national emblems dating only as far as half a century, as has rightly been pointed out regularly, the kitsch of nationalism now glosses over centuries old sensibilities of pan-national and trans-national affinities in many parts of the postcolonial world. Exclusion built in to the narrow notion of nationalism is what we intend to problematize in our search for alternative imaginings of what is a nation and how best to theorize its cultural, emotional and aesthetic borders separating from a Tagorean "home" from the "world". Our hope is to bring this discourse to the centre from where they currently lay scattered, that is, in folk myths and minstrel songs, published poetry and fiction, ballads and legendary epics, and so on.

Can poetry and fiction offer a corpus necessary for examining the popular notions of nation and region? Postmodern discourse on nationalism sees nationalist consciousness grounded in specific types of shared experience including media and historiography but also fiction-writing and poetry (Anderson, 1983; Brennan, 1989; Spivak, 1990; Chatterjee, 1993; Nandy, 1994; Visvanathan, 2003). Mythologies, folk songs and folk-lore have been retold and reinterpreted over and over to capture voices of the silenced and perspectives withdrawn (Richman, 1991). And there is a rich corpus – both anthropological and literary – that presents alternative imaginations about borderlands (van Schendel, 2007; Aggarwal, 1993; Gellner, 2013). Engaging with this genre(s) of scholarly work and creative writing, this conference seeks to push forth the frontiers on theorizing nation, border and pan-nation in sociology and social sciences. In this, we may consider revisiting Raymond Williams' (1978) work that insisted art (of words among others) to be an active process in mediating social reality and imaginative creativity. Sociologist Joan Rockwell (1974) built on Lukac's insight regarding the novel to point out that aesthetic experiences like reading literature allows for questioning accepted norms and capturing scattered imaginings of new identities into a formal domain. The anthropological classic 'Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography' has generated a vibrant discourse on the role of fiction in anthropological production of knowledge (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Geertz, 1989; Behar, 2011; Narayan, 1999) culminating possibly in a meaningful debate about feminist and non-Euro-American interventions in the mainstream anthropological traditions of writing culture (Harrison, 1995).

This conference seeks to contest the mainstream premise of everyday nation and border in proposing our central argument that rationalistic may clash with public and intellectual emotionality. When framed within this creative-contested field, and carrying an appetite to converse and engage meaningfully across a wide range of disciplines including but not limited to

sociology, social history and literary studies, this conference seeks to discuss question such as: What alternative popular imaginings have been around both in the centres and peripheries of Southasia beyond the Westphalian discourse “piggybacking” on its search for postcolonial nationalism? Can this engagement point us to theoretical and methodological departures that constructively but emphatically challenge the methodological nationalism hegemonising imagination of Southasia?

We list a broad area of focus including but not limited to the following:

- Fictionalizing nations, nationalizing fictions
- Periodicising discourses on nation and border
- Romance of the capital, romance of the hinterlands
- (Symbolic) violence and peace
- The poetics of borders, borderlands and border people
- Voice(s) of the stateless – refugees, exile and nomads
- Governmentality and rebellion: power and fallibility of words
- The poetics of caste, religion, ethnicity, gender
- Reclaiming mythology and folk, diverse aesthetics of story-telling
- Southasia in conversation with the Global South

The deadline for submission of abstracts is February 28, 2019. Please mail your abstracts, approximately 1500 words, to mallika@sau.ac.in and ISASpoetics2019@gmail.com. Contributors of selected abstracts will be contacted by early March, and full papers no longer than 5000 words excluding reference and footnotes are due by 14 April 2019.

Contributors are encouraged to seek independent funding for travel. Some support may be provided for scholars travelling from within South Asia. Local costs of all participants will be borne by the organizers.

Principal Investigator: Mallika Shakya, Department of Sociology, SAU

Advisory body

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