

Conference Reports

23rd European Conference on South Asian Studies

Zurich, 23-26 July 2014

The four-day 23rd European Conference on South Asian Studies (ECSAS) was held from 23 to 26 July at Irchel Campus of the University of Zurich. The conference operates under the auspices of the European Association for South Asian Studies (EASAS), which engages in the support of research and teaching concerning all periods and fields of study related to South Asia. The ECSAS rotates between European universities and this time was hosted by the Department of Geography and the Institute of Asian and Oriental Studies / Indian Studies of the University of Zurich. A total of 460 delegates from 35 countries participated in the 51 panels of the conference, all together providing around 400 presentations.

The conference started with a welcome address by Professors Ulrike Müller-Böker from the Department of Geography, Angelika Malinar from the Department of Indian Studies and Roger Jeffery (University of Edinburgh, UK), president for EASAS. After this the next question could not to be postponed any longer: Which panel to attend? Several panels on very interesting themes were held at the same time inside different rooms of the University of Zurich's Irchel campus, up to 13 sessions ran in parallel. The variety of the papers mirrored the vast cultural richness and diversity of South Asia, but also the different scientific realms and disciplines working on very different themes. Thematically, the panels were grouped in various realms, focused on history, religion, arts, literature, cinema, new media, medicine, domestic and foreign policies, socio-economic developments, social groups, migrations and many more. The vast majority focused on India, but a few panels looked at other South Asian countries as well – Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan. Most panels consisted of three sessions, running throughout the morning and/or afternoon. Short and long abstracts of every panel and paper can be found at <http://www.nomadit.co.uk/easas/ecsas2014/panels.php5>. The papers had been carefully selected by the scientific committee, paying heed to a well-balanced mix of interesting aspects of current debates in different disciplines as well as a good mix as to gender, countries and academic experience of the presenters. Thus, the conference was an important opportunity to discuss current research and scholarship on topics

relating to South Asia within the humanities and social sciences, and here and there discussions developed into very profound and lively exchanges. It was fun listening and participating.

As attendance at the conference was linked to membership of the EASAS, the opportunity was taken to hold a member assembly, which concluded the second day of the conference. This general assembly was led by the outgoing president of the EASAS council, Roger Jeffery. After a short report on former and future events and the financial situation, a new council was elected to run EASAS for the coming two years. The results were announced at the Final Assembly Session on Saturday: Professor Martin Gaenzle from the Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies, University of Vienna, Austria was elected new president, Professor Alessandra Consolaro from Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici at Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy, vice-president, and Lars Eklund from the Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET) at Lund University, Sweden, new treasurer.

For the first time the EASAS awarded three prizes for the best papers presented by doctoral students at the conference. The first went to Simon Wolfgang Fuchs from Princeton University, USA for his paper titled “It’s Not the Economy: Taking Pakistani Sunni-Shi’a Polemics (and Rapprochement) Seriously”, in which he traces the transformation of Sunni-Shi’a discourses in South Asia since the 1930s. It fleshes out how South Asian concerns and intellectual currents have shaped these debates in Pakistan and discusses attempts by Shi’a religious scholars to defend their position as a legitimate minority within Islam. Mythri Prasad from the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in Thiruvananthapuram, India, received a prize for her presentation “Cards and Carriers: Migration and the Politics of Identification in India”, in which she probes the quotidian exclusions that social life and contemporary capitalism produce and their effect on working-class mobility, employment opportunities and resistance. Finally, Giacomo Mantovan from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris, France, was selected for his paper “Between Subjectivisation and Resistance: The Relationship Between Sri Lankan Asylum Seekers and Asylum Courts in France”, which examines how Sri Lankan Tamils construct their life stories to seek asylum in France. It focuses on how unequal relations between asylum seekers and immigration institutions create both processes of subjection and forms of resistance.

Unusually, the keynote speech was not delivered on the first day, but was a highlight at the end of the third day of the conference. Under the title “‘Belief’ in Law: The Politics of Secularism, Religion and Hindu Majoritarianism in Indian Constitutional Law” Professor Ratna Kapur (Jindia Global Law School, Delhi; Faculty at the Geneva School of Diplomacy and Inter-

national Relations; and Faculty at Harvard International Global Law and Policy Institute) presented a topic which incited a lively plenum discussion. Focused on the famous Ayodhya property dispute, Professor Ratna's analysis showed the increasing influence of the Hindu Right on shaping the contours of secularism in contemporary law in India. The right to freedom of religion is being used to establish and reinforce Hindu majoritarianism through secular law and transforming the very definition and identity of the Indian nation-state.

Another highlight on Friday evening was the buffet dinner at Dozentenfoyer, the roof restaurant of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, providing a great view of Zurich alongside good food. This was only one of several opportunities over the duration of the conference to make contact with the conference participants. Thus, the conference was not only worth attending in order to listen and discuss important research results and new themes, but also for networking – meeting scholars from all over the world working on South Asia made for a really inspiring atmosphere and enabled both very interesting academic discussions and private talks. The 24th ECSAS conference will take place in July 2016 at the University of Warsaw and will surely bring new academic insights and pleasant contacts.

Ann-Elisabeth Philipp

Crossroads Asia Conference

Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life: Figurations and Methodology

Munich, 11 October 2014

On 11 October 2014, Crossroads Asia, a research network funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, held a one-day conference at the Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology of Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich. Called *Spaces of Conflict in Everyday Life: Figurations and Methodology*, the conference focused on one of the major research foci of Crossroads Asia: conflict. The conference took as its starting point a figurational understanding of conflict (see the Crossroads Asia Concept Paper on conflict, available online at <http://crossroads-asia.de/veroeffentlichungen/concept-papers/concept-paper-conflict.html>). This focused attention less on the content of conflicts – what they are about –