

South Asia Anthropology Group  
Rhetorics of Change in South Asia

Monday 8th and Tuesday 9th September 2008  
Venue: Durham

Call for papers

South Asian societies are all caught up in the experience of fundamental change. Processes of change entail communicative orders of persuasion and appeal, and rely on crafts of making social projects and intentions publicly compelling, whether in terms of economic globalisation, civil conflict, new information technologies, political systems, the mobilisation of ethnic and religious communities, or the creation of norms of gender, family and kinship. The move within anthropology to consider rhetoric is not to oppose it to 'reality', but to see its penetration in all social action. Distinct choices and preferences are made in the interpretation of any state of affairs, and in setting the scene for appropriate opinions to be formed. Rhetoric brings possibilities for considerable nuance in treatments of agency, as actions are picked up by others, translated into the terms of reference of diverse subject positions, and carried forward in ways that are not always foreseeable to the initiator. Rhetoric operates at different scales of applicability and inclusion, and in South Asia can be particularly sensitive to marking thresholds of collective imaginaries through language, expressive ritual, and narratives of region, kinship, and difference. Bringing attention to rhetorics of change in South Asia is intended to shed light on how people make things happen, and to enable creative thinking about the ways in which understandings and identifications are made tangible and convincing.

The workshop theme 'Rhetorics of Change in South Asia' is intended as a broad umbrella for participants to present work in progress of both ethnographic and theoretical character. Abstracts for papers could address e.g. the following areas:

Rhetorics of/in/and:

Science  
Politics  
Religion  
Presentation of self  
Gender  
Ethnicity  
Bollywood  
Journalism and cartoons  
Cyberspace and virtual society  
Development  
Well being

Please send abstracts to [saag2008@googlemail.com](mailto:saag2008@googlemail.com) by end of March

The venue

Recent appointments at the Department of Anthropology in Durham have resulted in a sufficient critical mass of South Asia oriented researchers to propose holding SAAG at Durham. The department's seminar series 'Public Culture in Theory and Practice' has had the theme of rhetoric as a conceptual and methodological thread in recent years, and Michael Carrithers in particular has published, supervised, and holds research awards, on the theme.

"This rhetorical perspective is fruitful both in a narrowly ethnographic sense, and in a wider theoretical sense. For ethnographers, it sets a high standard of achievement, the requirement to rest not with the specification of the characteristic organizations and schemas of a society, but to go beyond that to their skilled use in one situation or another. For anthropological theory in general, it proposes a way to deal with the pervasive but troubled metaphor of 'structure'...We might, for example, think sometimes of our cultural schemas as no more than 'tools', and of our existential situation not as 'structured', but perhaps as 'plastic', or as 'flowing', or even as a constantly mutable 'borderland' of contention" (Carrithers 2005:582)

Carrithers, Michael B. 2005. Why anthropologists should study rhetoric. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 11(3): 577-583.

Carrithers M. B. 2000. On polytropy or the natural condition of spiritual cosmopolitanism in India the Digambar Jain case. *Modern Asian studies* 34(4): 831-861.

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