

One Day Seminar on
Intercultural Dialogue on Himalaya:
Hinduism, Buddhism, Ubuntu and Other Ethnophilosophies

Jointly organized by
Centre for Himalayan Studies (CHS), University of North Bengal (NBU)
and *Chhimeki*, an NGO based in Salbari, Siliguri

Date: September 24, 2024

Venue: Conference Hall, CHS, NBU

CONCEPT NOTE

Going beyond modernity's conventional preoccupation that considers the 'human being' as the 'be-all and end-all project', this seminar seeks to address that the idea of 'being human' in the highlands is itself a crucial question that is entangled always and already with 'more-than-human' concerns for its realization. As such, the proposal to consider Himalaya through a post-humanist lens and thereby to develop an intercultural dialogue to re-evaluate nature-culture relationship in the hills may seem like an absurd claim to begin with. But such an attempt appears to become both meaningful and urgent if we are ready to take cognizance of the rapidly changing relationship that the highlanders share with each other and also with other biotic and abiotic elements of the Himalaya/ mountain/ nature. Highlands are no longer an isolated world, nor are the highlanders, mere specimens of ethnographic museums. In its journey to become a member of the civilizational core, a civilization that is located in the valley, both the highland and highlanders seem to have lost sight of the fundamental principles of its own civilizational essence. A civilization that not only Himalaya, but highlands across the world, epitomizes rests on a set of underlying principles like ecologically engrained life processes, oneness of humanity and nature, and interdependence between human beings and other elements of nature. These principles are a way to understand one's place in the scheme of things – cosmology – which brings forth why the notion of sacredness gets spontaneously attached to the mountains, or for that matter why deification of rocks, lakes, rivers, or glaciers emerges not as a staged reality in highland popular culture. However, this congealing of ecology and theology in highland ontology no longer appears to be a reality. Over time the exposure of the hills to colonialism, capitalism, and globalization and the triangle of science, technology, and market have moved the mountain from its foundational meaning characterised by the rule of persons over persons to the rules of things over persons. The surge of change and transformations undergoing in the hills, although created by human beings, now seems to have somehow escaped human control and have come to enslave or dominate their very creators.

It is at this juncture that we are pitching the idea of holding an *Intercultural Dialogue on Himalaya* to brainstorm on the multilayered disconnections that have taken place in the Himalaya – be it at the level of humanity, ecology, or cosmology – and find a way out to suture the gaps thus created, by looking inwards. We invite interventions from different strands of reasoning – philosophy or ethnophilosophy – drawn from the non-West. Despite intending to build up meaningful conversations around philosophies of interconnection or oneness of humanity that are inherent in Hinduism, Buddhism, or Ubuntu (African ethics)¹, the seminar welcomes interventions (mainly from Humanities and Social Science perspectives) that could direct our attention towards other philosophies or ethnophilosophies that emerge from the Himalayan and other highland life worlds.

¹The Seminar partner, *Chhimeki* (meaning neighbour), an NGO based in Salbari, Siliguri that works on building interconnected networks among various groups and fostering neighbourliness among communities in the region, has been focusing on 'Ubuntu' ethics for some time.

The very existence of the physical world (including human and other living and non-living entities) epitomises a web of interrelationship and compassion which stands as an ethical expression of a worldview which we are gradually forgetting. Such a relational framework does have resonance with Ubuntu (African ethics) that upholds – *co-creation of ourselves through our interactions with others*. We presume that these conjectures are also shared by other Oriental systems of thoughts/ ethics/ ethnophilosophies like Chinese Confucianism, Filipino ethics of Loob, or the Himalayan system of thoughts enshrined in oral traditions like Mundhum, Joshmani or Pranami Dharma and the like. We solicit interventions by scholars, practitioners, and opinion makers to shed light on any of the fronts tentatively outlined in the concept note and expect to indulge in a meaningful dialogue in multiple ways.

Here are some ideas (**in no ways restricted**) which could help in the interventions we seek as papers (from Humanities and Social Science perspective) for this seminar:

- i) Being human in the Highlands: Challenges and Possibilities
- ii) Multilayered (ecology, cosmology, humanity) disconnection witnessed in Himalaya today
- iii) Interconnectedness, Hinduism and Himalaya
- iv) Interconnectedness, Buddhism and Himalaya
- v) Any oriental system of thought, interconnectedness and Himalaya
- vi) Ubuntu in the Himalaya
- vii) Nature-culture relationship in Himalaya
- viii) Himalaya through post-Humanist lens
- ix) Himalaya and ecologically ingrained life processes
- x) Folk lifeworlds, interconnectedness and Himalaya

THINGS TO RECALL

- Abstract submission deadline is September 19, 2024
- Decisions will be communicated within September 20, 2024
- Abstracts (maximum 300 words) may be sent to emails: swatahsiddha@nbu.ac.in & chhimeki.u@gmail.com
- There is no Registration fee
- The organisers would not be able to provide any travel or accommodation support except refreshments.