

A Fruitful Attempt

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This volume is the result of an international seminar entitled 'Social Transformation and Cultural Change in South Asia from the Perspectives of the Socio-Economic Periphery'. The seminar was held on 13 and 14 November 2015 at the Higashimatsuyama Campus of Daito Bunka University (DBU) in Japan. It was sponsored by three institutes at DBU (the Postgraduate School for Asian Area Studies, Institute of Modern Asian Studies, and Institute of Oriental Studies) in collaboration with Acharya Bangalore B School, India and the Japanese Association for South Asian Studies.

DBU has a long history of Asian studies and has often hosted international seminars; however, these were mainly related to Chinese studies, because the university was originally founded as an institute of Chinese studies. We, scholars of South Asian Studies at the Postgraduate School for Asian Area Studies, have long cherished the idea of holding an international seminar or workshop on the theme of South Asian Studies. Fortunately, we had the opportunity to do so last year, and with the endeavours of our colleagues Prof. T. Shinoda and Prof. T. Inoue, we forged collaboration with Acharya Bangalore B School, which lent the seminar an international atmosphere with its large delegation. At the same time, we were able to welcome other scholars from various places in India, such as Prof. Indrani Mazumdar from Delhi and Prof. Achyut Yagnik from Ahmedabad. Along with the Japanese scholars, those from India ensured the seminar was informative and successful.

In the 2-day seminar, 14 papers were read and 3 speeches, aimed mainly at our students, presented. Among the 14 papers, 9 were selected to publish in this volume. As is often noticed at this type of conference, the topics of the papers in our seminar were varied and diverse, which imposed an intellectual

carefulness and slight disciplinary perplexity on listeners.

This volume consists of three parts: 1. Social Change, 2. Economic Change, and 3. Gender Issues.

Part 1 comprises three papers. I consider the common key word of the three papers to be 'identity'. Prof. Shinoda's paper is about the changing food culture over the last ten years among students in Gujarat Vidyapith. He carefully highlights background factors from various perspectives from which these changes have stemmed, and shows the strong relationship between the change and 'reorganisation of identities'. He concludes that the change in food culture has been closely related to the reorganisation of identities in terms of region, social group, and economic class. This reorganisation of food culture identities has been strongly affected by globalisation, Sanskritisation, and various political and religious movements.

Prof. Inoue's paper focuses on the recent activities of some Christian sects or groups in South India, who want to create a new situation through which they 'consolidate mutual relations' and 'foster a sense of belonging and security'. Prof. Inoue does not use the word 'identity', but I consider 'a sense of belonging and security' a synonym for 'identity'.

The title of Prof. Achyut Yagnik's paper is 'Adivasi Search for Self-Identity in Gujarat'. Prof. Yagnik shows how the Adivasi people in Gujarat assimilated themselves into mainstream Gujarati life, namely Hinduism and the Gujarati language, while at the same time trying to search for and retain their identity. From this paper, I got the impression that the lives of the Gujarati Adivasi people have been a balance between assimilation into the majority and specification of self-identity.

I think the three papers in Part 1 show three different stages of balance or the relation between assimilation and self-identification in India today. Prof. Shinoda explains part of the recent change in food culture using the word Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation can be understood as a cultural attitude toward assimilation into the majority or superior. Though informant students have their own cultural, social, and political backgrounds, they like to assimilate into the majority or superior group, namely the Hindus (of higher rank or caste) as

far as food culture is concerned. Important here is that most informant students (ST students are included) are already Hindus (except for some non-Hindu students). Changing their food habits seem to strengthen their consciousness of being Hindu without questioning who they were in the beginning, in other words, without disturbing their mind-set of self-identity. Therefore, the process of changing food habits is single-folded, because it does not confront the framework of self-identification.

On the other hand, in Prof. Yagnik's paper, the Adivasis must reflect on who they originally were, even though most have already converted to Hinduism. This is because 'in a caste-ridden Hindu society, the Adivasis were considered "Avarna", or without any standing in the caste hierarchy...and thus, continued to remain inferior'. This situation has led to the new development where some young people have begun to assert themselves, founding a group that is successfully expanding its influence. In this paper, questions pertaining to food habits are not asked. However, should food habits be questioned in a different context, an interesting phenomenon may emerge.

Prof. Inoue's paper reports on the recent activities of South Indian Christians. It is well known that many Indian Christians are from the lower classes of Indian society including SC and ST communities. In this paper, the activities of converted Christians from the lower strata are explored. Interesting when compared to the Adivasis in Prof. Yagnik's paper is that the Christians in this paper concentrate on retaining their identity as Christians through various activities among community fellows. It seems that they do not question who they were originally, while the Adivasis in Yagnik's paper have begun to question their origins. The problem of the so-called Dalit Christian is not the topic of this paper. Here, I would like to point out that converted Hindus, as shown in Prof. Yagnik's paper, reflect on their origin and identity, whereas converted Christians including the SC and ST people do not seem to reflect on theirs to such an extent. Perhaps the same tendency will be found in the case on converted Muslims.

Part 2, which also comprises three papers, focuses on economy as the primary subject. Prof. Suda's paper shows recent changes and the situation in

Nepalese society after the earthquake in 2015. The paper emphasises the role of financial institutions in recovering from the damage. Prof. Venkatesha's paper focuses on the 'human' aspect of micro financial institutions, which facilitate the relationship between banks and borrowers. This paper may offer a worthy solution to the problems faced by the Nepalese banking system today. The joint paper of Prof. Veena A. and Prof. Sandeep K. Rao focuses on the problems caused by migration to the city of Bengaluru. Their paper describes the expanding hardships South Asia's mega-cities now face.

Part 3 on gender issues also comprises three papers. Prof. Sato's paper describes the difficulty and harassment Nepalese women endure in their daily lives in Nepal. Prof. Usha Devi N. demonstrates the imbalanced sex ratio in newly born babies in India and recommends possible solutions to the problem. The issues addressed in the two papers are traditional problems often found in South Asia. Prof. Mazumdar describes in her paper the status of the female labour force in India. She points out the decreasing rate of women's work participation over the last decade despite India's economic growth. This is the reverse of the general notion that a growing economy means an increase in women's participation in economic activities. Therefore, the facts highlighted in Mazumdar's paper are astonishing and need more study. At the same time, we should observe how the traditional issues raised in the previous two papers will emerge or be affected in the recent situation discussed in Mazumdar's paper.

Finally, I am glad to say that the seminar was a fruitful attempt to understand the latest developments in South Asia. We hope DBU will continue holding this type of international academic gathering in collaboration with institutions worldwide.