

Graduate Conference 2021

## **Understanding Land: Configuring Spaces, Making Identities**

Organized by Graduate Students, Department of History, Shiv Nadar University

Land has been an important and perhaps an overarching category for us to understand how we perceive and make sense of the world. While on one hand it has often been seen as *tabula rasa* (a formless interval) in colonial thinking, a simple interrogation would reveal that land is often coterminous with a set of material and cultural practices that give it a distinct sense of identity and meaning over generations and for different societies. As both part and product of property relations, habitations and ecology, it therefore occupies an important place in thinking about arts, philosophy and history.

Seen from this perspective, some of the contemporary issues of the world today whether it be of environment, urban development or of culture and belongingness behoove us to think of land in a more emphatic and rigorous manner. Scholars today thus see land as produced with an accretion of ideas, sets of cultural practices and entanglements of meanings. Inspired by classical thinkers and yet not merely limited to speculations of mind, land could be thus understood at three different levels: a) of location (as it remains fixed on a particular geographical coordinate, its landscape), b) of socio-economic relations through which it is formed and given shape, and c) the phenomenological aspects of 'belongingness'. While scholars contest if they should put more emphasis on one aspect or another, as we interact, engage or even think about land, we have to concede that these different levels not only inform each other but are imbricated into one another.

With this consensus, land can be understood as a social space that is produced, represented and lived at the same time. This conglomeration, however, very often takes place in/with highly asymmetrical relations of power as dictated by colonialism, capitalism, gender and caste relations. In this connection, while on one hand it might indicate a conceptualization of power on the material and cultural terrains in terms of sovereignty, governmentality and politics; on the other hand, it can be seen as forming a kind of micro-politics that emphasizes differences among state functionaries, local organisations and different customary practices associated with land.

The year 2020 has brought to the fore a deep ecological/life crisis. In addition to exposing the existing inequities of the world, it has forced us to acknowledge and interrogate our relations with both space and time. The image of the migrant workers defying all odds to go back to their respective states during the pandemic not only has brought on surface the anxieties about 'homeland', but has also laid bare the precarious urban machination of big cities. Our anthropocentric worldviews and policies are neither well directed, nor do they seem efficient enough in the face of this crisis. Against this difficulty and multifarious possibilities in the discourse, can we then move away from seeing land as a mere ideational construct and understand how it is spatially configured and historically constructed?

In order to engage with these issues, the conference seeks to invite early career research scholars to use land as a dynamic act of placemaking and creating identities. We welcome contributions on the sub-themes including but not limited to:

- Land and Belonging
- Political Ecology of Land
- Law, Land and Property
- Ruination and Abandonment of Land
- Conflict and Violence over Land
- Land and Migration
- Land and Urban Formations

We invite MPhil and PhD scholars to send their abstracts (250-350 words), along with any other queries, to [snugraduateconference2021@gmail.com](mailto:snugraduateconference2021@gmail.com) by 31<sup>st</sup> October, 2020. Please also send a short bio-note within 150 words.

Selected participants will be informed over email by 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2020.

The selected papers (3500-5000 words) will have to be submitted by 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020.

The conference will be held online in January, 2021.