A DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENT FORTNIGHTLY

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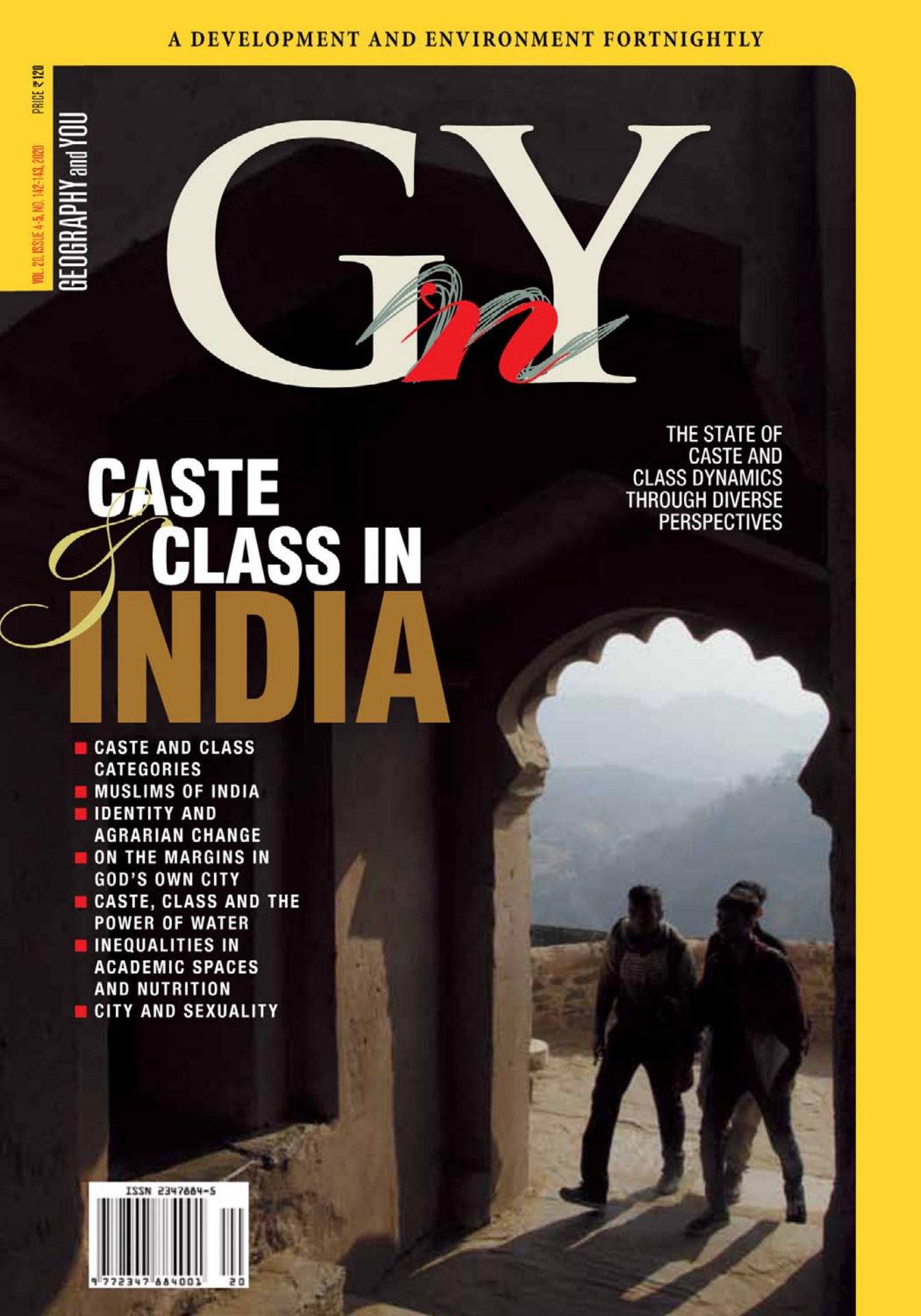
GEOGRAPHY and YOU

GnY

THE STATE OF CASTE AND CLASS DYNAMICS THROUGH DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

CASTE & CLASS IN INDIA

- CASTE AND CLASS CATEGORIES
- MUSLIMS OF INDIA
- IDENTITY AND AGRARIAN CHANGE
- ON THE MARGINS IN GOD'S OWN CITY
- CASTE, CLASS AND THE POWER OF WATER
- INEQUALITIES IN ACADEMIC SPACES AND NUTRITION
- CITY AND SEXUALITY



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Professor, CSRD, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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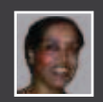
Prithvish Nag
Former Vice Chancellor, MG Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi.

Ajit Tyagi
Air Vice Marshal (Retd) Former DG, IMD, New Delhi.

K J Ramesh
Former Director General, IMD, New Delhi.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B Sengupta
Former Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board, New Delhi.

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Vol. 20, Issue 3, No. 141, 2020 | My favourite articles in the Alternative Medicine issue were related to Homoeopathy, primarily because I did not have any knowledge beforehand and the articles were quite insightful and easy to understand. I felt the article on Ayurveda could have used more scientific coverage. Siddha system was new to me, as they are not really included in the popular discourse. It would be interesting to see an issue about the rising popularity of right wing ideology globally and its geopolitical implications.—NARAYAN, *Via Consumer Feedback*

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I ENJOYED READING THE issue titled, 'Alternative Medicines' could not have been more well-timed. While we are grappling with COVID-19, without a cure in sight, the articles highlight the importance of AYUSH—a gamut of alternative health care options—in providing preventive health care, especially to developing countries such as India where health care facilities are found wanting in many aspects. Alternative medicines promise to plug the gaps in health care with their attributes of being inexpensive, having negligible side-effects, being locally, naturally sourced and most importantly, aiming at fundamentally changing unhealthy lifestyles. Besides, some of these alternative approaches form an integral part of India's rich socio-cultural heritage. I especially liked the article—'Criticisms of Homeopathy: Addressed through Scientific Research' which seeks to establish the much-needed scientific basis behind Homeopathy.—UPASANA DAS, *Via Consumer Feedback*

G'nY HAS BEEN A CONSTANT companion for me over the years. I really appreciate the simple language and the depth of the content presented with every issue. I love to read and G'nY has enriched my knowledge on a wide variety of engaging topics —APARNA SINGH, *Via Consumer Feedback*

WIDE VARIETY OF ARTICLES, interviews and opinions on every topic has been the defining feature of G'nY. The recent issue on Alternative Medicine was no different. I was amazed to learn about the Siddha system of medicine, it indeed was an enlightening read. I however have reservations about homeopathy and could not agree with the authors. I would like to read about the Covid-19 pandemic in the coming days.—ANIL GOSWAMI, *Via Consumer Feedback*

THE PREVIOUS EDITION TITLED, Alternative Medicine was chock full of insightful, excellent articles—'Homeopathy: A primer on its applicability', 'Quality of life: An Ayurvedic Approach', 'Traditional healing' and 'The Siddha system of medicine'—all of which are well written, concise and precise. Both the interviews were informative. Excellent questions were asked providing readers sufficient context and information. Point to be noted though is that more scholarly papers with criticisms should have been included to make the information provided balanced. The paper 'Criticisms of homeopathy' could have had more empirical evidence, rather than citing journals it could have added subtopics related to why homeopathy is not getting sufficient traction and reason why allopathy medicine overshadows homeopathic medicine.
—ISAAC THOMAS, *Via Consumer Feedback*

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The Editorial Advisor.

Editor's note

The unblurred lines of antiquity

Sulagna Chattopadhyay
Founder-Editor, Geography and You, New Delhi
editor@geographyandyou.com

My schooling amidst the dewy greenery of a convent in the east of India rarely allowed the ensconcement of caste identities. Class distinctions? Well one could never escape that. I easily recognised the entitled ones—their pens, colour pencils, backpacks and pencil boxes being objects of intense desire. At university, in the arid heat of north India, the tables however turned. I became the 'entitled', not because of my class, but my caste, an identity that had held no relevance for me until then.

I am a rebel. Never conforming to the caste, class or gender hierarchies laid down centuries ago. But today I am near certain, that despite the best efforts of a handful of stereotype hackers, the majority are willing to fall back on a system enshrined in the Vedic idea of India. At least that is what the data says. Being an empirical, evidence based researcher, it would be difficult for me to turn my back on what myriad experts contributing to this special issue of G'nY are pointing out, as clear as daylight.

The egalitarian changes are barely perceptible, they cite. The caste alignment overrides the class, they say. There are no geographies of alternative identities, they add. The monolithic placing of communities are actually more stratified than is perceived, they share. There is no hope it seems for the rebels of the system. Yet, I dream that one day caste will no longer matter—merit, hard work and equal opportunities is all that will count.

Sulagna Chattopadhyay

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Tribes: Forgotten Again

Nandini Sundar, a professor of sociology at the Delhi School of Economics, is an acclaimed researcher and a well accepted authority on tribal communities of India. In a conversation with Prof Sachidnanad Sinha, Guest Editor, G'nY, she discusses the various issues facing the scheduled tribe population in the remote regions of India.

G'nY. How do you see the Indian tribes in terms of their essential characteristics and what do you think are the key issues confronting the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities?

The figures are important. The term ST envelops a broad range with 781 communities listed under the Article 342, covering 8.6 per cent of the population, at 104.3 million as per the Census of 2011. These comprise the populous Bhil, Gond, Oraon, Mina, Munda and many others including 75 small communities described as a 'particularly vulnerable tribal group' (PVTG), previously called the 'primitive tribal group'. The PVTG include the Chenchu, Kurumba and Khoda Reddy of the south, the Jarawa, Onge, and Sentinelese of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and several others in the east. The ST category also covers communities which were called the 'criminal tribes' (during the British rule) and are now labelled as the denotified tribes (DNT), though some DNT are also classified as scheduled castes. There are a number of other

communities which should be classified as ST like the people who migrated from Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh to Assam but they have not got the ST status. There are also various other communities that are asking for the ST status. So, it is a large range that comes under this category of ST having different concerns as well as different ways of relating to the state. Some of them are struggling for survival, much like the PVTGs, their existence under threat. For others, the more common problems are landlessness—there has been a great deal of proletarianisation in the last five decades. They also suffer from militarisation. If you look at where you have had the maximum state repression it has usually been in the tribal areas whether in the North East or in Central India. People talk about how different religions need to be respected, but nobody recognises the Adivasi religions, as if they do not exist. And of course there is resource displacement--one in every four Adivasis is reported to have been displaced. That is a major issue.

G'nY. Do you think that the tribes are becoming more like castes? What is the nature of social stratification among the tribes?

I think in a way that debate is dated. To differentiate between tribes and peasants is simply not accurate. Most tribal communities have long been settled communities practising cultivation, like everyone else. In terms of egalitarianism, there is quite a bit of stratification even among tribal communities--there is a hierarchy in terms of who one can marry and who can eat with whom. However, I agree that within a tribal community, there is more egalitarianism than in the upper caste communities. And even though tribal women are much more equal than upper caste Hindu women, they do not have the same kind of religious and political rights as the men in their community. The Lokur Committee in the 1950s distinguished tribes from others on the basis of alleged 'shyness of contacts' and 'peculiar customs'—but what could be stranger than some upper caste customs of Rajput child marriage, untouchability or customs based on norms of purity and pollution.

People talk about how different religions need to be respected, but nobody recognises the Adivasi religions, as if they do not exist.

So, official categorisation has actually reinforced a racist viewpoint.

G'nY. In common parlance when we talk about tribes, we think of them as monoliths. How does that affect their survival within the Indian state?

Curiously, this argument about diversity was made by the Bihar Congress in the 1930s and 1940s when denying Jharkhand statehood. They claimed that there was no one common language among the tribals of Chotangapur and Santhal Pargana. The dominant political class just did not want to recognise that tribes were people with a strong political identity.

G'nY. You mentioned the plurality of religious identities of tribes—but there is no census data on tribal religions. The tribes may state their religion but every other religion other than the major six for which data is presented by the Census gets classified as 'others'. What are your views?

This is an old problem. Even during the 1941 Census the Hindu Mahasabha was trying to mobilise the Adivasis, especially in Jharkhand, to return themselves as Hindus. The Adivasis were resisting this. The Census forms do not provide for Adivasi religion and more significantly the census enumerators, usually school teachers who are non-tribals or from elsewhere, automatically record Hindu for the tribes.

G'nY. Based on your experiences, could you give us some insights about the implementation of reservations in our country?

There is a general delegitimisation of reservation and the Indian government is trying to phase it out. Bringing in the economically weaker section (EWS) was one such strike as it goes against the basic tenet of reservation in the Constitution which was specifically meant as a historic redressal rather than as an economic measure for unemployment. Addressing economic backwardness alone was never the intent of reservation. Reservation is very much under threat. If you look at some of the recent Supreme Court judgements saying that promotions are not a right and even reservation is not a right and that the 16(4) is just an enabling provision, it is clear that the government is not defending the rights in the Courts. There is an even more worrying judgement—the Andhra state government had guaranteed a 100 per cent reservation for ST teachers in its scheduled areas. The Andhra high court upheld it in the face of non-tribal persons appealing at the Supreme Court. What is worrying is that in your own district if you cannot be a teacher--then where is the space for the tribes to advance?. Without the reservation, local people will have no rights at all. I understand that as education spreads, more people will be able to make the ranks--but one cannot do away with reservation till that happens. In terms of resistance the SCs and STs are starting to come together to defend their rights but I believe more awareness is required.

G'nY. How can one ensure a proportionate share through reservations?

It is true that the dominant share of whatever has accrued to the tribes is concentrated among members of a certain tribal community. Therefore, we do need better mechanisms for equitable distribution. The Jawaharlal Nehru University model of admission with deprivation points for region and backwardness in addition to caste category is a relevant model to look into. It would also help to get data as to how many reserved seats actually get filled and why.

G'nY. The Arctic tribes have independent sub-governance structures. They can leverage for a share in development projects in the area. Is there any similar mechanism in India?

There is a District Minerals Fund (DMF) established by the Ministry of Mines to foot the bill for the development activities in mining affected areas, but it goes to the administration, not to the community. So for instance, the National Mineral Development Corporation (NMDC) in Dantewada has a big corporate social responsibility (CSR) budget which they had not spent for decades. Few years ago, the locals found out about it and demanded that they spend it, drawing up a plan for what should be done. Then the state government came along, transferring the funds to the district administration, taking it to Raipur thereafter. So although in theory the district minerals fund is meant for the development of local communities it is actually being used for other things.

G'nY. Please comment on the [draft] new educational policy's exclusive educational zones. Do you think there will be further segregation in the already highly segmentation field of education.

Although I have not examined the draft New Education Policy in detail but currently the state provides large Ashramshalas and portacabin schools and hostels to the tribes in the name of education. It is all about taking them away from their Adivasi identity. To have exclusive zones where the tribes are allowed to develop the Adivasi languages and get a good education would be welcome, bolstering confidence. If you come to think of it, all the elite schools in Delhi or elsewhere such as the air conditioned Goenka school, Rishi Valley, Mayo or Doon school are exclusive educational zones for the rich.

G'nY. A few years ago the Land Acquisition Act was in the news. How do you think it can impact the tribes?

The states are enacting their own laws and are not carrying out social impact assessments. They are not taking consent. The tribes are struggling against resource grab but the media is just not giving it any bandwidth. People are protesting, but the state and its agencies are not responsive to it.

G'nY. There are large tribal groups and also the tiny ones but we are viewing them through the same lens. Do we have an option to see a graded system?

The government does differentiate between STs and PVTGs as the state has historically recognised that some tribes need more protection. But the level of government commitment historically, has not matched the provisions either as enshrined in the Constitution or stated through its own policies. So we can have a policy meant for tribal protection but it is weak compared to the other policies such as the land acquisition, the forest act or the mining act. One needs to take a fresh look at all the policies which affect the scheduled tribes.

G'nY. How do you think we can better the situation?

If we were a democratic society we would not be stripping people off their assets. So I do not think we are a democratic society at this stage—in form maybe, but not in content. And if we look at drastic suicidal changes (such the climate), the biodiversity in tribal areas is the only defence. Here the companies and the government are stripping them further. The way out is to allow communities rights. There is a provision in the forest rights act about community forest rights. Managing the forests sustainably can be developed as a way forward. We need to organise and restart discussions about real onground environmental, employment, education and many other such issues. The media needs to talk about climate change in a way it has hitherto not been doing. That is the most important thing now. GY

Website

International Dalit Solidarity Network

idsn.org/

The International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) works on a global level for the elimination of caste discrimination and similar forms of discrimination based on work and descent. They link grassroot priorities with international mechanisms and institutions in order to change policies and practices that lead to caste discrimination.

National SC- ST Hub

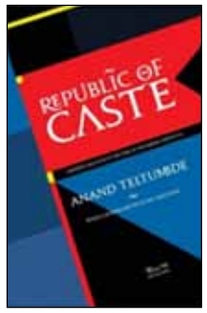
www.scsthub.in/

Operating under the ministry of micro, small and medium enterprises the hub supports existing SC/ST entrepreneurs and enterprises in technological upgradation and capacity building enabling them to effectively participate in the government. This also involves the active participation by Central public sector enterprises/central ministries, states, industry associations such as DICCI and others.

Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry

www.dicci.org

The Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) is an Indian association that promotes business enterprises for Dalits. It was founded in 2005 by Milind Kamble, a well-known Dalit industrialist and a Padmashri awardee. The association is responsible to inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship in Dalit youths, organising seminars and expo's to help lift the backward communities out of poverty.



Republic of Caste: Thinking Equality in the Time of Neoliberal Hindutva

By: **Anand Teltumbde**
Cover: Hardcover
ISBN: 9788189059842
Published: 2018
Publisher: Navyana
Pages: 432
Price: USD 5.95

Commanding in its scope, revelatory and unsparing in argument, Republic of Caste presents a new map of post-Independence India. Anand Teltumbde identifies the watershed moments of its journey—from the adoption of a flawed Constitution to the Green Revolution, the other backward caste (OBC) upsurge and rise of regional parties, to neoliberalism and hindutva in the present day. As a politics of symbolism exploits the fissile nature of caste to devitalise India's poorest, Teltumbde's damning analysis shows how progressive politics can forge a way out of the present impasse. Joining the dots between a wide range of events on the ground and the prevailing structure of power, he debunks the pieties of state and Constitution, political parties and identitarian rhetoric, to reveal the pernicious energies they have unleashed and their dire impact on India's most marginalised people, the Dalits.

Caste in Contemporary India

By: **Surinder S Jodhka**
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Caste and Life Narratives

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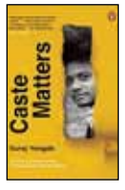

Caste Matters

By: **Suraj Yengde**
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Renunciation and Untouchability in India: The Notional and the Empirical in the Caste Order

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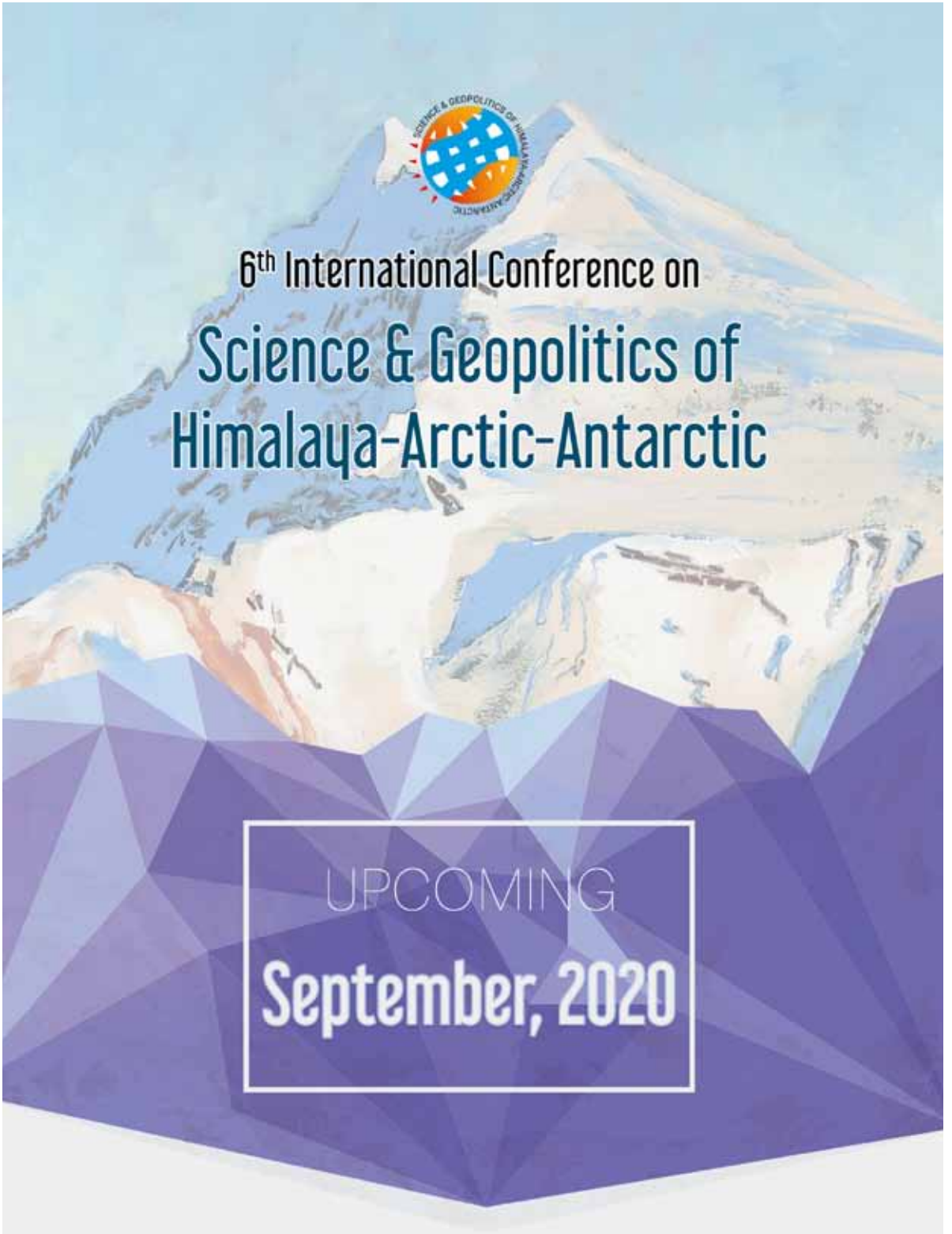

Conceptualised in 2011, The Science and Geopolitics of Himalaya-Arctic-Antarctic (SaGHAA), a Delhi based think tank has been organising an international bi-annual conference committed to addressing one of the most challenging issues facing the global community—climate change. It is the first in India to focus exclusively towards holistic tri-polar issues under the aegis of LIGHTS, an NGO working in multiple environmental and educational domains.

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