

Guest Lecture:

## **Prof. Dr. William Sax**

(South Asia Institute, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität  
Heidelberg)

### ***An Alternative Modernity in the Western Himalaya***

The lecture presents results from ongoing work on a monograph, tentatively entitled "In the Valley of the Kauravas: from subject to citizen in the Western Himalayas". The valley under discussion is the upper Tons River basin, in the Rawain region of Uttarakhand. In pre-colonial times, the entire region (including the Shimla Hill States) was divided into a number of (very) "little kingdoms" ruled by local deities, who waged war, settled disputes, and issued commands through their temple oracles. The most complete vestiges of this system survive in Rawain, where I have conducted fieldwork intermittently since 1991. Two of the most prominent local deities there are "Raja Karan" and "Duryodhan," and local cultural life is thoroughly infused with characters and themes from the Mahabharata. In the book, I intend to describe and analyze this unique local polity, and relate it to various discussions in Indian cultural history and anthropology. In this lecture, I provide an overview of the local polity, and describe the numerous transformations it has undergone in recent decades. Despite these changes, the divine kings remain central to social and cultural life. Basing my argument in current discussions of "alternative modernities," I argue that the persistence of such features does not compromise the modernity of the region, since "modernity" has multiple forms.

**Thursday, June 14, 18:00 c.t.**

Seminar Room 1

Department of South Asian, Tibetan and Buddhist Studies

Research Platform

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