

# KHABAR

2020-2021

## RALLYING TO SAVE A CAL TREASURE UC BERKELEY RETAINS SOUTH ASIA LIBRARY AFTER ACADEMICS PROTEST

*After proposing to remove the library to accommodate office cubicles, the university finally withdrew its proposal. A report by Quint reporter, Savita Patel.*

The 51st year has proven to be auspicious for the South and Southeast Asia Library at the University of California in Berkeley.

After proposing to remove the library and merge it with the Doe Library, which archives a majority of the academic literature at UC Berkeley, the university finally withdrew its proposal to close down the rare space used by scholars of South and Southeast Asian studies, in a victory for thousands of academicians in the US and abroad who signed a protest petition to save the library.

In March 2021, the UC Berkeley Library issued a call for comment to a proposal to integrate the South/Southeast Asia Library's collections and services into those of Doe Library and Main (Gardner) Stacks.

### UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION:

*And you responded. You shared fond memories of studying in the South/Southeast Asia Library. You told us how the library and its dedicated staff came through for you. You emphasised the library's value as a beacon of inclusion. And we listened.*

### RESEARCH SCHOLARS AND FACULTY THRILLED

Sohini Pillai, a scholar studying a 15th century Tamil version of Mahabharata and a retelling of its pre-modern-Hindi account for her PhD, was overjoyed at the news.

**SOHINI PILLAI:** *I'm relieved and delighted that students will continue to be able to learn about the rich and diverse history, literature, and culture of South and Southeast Asia in this beautiful and safe space on our campus.*

Pillai was introduced to the South and Southeast Asia Library on her orientation day. "One of the 3rd year PhD students needed to check the Valmiki Ramayana for a translation project and took me along to the South Asia Library – a warm, welcoming place. Impressed, I knew that I had made the right decision

to come to UCB," she fondly recalls.

With the library now accessible once again, students, researchers and faculty of South and Southeast Asian studies at UCB will be able to continue referring to the rare non-digitised books in the library.

Most importantly, they will be able to consult the curator-librarians, Virginia Shih and Adnan Malik again – better known as the 'walking-talking encyclopaedias on South and Southeast Asia texts' by scholars.

Lauding the two librarians, Professor of Chinese Literature and Chair of Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies at UCB, Dr Paula Varsano says:

**PROF. PAULA VARSANO:** *Scholars who do South and Southeast Asian studies are by definition interdisciplinary scholars. They know many languages. The texts in this space are in indigenous languages for the most part. Imagine, you are a scholar studying Burma – you go in there and find these essential Burmese texts, and right around the corner are relevant Thai texts. You can turn around and ask the welcoming librarians, Adnan and Virginia, when you need something specific. They are no words to describe what the curator Virginia has done for South and Southeast Asian studies on the campus. Any student that walks into that library, she just grabs you, and gives you a tour of the treasures of this library. Scholars from other institutions in US and even abroad consult this library.*

Dr Robert Goldman, a professor of Sanskrit at the Department of South and Southeast Asian studies at UC Berkeley, also had a good word for the librarians.

"For me, personally, the long and distinguished librarians in charge of the service have been unfailingly helpful in assisting me with bibliography of difficult to find Indian publications and in being responsive to my requests for acquisitions," he said.

Talking about the university's plan to dismantle the library a number of times, he said "There were several efforts on the part of the Library and the administration to move it elsewhere or simply integrate the collection with the main stacks. We fought these efforts a number of times and managed to keep it in place."

Recently, Dr Goldman and Professor



**THE SOUTH AND SOUTHEAST ASIA LIBRARY HAS MATERIAL IN MORE THAN 30 LANGUAGES, SPANNING 19 COUNTRIES THAT REPRESENT 30 PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION – WITH TEXTS FROM SOME OF THE OLDEST AND DIVERSE CIVILISATIONS. THIS INCLUDES A REAL WEALTH OF MATERIAL ON MAHABHARATA AND RAMAYANA IN THE ONLY DEDICATED SPACE IN NORTH AMERICA FOR RESEARCHING THESE EPICS.**

Sally Goldman received the AK Ramanujan award for their 7-volume scholarly translation of Valmiki's Ramayana.

In his 50 years teaching at UCB, he has been deeply involved with the development of South and Southeast Asia Library.

**PROF. ROBERT GOLDMAN:** *In a field such as ours, in which books published in South and Southeast Asia, often in one or another of the region's extraordinary number of languages can be very difficult to find without expert assistance, it is essential that we maintain—as do all of our peer institutions with strengths in our field as well as Berkeley units such as East Asian Languages and Cultures—a discrete and accessible library separate from the general collection.*

The South and Southeast Asia Library which accommodates up to 30 people at any given time is not only an important space for scholars to drop in to consult with curators and access its special collections, but also helps in generating funds for research. UC Berkeley has an active 'Institute for South Asia Studies' (ISAS),

# A VIEW FROM THE DIRECTOR

by Sugata Ray

Dear friends,  
In this time of a global pandemic, the loss of livelihood under disaster capitalism, and encroachments on indigenous and minority rights under authoritarian regimes globally, I am grateful to the Institute for South Asia Studies (ISAS) community for creating a space—both intellectual and pragmatic—for generating intersectional networks of camaraderie and friendships.

At the ISAS, we launched a new series of virtual conversations on the pandemic with talks by Siddhartha Mukherjee, Wasif Rizvi, Hasan Zaidi, Amita Baviskar, and Nishita Jha, among others. By way of critically engaging the regimes of virtual living that haunted us through COVID-19, the South Asia Art Initiative invited artists Mithu Sen and Brendan Fernandes to participate in a 72-hour virtual artists residency—notably, the first residency of this nature to be attempted by any educational institution, museum, or art space—in which the artists experimented with new forms of virtual making via a livestream for the entire duration of three days. At another time, the Tagore Program on Literature, Culture and Philosophy hosted a two-week long virtual festival with lectures, talks, Rabindrasangeet performances, as well as a virtual staging of *Dak Ghar*. Undeniably, COVID prompted us to imagine new ways of being and creating, even as we were virtually under siege.

The ISAS has created an expansive program of conferences and talks, internships for students, PhD dissertation and MFA prizes, as well as fifteen awards and research grants. I want to take a moment to celebrate our community as we strive to collectively redefine the study of South Asia on campus and beyond through frameworks that are critical, inclusive, and reflexive. We are excited to welcome ten new faculty as well as graduate and undergraduate students as we finally pivot back to campus. We are thrilled to finally see a breathtaking exhibition on Gandharan sculpture in-person in our campus museum and inaugurate new programs at the Center on Contemporary India. We are preparing to launch an ambitious four-year transdisciplinary program on climate change in collaboration with partner institutions in South Asia in the coming months. And this is just the tip of the iceberg—a metaphor that has ominous connotations in our Anthropocene present.

In 2021, our students rallied and mobilized to save the South and Southeast Asia Library—the only library in the United States devoted exclusively to the South and Southeast Asian region as a whole—at a time when we were witnessing a massive escalation of hate incidents against Asian and Asian American communities in the Bay Area.

The last two years have been challenging but we have learnt adaptability and resilience. And our affiliated faculty and students have won prestigious awards, published innovative scholarship, and taught cutting-edge courses. There is much to cherish even in these times of extreme precarity.

As the Interim Director for the 2021–22 academic year, I am indebted to our brilliant staff Sanchita Saxena, Puneeta Kala, Robin Satori, and Myriam Aviles for keeping our ship running and making the ISAS our collective home. With diminishing state support, we also remain indebted to our well-wishers and financial supporters for keeping our public-facing mission alive and thriving. From South Asian art to Rabindranath Tagore, from languages such as Bangla, Hindi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu that are taught on campus to our recently-launched Center on Contemporary India, from the Sikh & Punjabi Studies Program to the Pakistan Initiative and the Subir & Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies, the past years have seen us expand our focus in diverse directions. Despite the pandemic, this ecosystem is thriving because of the support of our faculty, students, staff, and well-wishers.

As the acclaimed author Arundhati Roy—whose April 2022 talk on campus we co-sponsored—recently wrote: “Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.” Taking inspiration from Roy, we invite you to push through that portal to collectively heal, connect, reflect, and build our world anew in the semesters and years to come. Join us as we imagine a more just future together.

Fiat Lux. Let there be light!

Sugata

## THE INSTITUTE FOR SOUTH ASIA STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY



The ISAS team (clockwise from left) Sanchita Saxena, Puneeta Kala, Robin Satori, Sugata Ray, Munis D. Faruqui, & Myriam Aviles

### ISAS STAFF

**Sanchita Banerjee Saxena** is the Executive Director of the Institute for South Asia Studies and the Director of the Subir and Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies. She is the author of *Made in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka: The Labor Behind the Global Garments and Textiles Industries* (2014). Dr. Saxena has been a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center (2010, 2014) as well as at the Rockefeller Foundation's Bellagio Center in Italy (2016). Dr. Saxena holds a PhD in Political Science from UCLA.

**Puneeta Kala** is the Institute's Program Director. She is an East Asianist who specialized in Japanese studies. She holds one M.Phil. and three M.A. degrees with the most recent from Harvard University. Puneeta has taught at the University of Vermont and the University of San Francisco and has been involved in a number of programming and fundraising initiatives at Harvard and elsewhere.

**Robin Satori** is the Program & Publications Assistant at the Institute. He graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of California, Berkeley.

**Myriam Aviles** is the Institute's Work Study student. She is a computer science student at UC Berkeley. With interests in design and game development, she has participated in hackathons creating games and designing websites.

*Through partnerships with leading institutions in Bangladesh, a vibrant lecture and conference series, and support of innovative research by graduate students, the Chowdhury Center has galvanized debate on many key issues around the economic, societal, political, and environmental transformations facing the country. These are unprecedented times, but we are committed now more than ever to bringing cutting edge scholarship about Bangladesh by leading experts in the field.*

— Sanchita Banerjee Saxena  
Director, Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies

which hosts numerous events, pulling many eminent American and international visitors.

The Executive Director of ISAS Dr Sanchita Banerjee Saxena knows that the library has been a selling point for South Asia studies at UC Berkeley.

**DR. SANCHITA SAXENA:** *In my 14 years, I have seen South Asian visitors - dignitaries, ambassadors, artists and authors - they request to visit it. A part of their visit was to attend or give a lecture at the institute, and part of their itinerary was to visit the 'South Asia Library'. We have received a lot of competitive grants, because we speak about the collection and highlight that it is a dedicated library. It is different if the holdings are spread over the main library.*

### RALLYING FOR A CAUSE

South Asian scholars at UCB rallied to protect the South and Southeast Asia Library, as the university had proposed to dismantle it to accommodate more office cubicles. With no students and faculty on the campus because of the pandemic, there could not be any in-person efforts to save the library.

There are more than 20 libraries of various sizes on campus with Doe being the largest, in which the South and Southeast Asia Library is housed. Previously an undergraduate library, Moffitt is being converted into a special study space, which threatened the existence of the South and Southeast Asia Library.

The UCB had issued a 'call for comment' seeking suggestions for the proposed change to the South and Southeast Asia Library, as clarified by University Librarian Dr Jeffrey Mackie-Mason: "We always solicit comments from our users when we consider a major library reconfiguration."

The reasons for the initiative included, "adding 25,000 square feet of engaging student learning space". The administration proposed to close the smallest of campus libraries, and one that attracts low foot traffic, to support creating new, modern library space for students.

South and Southeast Asia researchers disagreed with UC Berkeley's logic that 'finding and reading relevant South and Southeast Asian materials will actually be improved, by moving the small reading room collection to the same location as our much larger collection.'

In a world where we are not running documents to each other by hand anymore, UC Berkeley's proposal to make office cubicles to improve workflow, did not go down well with South and Southeast Asia scholars, who perceive 'work flow and efficiency' differently.

Dr Paula Varsano maintained, "I don't know what they are talking about. When you have that mindset, this library has very little relevance for anything you care about - you have to remember what a university is for."

The outrage among the petitioners demanding that UCB not dismantle the South and Southeast Asia Library, was not only about losing their 'beloved space where they feel at home', but also about going against Berkeley's fundamental values. Known the world over as an upholder of democratic values, UCB's guiding principles include a commitment to diversity and inclusivity, in maintaining it as a research university of the highest caliber, that serves not only California &

### Saving a CAL resource

#### OF ASIAN AMERICA:

—Students on campus recently coalesced to prevent the closing of a library dedicated to South East and South Asian Studies.

by Sugata Ray, Associate Professor of South Asian Art; Interim Chair, Institute for South Asia Studies.

Asian Americans across the United States rejoiced when Kamala Harris—the daughter of South Asian and Jamaican immigrants—was sworn in as the vice president. In the Bay Area—where the then vice president-elect spent her childhood and began her extraordinary political career—the results of the 2020 election set off celebrations as jubilant supporters took to the streets. In a triumphant public statement issued in Berkeley News on November 10, 2020, the University of California, Berkeley commemorated Harris's "biracial, multi-cultural roots" and emphasized her connections with UC Berkeley. After all, Shyamala Gopalan and Donald J. Harris, both immigrants from former British colonies, had not only received their PhDs from UC Berkeley, but had also met at a campus study group on race in America in the fall of 1962. Already in 1962, the critical movements that would shape the radical politics of the next few years could be sensed. In 1968, these movements would culminate in the formation of the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), who demanded representation and recognition in university curricula and the replacement of the term "Oriental" with "Asian American." To put it synoptically, at UC Berkeley, striking students of color were first met with force and later assuaged with the establishment of an ethnic studies department.

Fast forward to 2021. It is business

US, but also the world.

Kashi Gomez wrote a comment while signing the petition:

**KASHI GOMEZ:** *It is also a home for students who are experiencing the alienation of a large university and a safe space amid increasing anti-Asian violence. Berkeley's commitment to equity/diversity/inclusivity are meaningless if there is no support for concrete resources.*

### A WIN IN THESE STRANGE TIMES

UC Berkeley reiterated its values in the statement along with the withdrawal of the proposal, "You emphasized the library's value as a beacon of inclusion. And we listened."

**UNIVERSITY ADMINISTRATION:** *This is especially significant as it comes amidst a spate of hate crimes against Asians in US. The library continues to be relevant with the recent turmoil in Myanmar, and religion becoming more prominent in South Asian politics - issues that South and Southeast Asian scholars at Berkeley are concerned about.*

The pandemic had stalled the South and Southeast Asia Library's 50th anniversary celebrations, but with UC Berkeley's decision to give it a new lease of life, celebrations are in order on its 51st year. ❖

*This opinion piece was originally printed in The Quint on March 25, 2021. Reprinted here with permission from the author.*

as usual in the Bay Area. An 84-year-old Thai American, Vichar Ratanapakdee, is murdered in the Anza Vista neighborhood of San Francisco; Filipino American Danny Yu Chang is attacked and partially blinded in a brutal Mission District stabbing. And then six Asian American women are murdered in a series of mass shootings in Atlanta, Georgia on March 16. According to the 2021 Stop AAPI Hate National Report, 3,795 anti-Asian hate incidents have taken place since the beginning of the pandemic.

About 44% of these occurred in California. In the Bay Area, the steady acceleration of xenophobic hate crimes, murders, and deliberate violence against Asian and Asian American communities generates an outcry. On March 17, UC Berkeley Chancellor Carol T. Christ circulates a timely message to all UC Berkeley faculty, staff, and students in support of the large Asian and Asian American community on campus.

In part because of its location, UC Berkeley has been central to Asian American history in the United States, as has the San Francisco State University. Which is also why the chancellor's well-worded message resonated with many on campus. The sincerity of verbiage, of course, has always been somewhat out of step with administrative action and Asian American representation in a campus where 39.8% of the undergraduate students population identified as Asian/Pacific Islander in 2019-20 (compared to 28.4% white) while only 17% of the faculty are of Asian origin (compared to 77% white in 2020), according to campus data provided by the UC Berkeley Office for Faculty Equity & Welfare and the Office of Planning and Analysis. This disparity in representation appears doubly troubling given UC Berkeley's place in Asian American history and the institution's location within the largest community of people of Asian origin in the United States.

The slippage between the rhetoric of solidarity and representational apathy was recently exemplified by a March 2021 proposal to eliminate UC Berkeley's South/Southeast Asia Library—the only library in the United States devoted exclusively to the South and Southeast Asian region as a whole—allegedly in order to better serve "user communities" (which ones?) and increase library efficiency. As of February 2022, the proposal and Call For Public Comment can still be accessed through the UC Berkeley library website. As a minor campus library—both in terms of square footage and the community that it serves—the South/Southeast Asia Library apparently attracts the least foot traffic. In the eyes of the administration, this very same minority status purportedly made it an apropos site for redaction by eradication.

The minor, however, resists. Within days, a petition initiated by students via [www.change.org](http://www.change.org) accrued (cont'd on pg. 5)



Lee Davidson, "Berkeley strikers battle police," *New Left Notes*, (February 28, 1969) Courtesy *Washington Area Spark*

## COVID CONVERSATIONS: REFLECTIONS FROM SOUTH ASIA

In an effort to shed some light on the impact of the corona virus in South Asia, the Institute, in early 2021, launched **Covid Conversations: Reflections from South Asia**, a new series of virtual programs. Featuring UC Berkeley faculty in conversation with scholars, public intellectuals, health care providers, business leaders, journalists, and others in South Asia, the goal of this program is to understand the impact of the crisis from many different perspectives. The various talks and panel discussions that have taken place till now under this series are as follows.



Munis D. Faruqi & Wasif Rizvi

May 1, 2020

### AN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION'S CHALLENGE: HABIB UNIVERSITY IN THE TIME OF COVID

Prof. Munis D. Faruqi and Wasif Rizvi, the President of Habib University, talk on the impact of COVID on higher education in Pakistan. ❖



Munis D. Faruqi & Hasan Zaidi

May 3, 2020

### PAKISTANI POLITICS IN THE TIME OF COVID

Munis D. Faruqi and Journalist and Editor of Dawn Magazines, Hasan Zaidi, talk about Pakistan's response to COVID. ❖



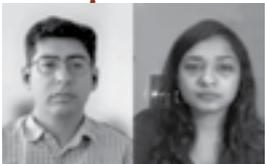
Raka Ray & Amita Baviskar

May 19, 2020

### COVID AT HOME: GENDER, CLASS AND THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY

Prof. Raka Ray and Sociologist

Prof. Amita Baviskar discuss COVID & the deepening of social inequalities in India. ❖

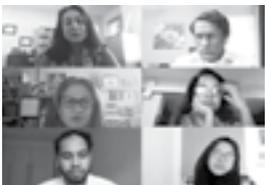


Abhishek Kaicker & Nishita Jha

May 21, 2020

### REPORTING ON CORONAVIRUS IN INDIA TODAY: TECHNOLOGY, GENDER, POLITICS

Prof. Abhishek Kaicker and global women's rights reporter for BuzzFeed News, Ms. Nishita Jha on the impact of media on COVID. ❖



Sanchita Saxena, Ali Riaz, Naomi Hossain, Sabina Rashid, Mabruur Ahmed, & Rahima Begum

May 27, 2020

### VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND COVID-19: BANGLADESH DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

A conversation led by Dr. Sanchita Saxena with Political Scientist

Prof. Ali Riaz, Sociologist Prof. Naomi Hossain, Anthropologist Dr. Sabina Rashid, and Mabruur Ahmed and Rahima Begum of Restless Beings. ❖

Recordings of all talks may be viewed at [southasia.berkeley.edu/covid-19-south-asia](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/covid-19-south-asia).



Siddhartha Mukherjee

### The 5th Bhattacharya Lecture on the Future of India

## WHAT THE CORONAVIRUS REVEALS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE AND PUBLIC HEALTH IN INDIA

In Fall 2021, the Institute was privileged to have Bengali-American physician, biologist, oncologist, author of *The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer*, and winner of the 2011 Pulitzer Prize, Dr. Siddhartha Mukherjee, as our fifth Bhattacharya speaker.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and, in particular, its devastating sweep through India, uncovered deep and striking weaknesses in our country's preparedness for the future. It has left behind a wake of questions within medicine that we are now forced to confront. Throughout the pandemic, Dr. Mukherjee has offered a broad global readership wise counsel on COVID, particularly as it has manifested in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, and so it was an honor that he chose to accept our invitation.

Dr. Mukherjee's thought provoking talk, which largely concerned the future of medicine and public health in India, focused on three broad themes. The first, delved into India's unique circumstances of broken supply chains, privatized hospitals, and the lack of a coordinated, centralized response, that made this pandemic so lethal to India's population.

In the second part of the talk, Dr. Mukherjee, focusing on India's medical preparedness for future pandemics, spoke at length on the reach and depth of our public health infrastructure and how it can be bolstered to deal with public health in general – i.e. beyond pandemics and into arenas of well being and prosperity in health. One of his main concerns was identifying concrete mechanisms by which faith in public health and medical preparedness, and in particular global preparedness for future pandemics, could be restored in the minds of the public.

In the third and final section of his talk, Dr. Mukherjee focused on the future of medical technologies in India and in particular spoke about new, transformative medicines including new t-cell therapies for cancer that he is bringing to India.

Dr. Mukherjee's talk was followed by a conversation between him and a panel of UC Berkeley faculty working on the intersections of medical anthropology,

demography, and genetics.

The Dean of Social Sciences and former ISAS Director, Prof. Raka Ray opened the event. ISAS Interim Director, Prof. Sugata Ray made the formal speaker introduction. The evening ended with some closing remarks by the founder of the Bhattacharya India Fund, Shankar Bhattacharya. ❖

A recording of the talk may be viewed at [southasia.berkeley.edu/bhattacharya-2021](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/bhattacharya-2021)



Faculty Respondent

### LAWRENCE COHEN

Professor of Anthropology; Co-Director, Medical Anthropology Program

In the case of the Covid pandemic, two years on, what is needed are forms of pandemic governance that combine the historic data of the past two years, that is a prevention regime, with practices oriented to uncertain futures. As a medical anthropologist I wonder how the notably mild pre Delta variant picture in India and the devastations of the Delta wave can be enfolded together to offer lessons in pandemic prevention, preparedness, policy, and care over coming years, lessons that do not penalize the poor and migrant but value and support their aspirations.



Faculty Respondent

### AYESHA S. MAHMUD

Assistant Professor, Department of Demography

I've been involved in studies looking at mortality due to Covid-19 in India. However, because of a lack of a central public health database, studying these figures has been quite challenging. Most of the data that we have is via investigative journalism or citizen activism. One of the pathways forward must be working on strengthening the system for collecting basic public health measures and making them available to people who study them. Thus, basic surveillance systems and basic health care systems are critical for South Asia's preparedness in mitigating future pandemics.



Faculty Respondent

### PRIYA MOORJANI

Assistant Professor of Molecular & Cell Biology, Center for Computational Biology

As a geneticist I think a lot about how the benefit of genetics today is very disproportionate across the world. The majority of genetic studies have been performed in people of European descent. And we know a lot about the genetics of Europeans including genetics of complex diseases whereas this benefit has not reached South Asians as much. India must invest in research and take advantage of new technologies to learn about our genetic makeup to try to see how we can leverage this information for reducing disease burden

## FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

—the social impact of UCB scholarship

### AS COVID SURGES, INDIANS GRAPPLE WITH DESPERATION, GRIEF — AND FURY

By Edward Lempinen,  
UC Berkeley Media relations

India in the 21st century has emerged as a powerhouse of development: education rising and poverty falling, with pharmaceuticals and tech driving a booming economy. But the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the country in recent weeks, and the nation's deadly inequality has been compounded by broad government failures.

Today, says UC Berkeley social anthropologist Aarti Sethi, virtually every family in India has experienced a direct loss from the pandemic. The country has been shocked to the core and staggered by grief, she said — and the death toll

is still climbing. More than a quarter-million fatalities are listed, but the toll is likely far higher.

Sethi grew up in India and obtained degrees from Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University, both in New Delhi, before coming to the U.S. to pursue advanced de-

grees. In an interview, she paired cultural analysis with a poignant understanding

of the Indian people. Her troubling conclusion: "It did not have to be this way."

The message resonates in the Berkeley community, which has deep connections to India and the Indian American community. "Together we mourn these losses," campus leaders said in a statement on the surge of cases in India last week. "Together we can provide strength and solace to our community members in need."

The interview with Aarti Sethi has been edited for length and clarity.

\*

*Berkeley News: Tell me about the human impact of the pandemic during this incredible, tragic surge in Indian communities.*

**Aarti Sethi:** It's absolute carnage — that's what we are witnessing right now. The human devastation is indescribable. Everyone in India, everyone from India, everyone with family in India, everyone has lost someone. Many have lost many. And the tragic fact is that in the coming days and weeks and months, we will continue to lose many.

The scale of the devastation is difficult to describe, as can be expected in a country of 1.3 billion people. In cities like Delhi or Bombay, there's an almost 40% positivity rate.

The reigning emotion is desperation. The desperation of watching your loved one's oxygen levels fall. The desperation of making hundreds of phone calls for a hospital bed that doesn't exist. The desperation of reaching a hospital and waiting in a parking lot and watching your loved one die because there



Police in Kolkata organized the distribution of food to low-income people struggling through the pandemic. (Photo by Indrajit Das via Wikimedia Commons)

are 100 patients in front of you.

This is being described as a situation in which the system has collapsed. We should be very clear: The central government has collapsed — it has failed in its responsibilities to the people.

But the people of India have not failed each other. The people of India are caring for each other with nothing at their disposal. People are coming together to enact private grace in a manner that is just humbling to see.

*'Private grace' — what form does that take?*

It takes the form of putting your life and your body on the line for other people. It means that you have volunteers, groups of people who spend the whole day making phone calls, collecting lists of oxygen supply vendors. It means running makeshift oxygen facilities in gurdwaras, the Sikh places of worship. Mosques have opened their doors so that people who are desperate and have (cont'd on pg. 6



Aarti Sethi

(cont'd from pg. 3) 18,000 signatures; The Daily Californian, a student-run newspaper, labeled the plan "particularly cruel" especially in face of the recent anti-Asian violence in an editorial on March 19; departments invested in the study of South and Southeast Asia appealed. The University Library buckled and withdrew its plan on March 22. The official statement released by Library Communications on March 22 yet again emphasizes its "value as a beacon of inclusion." We have been here before. As Professor Lok Siu, my colleague in the Department of Ethnic Studies, mentioned in an interview with Berkeley News on March 17: "Anti-Asian violence is an American tradition." We

might remember that "Anti-Hindu" riots had erupted in 1907 in Bellingham, Washington followed by similar brutal attacks on South Asian migrants in California. In 1910, The San Francisco Call published a caricature with Uncle Sam holding a "Hindu"—labeled incompetent and indolent—by the seat of his pants while asking the British Viceroy of India to "Take

this impossible thing back! We don't [sic] want it over here!"

Despite such odds, UC Berkeley attracted students from the region as early

as the 1900s. Their numbers were small in the beginning. But their anti-racist activism was nonetheless notable, as indicated by a news article titled "Hindu Students Flay Missionary" published in The San Francisco Call on January 18, 1908. By 1913, the campus had become a hotbed of global anti-imperial politics with the formation of the Pacific Coast Hindustani Association in San Francisco whose members not only agitated against colonialist British policies back home but simultaneously protested racism on campus. Even as precarious subjects with limited political agency, brown students did not hesitate to call out racism and xenophobia on campus, in the Bay Area, and in the United States. They took seriously—perhaps not without naïveté—the promise of freedom in the United States, itself a former British colony. This much becomes clear from the 1926 newsletter of the Pacific Coast Hindustani Association, which had a portrait of George Washington on its cover alongside his 1788 message to the "patriots of Ireland."

The subsequent century-long history of political mobilization by students of color on campus—from early 20th-century anti-imperialism to the TWLF, a coalition of African American, Mexican American, Asian American, and Native American students—is inspiring. This same history would bring Shyamala Gopalan to UC Berkeley at the age of 19 where she, like many other migrants from South and Southeast Asia, would meet kindred spirits from across the world united by the debilitating experience of growing up under colonial rule. This very same history would galvanize my own

imagination when I joined the History of Art Department several decades later to teach South and Southeast Asian art. Although the arts of South, Southeast, and East Asia had been taught at UC Berkeley since the 1960s, I would be the first faculty member of Asian origin to do so.

Of course, the presence of Asian and Asian American faculty does not in itself assuage structural inequity; indeed, there is much more to be said about race and representation and much work to be done. Edward Said had once described the American university as the last remaining utopia, one that we now recognize as being simultaneously substantial and fragile. Perhaps as a public research university, UC Berkeley, more than other peer, private universities, offers space for conversations on social justice. But this utopia, we now also know, needs to be defended, even from itself, as the corporate logic of workflow and efficiency become buzzwords for higher education in the United States and leads to the concomitant erasure of spaces for minority communities. ❖

*This essay is a revised version of an opinion piece published by the author in Hyperallergic on March 30, 2021.*



"A new problem for Uncle Sam," *The San Francisco Call*, (August 13, 1910) (artwork in public domain)



*Pacific Coast Hindustani Association Newsletter (Feb 1926) (artwork in public domain)*

(cont'd from pg. 5) nowhere else to go can come and be oxygenated. People are running kitchens where those who are in lockdown or who are sick can be fed. The newspapers are filled with stories of human beings helping each other. There was a story of an ambulance driver who sold all of his wife's jewels, simply to purchase oxygen cylinders for the patients that he was ferrying to the hospital. This is not somebody with a lot of means at his disposal, but he is standing witness to the enormity of human suffering before him



At a crematorium in New Delhi, a grief-stricken man crouches by the body of a family member who died of COVID-19. (AP photo by Ishant Chauhan)

and doing what he can to assuage it. It takes the form of older people giving up hospital beds for younger people. It takes the form of a crematorium worker — these are workers who come from Dalit castes, the most marginalized sections of Indian society — working 14, 15, 16 hours a day with no protective equipment, no vaccination and no priority for vaccination.



People in the city of Nagpur waiting for vaccines. (Photo by Ganesh Dhamodkar/Wiki Commons)

*You say that the state has failed, or is failing. What's gone wrong?*

It is a very important thing to place on the table: It did not have to be this way. Some of the longer-running issues, for instance, are the decades and decades of the lack of concern to build a vibrant public health system. India is the second-most populous country in the world, and one of the poorer countries in the world. It spends only 1.4% of gross domestic product on health. In health

access, in maternal mortality, in child mortality — on all of these health indicators, India does very badly. India ranks 145 in the global health care access and quality (HAQ), far below its neighboring countries Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, below poorer countries, like Sudan.

These longer-running issues came to a head because the government simply did not prepare. COVID was going to come to India. And when it came, the central government imposed one of the harshest lockdowns anywhere in the world. This was in March 2020. After that lockdown, the government went into self-congratulatory mode. But India had not beaten the wave.

The evidence was there from around the world about what a second wave does — and the government did not pay heed. Its own scientists were warning about the impact of a second wave. They were ignored.

There was a special committee of scientists that advised that India would need to ramp up its oxygen production capacities. But after India apparently beat COVID last year, from September 2020 to January 2021 there was a decrease of 37% in oxygen-supported hospital beds. India was exporting vaccines even in April this year.

There is a category in the law called criminal negligence, and the central government is certainly criminally negligent.

*You mentioned the great inequality among India's 1.3 billion people. How did that contribute to, or magnify, the problems that now afflict the country?*

India is such a socially and economically unequal society, and that radically impacts the everyday lives of people. We've seen that in India, and in America, as well. Here, the impact of the COVID crisis was disproportionately experienced by communities of color. People working jobs where they could not afford to stay at home.

Likewise in India: Last year when there was a lockdown imposed, there was absolutely no foresight given to how the vast majority of India's population, people who work in what is called the informal sector, were going to actually live. How will people who survive on daily wages and who cannot feed themselves or their families unless they go out to work every day, without any security of employment, or health insurance, or access to health care — how are those people going to survive?

*India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, is often classified as a populist, in the mold of Donald Trump in the U.S. or Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Has the populist approach to governing had a negative im-*



Prime Minister Modi with state ministers via video to discuss the pandemic. (Photo by Press Information Bureau, GOI via Wikipedia)

*pact on India's response to the pandemic?*

The short answer is yes.

The reason why Narendra Modi is often placed in the same class as Bolsonaro and Trump is that they seem to share a certain style of governing, which centers on the cult of the leader. The charisma of the leader and his obsession with his personal cult overtakes all considerations of society.

Social behavior is very closely pegged to political messaging in modern societies. So, the decision to allow and encourage the gathering of 3.5 million pilgrims at the height of the global crisis, simply because the prime minister wishes to encourage what he believes is his base. The insanity of the prime minister encouraging people in the hundreds



Indians of every region and class have seen their lives transformed and their livelihoods threatened by the COVID-19 pandemic. (Photo by Sumita Roy Dutta)

of thousands to come for election rallies in the middle of a COVID wave in Bengal. The insanity of continuing with a project to renovate the Parliament building and a new house for the prime minister that is going to cost millions of dollars, as opposed to using those resources to create mass vaccinations and health facilities in the country.

And the prime minister til now has not offered genuine, heartfelt condolences to the people of India for the deaths that are happening. What does this tell a nation?

*Populists often govern by turning people against each other — that's how they galvanize support for their own power.*

## NEW SOUTH ASIA RESEARCH NOTES

— e-versions at [southasia.berkeley.edu/south-asia-research-notes](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/south-asia-research-notes) —

**THE KING AND THE PEOPLE: SOVEREIGNTY AND POPULAR POLITICS IN MUGHAL DELHI**



**BEYOND THE CRISIS NARRATIVE: ROHINGYA STATELESSNESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR BANGLADESH**



## SOUTH ASIA ART INITIATIVE — ANNUAL REPORT —



**ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020-21**  
E-VERSION AT [SOUTHASIA. BERKELEY.EDU/ SAAI](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/saai)

Program Updates

## CELEBRATING RABINDRANATH TAGORE AT CAL

The Tagore Program at UC Berkeley organized Celebrating Rabindranath Tagore, a two-week long virtual festival, in the Spring semester of 2021. Featuring lectures and presentations by eminent scholars of Tagore Studies, *Rabindra Sangeet* performances by world renowned artists, as well as a staging of *Dak Ghar*, the festival showcased the life and legacy of Rabindranath Tagore. ❖

Recordings of all programs at [southasia.berkeley.edu/Tagore-Festival](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/Tagore-Festival)



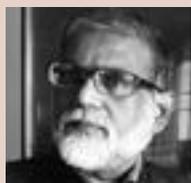
S. Bandyopadhyay  
Lecture: Tagore:  
Through The Wars



Fakrul Alam  
Lecture: Translating  
Rabindranath  
Tagore's Songs



Sukanta Chaudhuri  
Lecture: Tagore as  
Big Data



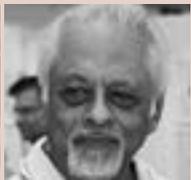
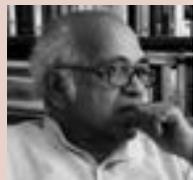
R. Sivakumar  
Lecture: Tagore's  
Self-discovery as an  
Artist



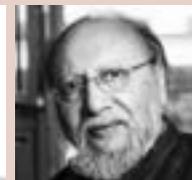
Mousumi Banerjee  
*Rabindra Sangeet*  
Performance



Serajul I. Choudhury  
Lecture: Tagore on  
Nationalism



Samik Bandyopadhyay | Partha Ghosh | Bikash Sinha  
Panel Discussion: Tagore and Science



Pranab Bardhan | Sudipta Kaviraj | Ashis Nandy  
Panel Discussion: Tagore and Nationalism



Subhasree Ghosh  
*Rabindra Sangeet*  
Performance



A. Chakrabarti  
Lecture: Dying in  
Tagore's Poetry &  
Philosophy



Kalpana Bardhan  
Lecture: Rabindra  
Sangeet Lyrics as  
Poems



Someswar Bhowmik  
Lecture: Cinematic  
Turns in Tagore's  
Literary Works



Sahana Bajpaie  
*Rabindra Sangeet*  
Performance



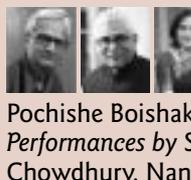
Imtiaz Ahmed  
*Rabindra Sangeet*  
Performance



Supriya Chaudhuri | Tanika Sarkar | Rusati Sen  
Panel Discussion: Women in Tagore's Art & Literature



T. Mukherjee & Team  
Play: *Dak Ghar*



Pochishe Boishakh  
Performances by Sakti Das, Waziuddin  
Chowdhury, Nandita Yasmin, Labonee  
Mohanta, Tannistha Mukherjee, & Kamalini  
Mukherji

*Has Modi done that? Has that had a bearing on India's response to the pandemic?*

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Modi's party, like many right-wing parties, operates by continuously creating internal 'others' and consolidating their supporters in opposition to the 'enemies of the people'. This has characterized the entire functioning of this regime.

Muslims especially have been made a target. There is a long history to the Hindutva project — its mission is to convert India into a theocratic Hindu nation. And its actions are fully in keeping with that.

I'll give you an example: In the early days of the crisis last year, there was an Islamic religious event in which mosques in India hosted travelers from other parts of the world. This resulted in some COVID cases, but that was used to vilify and target the Muslim community continuously for months. Whereas, the fact that 3.5 million people had gathered on the banks of the River Ganges is not only considered unremarkable, but it was encouraged by the government.

*In spite of criticism in India and globally, Modi has been very popular. But with a disaster of this magnitude, will his popularity suffer?*

There is enormous public anger against the central government.

They lost a huge election in the state of West Bengal last week. Despite the fact that the BJP is the richest political

party in India today, and they have ensured that they are the richest through a series of actions to make election funding completely opaque. This tells you about the cult of Modi — that hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on the election, not on COVID relief.

Recently, the high court of Madras described the actions of the Election Commission as murderous. The high court in Allahabad, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, currently ruled by the savage BJP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, described the fact that patients are dying for lack of oxygen as "a criminal act, no less than genocide."

These are very, very strong words for a court to use.

*Where does India go from here?*

All we can do is hope and pray that the ferocity of this wave will be contained as quickly as possible, that medical resources will get where they need to go as fast as possible. That people get a fighting chance to live — that's what we hope and pray for in the immediate future.

All societies create ways in which death is lived with and absorbed. Societies have funerary rites in which a person transitions from being a person in that society to an ancestor and how society lets that person go. Only through this mode of grieving can the dead be let go.

One of the most frightening things about COVID is the fact many of the normal

routes and modes that allow a society to grieve are blocked. Usually, people grieve with relations around them, by talking to others, by being with each other. In a mass death, how will society grieve?

The longer question is what a collective trauma of this magnitude does to a society.

*You're saying that the way people, as individuals and communities, come to terms with these deaths — taken together, by the millions — will shape where the country goes in the years ahead.*

The experience of the survivors watching the person they love, their kin, burn on the funeral pyre — that survivor is carrying with them an entire political failure. They are carrying with them also the super-human effort of people in society — doctors and nurses and good Samaritans, all the everyday people who are just trying to save themselves and save each other.

That cuts through all of the obfuscation and the disinformation and the callousness and the disregard. It is the only truth.

There's no going back now — there's no going back to anything. We just have to get through.

But for society to recover from this will take a very, very long time. ❖

*Reprinted from Berkeley News with permission from the author.*

South Asia Art Initiative Updates

## SCALING NEW BOUNDARIES: South Asia Art goes virtual at UC Berkeley

In Fall 2020, the South Asia Art Initiative invited artists Mithu Sen (New Delhi) and Brendan Fernandes (Chicago) to participate in a virtual artists residency in which they could experiment with new forms of virtual making as we faced a global pandemic. The two artists were live streamed for the duration of their residency.

Curated by UC Berkeley faculty Allan deSouza, Atreyee Gupta, Asma Kazmi, and Sugata Ray, this was the first project of this nature where two artists were live streamed for 72 hours on the SAAI Artist Residency website.

A 20 minute long encapsulation of the 72-hour livestream may be viewed on the SAAI's website at [southasia.berkeley.edu/artistscholar-residence](http://southasia.berkeley.edu/artistscholar-residence). A review of the Residency in *Take on Art*, a biannual art journal that reports on global art and cultural events from a South Asian perspective is included below. ❖

### BRENDAN FERNANDES

Brendan Fernandes is an internationally recognized Canadian artist working at the intersection of dance and visual arts. Brendan's projects address issues of race, queer culture, migration, protest and other forms of collective movement. Always looking to create new spaces and new forms of agency, Brendan's projects take on hybrid forms: part Ballet, part queer dance hall, part political protest...always rooted in collaboration and fostering solidarity.

Brendan is a graduate of the Whitney Independent Study Program (2007) and a recipient of a Robert Rauschenberg Fellowship (2014). In 2010, he was shortlisted for the Sobey Art Award, and is the recipient of a prestigious 2017 Canada Council New Chapters grant. Brendan's projects have shown at the 2019 Whitney Biennial (New York); the Guggenheim Museum (New York); MOMA (New York); The Getty Museum (Los Angeles); among many others. ❖



Mithu Sen



Brendan Fernandes

### MITHU SEN

Mithu Sen works in a variety of media to explore and subvert hierarchical codes and rules, with particular reference to sexuality, language, the value of art and objects, and experiences of marginalization. Through various devices and interventions, she challenges our standards of social exchange, undermining the codes we come to rely on and recalibrating types of interaction. Her practice incorporates painting, poetry, social media, instructional exchanges and performance to demonstrate how language and social conventions can restrict our capacity of expression. Sen uproots how we display and value art by constructing interactive scenarios, objects for exchange, and propositions to 'create and consume value', reconceiving how art is shared and circulated.

Sen completed her BFA and MFA from Visva Bharati, Santiniketan and a PG Program from the Glasgow School of Art 2000-2001, UK. ❖

A report on the SAAI's inaugural Virtual Artist Residency

### CRISIS & CREATIVITY

by TAKE on Art Team

On October 25, the UC Berkeley South Asia Art Initiative (SAAI) launched *Crisis & Creativity*, an experimental curatorial project in the form of a 72-hours born-digital live-streamed artists' residency with Mithu Sen and Brendan Fernandes. The idea of a born-digital artists' residency

world. And it was already obvious to the curators that our hyperactive pixel bodies now lived constantly in defiance of sleep protocols as we assembled in a never-ending stream of Zoom events across time zones. Sleep, after all, is an affront to capitalism and capital must circulate despite the need for humans to stay in place.

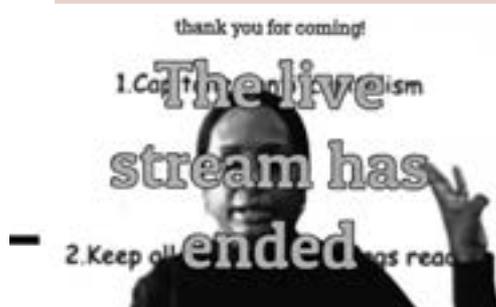
But what of the critical corporeal body of performance art? If pushed to its limit, could our pixel bodies generate a critical vocabulary? Is it possible to reimagine public and private spaces if we take pixels and software as our point of departure? In other words, could we transform crisis into radical creativity? The concept note with which the co-curators approached Mithu Sen and Brendan Fernandes consisted of such provocations; the only expectation from the two artists were that they will be 'live' on zoom for the entire duration of the 72-hour residency, which began at 00:00 PST on October 25 and ended at 11:59 on October 27 and was live-streamed on [www.ucberkeley-saa-artists-residency.com](http://www.ucberkeley-saa-artists-residency.com) as well as on YouTube.

Mithu Sen's response was a 72-hour Zoom work titled *Bar-clay far sale! Berk-lay far sale! Bark-ले far sale!* which transformed the visibility offered by the University of California Berkeley's virtual platform into a currency for trade fueled not by money or traditional forms of trade but rather through the currency of time, intimacy and the interpersonal. The generosity that the artist shared extended to a wide audience engaging with the work online. The gathering's collective punctum was perhaps most poignant on October 26 as Sen celebrated her birthday with a poetry session with her family, friends, and interlocutors.

We are happy to announce that in Spring 2023, **PARTHA MITTER, Emeritus Professor of History of Art at the University of Sussex, will be in residence at the Institute as the South Asia Art Initiative Scholar in Residence**



As Sen put it: "For me, this project was indeed about playing with the terms of the residency- from the title I chose to the manner in which I framed the residency, staging disruptions over (un) social/virtual media. I proceeded



Mithu Sen, *Bar-clay for sale! Berk-lay for sale! Bark-ले for sale!*, 72-hour Zoom work, 2020. Photo courtesy: Mithu Sen.

came to Atreyee Gupta, Asma Kazmi, Allan deSouza, and Sugata Ray-the four faculty co-curators of *Crisis & Creativity*--sometime in May, several months into statewide quarantine in California. During a Zoom conversation on an otherwise mundane afternoon, the curators became curious about what our current condition of COVID-19 imposed isolation may mean for the performative aspects of creative practice and how our present virtual life may shape a sociability of the future. Public institutional spaces and the privacy of the home had come together in a heady collision in a Zoomified quarantined



Brendan Fernandes, *Untitled*, 72-hour Zoom work, 2020. Photo courtesy: Brendan Fernandes.

by playfully sabotaging the platform of 'Berkeley' identity with my subversion that was carried out through the ad language of sale/marketing and product, questioning the virtue of institutional logics of selection, spectacularization, the new virtual aesthetics, and logistical arrangements. I passed on the platform to a wider set of people

SAAI Co-sponsored Exhibition

## BEYOND BOUNDARIES: BUDDHIST ART OF GANDHARA

The Gandharan region of northern India served as a crossroads of power, culture, and Buddhist art from the second to ninth centuries CE. Presenting rare images of the Buddha and his life story, this exhibition demonstrates through thirty-six sculptural examples from public and private collections the important cultural exchanges between the Hellenistic world of Greek and Roman art and the native artistic traditions of India. Artisans of this region took a new, humanistic approach to depicting the Buddha in clothing and settings drawn from the West and



*Seated Buddha, Gandhara, 2nd or third century; schist; 41 3/4 in. high; on long-term loan from a private collection. Image courtesy of Christie's.*

combined them with descriptive tales of the life and teachings of the Buddha. This is the first substantial exhibition focusing on Gandharan Buddhist art in an American museum in ten years and, as such, brings new scholarship and understanding to the field.

The exhibition was organized by Osmund Bopearachchi, adjunct professor of Central and South Asian Art, Archaeology, and Numismatics in the Group in Buddhist Studies, UC Berkeley, and Julia M. White, senior curator for Asian art, with Lucia Olubunmi Momoh, curatorial assistant.

The exhibition remained on display from April 30, 2021 to March 3, 2022 at the Berkeley Art

Museum & Pacific Film Archive. ❖

*A virtual tour at [bit.ly/Gandhara-Art](http://bit.ly/Gandhara-Art)*

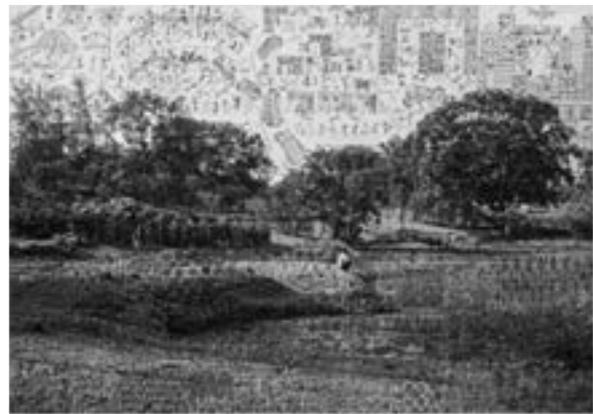
SAAI Co-sponsored Exhibition

## WHEN ALL THAT IS SOLID MELTS INTO AIR

—exploring the Intersection of the Folk and the Modern in Postcolonial India.

When All That Is Solid Melts into Air tells the story of the momentous social and artistic transformations that unfolded in the relationship between the “modern” and the “folk” within the political and historical context of postcolonial India.

The largest body of work in the exhibition comes from BAMPFA's



*Gauri Gill and Rajesh Vangad: A Seed's Journey, 2019, from the series Fields of Sight, 2013–ongoing; acrylic paint on archival pigment print; 42 x 62 in.; BAMPFA, museum purchase. © Gauri Gill and Rajesh Vangad.*

extraordinary collection of contemporary folk art by Mithila, Warli, and Gond artists. Modern and contemporary artists represented include Sunil Janah, Gauri Gill, Rajesh Vangad, Jagdish Swaminathan, and filmmakers Nina Paley and Amit Dutta.

The exhibition was organized by UC Berkeley History of Art Assistant Professor Atreyee Gupta and BAMPFA



*Baua Devi: Untitled, 1983; watercolor; 21 1/4 x 29 1/2 in.; BAMPFA, museum purchase.*

Director and Chief Curator Lawrence Rinder with Associate Curator Stephanie Cannizzo and undergraduate and graduate students in the seminar *The Folk and/in the Modern: Critical Concepts + Curatorial Practicum in Twentieth-Century South Asian Art*. Student curators were Uttara Chaudhuri, Shuli Fang, Yiman Hu, Vanessa Jackson, Michelle Kwhak, Ashley Pattison-Scott, Ariana Pemberton, Saif Radi, Ryan Serpa, and Ellen Song. The exhibition was made possible in part with generous support from Dipti and Rakesh Mathur. ❖

*A virtual tour of the exhibition may be viewed at [bit.ly/all-that-is-solid-virtual-tour](http://bit.ly/all-that-is-solid-virtual-tour)*

New in 2021

## SOUTH ASIA ART & ARCHITECTURE PRIZES

—two new awards in support of cutting edge scholarship and art relating to South Asia

The Institute's South Asia Art Initiative has launched two awards for recent graduate students: the **UC Berkeley South Asia Art & Architecture Dissertation Prize** for an outstanding doctoral dissertation on the art, architecture, or visual cultures of South Asia and its diasporas from any discipline in the arts, humanities, or social sciences and the **UC Berkeley South Asia Artist Prize** for an outstanding Master of Fine Arts body of work by an artist of the South Asian diaspora or by someone whose work addresses the politics and cultures of South Asia. Both prizes come with a \$1,500 award.

The 2021 Award Recipients:

### SOUTH ASIA ART & ARCHITECTURE DISSERTATION PRIZE

**Aparna Kumar** (PhD, University of California, Los Angeles, 2018): *Partition and the Historiography of Art in South Asia*

*Honorable Mention for 2021:*

**AURORA GRALDI** (PhD, University of Vienna, 2019): *Transforming the Buddha: A Biography of the Monumental Buddha of Guita Bahi, Lalitpur, and its Implication for the Nepalese School of Sculpture in Metal*

### SOUTH ASIA ARTIST PRIZE

**Maryam Hina Hasnain** (MFA, Chelsea College of Art, London, 2020).

*For application procedures & eligibility requirements please visit*

**[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/ART-AWARDS](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/ART-AWARDS)**

**Deadline: DECEMBER 1, 2022**

instead of limiting it to myself by counter-actively offering space to other creative professionals as a strategic un-collaboration, where complex selections and scheduling different sets of "performances" by guests expanded my engagement with "Radical Hospitality" during this global pandemic. My role and my playbour tried to unmyth the idea of an artist as:

Artist as CONMAN  
Artist as MANIPULATOR  
Artist as PERFORMER  
Artist as TIMEKEEPER  
Artist as PERFORMER  
Artist as TIMEKEEPER.

Taking seriously the residency's mandate to be at home, Brendan Fernandes' 72-hour interjections consisted of a series of conversations with invited guests that focused broadly on his performance practice and one performance each day that interrogated

the possibility of interrupting pixels with the corporeal imprint of the body. The two artists also intersected in the virtual world over a bowl of dal-one prepared in New Delhi and the other in Chicago.

The photographs included encapsulate the *Crisis & Creativity: Virtual Artists in Residence* at UC Berkeley South Asia Art Initiative project synoptically. This is the first experimental art residency to directly engage the Zoom and COVID-19 constellation. The project archives - including behind the scene style documentation are hosted in a web platform by the UC Berkeley South Asia Art Initiative, which promotes research-based projects, conversations, and collaborations around the arts of South Asia and its diasporas. ❖

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**FACULTY SPOTLIGHT**  
—the social impact of UCB scholarship

## INDIA'S FARMERS ARE PROTESTING AUTHORITARIANISM DISGUISED AS CAPITALISM. SOUND FAMILIAR?

*The Indian government forced through a series of laws that could enrich a few corporations while impoverishing millions. No wonder people are protesting.*



Supreet Kaur

by **Supreet Kaur**  
Assistant Professor of  
Economics

If you've been watching the news — or even just following Rihanna on Twitter — you're likely to know that protests of unprecedented scope — at least one may have been the largest in modern history — and duration are raging across India.

Although they are being called the "farmer protests," the collective protest by millions of Indians — cutting across religion, caste and income lines — is about much more than any agriculture legislation. It is a coming together of desperate people to resist being subjected by their government to increased economic vulnerability.

In India, millions of farmers are

*Farmers fear that the new agricultural laws will enable big corporations to snatch up market control in the agricultural sector.*

protesting to overturn three new agriculture laws the government says are designed to reform India's agricultural sector to make it less state-controlled and more market-based — what economists call liberalizing the sector.

The need for reforms is urgent, and farmers themselves would generally agree that change is sorely needed. My 14 years of doing development economics work in rural India have shown me that farmers face crushing debt, unsustainable groundwater depletion and an epidemic of suicides.

So why, then, are they protesting their own deliverance?

Well, as farmers — and many small-business people — all over the world know, rapid economic liberalization of a sector doesn't guarantee free markets or efficiency, let alone any farmer's livelihood. And it is at least as unlikely in this case as anywhere else — both because of the specifics of these laws and because of how the economy works in India.

For instance, the new laws completely lack the obvious safeguards that should accompany any massive deregulation, including a regulatory framework or safety nets to protect growers against market volatility. Previous government commissions have consistently recommended

*Rapid economic liberalization of a sector doesn't guarantee free markets or efficiency, let alone any farmer's livelihood.*

such measures. Their lack is puzzling if the government is serious about pursuing economic growth in a way that allows smallholder farmers to benefit from it.

Farmers' fears that these laws leave them vulnerable to exploitation weren't assuaged by many of the other provisions. For example, one of the laws prevents farmers from being able to take companies to court if they violate contracts to buy farmers' products in any way. That this provision was ever included is impossible to defend, and it raises understandable concerns about intent.

It's also important to understand the broader economic picture for the farmers (and everyone else in India). In India, monopoly power is commonplace. For example, in one-third of industries, a single company often controls over 50 percent of sales. A mere 20 companies account for 70 percent of all corporate earnings in India (compared to 25 percent in the U.S.).

Farmers fear that the new agricultural laws will enable big corporations to snatch up market control in the agricultural sector as well, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. This is not a fantasy, but a legitimate fear that stems from the government's failure to curb monopolistic power in other sectors. (The tight financial links between major corporations and the ruling BJP party only augment these concerns.)

Economic reforms are undoubtedly needed in Indian agriculture, but it is, at best, naive to assume that simply allowing for free markets will necessarily deliver them. It may, or it may not. For those who are already living on the brink of survival, this is a gamble that feels too risky to blithely undertake on faith alone.

Meanwhile, proponents of the new laws simply argue that the farmers and those supporting them are being misled by propagandists. That view not only insults the dignity of those risking their lives on the highways of Delhi; it also ignores the reality of the Indian economy.

And it ignores the fundamental question the ruling party hasn't answered to anyone's satisfaction: Why weren't provisions built into the laws that would have left farmers feeling protected, thereby paving a middle path that could satisfy all sides? In a functioning democracy, these conversations would have happened during the legislative process, making protests after the laws were passed unnecessary.

But under the right-wing BJP, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's

*The BJP's increasingly authoritarian bent is blatantly on display in how it has reacted to the largely peaceful farmer protests.*

democracy is hurtling toward dysfunction.

The new agricultural laws were rammed through Parliament during the pandemic without allowing for regular parliamentary procedure and without consulting even a single farmers organization — undermining their perceived legitimacy.

Implementing drastic policy changes without regard for democratic process is, however, the new norm in the Modi government. For instance, in a surprise announcement in 2016, the government abruptly suspended the use of major cash currency. This demonetization broke the back of the Indian economy



Farmers protest at the Delhi Singhu border in Delhi, India, on Dec. 18, 2020. Anindito Mukherjee

overnight, with catastrophic results: National GDP growth fell by 13 percent, with the poor bearing the brunt.

This government has already shown a willingness to unilaterally enact sweeping policy changes that expose its most vulnerable people to potential disaster — an approach to governing that is as arrogant as it is cavalier. It isn't an approach designed to engender trust among its constituents.

The BJP's increasingly authoritarian bent is blatantly on display in how

*Why weren't provisions built into the laws that would have left farmers feeling protected, thereby paving a middle path that could satisfy all sides?*

it has reacted to the largely peaceful farmer protests. The police beat protesters while they slept on the streets, and right-wing nationalists have used violence to disrupt protest sites. The government suspended internet access for millions of people, and it has cut off electricity and bathroom access for protest camps. Journalists like Mandeep Punia are being picked up and detained. Protestors like Nodeep Kaur are reported to have been tortured and sexually assaulted in jail. National media outlets — many of which have close ties to the government and are owned by the corporations that control so much else in the economy — do little to shine light on these activities.

Even Twitter has bowed to government pressure by suspending the accounts of journalists, protesters, sympathizers and opposition politicians; while some of these accounts were later restored, Twitter permanently suspended 500 accounts just last week after facing threats from the Modi government. The violent and sexualized threats against Rihanna, Greta Thunberg and Meena Harris for their online statements of support for the farmers reflect a pattern that emerges any time Modi's government is challenged.

The government wants farmers to trust in its benevolence when it designs laws without their input to supposedly benefit them, but it undermines this trust by repressing their dissent to those laws with indifferent cruelty.

There's no doubt that improving farmers' economic fortunes requires liberalizing the agricultural sector and allowing the free market to play more of a central role. But changing how the entirety of Indian agriculture is organized must be done thoughtfully and democratically — and in a way that recognizes that the supply side of the market is made up of human beings. ❖

*Article originally published on NBC THINK on Feb 16, 2021. Reprinted here with permission from the author.*

Highlighting Student Activism

## NO FARMERS, NO FOOD: UC BERKELEY STUDENTS RALLY RAISES AWARENESS FOR INDIAN FARMERS

by Winni Lau, Staff Writer, *The Daily Cal*

Dozens of students gathered on Tuesday, November 16, 2021, in front of Sather Gate to protest against the Indian government's agricultural reforms in India.

Students held a large banner that read "India is Killing its Farmers; No farmers No Food." The protest lasted for two hours and started at 11:30 a.m. At least 50 students showed up, according to protest organizers.

"The slogan 'No farmers No Food' reminds us that without the labor of farmers, the nation (India) cannot eat," said rally organizer and ASUC Senator Mehnaz Grewal. "We must support our farmers in protesting laws that will ensure economic genocide and will endanger their lives in India."

The rally was organized by the Sikh Student Association, the Jakara Movement Chapter, Bhagat Puran Singh Health Initiative and Grewal's office. Students also held signs that read "Murderer of Democracy in India" and "Recall the farm bills."

Last year, the government passed farmers' laws to minimize government intervention in the farming industry. However, for centuries, most Indian farmers sold their produce to the government market with an assured floor price or minimum set price.

With the new laws, farmers are afraid that private industries will "buy up the crops" and small farmers will no longer be able to support themselves, according to Grewal. The nationwide protest began in Punjab, an Indian state where most families' livelihoods are supported by the farming industry, and soon spread to other farming states.

Grewal added it has been very difficult for small farmers to get by due to globalization and capitalism. There has also been an epidemic of suicide in India, because farmers are under such stress — they "have never gone to college or done any other professional work, other than farming," according to Grewal, and so worry they cannot make a livelihood without it.

"It is the largest protest in human history," said Harvir Kaur, rally organizer, president of the Jakara Movement Chapter and campus sophomore, during the protest.

The government claims the laws allow small farmers to negotiate with private businesses and markets in order to set prices that they want, according to Kaur.

However, private corporations will be able to offer a low amount of money, while farmers are on a "take it or leave it" basis, Kaur added.

"Right now, we are already seeing farmers throwing away tomatoes and cauliflower because the rates that are being offered at market level are just too low to sustain," Kaur said.

Kaur added Indian farmers have been protesting for a year, but the government has responded by violence and internet blockage.

Cumulatively, the death toll related to the protests amounts to more than 600 people. Farmers continue their efforts,



A rally organized by UC Berkeley student organizations protested agricultural laws made by the Indian government and raised support for Indian farmers. Photo by Rachel Barber, Senior Staff, *The Daily Cal*.

but media coverage of the protests has died down significantly, according to Kaur.

"We are in different countries, it is important to show support," said campus senior Ameet Bindra during the protest. "It is important that we at the top public institutions show that we care and don't allow it to happen."

Protest organizers will soon coordinate a collective fundraiser named "Punjab Berkeley" to raise money to help farmers in India, according to Kaur. They raised \$15,000 last year for 5 Rivers Heart Association, a nonprofit organization that aims to provide relief to farmers protesting in India.

Bindra encourages campus students to help raise awareness and watch out for updates on news and donations on social media.

"The more people posting on social media, the better the news can spread out," Bindra said during the protest. ❖

*Article originally published in The Daily Cal on Nov 18, 2021. Reprinted here with permission from the author.*

Center Update

## NEW PROGRAMS AT THE CENTER ON CONTEMPORARY INDIA

The 2020-21 academic year marked the launch of programming for

the Center on Contemporary India. While Covid-19 restrictions limited our ability to host in-person events, we were delighted to initiate multiple new programs and grant opportunities.

### SOUTH ASIA SUMMER READING GROUP

One of our first initiatives was to take over hosting of the South Asia Summer

Reading Group (SARG) that Faculty Director Dr. Jennifer Bussell has run since 2018. In 2020, SARG facilitated review and discussion of six books on a range of topics including the political dynamics of caste and ethnicity in current-day India, the politics of gender and inheritance laws, and the day-to-day practice of access to the state in India's urban slums. Our closed discussions engaged a large community of India-scholars and our public twitter feed garnered more than 800 followers. In 2021, we expanded the program to include eight books on a similarly broad range of topics, such as the rise of the BJP under Modi, the potential for rebel retirement in the Maoist movement, and the institutional barriers faced by women experiencing domestic violence.

### INDIA POLITICS WORKSHOP

A second major initiative in our first year was the launch of the India Politics Workshop. This annual event is a set of curated panels around a core theme, with the goal of exploring cutting edge research and developing conversations across academia and the public and private sectors. The theme for 2021 was Gender and Politics, which resulted in a diverse set of six panels of academic papers focusing on the position of female voters, the role of female politicians, and women's politics between elections. Two keynote panels, which brought together academics and members of the public sector, and drew audiences of

more than 1200 people, considered the role of women's self-help groups and the experience of senior women in state security.

### RESEARCH GRANTS PROGRAM

Our final major initiative introduced a new grants program for graduate students. The CCI Rapid Research grant provides grants of up to \$5,000

for Masters and PhD students to support short term research needs. The CCI Fellowship provides \$15,000 of more general funding once a PhD student has advanced to candidacy. In the first year, these grants allowed us to support students across five different departments with projects concerning questions related to, among other topics, private security in India and South Africa, the South Asian genome, and the role of women in the BJP. ❖

*Read SARG book reviews, watch videos of the IPW 2021 papers, or read about CCI grant awardees at [indiacenter.berkeley.edu](http://indiacenter.berkeley.edu)*



Keynote speakers Janet Napolitano and Nina Singh with Jennifer Bussell in the "Conversations with Public Leaders" session of the 2021 India Politics Workshop.

### #SARG2020



### #SARG2021



SARG book selections

## PAKISTAN@BERKELEY

—Pakistan@Berkeley is the only area studies initiative or program, at a major university in the US, that is focused entirely on Pakistan related research, teaching and programming. The goal of this initiative is to broaden and deepen the understanding of Pakistan through on-campus talks and conferences, promote scholarly exchanges between UC Berkeley and educational institutions in Pakistan, raise funds for graduate fellowships, train the next generation of scholars of Pakistan, and provide funding for Pakistan-specific courses at UC Berkeley.

### PAKISTAN@BERKELEY—a new student-led speaker series

A new student-led speaker series in which prominent Pakistani writers, artists and public intellectuals share their ideas about where Pakistan is going economically, socially and politically, with Berkeley and the larger community. The inaugural event in this series, took place on April 2, 2021, was a conversation between Pakistani author and journalist, Mohammed Hanif and graduate students Mehak Khan (English), Noor Asif (English), and Syed Shiraz Ali (Near Eastern Studies). ❖ [Video at southasia.berkeley.edu/hanif-2021](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/hanif-2021)



Mohammed Hanif (top left) with Cal graduate students

### THE SYED SHARIFUDDIN PIRZADA DISTINGUISHED LECTURE ON PAKISTAN

—Delivered by the recipient of the S.S. Pirzada Dissertation Prize on Pakistan, an annual dissertation prize for the best work in the humanities, social sciences, law, or public health on Pakistan.

The 6th S.S. Pirzada Lecture

#### SAVING SINDHU: INDUS ENCLOSURE AND RIVER DEFENSE IN PAKISTAN

The 2020 Pirzada Distinguished Lecture on Pakistan was delivered by Dr. Ahsan Kamal (Lecturer, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam



Dr. Kamal with (from top right) Prof. Isha Ray, Prof. David Gilmartin, & Prof. Humeira Iqtidar

University, Islamabad). Dr. Kamal's lecture was based on his dissertation of the same title and completed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The talk, which took place on Zoom, was followed by a Q&A session with

discussant, Isha Ray, Professor, Energy & Resources Group, UC Berkeley and members of the Pirzada Prize selection committee David Gilmartin, Professor of History at North Carolina State University, and Humeira Iqtidar, Reader in Politics, King's College London. ❖

More on the prize and videorecordings of lectures at [southasia.berkeley.edu/pirzada-awardees](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/pirzada-awardees).

The 5th S.S. Pirzada Lecture

#### ECOLOGIES OF WATER GOVERNANCE IN PAKISTAN

The 2019 Pirzada Distinguished Lecture on Pakistan was delivered by Dr. Maira Hayat (Assistant Professor of Environment and Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame).

Dr. Hayat's lecture was based on her dissertation of the same title and completed at the University of Chicago. The talk, which took place on Zoom, was followed by a Q&A session with members of the Pirzada



Dr. Hayat with (from top right) Prof. Sadia Saeed, Prof. Humeira Iqtidar, & Prof. David Gilmartin

Prize selection committee, David Gilmartin, Professor of History at North Carolina State University, Humeira Iqtidar, Reader in Politics, King's College London, and Sadia Saeed, Assistant Professor of Sociology, University of San Francisco, who also acted as discussant. ❖

A Pakistan@Berkeley Initiative:

### BULPIP-AIPS URDU LANGUAGE PROGRAM ENDS AFTER A RUN



BULPIP-AIPS

#### OF EIGHT SUCCESSFUL YEARS

The Berkeley Urdu Language Program in Pakistan (BULPIP), run in conjunction with the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS) and the Lahore Institute of Management Studies (LUMS), just completed its eighth and final year.

BULPIP students typically undertake a fifteen-week immersion program that not only includes formal training in grammar and literary studies, but also

many opportunities to explore Lahore, meet noted intellectuals and public figures, develop friendship with ordinary Lahoris, and pursue their own research.

Due to the global pandemic, in Fall 2021, the program hosted a cohort of seven students virtually. They came from a range of universities (including McGill University, Tufts University, University of Virginia, UC Berkeley). The instructors of the Fall 2021 program were Mr. Umar Anjum and Ms. Faiza Saleem. According to Dr. Munis D. Faruqi, Faculty Director of the BULPIP program, "All in all, I'm really happy with how things have worked out. Yes, an in-person program would have been preferable but all things considered this is a very solid second." ❖

More information on the program and past students at [southasia.berkeley.edu/bulpip](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/bulpip). An annual report of the first five years at [bit.ly/BULPIP-AR](https://bit.ly/BULPIP-AR).

## THE MAHOMEDALI HABIB DISTINGUISHED LECTURES ON PAKISTAN FOR 2020 & 2021

—Endowed by the Habib Family, this lecture series is aimed at improving and diversifying conversations about Pakistan in the United States as well as creating opportunities for US and Pakistan-based scholars to dialogue. The speakers for 2020 & 2021 were Pakistani artist, curator and contemporary art historian, **Salima Hashmi** and Sri Lankan numismatist, art historian and archeologist, **Osmund Bopearachchi**.

Habib Distinguished Lecture 2021

### OSMUND BOPEARACHCHI —GANDHARAN ART REVISITED: WHAT IS NEW AND WHAT IS NEXT

The 9th Annual Mahomedali Habib Distinguished Lecture on Pakistan was delivered on Dec. 9, 2021 by Sri Lankan numismatist, art historian, and archaeologist, **Osmund Bopearachchi**.

Dr. Bopearachchi's talk was an in-depth exploration of how Gandharan artists depicted episodes in the life of the Buddha. The talk was held in conjunction with an exhibition curated by him titled, *Beyond Boundaries: Buddhist Art of Gandhara*, on view at the Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive through March 13, 2022. Dr. Bopearachchi led a select group of invited guests on a curator's tour of the exhibition. ❖



Prof. Bopearachchi giving a curator's tour of the exhibition

Habib Distinguished Lecture 2020

### SALIMA HASHMI —RUMOURS OF SPRING: REFLECTIONS ON PAKISTANI CONTEMPORARY ART

The 8th Annual Mahomedali Habib Distinguished Lecture on Pakistan was delivered on September 16, 2020 by the eminent Pakistan-based academic, curator, and art historian, **Salima Hashmi**. Prof. Hashmi, through a carefully-selected visual anthology of Pakistani artists, helped deconstruct associations between

artists' works and the current climate of social resilience in Pakistan. The talk, which took place on Zoom, was followed by a Q&A session with UC Berkeley's Asma Kazmi, Assistant Professor of Performance Art and Atreyee Gupta, Assistant Professor of Global Modern Art; and Nauman Naqvi, Associate Professor of Comparative Liberal Studies at Habib University. ❖

Videos of both lectures at [southasia.berkeley.edu/mahomedali-habib-lecture-series](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/mahomedali-habib-lecture-series)



Prof. Hashmi with (from top right) Prof. Asma Kazmi, Prof. Atreyee Gupta, & Prof. Nauman Naqvi

# BANGLADESH@BERKELEY

—the social impact of the Subir & Malini Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies

## CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF BAGABANDHU AND 50 YEARS OF BANGLADESH AT UC BERKELEY

2020-21 was a milestone year for Bangladesh, marking first, the birth centenary of the Founding Father of Bangladesh, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and second, 50 years of Bangladesh's independence. The Chowdhury

Center sponsored several events in commemoration of both occasions.

To honor Bangabandhu and his many contributions, the Chowdhury Center partnered with the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the United Nations and UNESCO on a virtual seminar on the foreign policy visions of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. The seminar was opened by Dr. A K Abdul Momen, Foreign Minister of Bangladesh and in-

cluded remarks by Rabab Fatima, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN, journalist, Salil Tripathi, Friends of Bangladesh Liberation War honoree, Tom A Dine and historian, Dr. Syed Anwar Husain. The program was moderated by Chowdhury Center Director, Dr. Sanchita B. Saxena.

To celebrate 50 years of Bangladesh's independence, the Chowdhury Center partnered with the American Institute for Bangladesh Studies (AIBS) on two virtual events. The first titled, *Bangladesh at 50: Achievements and Challenges of Bangladesh's Economy*, focused on the economic transformations in the country over the last 50 years, and the second titled, *Bangladesh at 50: The Transformation of Culture*, explored the past five decades of social and cultural changes that have reshaped the social milieu of Bangladesh.

Recordings at [chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/videos](http://chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/videos)



## SELECT CHOWDHURY CENTER EVENTS 2020-21 (COVID-related events in red boxes)

February 18, 2020  
*Crisis and Creativity*  
Naeem Mohaiemen (Filmmaker), Yasufumi Nakamori (Tate Modern)

### May 27, 2020 Vulnerable Populations and COVID-19: Bangladesh During a Global Pandemic

Sabina Rashid (BRAC University), Ali Riaz (Illinois State University), Naomi Hossain (American University), Mabrur Ahmed (Restless Beings), Rahima Begum (Restless Beings)

Video: [chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/bangladesh-vulnerable-populations](http://chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/bangladesh-vulnerable-populations)

Health, Safety, and Livelihoods of Workers During a Global Pandemic  
Rebecca Prentice (University of Sussex), Sanchita B. Saxena (UC Berkeley), Ashley

### September 3, 2020 Migration & the Labor Market Impacts of COVID-19 in Bangladesh and Nepal



Mushfiq Mo-barak, Yale University

Video: [chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/covid-19-migration-labor-nepal-bangladesh](http://chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/covid-19-migration-labor-nepal-bangladesh)

November 17, 2020  
*From the Throat: Women's Textile Work & Memories of Disaster in Bangladesh*  
Poulomi Saha (UC Berkeley)

November 17, 2020  
*Climate Change in Bangladesh*  
Jason Cons (UT-Austin), Kasia Paprocki (LSE), Naveeda Khan (Johns Hopkins), Sugata Ray (UC Berkeley), Sarah Vaughn (UC Berkeley)

December 4, 2020  
*The Garment Sector Unraveling in Bangladesh: Rethinking the*

Health, Safety, and Livelihoods of Workers During a Global Pandemic  
Rebecca Prentice (University of Sussex), Sanchita B. Saxena (UC Berkeley), Ashley Rene Styczynski (Stanford University), Hasan Ashraf, (Jahangirnagar University), Imran Matin, (BRAC University), Ranak Trivedi (Stanford University)

March 11, 2021  
*Understanding the dynamics of infectious diseases in Bangladesh*  
Ayesha Mahmud (UC Berkeley)

March 14, 2021  
*Kantha In Bangladesh: Exploring the fu-*

ture of kantha embroidery & the economic challenges faced by women artisans  
Cathy Stevulak (Director)

April 16, 2021  
*Gender, Sexuality, Violence: A Transnational Conversation*  
Saad Khan (University of Washington), Umama Zil-lur (Kotha), Kabita Chakma (Writer), Poulomi Saha (UC Berkeley)

October 7, 2021  
*"The Ever Falling Darkness of History": Tagorean Visions of Aesthetics and Politics*  
Ananya Vajpeyi, (Centre for the Study of Developing Societies)

November 2, 2021  
*Fixing the National Economy: Tobacco and Ganja across the northern borderlands of Bangladesh*  
Sahana Ghosh (National University of Singapore)

November 30, 2021  
*Enduring Influence of the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War on Women*  
M Niaz Asadullah (Malaya University), Anirban Mitra (University of Kent), Zaki Wahhaj (University of Kent)

September 30, 2020

### Covid-19 Experience: Bangladeshi Garment Workers' Perspective



Sanchita Banerjee Saxena (UC Berkeley), Atonu Rab-bani (University of Dhaka)

Video: [chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/covid-19-experience-garment-workers'-perspective-bangladesh](http://chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/covid-19-experience-garment-workers'-perspective-bangladesh)

October 12, 2021

### Governing COVID-19 in Bangladesh: Realities & Reflections to Build Forward Better



Mirza M. Hassan (BIGD), Naomi Hossain (American University)

Video: [chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/governing-covid-19-bangladesh-0](http://chowdhurycenter.berkeley.edu/governing-covid-19-bangladesh-0)

Chowdhury Center Distinguished Lecture

## NAILA KABEER

### CONTESTED NARRATIVES ABOUT NATIONAL IDENTITY: GENDER, STATE & COMMUNITY



Prof. Naila Kabeer

We were privileged to have **Naila Kabeer**, Bangladeshi social economist and Professor of Gender and Development at the Gender Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, deliver the Chowdhury Center's Distinguished Lecture for 2020.

Prof. Kabeer discussed how the contestations about national identity in Bangladesh were about different interpretations of religion rather than a secularism versus Islam dichotomy. The talk, which took place on Zoom, was followed by a conversation between her and Deniz Kandiyoti, Emeritus Professor in Development Studies, SOAS. ❖

Chowdhury Center Co-sponsored Lecture

## JHUMPA LAHIRI IN CONVERSATION WITH HARSHA RAM

In Spring 2021, the Chowdhury Center for Bangladesh Studies at UC Berkeley, in collaboration with the Institute for South Asia Studies, the Townsend Center for the Humanities, and the Office of the Dean of Arts & Humanities, had the distinct honor of inviting Jhumpa Lahiri, the author of *Interpreter of Maladies & The Namesake*, to give a virtual talk at UC Berkeley.

Formatted as a free flowing conversation between Dr. Lahiri and Associate Professor of Comparative Literature, Prof. Harsha Ram, the discussion touched upon the themes of identity, clash of culture, isolation, the importance of names and family.

Speaking to a virtual audience of more than six hundred, the Pulitzer Prize-winning author spoke at length about the forging of her artistic identity while reflecting on her own mutable relationship with language and writing, and on the marvelous yet precarious ways in which our lives unfold.

The official speaker introduction was made by Associate Professor of English, Poulomi Saha. ❖



Jhumpa Lahiri in conversation with Harsha Ram

## BRINGING IN THE NEW YEAR IN INDIA: HOW CARS AND CHAOS GAVE ME HOPE

by Jose Alejandro Gonzalez-Suarez.



Jose A. Gonzalez-Suarez

*Jose Alejandro Gonzalez-Suarez is Instructor of Construction & Environmental Technology at Tompkins Cortland Community College, Dryden, New York. He was among 16 faculty participants who attended "Exploring Urban Sustainability through India's Cities," an India-based seminar co-organized by the*

*Institute in the winter of 2019.*

Twenty hours and counting on various forms of public transportation—two trains, two planes, and I've crossed an ocean and had a stopover in a desert metropolis. Now in a taxi, on a much slower journey (several hours in New Delhi's traffic), I am tired. I am in a foreign land. Why then, a familiarity?

An old friendly tug of recognition beckons us at moments of having come back to ourselves after having been distanced for too long. These colors, these smells, this collage of India's urban sprawl is all new to me—cars beeping in syncopated rhythms, scattered people, animals, as many carts as cars. The off-tune chorus of vendors cuts through my recent memories of the United States, a country defined by order, by neat lawns and square blocks. Vacant roads, people tucked away neatly in houses and cars in garages, have, after several years of living on them, already etched themselves like maps through layers of me. But perhaps this mark is only surface deep, for it is chaos now that reaches my core, reminding me of the Managua of my youth; me, a wide-eyed student just arriving.

My tired eyes will record two lasting impressions of New Delhi: its chaos and its cars. Both observations will be important. I let go of questioning, for the time being, in favor of some expanding sense of connectedness, which I hadn't previously known could stretch across the world and join me in this strange new place.

The CAORC-AIIS Faculty Development Seminar on urban sustainability had a common thread about access to water woven throughout visits to New Delhi, Jaipur, and Lucknow, just as it has been a theme during my life. In 1998, catastrophic flooding from a slow-motion storm we later came to know as Hurricane Mitch, blew northern Nicaragua's infrastructure away as if it were nothing but a fragile window, easily shattered. No bridge, large or small, was left standing. Landslides swallowed roads. Highways sunk into rivers. What started as a soft "chi-chi," the sound of rain pattering on clay-shingled rooftops, left Nicaragua and Honduras with a death toll between 11 and 18 thousand. The majority of the countries' crops were destroyed, and more than a million people left homeless. We cannot know when and how chaos will shape us. My father declared he didn't like that "chi-chi" sound, and was un-

settled. Having already lived through the upheavals of both revolution and civil war, what he heard in that pitter-patter was the familiar sound of irreversible change on its way.

During the seminar, representatives of the government water entity introduce us to the enormous challenges facing the country. New Delhi supplies 920 million gallons per day (MGD) of drinking water to 20 million people. To put that in perspective, New York City's system offers 1 billion gallons per day for a population of 8.5 million. Water coverage in the greater Delhi area does not include services to informal settlements. Not being recognized by the authorities means a lack of basic services. It is a permanent struggle for the people residing in India's "not notified slums," to achieve the legality of the place where they live to be able to obtain coverage of basic services.

I notice I am talking too much when a new colleague, an urban sociologist whom I already view as an expert, asks me, "Why the obsession with water?" Though I can articulate an intellectual answer, what I wish I could share is what cannot be known intellectually. There is the experience of a built environment, which gives structure to our lives, leveled in a matter of weeks. There is the experience of not knowing where the next water comes from. There is the shared experience of families rationing the last precious water saved in buckets; of crowds, entire neighborhoods, walking into the hills together carrying every crude receptacle we could find to fill from some trickle, somewhere. I left home with those memories, and at the same time I've never left them. My students at Tompkins Cortland Community College can confirm I'm passionate about technology, the materials and fundamentals of construction, right down to formulas, right down to the math. But there are different ways of knowing that I don't know how to share with them. And this is what I am in search of in India. Never will I know anything intellectually the way urgency has insisted on my knowing water as a keystone to development. I've never been taught anything that has impacted me like necessity. Nothing I've done in my life has mattered more than joining others in sourcing clean water.

From the academic sector, we hear of plans to implement a mega-project to prevent pollution by building treatment plants for wastewater before it is discharged into the Yamuna River. In some cases, non-governmental organizations are developing and promoting appropriate technologies with communities. The Segal Foundation works in the design and construction of levees to allow the runoffs of rain recharge aquifers exhausted by over-exploitation. Their projects have allowed the NGO to validate their designs, expanding the implementation to other regions. In Jaipur, we visit a city water treatment plant operated by a private corporation. Not uncommon, but what stands out for me is that this private corporation is Indian, not transnational.

Rich history and monuments now coexist with the socio-economic and environmental challenges generated by the stress of a growth so rapid that these metropolises have yet to meet demands. I see this; and I see researchers, resources, autonomy, and self-sufficiency. My surprise in observing the make of the unfamiliar

*Supporting Community College Faculty Development:*

## EXPLORING URBAN SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH INDIA'S CITIES

The Institute, in partnership with the Council of American Overseas Research Centers and the American Institute of Indian Studies, offers a program for professors at U.S. community colleges and minority-serving institutions to help them develop and expand international education related to India on their campuses. Titled, *Exploring Urban Sustainability through India's Cities*, this fully-funded, two-week long, study trip allows faculty to experience India's rich culture and engage with local scholars grappling with complex global issues like climate change and religious and ethnic diversity, thus gaining the first-hand experience needed to develop and improve the India component in their international curricula.

cars on my arrival day becomes admiration—India develops and produces its own brands of vehicles, of construction machinery, and industrial equipment. The effects of my own country's utter dependence on these types of imports have been staggering. Toyotas and Fords are what we had in the 80s. Then it was all out of commission during the embargo. Toyotas, Fords, and transnationals are what we've had since.

Can I know that being comfortable with chaos, and having their own trademarks of cars, will lead to successes in India? I cannot. Two weeks in a country is only enough to become acquainted with how much one doesn't know. I will leave with plans to return, to share with my students the reasons we can learn from India's self-sufficiency and aptness for innovation, as unsettling rates of urban migration launch us all into new urgencies. I am on my way to forming a belief that if comfort with chaos can awaken perceptions of reality and bust open mind-sets, it could also give us evolutionary change.

I call in the new year and kick-off a decade with a group of intelligent, introspective, dedicated scholars, all still unaware of what we are on the brink of—a novel coronavirus disease has already spread around the world, violence against black people and the "pandemic of racism" rooted in U.S. society will soon lead to mass demonstrations and calls for addressing this systemically.

Systems we find ourselves steeped in, living our day-to-day, contribute significantly to how we respond. How will we know what we are capable of, if not for the upheaval of our lives as we've known them? Visible realities of systemic inadequacies around every turn in India's northern cities reminded me to see. They woke me up from a more unsettled knowing we endure when the struggles of 'away' neighborhoods and 'away' countries are tucked in neatly, swept to the edges of fast and functional lives. Responsiveness and agility have been known to appear on ships with burning decks. Perhaps we have a way of finding ourselves where we need to be. ❖

## The Arignar Anna Endowment for Tamil Studies

As we continue our work to build endowments to support language instruction at Berkeley, we are especially grateful to Dr. Vijay Janakiraman, representing Tamil Chair, Inc., for their incredibly generous gift of \$250,000 in support of Tamil Studies at UC Berkeley. ❖



Dr. & Mrs. Janakiram (holding check), with (from left) Prof. Bharathy, Mr. Abu Khan, Mr. K. Kumarappan, Prof. Ray, Prof. Faruqui, Prof. Varsano, & Dr. Saxena.

## The Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Award



Sheikh Mujibur Rahman

Established with the generous support of the US Bangabandhu Parishad, a California-based community organization engaged in the promotion of the history and culture of Bangladesh, this award will allow us to bring graduate students or early career faculty members each year from institutions in the US and Europe to share their research on Bangabandhu and/or Bangladesh with the UC Berkeley community. We hope to officially launch this award in Fall 2022. ❖

## The Maya Mitra Das Annual Lecture on Tagore

Endowed with the generous support of Drs. Maya and Sakti Das, both long time supporters of the Institute, and housed within the Tagore Program on Literature, Culture and Philosophy at UC Berkeley, the Maya Mitra Das Annual Lecture will bring a distinguished scholar to campus each year to give a lecture on Rabindranath Tagore. The inaugural lecture under this new endowed series was by Prof. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on April 29, 2022. ❖



Gayatri C. Spivak

## Dr. Ranjit Singh Sabharwal Endowed Fund for Sikh Studies

Generously funded by the friends and family of Dr. Ranjit Singh Sabharwal, as well as those committed to the furthering of Sikh Studies, the Sabharwal Fund will support the creation of a semester-long



Dr. R. S. Sabharwal

visiting lecturer program. The visiting lecturer will be based in the Institute for South Asia Studies and the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies. In addition to teaching two courses in Sikh Studies, the visiting lecturer will give presentations of their research work to the campus and local community. We expect the first lecturer to be in residence in Fall 2023.

The Fund and the Program is named in honor of the late Dr. Ranjit Singh Sabharwal. Dr. Sabharwal received an MA in Mathematics at UC Berkeley in 1962 and a Ph.D. from Washington

State University. He taught at California State University (East Bay) for twenty-six years. A much-respected and loved figure in the Bay Area Sikh community, Dr. Sabharwal helped launch the *Sikh Times* and was involved in the establishment of the Fremont Gurdwara as well as the Guru Granth Sahib Foundation, Inc. (Hayward Gurdwara). ❖



Dr. Sabharwal as a student at UC Berkeley, circa 1958

## The Inder Dosanjh Gift for Sanskrit Studies

Established by Inder Dosanjh and Dr. TV Nagendra Prasad, the Consul General of India, San Francisco, in support of Sanskrit Studies, this generous gift helps us ensure the growth and continuance of teaching and research in and on the Sanskrit language and literature for future generations of students at UC Berkeley.

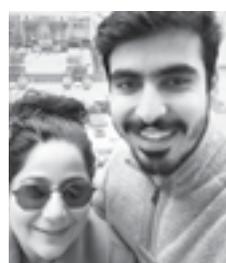


Inder Dosanjh

Mr Dosanjh is the President of California Automotive Retailing Group Inc. and owns 16 franchises retailing over 2,500 units per month. He started his automotive career as a mechanic at a Saturn dealership and worked his way up to becoming the General Manager and partner. He is currently also serving as a board member of the New Motor Vehicle Board (California). ❖

## The Mir Research Fellowship in Urdu Studies

The Mir Research Fellowship is a new funding opportunity in support of Urdu Studies that was established with a generous contribution from Sadia Azmat & Muhammad Umair Shaikh, both prominent business analysts from the Bay Area and members of the Institute's Urdu Language Advisory Board. Sadia leads the Global Business Resiliency for a biotech giant and Umair is an entrepreneur focusing on Business Efficiency and Productivity through his company, Roshé Technologies. The fund provides for one or more graduate research awards (max: \$10k) on a topic related to the study of Urdu to any UC graduate student. ❖



Sadia Azmat & Md. Umair Shaikh

## The Dipti & Rakesh Mathur Family Fund for South Asian Art

The UC Berkeley South Asia Art Initiative thanks Rakesh Mathur and Board Chair, Dipti Mathur for establishing the Mathur Family Fund for South Asian Art with their generous gift of \$300,000.

The Mathurs have a long tradition of supporting the Institute and have given generously in support of the Institute's various art-related initiatives. Dipti Mathur is biochemist turned collector of contemporary South Asian art. She has a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from IIT-Kanpur. Her husband, Rakesh Mathur, a graduate of IIT-Bombay is an innovator, entrepreneur and investor in technology companies since the mid 90s. ❖



Rakesh and Dipti Mathur

## STUDENT FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

THE INSTITUTE OFFERS A WIDE VARIETY OF FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES TO FULL-TIME GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS WHOSE WORK FOCUSES ON SOME ASPECT OF SOUTH ASIA. FUNDING INCLUDES TRAVEL GRANTS FOR RESEARCH & CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE, PRIZES FOR OUTSTANDING PAPERS, SUMMER INTERNSHIPS IN INDIA, AND FELLOWSHIPS FOR LANGUAGE STUDIES. IN 2018 WE ADDED A NEW FUNDING SOURCE IN SUPPORT OF HINDI LITERATURE STUDIES. FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE VISIT [SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/GRANTS-AWARDS](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/GRANTS-AWARDS)

### THE MAHARAJ KAUL MEMORIAL GRANT

Established in the memory of Maharaj Kaul, a UC Berkeley alum, tireless campaigner against injustice, and long-time supporter of ISAS's mission and activities, this grant provides support for awards of \$1000 toward research travel in South Asia and \$500 for domestic conference travel.

*The 2021 Award Recipients:*

#### RESEARCH TRAVEL

**Shaivya Mishra** (History): *The Bomb, the Bullet and the Gandhi Cap: Violent Nationalism and Political Surveillance in Colonial India, 1906-1945*

*The 2020 Award Recipients:*

#### RESEARCH TRAVEL

**Payal Hathi** (Demography): *Giving birth to death: women's wellbeing and the undercounting of stillbirth*

**Bharat Suri** (Education): *Learning on/ from a Platform: The (Re)engineering of Indian Education*

#### CONFERENCE TRAVEL

**Nirvikar Jassal** (Nirvikar Jassal): *Why Are Female Bureaucrats Marginalized (And What Can Be Done)? Evidence from the Indian Police*

*More information at*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/MAHARAJ-KAUL-GRANTS](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/MAHARAJ-KAUL-GRANTS)

*Deadline: APRIL 1*

### THE S.S. PIRZADA DISSERTATION PRIZE ON PAKISTAN

Through the generosity of the Pirzada Family, the Syed Sharifuddin Pirzada Dissertation Prize honors the best doctoral dissertation on Pakistan (or the region that is now Pakistan) in the Humanities, Social Sciences, Education, Visual & Fine Arts, Law, and Public Health with an award of \$2,500.

#### THE 2021 AWARD RECIPIENT

**Amna Qayyum** (Phd, History, Princeton University): *The Demographic State: Population, Global Biopolitics, and Decolonization in South Asia, c. 1947-71.*

#### 2021 HONORABLE MENTION

**Ghazal Asif Farrukhi** (Phd, Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University): *Marvi's Sisters: Hindu Belonging and the Muslim State in Pakistan*

#### THE 2020 AWARD RECIPIENT

**Ahsan Kamal** (Phd, Sociology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill): *Saving Sindh: River Defense along the Indus River in Pakistan.*

*For application procedures & eligibility requirements please visit*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/PIRZADA-PRIZE](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/PIRZADA-PRIZE)

*Deadline: DECEMBER 1*

## FLAS FELLOWSHIPS

Each year the Institute provides U.S. Dept. of Education funded Foreign Language & Area Studies (FLAS) awards to support students studying Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. FLAS fellowships cover tuition and a stipend and are awarded either for the academic year or for a summer language study program.

*The 2021 Award Recipients*

#### ACADEMIC YEAR AWARD

**BANGLA:** Rumassah Chohan (UC Berkeley)

**SANSKRIT:** Alexandra Ciolac (UC Berkeley), Petra Lamberson (UC Berkeley)

**URDU:** Britt Leake (UC Berkeley), Sarah Merchant (UC Berkeley)

#### SUMMER AWARD

**URDU:** Rachel Hirsch (Harvard University)

*The 2020 Award Recipients*

#### ACADEMIC YEAR AWARD

**Hindi:** Britt Leake (UC Berkeley)

**Sanskrit:** Alexandra Ciolac (UC Berkeley), Gideon Enz (UC Berkeley)

**Telugu:** Anjali Kantharuban (UC Berkeley), Bhumi Purohit (UC Berkeley)

**Urdu:** Andrew Kerr (UC San Diego)

#### SUMMER AWARD

**Assamese:** Derrika Hunt (UC Berkeley)

**Bengali:** Devin Choudhury (UC Berkeley), Patrick DeSutter (UC Berkeley)

**Hindi:** Shreya Kareti (UC Berkeley)

**Urdu:** Eliza Hollingsworth (UC Berkeley)

*More information at*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FLAS-FELLOWSHIPS](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/FLAS-FELLOWSHIPS)

*Deadline: JANUARY 30*

### THE BHATTACHARYA GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP

Established by Kimi and Shankar Bhattacharya, the fellowship awards competitive grants of up to \$1000 for research travel to India on topics related to contemporary India.

*The 2021 Award Recipient:*

#### RESEARCH TRAVEL

**Maria Villalpando Paez** (Masters of Development Practice): *Community seed bank for sustainable rural livelihoods in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary*

*The 2020 Award Recipients:*

#### RESEARCH TRAVEL

**Devanshi Unadkat** (Education): *Constructing digital narratives, deconstructing rampant patriarchy*

**Chiman Cheung** (Agricultural and Resource Economics): *Political Cycles of "Random" Audits: Evidence from PMGSY in India*

*For details please visit*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/BHATTACHARYA-GRANTS](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/BHATTACHARYA-GRANTS)

*Deadline: APRIL 1*

### THE SOUTH ASIA FORUM

Offered by the ISAS in order to encourage collaborative work between graduate students at UC Berkeley. It sponsors one graduate student-led research workshop or mini-conference in

any field on contemporary or historical South Asia-related topics every Spring.

*For application procedures & eligibility requirements please visit*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/SOUTH-ASIA-FORUM](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/SOUTH-ASIA-FORUM)

*Deadline: LAST FRIDAY OF OCTOBER*

### THE SUBIR & MALINI CHOWDHURY CENTER FELLOWSHIPS FOR BANGLADESH STUDIES

*The 2021 Fellowship Awardees*

**Nazmul Ahasan:** MA Candidate, Journalism, was awarded the Subir Chowdhury Fellowship on Quality of Life in Bangladesh for his work on investigative journalism, long-form writing, and interactive news presentation.

**Ariana Pemberton,** PhD Candidate in History of Art, was awarded the Malini Chowdhury Fellowship on Bangladesh Studies in support of her work on the history of the art and architecture of Bangladesh under Abyssinian rule.

*The 2020 Fellowship Awardees*

**Anushah Hossain:** PhD Candidate, Energy & Resource Group, was awarded the Subir Chowdhury Fellowship on Quality of Life in Bangladesh for her research on a Socio-Technical History of Bangla Computing

**Tausif Noor,** PhD Candidate in History of Art, was awarded the Malini Chowdhury Fellowship on Bangladesh Studies in support of his work on the intersections between artistic practices and processes of political liberation in Bangladesh and West Bengal.

*More information at*

[CHOWDHURYCENTER.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING](http://CHOWDHURYCENTER.BERKELEY.EDU/FUNDING)

*Deadline: APRIL 1*

## THE PREMCHAND RESEARCH AWARD FOR HINDI STUDIES

—funding in support of Hindi Literature

The Premchand Research Award in Hindi Studies, an award in support of research in Hindi literature, provides for one \$2000 grant to a student for undertaking research on Hindi literature in India. This award is funded by an anonymous donor and is named in honor of Munshi Premchand, a towering Hindi literary figure.

*The 2020 Award Recipient*

**Swarnim Khare** (PhD Student, Asian Languages and Cultures, University of Michigan) for her research project titled, *Writing in Prison: The Political Prisoner and Public Spheres in India*

More information at  
[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/  
HINDI-AWARD](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/HINDI-AWARD)

Deadline: **APRIL 1**

## THE BHUSHAN & SANTOSH KHASHU RESEARCH AWARD FOR TAGORE RELATED STUDIES

Established with a generous contribution from Dr. Bhushan Khashu and Dr. Santosh Khashu, both prominent physicians and philanthropists from New York, the Bhushan & Santosh Khashu Research Award for Tagore Studies supports graduate students pursuing research projects focusing on the life and legacy of Rabindranath Tagore. The award provides for one grant of \$5000 for research travel to South Asia. Mid-career graduate students conducting research toward a Master's thesis or dissertation proposal may propose to conduct research in Santiniketan, West Bengal or at another location relevant to Tagore's life.

## HART FELLOWSHIPS FOR TAMIL STUDIES

Annual grants in support of Tamil studies through the generous contribution of UC Berkeley Professors of Tamil studies, George & Kausalya Hart:

- **Hart Fellowship for Tamil Studies** of up to \$2000 for research & \$500 for conference/library travel
- **Bodha Pravaham Undergraduate Fellowship for Tamil Studies** supports two awards of grants of \$900 for travel to South Asia for Cal under-grads.

*New in 2021*

## CENTER ON CONTEMPORARY INDIA FELLOWSHIPS—funding for studying contemporary India

We are pleased to announce two new funding opportunities being offered by the newly established Center on Contemporary India: the **Rapid Response Research Grant** (award amount upto \$5000, Feb 15 deadline) and the **Dissertation Research Grant** (award amount upto \$15000, Apr 1 deadline). Both grants are intended for UC Berkeley graduate students conducting research on or related to contemporary India (post-1947).

*The 2021 Award Recipients:*

### RAPID RESPONSE RESEARCH GRANT

**Anirvan Chowdhury** (PhD Student, Political Science): *How do Political Parties Mobilize Women? Theory and Evidence from India*

**Tamara Kerzhner** (PhD Student, City & Regional Planning): *Women's Fare-Free Public Transport in New Delhi : Empowerment, Equity and the Mobility of Care*

**Gauthami Penakalapati** (PhD Student, Energy & Resource Group): *Encoding empowerment: a systematic review of*

*women's and adolescent empowerment programs in South Asia from 2000 to present day*

**Bhumi Purohit** (PhD Student, Political Science): *Laments of Getting Things Done: The Case of Female Politicians and Bureaucrats in India*

**María Villalpando** (MDP Candidate, Development Practice): *Community seed banks for sustainable rural livelihoods in Bhimashankar Wildlife Sanctuary Berkeley*

### DISSERTATION RESEARCH GRANT

**Ritika Goel** (PhD Student, Political Science): *The links between social mobility and political attitudes in South Asia*

**Alli Appelbaum** (PhD Student, City & Regional Planning): *Private security companies and urban governance in India and Johannesburg*

**Luisa Cefala** (PhD Student, Economics): *Social Image Concerns and Labor Supply among Indian Urban Casual Laborers*

**Kailey Ferger** (PhD Student, Computational Biology): *Genomes and selection and adaptation in South Asians*

*For application procedures & eligibility requirements please visit*

[INDIACENTER.BERKELEY.EDU/  
CCI-GRANTS](http://INDIACENTER.BERKELEY.EDU/CCI-GRANTS)

Deadline  
**FEBRUARY 15 & APRIL 1**

*The 2021 Award Recipient:*

**Devin Choudhury** (PhD Candidate, Rhetoric, UC Berkeley): *Writing on the Land: Narrative, Agriculture, and Ecology in Bengal*

*The 2020 Award Recipient:*

**Apala Das** (PhD Candidate, English, University of Toronto): *Modernist Askesis in the Works of Rabindranath Tagore*

*For application procedures & eligibility requirements please visit*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/  
KHASHU-AWARD](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/KHASHU-AWARD)

Deadline: **APRIL 1**

*The 2021 Hart Research Fellow*

**Henria Aton** (PhD Student, Information, University of Toronto): *A Tamil Archival Multiverse: Power, Memory, and Loss in Contemporary Sri Lankan Archives*

*The 2020 Hart Research Fellow*

**Kimberly Kolor** (PhD Candidate, South and Southeast Asian Studies, UC Berkeley) for *Making Histor(icit)y: Figuring Muslim traditions in Eastern Sri Lanka*.

More information at  
[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/  
HART-FUND](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/HART-FUND)  
Deadline: **APRIL 1**

## THE TELUGU SOCIETY OF AMERICA SUMMER STUDIES RESEARCH AWARD

Established with the generous support of the Telugu Society of America, the goal of this award is to promote quality interdisciplinary undergraduate or graduate research on topics pertaining to the Telugu people, their language, region, culture, political economy, and rural and urban planning. The award provides for one grant of \$2500 towards Telugu Studies or research in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana.

*The 2021 Award Recipient:*

**Rachana Nettem** (BA Student, Political Science, Temple University): *A Tale of Two Villages: Globalization and Rural Life in Telugu States*.

*The 2020 Award Recipient:*

**Aalekhya Malladi** (PhD Candidate, West and South Asian Religions, Emory University): *Unravelling the Works and Mythologies of Tarigonda Vengamaba*.

*For details please visit*  
[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/  
TELUGU-AWARD](http://SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/TELUGU-AWARD)  
Deadline: **APRIL 1**

## SUPPORT ISAS

By supporting us, you strengthen our ability to provide quality programs, and research not covered by Title VI. Your contribution can help us:

- Fund student research in South Asia
- Enable students from South Asia to attend graduate programs at Cal
- Support visiting scholars
- Host performances and speakers of interest to the wider community

*For more information on giving opportunities go to*

[southasia.berkeley.edu/](http://southasia.berkeley.edu/)  
**GIVE-BIG-SOUTH-ASIA**

## THE BERREMAN-YAMANAKA GRANT FOR HIMALAYAN STUDIES

Established in memory of famed UC Berkeley Anthropologist, Prof. Gerald Berreman, by his family and wife, Dr. Keiko Yamanaka, this endowment provides an annual award of up to \$1500 to UC Berkeley graduate students for research related to Himalayan Studies across Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

*For details please visit*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/HIMALAYAN-GRANTS](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/himalayan-grants)  
Deadline: **APRIL 1**

## ISAS FACULTY RESEARCH SUPPORT GRANTS

The Institute for South Asia Studies offers a limited number of grants for UC Berkeley faculty and lecturers in support of their extraordinary research work. Recent awardees and their projects are listed below:

*The 2020 Faculty Research Support Grant*

**Gregory Maxwell Bruce** (Lecturer in Urdu, South & Southeast Asian Studies) in support of his work at *The Journal of Urdu Studies*. The journal is the only peer-reviewed, academic journal in English dedicated to the study of Urdu. Dr. Bruce,

co-founded and co-edits the journal. The *Journal of Urdu Studies* published its inaugural issue in January 2020.

*The 2020 Faculty & Lecturer Manuscript Workshop Grant*

**Atreyee Gupta** (Assistant Professor, Art History): *Non-Aligned: Decolonization, Modernism, and the Third World Project, India ca. 1930–1960*

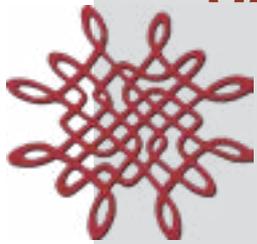
*For application procedures & eligibility requirements please visit*

[SOUTHASIA.BERKELEY.EDU/ISAS-FACULTY-GRANTS](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/isas-faculty-grants)

*Application Deadline*  
**ROLLING BASIS**

*A New ISAS Program*

## ADAPTATION & RESILIENCE: ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOUTH ASIA



Spring 2022 witnessed a heat wave in South Asia, bringing temperatures to a point past the limit for human survivability. India witnessed 115°F and Pakistan 120°F, with cascading impacts on health, agriculture, and the destruction of infrastructure due to melting glaciers. Heatwaves, tsunamis, and monsoon failures are no longer indicators of extreme weather in South Asia—home to 25% of the world's population—but the new norm. It is no exaggeration to say that the eight countries that constitute South Asia—Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—are among the most vulnerable globally to the impacts of climate change.

In response to the cataclysmic climate change in the region, the Institute for South Asia Studies (ISAS) is launching a four-year program (2022-26) on the critical and urgent issue of climate change in South Asia. Interdisciplinary public conferences, a speaker series, collaborative workshops with organizations in South Asia, and open-access resources including interactive teaching tools will link the ISAS closely with one of UC Berkeley's Signature Initiatives on Environmental Change, Sustainability, and Justice as part of the campus' Strategic Plan. Building on our interdisciplinary faculty strengths across the College of Letters & Science, the College of Environmental Design, the College of Engineering, the Rausser College of Natural Resource, and the Haas School of Business, the aim of the four-year program is to provide UC Berkeley faculty, staff, and students in-depth resources to develop area-based knowledge, research tools, language training, and opportunities to collaborate with leading institutions in South Asia.

### PROGRAM

Bringing together humanists, artists and creative thinkers, social scientists, journalists, lawyers, activists, scientists,

engineers, and policy makers, each year of the four-year program will focus on a key ecological question from diverse disciplinary frameworks: pollution, loss of biodiversity, monsoon failures, and food scarcity. The aim is to involve faculty and both graduate and undergraduate students in the Humanities, the Social Sciences and Public Policy, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Public Health, Law, and the School of Journalism to develop interdisciplinary insights into the climate crisis.

Year 1 will focus on pollution. According to the 2020 World Air Quality Report, 37 of the 40 most polluted cities in the world are in South Asia. Recognizing that air pollution and climate change needs cross-border collaborations, the first year will be dedicated to this urgent public health emergency. Year 2 will focus on both historical and current loss of biodiversity, forest management, and plant and animal extinction. In year 3, we will turn to the Indian Summer Monsoon—the hydrological system that is one of the nine critical tipping points for the Earth system. Lastly, in year 4, we will investigate food scarcity as well as study food sovereignty movements, both in South Asia but also in the diaspora, for instance, through a collaboration with the large population of migrant Sikh Punjabi farmers in Central California.

We will address these four sub-themes through interdisciplinary conferences, courses by faculty across the campus, an inclusive speaker series, community-based programming, and workshops with organizations in South Asia, as well as a dedicated webpage that will archive the research material generated over the four years. The ISAS will also prepare a set of teaching tools including interactive maps, datasets, podcasts, and interviews in collaboration with the program participants. At the end of the four years, we will have a series of research briefs focusing on each key issue, a video library of recordings from our conference and workshops, a podcast series, and blog posts by climate change scholars and activists from across the world. After the completion of the program, the open access archived material will provide scholars, students, and interested community members with an indispensable toolkit for the study of climate change in South Asia.

In addition, the ISAS also supports K-14 outreach through the UC Berkeley Office of Resources for International and Area Studies (ORIAS), which facilitates teacher training and curriculum develop-

ment with the help of Berkeley faculty. Over the next few years, ORIAS, in partnership with the ISAS, will explore themes such as Global Climate Change beyond the Science Classroom and Climate and Migration. We are also planning to implement the Climate Change Adaptation and Career/Technical Education project with faculty from Minority Serving Institutions over the next four years.

### INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

The ISAS has signed an MOU with the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, which is a part of a larger regional organization called the South Asia Centre for Labour Mobility and Migrants (SALAM). Under SALAM, we will partner with other key institutions in South Asia, including Bangladesh's Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit, Nepal's Centre for the Study of Labour and Mobility, Pakistan's Sustainable Development Policy Institute and the Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka. The aim is to bring together academic programs and policy think tanks from across the UC Berkeley campus and South Asia to advance research and policy impacts on critical issues on climate change in the region by participating in peer-to-peer exchange programs, joint workshops with the ISAS, internships (remote and in person), and a joint lecture series.

### MOVING FORWARD

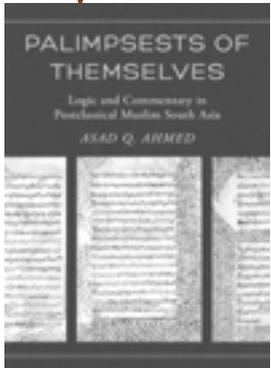
With over 100 affiliated faculty across UC Berkeley, the ISAS has many of the key elements in place for a successful series of programs on climate change in South Asia. Alongside a wide range of interdisciplinary faculty and student researchers, the ISAS also has partnerships with key organizations in the region as well as a strong administrative and management experience to be able to carry out a program of this scale. We look forward to connecting with other units on campus working on these issues from a variety of perspectives.

We are expecting a small amount of seed funding to initially launch the program. We look forward to collaborating with interested scholars and campus units working on climate change to explore possibilities for joint funding, as well as meet with campus leaders to include South Asia as a part of larger campus-level climate initiative plans. ❖

*More information at [southasia.berkeley.edu/climate-change](https://southasia.berkeley.edu/climate-change)*

## NEW PUBLICATIONS BY UCB SOUTH ASIANISTS

### **Palimpsests of Themselves: Logic & Commentary in Postclassical Muslim South Asia**



Asad Q Ahmed  
(Author)

**P**alimpsests of Themselves is an intervention in current discussions about the fate of philosophy

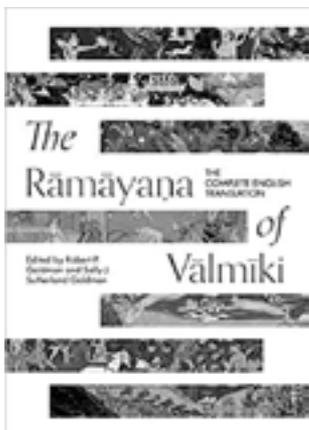
in postclassical Islamic intellectual history. The author uses as a case study the most advanced logic textbook of Muslim South Asia, *The Ladder of the Sciences*, presenting in English its first full translation and extended commentary. He offers detailed assessments of the technical contributions of the work, explores the social and institutional settings of the vast commentarial response it elicited, and develops a theory of the philosophical commentary that is internal to the tradition. Ahmed offers a unique and powerful opportunity to understand the transmission of knowledge across the Islamic world.

**About the Author:** *Asad Q. Ahmed* is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies and the Chair of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at UC Berkeley.

### **The Ramayana of Valmiki: The Complete English Translation**

Robert P. Goldman & Sally J. Sutherland Goldman (Authors)

**B**ased on the authoritative seven-volume translation of the Ramayana of Valmiki edited by Robert Goldman and Sally Sutherland Goldman, this volume



presents the unabridged translated text of the classic Sanskrit epic poem in contemporary English, revised and reformatted into paragraph form. The book includes a

new introduction providing important historical and literary contexts, as well as a glossary, pronunciation guide, and index.

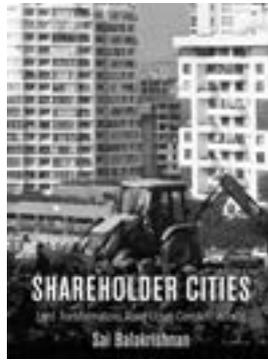
#### **About the Authors:**

*Robert P. Goldman* is the Magistretti Distinguished Professor of Sanskrit and Indian Studies in the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies. *Sally J. Sutherland Goldman* is senior lecturer in Sanskrit in the Department of South & Southeast Asian Studies.

### **Shareholder Cities: Land Transformations Along Urban Corridors in India**

Sai Balakrishnan (Author)

**E**conomic corridors in newly liberalizing countries in Asia and Africa are dramatically redefining the shape of urbanization. Spanning multiple cities and croplands, these corridors connect metropolises via high-speed superhighways in an effort to make certain strategic regions attractive



destinations for private investment. In this book, Balakrishnan explores the sociopolitical and economic impact of India's new economic corridors, which have both expanded

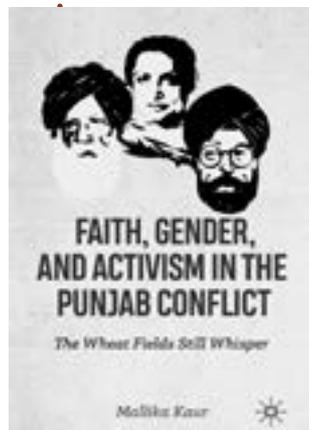
urbanization beyond existing cities and produced new kinds of cities, and argues that some of India's most decisive urban conflicts will unfold along them.

**About the Author:** *Sai Balakrishnan* is Assistant Professor of City and Urban Planning at UC Berkeley.

### **Faith, Gender, and Activism in the Punjab Conflict: The Wheat Fields Still Whisper**

Mallika Kaur (Author)

**P**unjab was the arena of one of the first major armed conflicts of post-colonial India. During its deadliest decade, as many as 250,000 people were killed. This book brings together personal narrative,



oral history, and scholarly rigor to offer a new perspective on this understudied conflict. Braiding oral histories, personal snapshots, and primary documents recovered from at-risk archives, Kaur shows that when entire conflicts are

marginalized, we miss essential stories: stories of faith, feminist action, and the power of citizen-activists. The book will appeal to scholars, students, and activists interested in South Asian studies, oral history, memory studies, gender and conflict, transitional justice, Sikh culture and history, and the history of postcolonial India.

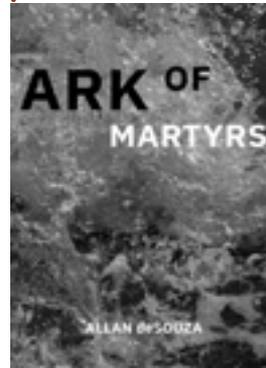
#### **About the Author:**

*Mallika Kaur* is Lecturer of Law at the UC Berkeley School of Law.

### **Ark of Martyrs**

Al-An deSouza (Author)

**A**rk of Martyrs is a rewriting of Joseph Conrad's 1899 novel, Heart of Darkness. In the vocal traditions of gospel, toasting, and rap, Allan deSouza replaces



Conrad's words with ones that loosely rhyme to form an autobiography of V whose story consists of the mental chatter, unspoken and unspeakable desires, avarice, anxieties,

and political resentments of guests at a wedding party on a cruise ship that's adrift and under quarantine.

#### **About the Author:**

*Al-An deSouza* is a trans-media artist and Professor of Photography in the Department of Art Practice at UC Berkeley.

### **New South Asia Publications by select CAL alumni**

- **Patchwork States: The Historical Roots of Subnational Conflict and Competition in South Asia**  
*Adnan Naseemullah (PhD '10)*, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, King's College London
- **Many Mahabharatas**  
(Ed.) *Sohini Sarah Pillai (PhD '21)* Assistant Professor of Religion, Kalama-zoo College) & *Nell Shapiro Hawley*, Preceptor in Sanskrit, Harvard
- **The Moving City: Scenes from the Delhi Metro and the Social Life of Infrastructure**  
*Rashmi Sadana (PhD '03)*, Associate Professor of Anthropology, George Mason University
- **Displacement: Global Conversations on Refuge**  
(Ed.) *Romola Sanyal (PhD '08)*, Associate Professor in Urban Geography, LSE, & *Silvia Pasquetti*, Lecturer in Sociology, Newcastle University
- **Patching Development: Information Politics & Social Change in India**  
*Rajesh Veeraraghavan (PhD '15)*, Assistant Professor of Science Technology and International Affairs, Georgetown University
- **Endless Song: Nammalvar's Tiruvymoli**  
*Archana Venkatesan (PhD '04)*, Professor of Religious Studies and Comparative Literature, UC Davis
- **At Risk: Indian Sexual Politics and the Global AIDS Crisis**  
*Gowri Vijayakumar (PhD '16)*, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Brandeis University)

**Anurag Advani**, (PhD Candidate, South and Southeast Asian Studies) presented three papers in 2021: *Madness of the Majzubs: Marginal Sufis in Mughal India* at the Conference of the Association of Asian Studies, Brigham Young University, *Women and Madness in Mughal India* at the Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin-Madison (on Zoom), and *Madness in the Fatawa-yi Alamgiri: Insanity and Islamic Law during Aurangzeb's Reign* at the Annual Conference of the American Society for Legal History, New Orleans.

**Sourav Ghosh** (PhD Candidate, History) was awarded the New Directions in Theology Grant by the Berkeley Centre for the Study of Religion for Fall 2021. He is also one of the fellows for the BCSR's community outreach program 2021-2022.

**Caylee Hong** (PhD Candidate, Anthropology) published an article on the development of safe city technologies in Pakistan titled, "Safe Cities" in Pakistan: Knowledge Infrastructures, Urban Planning, and the Security State," in the *Antipode* Special Issue on infrastructure in Pakistan, which brings together scholars from LUMS, King's College London, SOAS, Carnegie Mellon, and UC Berkeley.

**Vasugi Kailasam** (Assistant Professor of Tamil Studies, South and Southeast Asian Studies) was awarded a Townsend Assistant Professor Fellowship to advance her book project, tentatively titled, *Tamil Realisms: Reading the Global Tamil Novel*.

**Sean Kerr** (PhD South and Southeast Asian Studies) has advanced from Teaching Fellow to Assistant Professor of Sanskrit at the Dharma Realm Buddhist University.

**Riyad Sadiq Koya** (PhD History) published two articles: "The Regulation, Division, and Multiplication of Emigrant Labor: The Border between Land and Sea in Colonial India, 1834-1922." *Journal of World History*, 32, no. 1 (March 2021): 45-63, and, "Slavery, abolitionism, indentured labour: The problem of exit and the border between land and sea in colonial India. In *South Asian Migrations in Global History: Labour, Law and Wayward Lives*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021.

**Nora Melnikova** (Lecturer of Hindi, South and Southeast Asian Studies) presented three papers: "Conceptual transfer in translations of Early Modern Hindi bhakti poetry" at the 2021 European Conference on South Asian Studies Conference (Vienna); "Teaching Hindi Pragmatics" at the Institut national des langues et civilisations orientales' conference on Hindi grammar and lexicon (Paris); "Nirmal Verma: From Prague to Prayag" at the 49th Annual Conference on South Asia, University of Wisconsin, Madison. Additionally, she gave a talk on Hindi Divas for Hindi Department of the Cochin University of Science and Technology, Cochin, and published "Phonetic/phonological transfer from Czech to Hindi in Hindi

LI speakers with Czech as L2", in Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021.

**Ariana Pemberton** (PhD Candidate, Art History) will be presenting a paper titled, *Multi-spheric Belonging: Articulating Habshi Kingship through Architectural Patronage in Sultanate Bengal*, for the Association for Asian Studies conference in March 2022. This is the research for which she was awarded the Malini Chowdhury Fellowship for Bangladesh Studies.

**Swetha Prabakaran** (Computer Science and Dance & Performance Studies, Class of 2021, UC Berkeley Regents' and Chancellor's Scholar) was the Dramaturg and Assistant Technology specialist for the Berkeley Dance Project show that took place on Feb 17-20, 2022 at the Playhouse at Zellerbach Hall.

### Atreyee Gupta Awarded the Hellman Fellowship for 2020

Congratulations to Prof. Atreyee Gupta on being awarded a 2020 Hellman Fellowship!

Established in 1994, the purpose of the Hellman Fellows Program is to support the research of promising assistant professors who show capacity for great distinction in their chosen fields of endeavor.



Atreyee Gupta

Professor Gupta's Hellman-funded research will support a book project that examines the artistic and intellectual resonances of the 1955 Afro-Asian Bandung Conference and the 1961 Non-Aligned Movement, using India as a case study.

### Geeta Anand Named Dean of Berkeley Journalism

After a national search, campus professor Geeta Anand was appointed as the Dean of the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism, making her the first woman - and woman of color - to serve in this role. As Dean, Anand said one of her goals will be to diversify the school and the larger field of journalism. She added that she intends on raising a \$100 million endowment to make the school tuition free so students can "focus on learning." In her role as dean, she also plans to improve the partnerships between the school and publications including *The New York Times* to give students a more apprenticeship-like experience at the school.



Geeta Anand

Dean Anand began teaching at Berkeley in 2018 and also serves as director of the Investigative Reporting Program. Prior to coming to campus, she worked as a foreign correspondent in India for *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal*. While working for *The Wall Street Journal*, she shared the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for her stories on Wall Street corruption. She was also the lead reporter in a series on health care that was a Pulitzer Prize finalist in 2003. She is the author of *The Cure*, a nonfiction book about a father who started a biotech company to make a medicine for his children's untreatable illness. The book was adapted in the 2010 film "Extraordinary Measures."

### Sugata Ray awarded the Religion and the Arts Book Award for 2020 by the American Academy of Religion and the Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion for 2021 by the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain

Congratulations to Prof. Sugata Ray on being awarded two prestigious prizes, the Religion and the Arts Book Award for 2020 by the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion for 2021 by the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain's (SAHGB), for his outstanding and groundbreaking book, *Climate Change and the Art of Devotion: Geoaesthetics in the Land of Krishna, 1550-1850*.

Established in 2019, the AAR's Religion and the Arts Book Award recognizes new scholarly publications that make significant contributions to the study of religion and the arts. The winner is awarded a \$1,000 prize and recognized in a variety of AAR publications.

The AAR's jury in selecting Prof. Ray's book observed, "Ray engages readers in current thinking on material culture, new aesthetic thought, cultural geography, and ecological studies. Beautifully produced, this book offers an original

investigation and a novel methodology, scrutinizing mosque, temple, shrine, and urban architecture as monuments in the history of devotion in South Asia that register the impact of climate change, ecology, and biodiversity."

The Alice Davis Hitchcock Medallion is awarded annually by the SAHGB since 1959 to a monograph that makes an outstanding contribution to the study or knowledge of architectural history.



Sugata Ray

The SAHGB's jury in selecting Prof. Ray's book recognized, "the innovative and paradigm shifting nature of this book, the author's command and synthesis of multiple epistemologies that connected architecture and the environment, and its potential to open up avenues for architectural history as a global discipline."

## NEW SOUTH ASIA FACULTY



**Joshua Apte** is an Assistant Professor of Environmental Health Sciences and Environmental Engineering, in a joint appointment with the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering and the School of Public Health. His research focuses on air pollution and addresses policy challenges, especially as related to energy, infrastructure, climate change and human health. He holds an ScB in Environmental Science from Brown University (2004) and MS and PhD degrees in Energy and Resources from UC Berkeley (2008, 2013). Prior to joining UC Berkeley, he was an Assistant Professor in the Dept. of Civil, Architectural & Environmental Engineering at UT-Austin.



**Sai Balakrishnan** is an Assistant Professor of Urban Studies, in a joint appointment with the Department of City and Regional Planning and Global Metropolitan Studies. Her research broadly pivots around global urban inequalities, with a particular focus on urbanization and planning institutions in the global south, and on the spatial politics of land-use and property. She is the author of *Shareholder Cities: Land Transformations Along Urban Corridors in India* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019). Prof. Balakrishnan comes to us from Harvard University's Graduate School of Design where she was an Assistant Professor of Urban Planning.



**Sukanya Banerjee** is an Associate Professor of English at UC Berkeley. She works on the literature and culture of Victorian Britain and its empire. More broadly, she is interested in postcolonial studies, ecology, studies of transnationalism and diaspora, political theory, and South Asia. Her book, *Becoming Imperial Citizens: Indians in the Late-Victorian Empire* (Duke University Press, 2010), was awarded the NVSA Sonya Rudikoff Prize for best first book in Victorian studies. Banerjee joined the English department at Berkeley in 2020 after teaching for nearly two decades at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.



**Zachary Lamb** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of City and Regional Planning. His research focuses on the role of urban planning and design in shaping uneven vulnerability and resilience in the face of climate change and his current book project, *Making and Unmaking the Dry City*, examines the historical evolutions and contemporary problematics of flood mitigation in two delta cities, New Orleans and Dhaka. Prof. Lamb is also an Associate Director of MIT's Resilient Cities Housing Initiative and the co-founder of Crookedworks, a design-build firm that uses collaborative design and building projects to tackle complex urban challenges.



**Ayesha Mahmud** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Demography at UC Berkeley. She is broadly interested in the interplay between human population changes, environmental factors, and infectious disease dynamics. Her research draws on theory and methods from demography and disease ecology, to answer questions such as - why do outbreaks occur at certain times of the year? How and why does the mortality burden of infectious diseases vary over time? How do population travel patterns drive the spatial dynamics of outbreaks? How will global environmental and demographic changes alter the landscape of infectious disease burden in the future?



**Rahul Parson** is an Assistant Professor of Hindi Literature in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies at UC Berkeley. His area of specialization is Hindi literature and literary history, with a particular emphasis on Hindi movements in Bengal. His book project, *Confluences at the End of the Ganges: Modernity, Migration and Hindi Literature in Kolkata*, fills in the Bengal portion of the map of Hindi studies. Additionally, he researches early-modern Jain poetry and philosophy, particularly Jain spiritual or mystical poetry. Prior to joining Berkeley, Prof. Parson served as an Assistant Professor of Hindi and Urdu at the University of Colorado, Boulder.



**Aruna Ranganathan** is an Associate Professor of Management of Organizations, in a joint appointment at the Haas School of Business and the Department of Sociology at UC Berkeley. Her research interests focus on the challenges related to identity, inequality, and technological change within the work environment and on the impact of work-family programs on employee well-being. Prof. Ranganathan holds a PhD from the Sloan School of Management (MIT). Prior to joining UC Berkeley, she was an Associate Professor in the Organizational Behavior Group, at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.



**Aarti Sethi** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Anthropology at UC Berkeley. She is a socio-cultural anthropologist with primary interests in agrarian anthropology, political-economy and the study of South Asia. Her current manuscript, *Cotton Fever in Central India*, examines cash-crop economies to understand how monetary debt undertaken for transgenic cotton-cultivation transforms intimate, social and productive relations in rural society. Prof. Sethi received her PhD in anthropology from Columbia University. Before joining Berkeley, She had postdoctoral fellowships at Harvard and Brown universities.



**Jvala Singh** joins UC Berkeley as a lecturer for Punjabi while completing his PhD at the University of British Columbia, where he is examining pre-colonial Sikh historical narratives via the literature in Punjabi and Brajbhasha from the 18th and 19th centuries, building off his previous M.A. research completed at the University of Toronto, where he focused on Sikh Brajbhasha versions of Sanskrit epics, such as the Ramayana. Prof. Singh runs the *Suraj Podcast*, where each episode is a chapter summary in English of Santokh Singh's voluminous *Suraj Prakash*, a historical narrative covering the lives of the ten Sikh Gurus.



**Stacey Van Vleet** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History at UC Berkeley. Her research and teaching are concerned with the place of Tibet in regional and global histories, and with how Tibetan historiography - and relatedly, that of contemporary states including China, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Mongolia, and Russia - has been shaped by modern transformations in knowledge, economy, culture, and governance. Her book in progress, *Plagues, Precious Pills, and the Politics of Tibetan Learning in Qing China*, examines the rise of a vast network of Tibetan medical institutions across Inner Asia during the period of Qing Empire (1644-1911).

## THE BOMB, THE BULLET AND THE GANDHI CAP: REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM AND POLITICAL SURVEILLANCE IN COLONIAL INDIA, 1906-1945

A PhD Candidate at the Department of History, Shaivya Mishra works on underground radical politics and the rise of modern security states in the 20th century. With support from the American Institute for Indian Studies and the Department of History, she carried out fieldwork in the Intelligence office Record Room and Uttar Pradesh State Archives in Lucknow, National Archives, Delhi and the British Library, London. Her broader research interests include the comparative history of empires, science and technology, histories of law, violence, policing and decolonization in the modern world



At the National Archives, Delhi

### TELL US ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT AND YOUR FIELDWORK?

My dissertation project explores a question that has long puzzled historians of modern politics: why were 20th century anti-colonial movements plagued by such extraordinary violence? I argue that the answer lies in the surprising entanglements between “open”, constitutional associations like the Indian National Congress (INC) and the many secret societies, travelling revolutionaries, cosmopolitan intellectuals and political fugitives who waged a dedicated battle against British imperialism. The rise of the global radical underground network ran parallel to the birth of modern surveillance agencies like the Central Investigation Department and the development of an expansive covert infrastructure for monitoring dissent. Standing at the intersection of urban studies and the history of science and technology, my research suggests that it was the dialectics between an emergent culture of political secrecy and the expanding technologies of modern security states that gave birth to a new urban, political subject in the 20th century.

With support from the American Institute for Indian Studies and the Department of History, I spent 18 months in the field. My research took me to various district intelligence offices, and many local state archives and libraries in India. In addition, I also worked at the National Archives in Delhi and the African and Asian Studies reading room at the British Library in London.



With Berkeley colleagues (from left) Nicole Ferreira and Kimberley Kolor

### WHAT ARE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES THAT YOU HAVE FACED DURING FIELDWORK?

For any historian of modern surveillance, access to intelligence records is the biggest challenge. While some recently declassified records are now freely available at the British Library, a number of grassroots, fortnightly intelligence reports and judicial documents are tightly held in post-colonial intelligence

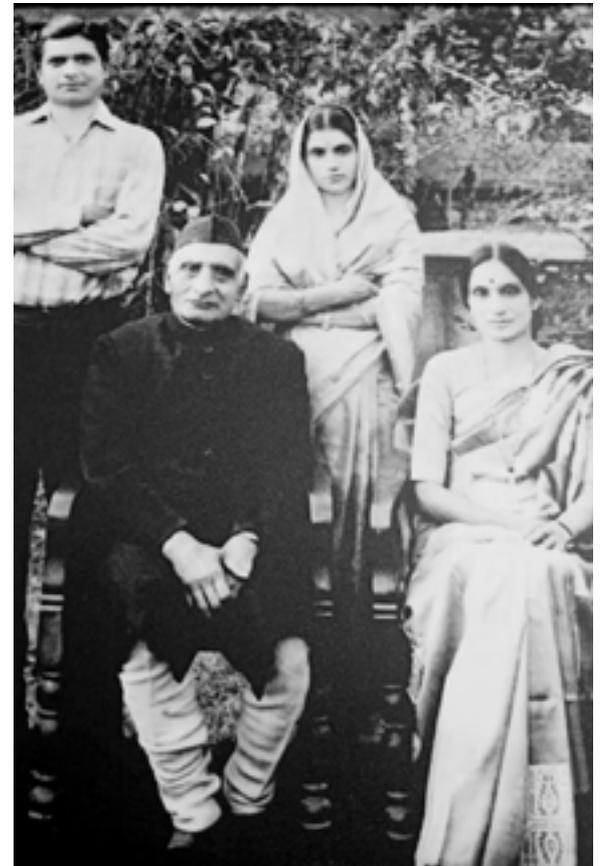
offices. These are invaluable records which offer a remarkable glimpse into the secret world of underground politics and the everyday work of political detection. Though I was able to enter the local intelligence offices after months of petitioning, there are documents that I am yet to access.

### COULD YOU SHARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM YOUR FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE?



With Berkeley colleagues (from left) Anurag Advani and Brent Otto

In the winter of 2018 I was working at the African and Asian Studies reading room at the British Library. Here I chanced upon an unexpected record: colonial deliberations on Thakur Prasad Sharma, an alleged member of an underground anti-colonial society, a “conspirator” in the Mainpuri Case of 1919, and incidentally also my great-grandfather! I had heard whispers of his revolutionary past but it was extraordinary to discover old files on his political life. The British state prosecuted thirty-seven members in the Mainpuri Case on charges of sedition under sections 120 B and 121 A of the Indian Penal Code: some like Genda Lal escaped and became political fugitives only to die in extreme poverty, others like Ram Prasad Bismil went on to establish the Hindustan Republican Army and were finally executed by the state. My great-grandfather was one of the few who lived to celebrate his seventy-third birthday with friends and family.



My great-grandfather Sri Thakur Prasad Sharma (seated) with his children

### WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE FUTURE?

I am currently in the final stages of dissertation writing. In addition, I am also exploring a second book project on global surveillance titled *The Empire of Spies: South Asian Dissent and the Making of Transatlantic Surveillance in 20th Century North America*. Part global history, part history of technology, part history of race and immigration, *The Empire of Spies* will be the first comprehensive study of the transatlantic surveillance networks—overt and covert—as well as institutions, technologies, legal infrastructures and social relationships through which the British policed South Asian dissent in 20th century America. ❖

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

### WHEN RELIGIOUSLY CONSERVATIVE PARTIES MOBILIZE WOMEN: NORMS AND PARTY ACTIVISM IN INDIA

Anirvan Chowdhury is a PhD candidate in political science. His research examines the links between social norms and political behavior with applications to gender and religion. Between 2018 and 2021, he conducted field research in India for his dissertation project on how political parties in India mobilize women to enter public spaces. He has previously studied economics and public policy at Georgetown University, the Madras School of Economics and the University of Delhi.

#### TELL US ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT AND YOUR FIELDWORK?

Indian politics has historically suffered from a gender gap in participation. Yet, recent years have seen an upsurge in women's engagement: more and more women are attending election rallies, meetings and canvassing for parties. All these activities require women to visibly enter public spaces for a partisan cause. But interestingly, not all parties benefited uniformly: according to survey data collected between 2009 and 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) profited disproportionately from this increase. It is often suggested that the BJP's—and RSS's—ideology of political Hinduism, Hindutva, leaves little space for women. What then explains the BJP's success at mobilizing women in such large numbers? To understand this, I travelled to India in October 2018.

My initial months were spent interviewing voters in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan during assembly (state-level) elections about their political preferences and participation in election events. I then spent a few months making connections among high-level politicians in Delhi and speaking with political scientists, analysts and commentators. After this, in the run-up to general (national-level) elections, I returned to Rajasthan and spent several weeks tracking political campaigns, attending rallies and election meetings. I even got the opportunity to accompany some candidates during their campaigns, which was a lot of fun, but also tremendously grueling. On the first day, I left with a candidate's retinue at 7:30 am, traveled to 15 villages with the midsummer Rajasthani sun beating down mercilessly, returning to the city at 2 am, only to repeat it all over again the next day, and the day after that... I now have enormous respect for how much work politicians and party workers are capable of (if only during elections!). I have since then, focused on three districts in Rajasthan—Jaipur, Jodhpur and Kota—where I spent several months conducting interviews and focus group discussions with voters, party workers and local politicians. During these interactions, I was struck by how often women party activists referred to their work in terms of *seva*, a norm of service, and a concept I try to unpack in my writing. In addition to this, I have recently completed a set of large-scale surveys and experiments with households and party workers to triangulate qualitative and quantitative evidence on how *seva* can facilitate women's entry into political spaces..

#### WHAT ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUR FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE?

Without question, the kindness of strangers. I have been treated to lunch by people I met during long rides on rickety buses, lifts by passing cars and bikes, and occasionally even a place to stay the night when I missed the last bus to the city. I also feel privileged that so many people were willing to give me so much of their time and trust me with their stories. Sometimes, one-hour meetings turned into conversations that lasted half a day. In one district, a group of journalists allowed me to work out their office for weeks on end.

I also met people with interesting side hustles. For instance, there was a down-on-his-luck poet who started composing political jingles in his spare time to make ends meet. He turned out to be so successful that a party hired him to be their campaign announcer and to prepare and charge up audiences before candidates and other VIPs took the stage. Then there was the receptionist who doubled up as a *pahalwan* (traditional bonesetter) and took it upon himself to correct my spinal alignment when I complained that the guesthouse's mattress was giving me a backache.

#### WHAT WERE SOME CHALLENGES THAT YOU FACED DURING FIELDWORK?

I think there were two key challenges. To begin with, this was the first time I was undertaking and managing a large-scale study entirely on my own. I had previously conducted fieldwork in many Indian states as well as another country, and thought I was well placed to manage my dissertation fieldwork. However, I had almost always had back-up and people with whom I could discuss and bounce ideas off. But this time I was entirely on my own and had to set things up from scratch—raise funds, develop a community, build relationships with personnel in political parties and government officials, hire and manage research assistants, survey firms and enumerators, and always have a Plan B for when things start going south, as they inevitably do. But by far, the biggest challenge I faced was the onset of Covid. I had all but completed my qualitative fieldwork by the end of 2019 and was about to launch my surveys when field operations were called off due to Covid. But to take things in perspective, I was incredibly fortunate in that I could work from home when so many others had to worry about survival. This was followed by the devastating second wave of the Delta variant. Research seemed really trivial in comparison.

#### GOALS FOR THE FUTURE?

My remaining fieldwork did get done, although I had to cut it a little short with the arrival of Omicron. I'm going to remain in Delhi for next month or two, so I am trying to meet some India-based scholars for their perspectives on my research. I've realized I enjoy teaching and research and it would be nice to be able to continue doing that as an academic. But the first step towards that is to write my dissertation, so I should really get a move on! I really look forward to returning to Berkeley and reconnecting with peers and faculty, some of whom I fear might not recognize me as I've been away for the better part of the last three years. Although I'll miss *ghar ka khana*, Berkeley summers seem far more inviting than sweating it out in Rajasthan right now! ❖



Conducting a focus group discussion



Scenes from a BJP public meeting in Kota



BJP workers at a blood donation camp in Jodhpur



Women leading a Congress protest in Jaipur

## REMEMBERING SCHOLAR OF JAINISM AND BUDDHISM, PROF. PADMANABH JAINI (OCTOBER 23, 1923 - MAY 25, 2021)

By Alexander von Rospatt, Professor in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, and Director of the Group in Buddhist Studies

Our revered colleague, teacher and friend, Professor Padmanabh Srivarma Jaini, master of Buddhist and Jain Studies, passed away on Tuesday May 25, just five months shy from what would have been his 98th birthday. His health had been failing over the last weeks, and he peacefully passed away on his own terms in his home in the Berkeley hills, with his son Arvind at his side, who as medical doctor oversaw his gentle departure. For most of the nearly fifty years that Prof. Jaini lived at Berkeley he walked day in day out some two miles, from his home in Kensington overlooking Tilden Park, down to campus, and in the evening, much more strenuously, up again. This, as well as his frugal lifestyle, kept him in excellent shape, though over the last years he became more frail and finally was forced to abandon this routine. His advanced age in no way affected his mind, and he remained crystal clear until the very end, remembering details and names with great accuracy and leaving us a lovely account of his rich and long life with his *Yogayoga* ("Coincidences") memoir, which includes a complete list of his publications (2019). An informative review of this work has been published in Telegraph India.

As emeritus Prof. Jaini continued to be accessible to colleagues and students, taking a deep interest in their work. This included endowing the Padmanabh S. Jaini Graduate Student Award in Buddhist Studies in 2009 to support graduate students. Speaking to his continued investment, only a few weeks before his passing he gave a long and passionate speech about Buddhist Studies and its history at Berkeley, standing on the balcony of his home and addressing the students and faculty of Berkeley's Buddhist Studies graduate program who had assembled below in the street. Together with Prof. Lewis

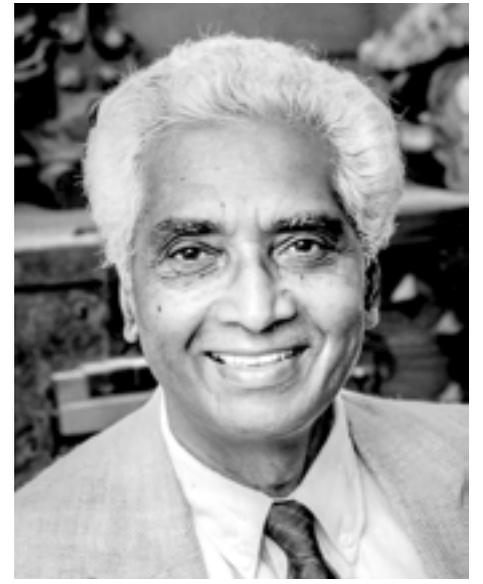
Lancaster he had founded this program after moving from Ann Arbor (University of Michigan) to Berkeley (University of California) in 1972, where he served as professor in the Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies until his retirement in 1994. The program allowed him to train an entire generation of Buddhist Studies scholars who came to serve as professors at premier institutions, advancing and institutionalizing

the study of Buddhism in the US and beyond. As he said shortly before his passing "my legacy are my books, and my students who went on to be professors and academics." Jaini's service to the field of Buddhist Studies as something of an *adiguru* is matched by his contributions to the field of Jain Studies, which were duly celebrated in an international symposium on The Study of Jainism held in his honor at Berkeley in October 2013 on the occasion of his 90th birthday. His Festschrift *Jainism and Early Buddhism, Essays in Honour of Padmanabh S. Jaini* (2003) draws on his specialization in both areas.

Born into a Jain family in coastal Karnataka in 1923, Padmanabh Jaini was trained in Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali at Nashik (BA Honours from Hamsaraj Pragji Thakarsi College of Arts, 1943-47), Ahmedabad and the University of Bombay (MA awarded in 1949), and at Vidyodaya Pirivena in Sri Lanka, where he received the *tipitaka Achariya* degree in 1951. After appointments as lecturer in Pali at the B.J. Institute in Ahmedabad (1951-52) and at Banaras Hindu University (1952-56), Jaini moved to London, where he earned his PhD under the supervision of John Brough at SOAS (1958). At SOAS he also served as lecturer (1956-64) and reader (1965-67) before being appointed as Professor of Sanskrit and Pali at the University of Michigan (1967-72). His dissertation was dedicated to a study of the *Abhidharmadipa*, a less well-known

*Vaibhashika* treatise not translated into Tibetan or Chinese. The publication of the critical edition (1959) marks the beginning of a long list of editions, prepared from manuscripts, monographs and articles dedicated to the study of Indian Buddhism. This

list includes editions of Pali works, viz. the *Milinda-tika* (1961), the *Lo-kaneyyappakaranam* (1986), the fifty extra-canonical *Jatakas* Prof. Jaini had discovered in Burma (*Paññasa-Jataka*, 1981-1983; translation 1985-1986), and *Sangharakkhita's* treatise on rheto-



Professor Padmanabh S. Jaini

ric entitled *Subodhalarikara* together with its commentarial tradition (2000). The list also includes further editions of Sanskrit works, viz. *Ratnakarashnti's pañjika* (entitled *Saratama*) on the *Ashtasahasrika* (1979) and *Amrtacandrasuri's Laghutattvasphota* (1978), a Jain (Digambara) work. Beyond these editions and textual studies Prof. Jaini authored a wide range of articles and book chapters that explore particular aspects of the aforementioned texts, and that are also dedicated to an array of other topics and subjects in the history of Buddhism, albeit with a clear focus on abhidharma and related scholastic traditions. Many of these incisive papers have been brought together in his *Collected Papers on Buddhist Studies* (2001).

Prof. Jaini's work on Buddhism stands out not only for the critical acumen, learnedness and precision he has brought to it thanks also to his superb command of Sanskrit and Pali, but also because he has always treated Buddhism as part of the larger Indian religious landscape. This came natural to him because of his intimate knowledge of Jainism and the Brahmanical traditions. His monograph *The Jaina Path of Purification* (first published in 1979) became a classic that has brought the study and knowledge of Jainism to a broader English speaking public, and his numerous further publications on Jainism have made him something of a founder figure of this field in North America.

Beyond his mentioned introduction to Jainism, this includes a detailed monograph dedicated to the study of *Gender and Salvation: Jaina Debates on the Spiritual Liberation of Women* (1991), a book-length study of

"Jain Sectarian Debates: Eighty-four points of contention (*Cauryamsi Bol*) Between *Svetambaras* and *Digambaras*" (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* 36, 2008, pp. 1-246), an earlier monograph authored in Hindi on



Dr Jaini with HH the Dalai Lama in Delhi, 1978. Picture credit, Manish Modi



Dr Jaini with HH Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, 1995. PC: Manish Modi



Prof. Jaini on a train. Picture credit: Manish Modi

## REMEMBERING SCHOLAR OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS, PROF. KIREN AZIZ CHAUDHRY, (MARCH 17, 1959 - JUNE 25, 2020)

By Wendy Brown, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Political Science

Professor Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, a scholar of comparative politics who focused on the Middle East, died in her home of a heart attack on June 25, 2020.

Professor Chaudhry was born March 17, 1959, in the Punjabi village of Shakargarh, Pakistan. Upon completing her secondary school education in Lahore, she came to the United States for college. In 1980, she graduated summa cum laude from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, where she obtained high distinctions in political science and English. She subsequently pursued Harvard for graduate study and received her M.A. in government in 1983 and her Ph.D. in 1990. While at Harvard, she was the recipient of a raft of Social Science Research Council research and writing fellowships, as well as a Fulbright-Hays and Kucin Fellowship.

Chaudhry joined the Department of Political Science at Berkeley in 1990, where even as an assistant professor, she became an important figure in the emerging field of political economy in comparative politics. Her first book, *The Price of Wealth*, was based on years of field work in Saudi Arabia and Yemen. It won the Middle East Studies Association Albert Hourani Best Book Award and was lauded by senior experts as a stunning accomplishment. In it, Chaudhry examined how fundamental state and market institutions forged at the end of World War I were repeatedly reshaped in response to exogenous shocks, and how this reshaping in turn determined institutional outcomes. David Woodruff, an early student of Chaudhry's now on the London School of Economics faculty, writes, "Based on remarkable anthropological and archival research, the book offered a pioneering examination of the process of state-building in Saudi Arabia, launching an important

discussion on how, and how much, the presence of oil revenues shaped state capacity." Woodruff adds that the book's "analysis of the institutional and economic roots of splits between northern and southern Yemen has enduring relevance to the country's conflictual history. For scholars of all regions, it offers a model of how to connect detailed local knowledge to themes of the broadest comparative significance."

Beyond her study of the specific regions featured in *The Price of Wealth*, Chaudhry also developed a novel way of understanding and criticizing the effects of the free-market orthodoxy taking shape with neoliberal globalization. Melani Cammett, another former student of Chaudhry's and now a professor of international affairs at Harvard, writes of Chaudhry's important 1993 article, "Myths of the Market and the Common History of Late Developers": "In the early 1990s, well before others were doing so and at the height of market-based orthodoxy in economics, Chaudhry articulated a framework for understanding the challenges to economic liberalization programs in developing countries. Her arguments emphasized the political and historically rooted processes undergirding the construction of national markets. First, rather than an alternative to weak states, markets require states with effective national legal and regulatory institutions in order to emerge and function. Second, she underscored the importance of the international context for market-making efforts in developing countries... and insisted that the historical moment when countries build national economies greatly affects the nature of the institutions they build: While early developers had the luxury of building markets without much interference from external forces, 'late developers' were obliged to do so in the context of highly mobile capital, undercutting the institutional and political capacities needed for markets to function." This argument, Cammett writes, forged "a new understanding of the political economy of development - and one that subsequently became widely accepted among social scientists and policy makers alike."

In the early 2000s, Chaudhry turned her scholarly attention to issues of political trauma and displacement, integrating into these phenomena her deep understanding of political economy and

*Jain Sampraday men moksa, avatar aur punarjanma* (1982), as well as a broad array of articles and book chapters, most of which have been reprinted in his *Collected Papers on Jaina Studies* (2000).

Prof. Jaini's rich oeuvre combines the best virtues of Western scholarship with the deep traditional learning in which he was steeped before moving to the west. He was a capacious thinker whose keen interest in religion extended beyond India to the Abrahamic traditions and made him a welcome (though somewhat reluctant) participant in interreligious dialogue (cf. Christianity

and Jainism: Professor Padmanabh S. Jaini in conversation with Sir Mark Tully, 2009). More generally he was extraordinarily well read also in areas outside the confines of his academic specialization. His intellectual curiosity and the spirit of unrelenting inquiry he brought to his studies were infectious. He inspired not only his numerous students but also touched the lives of his colleagues and friends with his gentle smile and the generosity with which he shared his seemingly boundless knowledge. Padmanabh Jaini is survived by his son Arvind and his grandson Ashwin. ❖



Professor Kiren Aziz Chaudhry.  
Picture credit, David Woodruff

its effects. She won a series of fellowships in support of this research, including a MacArthur Foundation Peace and Security Fellowship, IREX grants, and two Berkeley Sultan Research Fellowships. In 2010, she added an affiliation with the Department of Gender and Women's Studies to her existing affiliations with the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the Institute for South Asia Studies. The book she was completing when she died, *Trauma and Memory in Istanbul*, is framed by several disciplines and draws on trauma theory, ethnography, and archival research to analyze how post-Soviet female circular traders and sex workers and their male hosts in Turkey developed forms of solidarity amidst a severe economic crisis.

Chaudhry loved teaching and brought to it her fierce intelligence, maverick spirit, infectious curiosity, and high expectations of others. For both undergraduate and graduate students, her classes and mentorship were often life-changing. Professor Woodruff notes, "for many Berkeley graduate students, her seminar on the political economy of development was an intellectually transformative experience that shaped long-term research and teaching agendas. Students influenced by her vision launched investigations of developing and post-communist countries throughout the world." She encouraged in her graduate students, Woodruff adds, "ambition, originality, and the bravery needed to pursue both." Former student Milad Odabaei writes, "in 2004, Kiren's undergraduate course on the political economy of the Middle East was one of the few spaces to consider the histories and processes that contributed to 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq outside simplistic narratives of good vs. evil." He adds that her lectures on economic sanctions continue to inform his scholarly analysis of Iran.

Professor Chaudhry retired in 2019. In addition to her passion for politics, scholarship, and teaching, she loved Urdu poetry, the English modernist writers, science fiction, gardening, culinary feats, Sufi music, long walks in nature, and the sound of the ocean. Her deep sense of irony barely masked her longing for the human world to be more just and kind. She is survived by her daughter Aden Kinne, her brothers Adil, Bilaal, and Daniyal, and her parents Kathleen and Anwar Aziz Chaudhry. She was buried in Shakargarh, the village of her birth. ❖

## WRITING PANDEMICS: A COVID AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

By Gowri Vijayakumar (MA '11, PhD '16), is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at Brandeis University. Her book, *At Risk: Indian Sexual Politics and the Global AIDS Crisis*, won the American Sociological Association's Transnational Book Award for 2022.

As someone who has taught and studied the politics of AIDS for many years, I've often had to do the work of representation. Though a diligent teacher of Sontag's wariness of metaphors, I've made obstinate use of them all. Concepts of virality, mutations, plagues, battlefields have helped me convey the magnitude of pandemics, scales of illness and death that are ordinarily difficult to comprehend. I've filled presentation slides with images of viruses, graphs of disease counts climbing and plateauing, and withering critiques of the regimes of knowledge the graphs reproduce.

This was the set of analytical tools I took with me to a tiny rented studio on the Massachusetts coast in the middle of July. Its sliding doors looked out on a line of summer cottages that ended in a small patch of gray sea. For two days, I wandered with my laptop from cross-legged on the bed to sprawling on the wooden chairs on the deck, and worked my way through edits on my book.

I didn't know yet that, a few days later, I would find myself poring over the time I had spent there, as though I'd be able to reconstruct a microscopic memory of the moment of contagion.

The apartment was, as the listing gushed, "spotlessly clean." A dish sponge had been cut in half to fit perfectly into the porcelain tray next to the kitchen sink. There was a pile of towels stacked in the bathroom, a bottle of disinfectant spray sitting out on the table as a visual reminder of the times. But when



On the Massachusetts coast. Photo by author.

the temperature touched ninety as I sat on the beach, I pulled down my mask and breathed in the heavy, humid air. I stopped at a liquor store for a bottle of wine. I wondered later if, alone in a

town of volleyball-wielding white teenagers and yachts with Trump banners fluttering from their bows, I'd lingered too long exchanging masked pleasantries with the Gujarati man at the counter.

What I do know for sure is that, two nights after I returned home, the results of my COVID test on the screen quietly blinked red—positive for SARS-CoV-2.

What I had not predicted about a COVID diagnosis was the guilt. I had spent months rearranging my life to protect myself from this virus. I had lectured my relatives about



Through the window. Photo by author.

being "more careful." I had passed judgment on people I thought were overly cautious, and I had passed judgment on people I thought were not cautious enough. Now it was finally here. If I die will you finish my book? I texted a friend, adding an ironic crying emoji to blunt the emotion. It was a kind of melodrama that I try not to betray myself to entertain.

There were, meanwhile, more immediate arrangements to consider. I clapped a mask haphazardly over my mouth, went to the bedroom, and closed the door. I stayed in that room, more or less, for the next fourteen days. Three times a day, my partner brought in a meal neatly arranged on a tray. At night, after our

toddler was in bed, I crept out of the room, two masks piled onto my face, and washed my dishes in the kitchen. As the doctor had advised,



Quarantine breakfast prepared by Josh. Photo by author

I sprayed every surface I touched with so much disinfectant that it felt permanently soaked into my skin.

Both of them tested negative for COVID on the third day of my quarantine. We were relieved, and irritated. If we all had COVID already, we could at least quarantine together. The negative test meant that I could still put them at risk. "Isolation means different things to different people," my doctor explained over the phone, quoting from the CDC website. "If you're homeless, it might mean putting up a sheet around your bed at the shelter. If you're breast-feeding, it might mean breast-feeding with a mask on." Faced with this choice that was not a choice, this individualism gone dystopic, we decided I would stay in the room.

The first few days, I had no symptoms. I watched my body for signs, but it remained stubbornly impervious. The only hint so far was an elevated temperature I only noticed when I measured it. "I wish I knew the nausea," Danez Smith writes, "its thick yell/ in the morning, the pregnant proof/ that in you, life swells. i know/ i'm not a mother, but i know what it is/ to nurse a thing you want to kill."

***I was harboring something in my body that could prove fatal to others. But my day-to-day was just a series of logistical uncertainties. How to get to the bathroom? Could I go outside at all?***

I am a sociologist, and I am also an introvert. I learn by lurking. I sat on the front porch with two

masks on, watching people pass by. I wondered if they could see the virus on me, inside me. I worried that they could, that they'd condemn me for my irresponsibility. And I worried that they couldn't, that they'd come too close, pull their masks down to say hello.

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I have mostly learned about AIDS secondhand, after the crisis had already been forgotten (or distributed). I was two when the first cases of AIDS were detected in India. My parents told me stories about their friends in Alabama in the late 1980s who had died of it. When I got to college, I helped run an HIV prevention peer education group. We drove around Providence to schools and youth centers and facilitated sexual health workshops with teenagers who mostly rolled their eyes at our predictability. One of the exercises we did was to give everyone a paper cup of water. One of the cups held only vinegar. We gave everyone a plastic eyedropper to exchange drops of water from one cup to another. You received a little note that told you whether you should drop your water into the cup of just one partner, or two, or five. At the end, we gave them all litmus tests to check whose water had turned acidic. Even now when I think about epidemics, I think of all those paper strips turning red.

We talked about HIV transmission, but mostly used it as an opening to conversations about consent and violence and relationships and communication. At one school, where who knows why college students were teaching the sex ed classes, the teacher collected the condoms we used on bananas for demonstrations and threw them out in the dumpster in the school playground so no one would find out. It was the era of George W. Bush. Abstinence-only sex education curricula were taught in some Rhode Island schools. Through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), Bush committed \$18 billion to combat AIDS globally as a matter of national security,[5] but AIDS continued to devastate Black communities within the US, largely with no relief. AIDS is today the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age globally, and, in the US, it is intimately tied to circuits of sex and drug use at the intersection of racism, patriarchy, and homophobia. But already, by then, AIDS was considered a haunting

presence. As I moved through graduate school, I was told even more often that the topic was ill-timed. One professor warned me that AIDS wasn't "hot" anymore.

Can there be too much writing on something so big? I ignored the advice, but not a general sense of skepticism about the exceptional status AIDS was afforded. When I did research in South Africa as a college student, people were already talking about how AIDS took up too many resources, too much attention, was treated as an exception, while the structural violence of neoliberal capitalism was overlooked. The activists I interviewed spoke of HIV prevention as biomedicalizing their lives, deradicalizing their politics, creating an opening for the corporatization of public health. They pointed out the contradictions of HIV funding when the lives of those at risk of HIV were criminalized and routinely brutalized.

AIDS was everywhere; it was too much; it wasn't the only thing; it operated on excess; it obscured the underlying conditions. It took up too many analytical, symbolic, material resources. And yet at the core of it were forms of abandonment that were, and continue to be, unfathomable. The geographer Debanuj Dasgupta writes of the disjuncture between activist scholarship and lived experience as an HIV positive immigrant of color: "Publicly my body was mapped as that of an Immigration and Education Policy Expert, whereas privately I was intimately aware that any inkling of my health status would have me labeled as 'diseased, public burden.'"

COVID is different from AIDS, but it resurrects this conjuncture of panic, guilt, and rage.

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Most people I told about my COVID diagnosis were in as much disbelief as I was. "Do you know how you got it?" people kept asking, perhaps hoping I would reveal some secret that would enable them to avoid my fate. "See," one said triumphantly, "That's why we haven't been getting takeout since February." I got used to explaining each symptom, what it really felt like, how bad it really was or wasn't. For those for whom I wasn't a guilty party, or a data source, I was a cautionary tale—a reminder that you could do everything "right," and still catch it.

In the context of a failed state, COVID has become a feature of

individual expertise. Even Trump got COVID, the liberal narrative goes, because his personal decisions were reckless and stupid — not because the ruling class refused to interrupt profit. Most academics consider ourselves far too smart to get COVID. We know the precautions; we know the data; and we know where we stand in relation to social inequality. But social scientific insight better equips us to understand structural violence than individual pain. "You're the first person I know to actually get it," many of my academic friends said. "It's more of a working-class thing," another explained. "I don't know anyone who has it, but the working-class people in my area are dying of it."

***We usually placed ourselves outside of such earthly realities — if not out of condescension, out of an obedience to structural explanation.***

Every day, I received a call from a contact tracer who had been assigned to my case. She sounded young, like one of my students. Like them, she laughed politely when I tried to amuse her with uncle jokes or an excess of personal information. Her main goal was to find out if I still had symptoms, so she could calculate my date of release from quarantine and her office could remove me from its list of active cases. But I furnished her with elaborate details—a quirky thermometer that revealed a temperature of 101 on one temple and 99.5 on the other, the ups and downs of my headache, the hours of tossing and turning at night, the catch in my breath.

From the hundreds of sociological interviews I've conducted, I knew her attention probably slipped, that her mind shifted to something else once I began a story she already knew the end to, a symptom she could fit into a pattern. Still, for me, it was a way of imposing a shape on the random banality of being sick. It was a way of acknowledging that the churn of crisis events was not just an abstraction, that its effects on me were real and seen, that someone official had noticed my presence. I don't know what I was looking for from this agent of public health surveillance—acknowledgment or apology. Then after each call, I'd hear my partner on the other side of the door, repeating the answers to the same questions the interviewer had just asked me.

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Audre Lorde writes that “the weave of [a woman’s] every day existence is the training ground for how she handles crisis.” Quarantine taught me that to think clearly, I need space to move. I crafted paths around different parts of the room —

***Cross-legged on the bed to eat lunch and watch TV.***

***The wicker chair by the window for Zoom calls.***

***The floor beside it for attempts at workouts.***

***Leaning against the dresser for phone calls with the doctor.***

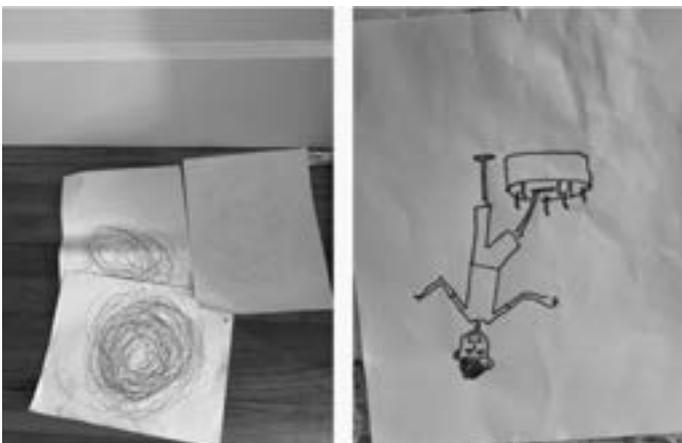
***Pacing by the door to read.***

***Kneeling on the floor to type.***

But all I remember from some afternoons is the chipping paint on one of the windowsills, the rickety part of the window from which the outside air whistles through. There is a loose section of a floorboard; the air bubble beneath it flattens as I step on it. One crack near the wall in which some old dull glitter, from a bangle or an art project, has lodged itself and catches light.

Lockdown expands and contracts time. Sucharita Sarkar writes of “slow COVID time.” I worked through Karan Johar’s oeuvre. I painted my nails. The patterns of the room solidified—the exact moment every day when the sun moved from a patch on the wall to a broken grid on the floor, the shifts in the smell of the air through the phases of the night.

Every morning, my toddler



*Art of isolation. Photo by author.*

knocked on the door to wake me up. He is rambunctious, effervescent, with none of the gloomy prevarications of his academic parents. In a way, he has never really known a world without COVID.

As the days passed, he began to sit outside the door and scribble with crayons on a piece of paper and cram them under the crack in my door. “Draw me standing on a cake!” he’d declare. I would take the task seriously. I gave it time I would normally struggle to find. I’d crouch on the floor and sketch out his triumphant arms in the air as the icing on the cake sagged beneath him, then slide the finished product back to him. We’d video chat on our phones as we watched each other react to the latest piece of art. I was showing him that, even though it was dangerous to breathe the air I breathed, and even though I had few words left to interpret my reality, I was still real. Even now when he makes a drawing he really likes, he pushes it under the bedroom door for me to find.

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There’s an explosion of personal writing about COVID-19. The editors of *The Journal of Autoethnography* warn, “A day in the life of COVID-19 also isn’t novel... we are all affected by it.”

***Everyone with an Instagram account is an amateur memoirist; every scholarly subfield has been repurposed “in the time of COVID.” It’s a moment of patterned silences and overshares.***

Part of my sense of invisibility during quarantine emerged from the structure of academic labor, the false gift of unstructured time. Countless committees and consultations later, most universities have very little to say about what happens when their academic laborers actually get sick, especially when they are precariously employed. So even if I was lying on the bed coughing, I anchored myself in work. When it was time to edit my syllabus, I did. Would my CV reflect my days of tossing and turning, fighting chills? Would my course evaluations reflect the fact that I had spent the weeks of preparing to teach monitoring my oxygen levels? The conference at which I was scheduled to give a presentation passed by in a few feverish afternoons, and I had no

way of knowing if anyone had noticed my absence. Through the unequal distribution of disease, its mental health effects, and the care demands it generates, a generation of scholars has effectively gone silent.

Meanwhile, the necessary hyperboles of activist scholarship rattled me. People on my social media feeds conflated COVID and death as a way of highlighting the violent failures of the state. Yet against my own political inclinations, I found myself comforted with ideas of COVID as an ordinary ailment that would pass. The contradictions of my class and caste privilege were vividly visible: my slow time was built on others’ lack of it. I had health insurance, a doctor who listened to me, a paying job, safe housing, loved ones to drop off groceries and food. I managed to answer emails with breezy certitude — “I should be back to normal in a couple of weeks.” Outside my door, the death counts were rising, tied to the logics and structures of racial capitalism.

And yet, somehow, the incalculability of the pandemic had rendered most of us numb to its emotional life. My friends were unstoppable, launching new research projects, conducting interviews, writing historical essays, and studying epidemiological patterns. I, on the other hand, felt I was frozen in place — surrounded by an accelerating deluge of analysis. The pandemic had given social scientists new urgency, new relevance, new dynamics for investigation. Yet here I was: my expertise had failed, the virus had found me, and I had nothing to say.

As a sociologist, I’ve been trained to find elaborate routes to my uniqueness—the gap in the literature, the novel perspective or site for research. With COVID, these bids for sparkling new contributions faded into monotony. There was nothing to say about living in my body that wasn’t already the topic of every debate, every symposium, every hastily organized webinar.

I was living at the heart of a historical moment, a member of the aggregate.

But quarantine reminded me that when sociologists fetishize the next frontier of analysis, we may foreclose mundane suffering in real time—the inventiveness, the tactics of survival, even the joy of the scribbled drawing passed under the door. There must be a way to hold together a structural analysis of planetary catastrophe and the fear and fragility that lie at its heart. ❖

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## SPECIAL SECTION

## BOOR SINGH

## BERKELEY'S FIRST DESI FORTUNE TELLER

Anirvan Chatterjee (BA '98),  
technologist, storyteller, activist and  
co founder of the  
Berkeley South  
Asian Radical  
History Walking  
Tour, uncovers  
the strange and  
fascinating tale of  
an early Punjabi



immigrant who  
took on cops, dog  
breeders, racists,  
and clairvoyants.

Boor Singh immigrated to California in 1907, married a Black or mixed-race woman, became a fortune teller, and lived a life full of drama and tragedy. I've spent months trying to piece together his story, and the more I look, the stranger it gets.

## HOW I ACCIDENTALLY DISCOVERED BOOR SINGH

I was looking through old Berkeley, California city council meeting minutes when I came across a curious permitting request.

In July 1916, a man named Boor Singh asked the city for permission

From Boor Singh requesting permission to erect a tent on the west side of Shattuck avenue, 30 feet south of Bancroft way, to be used in the business of fortune telling.

— Berkeley, California city council minutes, 7/28/1916, page 191 as paginated

to erect a fortune telling tent in the heart of downtown Berkeley:

His application was unanimously denied the very next month.

Who was this Punjabi immigrant conning Berkeley residents with his East Indian fortune-telling skills?

I began to dig, and here's what I found.

## WHO SHOT BOOR SINGH? (1870S–1907)

Boor Singh was born in Gurdaspur, Punjab sometime between 1871–1876, depending on which record we trust. It's not clear what his life in India was like, but he apparently studied up through the 6th grade, and his immigration paperwork says he had two rifle shots on his left leg. He lived in Shanghai for some time, then arrived in San Francisco in 1907, while in his thirties.

Who shot Boor Singh in the leg? I have a guess. In 1911, U.S. newspapers reported that “Boohr Singh,” a laborer in Oakland, California, was arrested for public intoxication. When he went to court, he showed off his collection of medals for military service with the British Indian Army, working in Sudan, Punjab, and China during the Boxer Rebellion

Did the Indian veteran of Britain's global wars suffer injury, move to California, and go on to become a fortune teller? If he did, he couldn't possibly have predicted



Prof. Boor Singh  
Hindu from India

Crystal Gazer, Palmist and  
Reader, and Special Advisor.

On Highway at Belmont  
Next door to Postoffice

A vintage Boor Singh ad from 1929

how his life would turn out: husband, father, clairvoyant, concrete worker, laborer, shoemaker, hotel owner, restaurateur, and survivor of umpteen scrapes with the law.

## BOOR SINGH MEETS HIS FUTURE WIFE IN OAKLAND (~1917)

We know little about Singh's first years in the United States, but he had been in the country for about a decade when he met his future wife.

Grace Merrida was another non-White immigrant to California. She was born in Kansas in 1877, but was living in Oakland, California with her sister Amy by age twenty-three. She was likely Black or mixed-race, but White-passing; while the 1900 census marked her and her sister as Black, she was listed as White in every subsequent census.

Grace and Boor had a fortune-telling meet cute. Per the *Oakland Tribune*:

Mrs. Singh met her husband while he was conducting a fortune-telling booth in Berkeley. She consulted him at that time for advice in connection with difficulties arising out of a former marriage.

— “Hotel Owner is Sued for Divorce.” *Oakland Tribune*, 3 Mar 1921, p. 6, col. 4

A vintage Boor Singh ad from 1929

On Boor Singh's medals

### BOOR SINGH GETS AN AMERICAN FAMILY (1918)

Boor Singh and Grace Merrida, both in their forties, had a child, Babu, in June 1918. That October, Boor and Grace got married in San Jose, with Grace possibly posing as “Mary Grace Shimada.”

It wasn't a first relationship for either of them. In September 1918, Singh said he had a wife, “Otto Boor Singh” in “Jangley, India” (Attar Bir from Jangla?), while Grace had a daughter born around 1913, and later told a court that she had a prior marriage.

And just like that, the Singhs became a family of four: Boor, Grace, her five-year-old daughter Lillian, and their son Babu. (Babu's name progressively whitened over the years: “Baboo,” “Babu,” Robert Singh,” and finally “Robert Burton Singley”; Lillian Singh became Lillian Dowell after her marriage.)

### BOOR SINGH IS UNMASKED DURING A PANDEMIC (1918)

It was November 1918, the flu pandemic was on, and a mask order was in place. Was Boor Singh an anti-masker, or just a forgetful new husband and father? Either way, the papers reported that he managed to get arrested by the Berkeley police for being out without a mask.

### BOOR SINGH MAKES HIS FORTUNE (1910S-1920S)

Boor Singh learned how to sell himself to San Francisco Bay Area customers. By around 1922, he was apparently making about \$10 a day from telling fortunes, sometimes charging \$6 per reading. This was in addition to owning and managing a rooming house, and doing concrete work. His assets at the time were reportedly worth between \$12,000 and \$20,000 — or between \$180,000 and \$300,000 in today's dollars.

### BOOR SINGH TRIES A TERRIBLE PICKUP LINE (1922)

Boor and Grace met while she was getting her fortune told, but he apparently didn't stop there. In 1922, Grace alleged that he harassed a customer, starting with a terrible pickup line, and suddenly escalating. The *Oakland Tribune* described her allegation:

|| Boor Singh, Hindu fortune teller, told a woman client there was a “dark man coming into her life who would love her...I am that man,” then he kissed the woman.

— “Court to Tell Fortune Teller Fate's Decree.” *Oakland Tribune*, 19 Oct 1922, p. 4

### BOOR SINGH CONFRONTS A RACIST GOVERNMENT LAWYER (1919–1923)

Boor Singh applied for citizenship in 1919, with signatures from two White men who had known him for the last five years, a concrete worker and a police officer. But the next year, Singh was forced to go to court, trying to prove that he was eligible for citizenship at a time when Indians were being increasingly barred for their race.

A newspaper described Singh as “a tall, broad-shouldered East Indian of rather intellectual appearance” facing a naturalization inspector who argued not only that East Indians were ineligible, but that Singh “made statements opposed to the government during the war.”

Boor Singh lost, and was denied the right to citizenship because of his race. His chances ended with the 1923 Thind decision, and he lived as an alien for the rest of his life, the racist policy reversed only after his death.

### BOOR SINGH BEATS A FAKE FRENCH CLAIRVOYANT (1924)

In 1924, Boor Singh got dragged into a legal battle with a fake French fortune teller working in the same San Leandro, California building. In one version of the story, Emma Quinn, a.k.a. “Madame Von Dohne,” was unhappy that Singh was unlicensed, and felt he was stealing her business. She would harass him by turning off the electric lights in his room, driving him to destroy her advertising materials. The judge asked their Chinese landlord to kick one of the two out. “Madame Von Dohne” apparently left, leaving Boor Singh the last fortune teller standing.

### BOOR SINGH SURVIVES A VIOLENT ATTACK (1924)

In 1924, Boor Singh was assaulted near his office and taken to the

|| That he was followed from the street car and attacked by three men was the story Singh told the police. The Hindu palmist declared that he was hit over the head by a gun and otherwise mistreated by the assailants. Whether the attack was inspired by former customers of the Hindu whose palms he failed to read correctly or whether an oriental love affair is the cause of the excitement is being investigated today.

— “Hindu Palmist is Attacked by Trio.” *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, 8 March 1924 evening, p. 11, col. 4. “Thugs Give 2 Berkeley Men Beating.” *Oakland Tribune*, 8 Mar 1924, p. 22.

hospital. The *Berkeley Daily Gazette* reported that no money was taken, and there were three attackers, one with a club. The *Oakland Tribune* reported the use of a gun, rather than a club.

### BOOR SINGH GETS SUED BY AN ANGRY DOG BREEDER (1925–1928)

In 1924, Boor and Grace rented a building in San Leandro as a palm reading location. The back half of the space was occupied rent-free by dog breeder Richard Wilkinson and his twenty-seven dogs. Two months later, Singh demanded that the dog breeder leave, throwing his furniture into the yard, and knocking the hinges off a door, which allowed some of the dogs to escape. An angry Wilkinson retrieved all but two of his show dogs.

Wilkinson would have his revenge, suing Boor Singh for \$11,175. The media had a field day, with headlines reading “Neighbor Sues Hindu,” “Dog Eviction Suit Exhibit,” “Valued Terriers Form Exhibit in Court Suit,” and “Man's Nap in Kennel Costs Mystic.” The jury verdict assessed the damages at \$2,500. But in 1928, an amused appeals court judge eviscerated the jury's decision, lowering the damages to \$370.

### BOOR SINGH INSPIRES A NEW LAW (1925)

As local governments started pushing Boor Singh out of their cities, he set up shop right outside city lines. In 1925, the Alameda County Board of Supervisors responded to complaints by introducing new legislation to tax and license palmists and sleight-of-hand performers. According to the *Hayward Daily Review*:

|| The action by the board is a result of complaints received...because of the activities of Boor Singh, Hindu palmist, who has offices on East Fourteenth Street just east of the San Leandro city limits. Boor Singh has been driven out of Berkeley and Oakland...and was denied the privilege of working in San Leandro. The directors of the San Leandro chamber are now asking the supervisors to prevent him from working anywhere in the county.

— “Palmists Will Be Barred from the County by Board.” *Daily Review (Hayward, California)*, 26 May 1925, p. 4, col. 1.

### BOOR SINGH'S OFFICE EXPLODES (1926)

In 1926, Boor Singh's workplace, a studio at 1641 San Pablo in Berkeley, was destroyed by an

explosion and fire. It's unclear if this was an act of arson, perhaps racially motivated, but Singh would not be pushed out, and continued to work and invest in the building. The *Oakland Tribune* described the event:

!! **An explosion and fire which early today destroyed a cottage at 1641 San Pablo Avenue is being investigated by police. Loss is placed at \$2000. Neighbors told the officers that men had been seen running from the blaze and that a sharp blast accompanied the first flames. The structure was owned by Boor Singh, a Hindu, and has been used in the last few years as the studio of a clairvoyant.**

— “Fire in Medium’s House Probed.” *Oakland Tribune*, 21 June 1926 afternoon, p. 17, col. 3.

### **BOOR SINGH GETS DIVORCED, BUT NOT REALLY (1920–1945)**

Boor Singh was not a good husband. In 1920, two years after his marriage, Grace was in court, asking for a divorce for cruelty. The judge would hear that he refused to eat with Grace, called her ugly, hit her, and made a creepy comment to Lillian. The highly public divorce dragged all the way through 1923, as divorce and alimony were granted, Boor failed to pay after pleading poverty, and Grace went to court to prevent him from hiding thousands of dollars and sending some of it to India.

But after the dust settled, Boor and Grace found some way to reconcile, and got back together as husband and wife until the end of their lives. After presumably living apart in 1923, records show that the two were living and working together from at least 1924. The marriage might still have been rocky at times (like in 1932, when Boor printed a notice in the newspaper announcing he was no longer responsible for Grace’s debts), but somehow this time, it lasted.

### **BOOR SINGH MEETS AN UNDERCOVER COP (1928)**

In 1928, Boor Singh told an undercover Berkeley police officer that the officer’s wife had divorced him, and gave him advice on marital difficulties; unfortunately, the officer was a bachelor.

Singh was arrested for violating a Berkeley law banning fortune telling, mind reading, or seances. He insisted that he ran a shoe repair shop and didn’t read palms, but was found guilty and sentenced to pay \$25 or spend 25 days in jail. He filed an appeal, and while the result is

unclear, by 1929, he was exclusively advertising his services in a different county.

### **BOOR SINGH WINS A PATENT (1928–1932)**

Boor Singh had a background in concrete. Maybe that’s why in 1928, he applied for a patent for a concrete building mold system invented by his partner Christian Wolff of San Francisco. The patent was finally issued in 1932, with Boor named the 50% assignee. It’s unclear if Singh ever did anything with the patent to “facilitate the building of concrete structures but also takes into consideration the provision of a novel wall construction which may be embodied in ceilings, floors, columns and other building structures.”

### **BOOR SINGH STARTS A CAFE, FAILS HIS LIQUOR LICENSE (1935)**

By the end of his life, Boor Singh would be known less as a fortune teller, and more as the owner of a cafe or restaurant. In 1935, the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* reported that the California State Board of Equalization denied Boor Singh a liquor license at his establishment at 1643 San Pablo in Oakland. According to the writer, most of the establishments denied a license “did not comply with State laws.” It’s unclear if he ever got his license.

### **THE DEATH OF BOOR SINGH (1945)**

Boor Singh died in 1945, when he was in his 70s. He’s buried at Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, California, and his great-grandchildren are still in the Bay Area. Robert died in 1946, Grace in 1955, but Lillian lived until 2010. She was probably the very last person alive to have known him, over a century after his arrival in the US.



Illustration by Indian cartoonist Rajendra Yadav, based on a 1929 photo

### **WHY BOOR SINGH MATTERS**

On the Berkeley South Asian Radical History Walking Tour, we tell stories of students, freedom fighters, and laborers of the 1910s. But that’s not the whole story.

I’ve spent months uncovering Boor Singh’s story, because his immigrant hustle, mixed-race family, fortune-telling cons, scrapes with the law, and occasionally poor judgment show a grittier, weirder, and more iconoclastic side of early South Asian life in Berkeley.

The Boor Singh in the media was an absurd figure, but immigrants are sometimes captured at the most awkward moments of their lives. Was he also an avid gardener, a lover of radio dramas, or someone dealing with PTSD? The papers wouldn’t print such mundane details, so it’s on us to fill in the gaps and breathe a little more life into a historical figure we never knew we needed. ❖

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